A THOUSAND AND ONE THRESHOLDS OF ARDOR:

A Critical Analysis of Female Madness in 21st Century Western Literature

by

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This project examines depictions of female psychological difference in two Western contemporary primary texts: Elyn Saks' 2007 memoir, *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness* (Harper & Row, New York) and Mira T. Lee's 2019 novel, *Everything Here is Beautiful* (Penguin Books, New York). Following a detailed discussion of the historical conversation surrounding female literary madness, I argue, using an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, that recent narratives by women portray feminine malaise in a manner which subverts dominant hegemonic discourse by challenging the third-person social and clinical practices that currently exist to define and contend with gendered and psychological categories of identity. In specific, I demonstrate how primary texts, in both memoir and novel form, destabilize the "speech/noise" binary, a cultural practice which French philosopher, Jacques Ranciere, outlines and censures in his 1999 text, *Disagreement* (Regents of the University of Minnesota). The "speech/noise" binary is the process by which society discredits any discourse that deviates from the dominant mode of communication, defining it as unintelligible "noise" rather than rational "speech."

In addition to exploring the discrepancies between first-person and outside understandings of madness, I also examine the complexities of identity, emphasizing the fruitfulness of using literary analysis to understand the role of sociocultural factors beyond gender and psychological condition, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, in the development of ideological understandings and literary narrations of human experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Representations of female madness[1] are everywhere. Mass media, advertising, the press, literature, and many other platforms participate in discourse surrounding women and their psychosocial condition. Despite society's changing relationship with, and understanding of, those who live with non-normative psychological conditions, human beings are apt to use loaded terms in labeling others, particularly women, such as "crazy," "nuts," "schizo," "unstable," "psycho," "hysterical," "unhinged," and myriad other words which indicate a lack of understanding or empathy towards those who live with mental health conditions. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, "22.3% of women in the United States experience mental illness" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Despite the undeniable prevalence of the condition, stereotypes and social oppression still prevail against affected populations.

In regard to academia, psychological difference is relevant in many different fields, including literature, history, sociology, psychology, neuroscience and more. Throughout my undergraduate studies of English Literature at the University of Oregon, I have encountered frequent literary representations of female madness. For example, in Charlotte Brontë's prominent Victorian novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), she employs the well-

[1] In the disability studies field, terminology is a subject of controversy and fosters a spectrum of belief in regard to the sensitivity of certain terms. This paper will avoid using terms such as "illness" and "disorder" in relation to psychosocial condition, challenging the tendency to label both physical and mental conditions which diverge from social norms as "impairments" in order to subvert the general stigma that has historically accompanied differences of this nature. For this reason, I will use objective discourse that destigmatizes the conditions I discuss, such as "psychosocial difference," "behavioral non-normativity" and "psychological condition." Furthermore, within the context of this paper, the word "madness," despite its subjective and negatively connotative implications, derives from the long-standing literary tradition of using this specific term in relation to the thematic textual engagement with psychological non-normativity.

known trope of the “madwoman in the attic” through the character of Mr. Rochester’s secret wife, Bertha Mason. Additionally, in my Junior year, I took an English 399 class, the topic of which was Electronic Literature, and due in part to the unconventional nature of these texts, the themes of gender and psychological condition were relevant. In a piece of 2017 literary theory we read for the class, entitled “Hypertext: Storyspace to Twine,” the authors, Astrid Ensslin and Lyle Skains, state that “frequently recommended Twine games… all incorporate innovative gameplay and interaction, focusing the reader/player’s attention on questions of love, gender, sexuality, body awareness, and mental illness—using the text-dominance and intimacy afforded by hypertext to explore deeply personal topics that mainstream gaming rarely addresses” (Ensslin & Skains 302). As I stated previously, I have worked intermittently to understand this subject and how it functions in a literary context and within the scope of the relevant courses. However, I have yet to engage deeply with the theme, nor have I had the opportunity to place it into a broader, more interdisciplinary academic background.

Female psychological difference is a subject that is extremely personal to me. Not only do I live with it myself, it also affects the daily lives of many women about whom I care deeply. Furthermore, over the course of my undergraduate education, I have been passionate about literary analysis, not only because of the systematic and logical skill that the discipline instills in its scholars, but also because of the ways in which literature both informs and interacts with various elements of society and self. Literary criticism is a particularly effective way to examine and question cultural understandings of madness, because primary texts with this thematic focus provide

unique artistic insight into the firsthand experience of mental and emotional distress. A literary approach also allows for the close-reading and theoretical analysis of the kinds of language that repress women and other nondominant groups through harmful ideological frameworks and, conversely, the discursive choices that appear in works by women and assist them in subverting these labels.

Review of Relevant Literature

In terms of the existing critical discussion of the topic at hand, I have identified three main waves of argument in the field. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar initiate the first phase of criticism through their 1979 book entitled *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Yale University, Conneticut), in which they discuss Victorian literature through the context of feminist literary theory. This movement also includes counterarguments from other critics, such as Nina Baym, who highlight the internalized misogyny present in Gilbert and Gubar's work. Finally, this period marks the beginning of more interdisciplinary explorations of female madness, such as Elaine Showalter's 1985 work, *The Female Malady* (Pantheon Books, New York), which examines the history of female madness in the context of English cultural and psychiatric discourse and practices. This first phase of discussion, while it engages with themes of madness, focuses generally on the female role within literature and society. The field becomes more specific in its second phase as female madness becomes a literary focus of its own. Finally, more contemporary, 21st-century criticisms tend to move away from this binary opposition between the patriarchy and female madness, fostering understandings which acknowledge the multifacetedness of human identity and engaging more holistically with the intersections between madness, gender, race, and other sociocultural factors which also influence the literature significantly.

First Phase: Gilbert & Gubar, Baym, Showalter

When Gilbert and Gubar wrote *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the academic literary canon in the West had almost entirely limited itself to the work of white, British and American men. Though academics had begun to look at singular feminist texts,

such as Virginia Woolf's 1929 extended essay *A Room of One's Own* (Hogarth Press, London), within the context of traditional discourse, academics had only just begun to identify literature by women as a unique genre, or as Gilbert and Gubar state in their introduction, "a distinctively female literary tradition… which no one had yet defined in its entirety" (26). Much of their work in *The Madwoman in the Attic* focuses on the female place within a patriarchal and misogynistic literary tradition, and the resulting anxieties that present themselves in literature written by females. In fact, the book begins by asking: "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?" (37). Later, the authors ask: "If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts?" (46). Essentially, Gilbert and Gubar understand literary tradition as a subject of male ownership, and even further, the literary male, as crafted by men, is malleable given that male authors have the opportunity to represent their own gender however they see fit. Gilbert and Gubar state that the female position within literary works is quite different, as "the chief creature man has generated is woman," meaning men, who occupy the foremost literary stage, construct cultural understandings of women, who then do not have the opportunity to define themselves (58).

In terms of madness and its role within this understanding of the literary system, Gilbert and Gubar argue that male authors have created "eternal types" which constrain women's identities to dichotomous labels: the "angel" and the "monster." The angel represents the docile, repressed, selfless, male-pleasing character who occupies the traditional female space in a narrative; Virginia Woolf defines her as the "angel in the house" (Gilbert and Gubar 75). The monster is the angel's dark opposite, representing men's anxieties towards the female subversion of her expected angelic qualities. One

salient example Gilbert and Gubar delineate in regard to this angel-monster binary is Snow White and her evil stepmother. They state that:

> It seems as if there is a sense in which the intense desperation with which the Queen enacts her rituals of self-absorption causes (or is caused by) her hatred of Snow White. Innocent, passive, and selflessly free of the mirror madness that consumes the Queen, Snow White represents the ideal of renunciation that the Queen has already renounced at the beginning of the story. Thus Snow White is destined to replace the Queen because the Queen hates her, rather than vice versa (Gilbert and Gubar 119).

Gilbert and Gubar argue here that Snow White's angelic qualities come into direct conflict with the Queen's characteristics and intentions in the story. Even further, the Queen's monstrosity, which the narrative often emphasizes in the scenes where she interacts with the Magic Mirror, manifests through the "madness" with which she expresses her desire to eliminate Snow White altogether. By placing the Queen's mad desires at odds with Snow White's patriarchal perfection, then, the hegemonic discourse stigmatizes female madness and defines it as monstrous.

Of course, it is impossible to review Gilbert and Gubar's criticism without acknowledging the character who gave the book its title: Bertha Mason, from Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*. Brontë's work demonstrates the ways in which women writers reproduce the literary expectations that male authors have created for them. Gilbert and Gubar view Bertha, the secret, attic-residing first wife of Jane's eventual husband, as Jane's "dark double" due to her role as a "madwoman" within the narrative. Bertha embodies the opposite of what makes Jane a favorable character, and thus she must perish in order for Jane to achieve love and upward mobility through her marriage with Rochester. Even further, Gilbert and Gubar state that "Rochester's description of Bertha as a 'monster' ironically echoes Jane's own fear of being a monster… the literal

and symbolic death of Bertha frees her from the furies that torment her and makes possible a marriage of equality—makes possible, that is, wholeness within herself" (807). Similar to the construction of characters in Snow White, by creating this relationship between Jane and Bertha, Brontë's narrative embeds the quality of madness within the category of "monster." Gilbert and Gubar's text was groundbreaking, influential, and sought to give women a voice in a field where they had lacked it for so long. Regardless of the progression they enacted through their work, they received backlash from other feminist critics for the ways in which their criticism tended to internalize and reproduce the very patriarchal structures of which they were so critical, in that Gilbert and Gubar's theory fails to apply feminist considerations to female characters besides the heroine and constructs a strict binary between men and women. As a result, they overlook the variation of identity that exists *within* the category of "woman," specifically in relation to the complex spectrum of representation and experience that accompanies female racial identity.

One example of a countercriticism towards Gilbert and Gubar is Nina Baym's frequently cited 1984 work, "The Madwoman and her Languages: Why I Don't do Feminist Literary Theory" (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Oklahoma). Baym argues that Gilbert and Gubar's understanding of Bertha stems from the violence Jane's first-person narrative imposes upon her; rather than demonstrating any form of consciousness towards the similarities between Bertha and herself, Jane merely misplaces her anger at Rochester onto Bertha. From the perspective of the narrative, Baym says, "The woman, rather than the man, becomes her adversary; that woman's death is as necessary as Rochester's blinding for Jane's liberation" (48). However,

rather than understanding the inherent misogyny that accompanies Brontë's narrative decisions in this regard, Gilbert and Gubar direct their feminist sympathies exclusively to Jane, failing to understand the misogyny that accompanies both Jane's own violent descriptions of Bertha as well as the problematic mechanism of removing a female character from the narrative as a condition for the success of the heroine.[2]

Baym additionally challenges Gilbert and Gubar's rhetoric in discussing Bertha's inability to speak. Critics often understand Bertha's voicelessness as defiance through her own rejection of the dominant, masculine language, because as Baym notes, theory typically asserts that the principal mode of speaking in Western society is the "masculine language," due to male dominance in the social and academic sphere. The female mode of speaking, as often argued by feminist theorists: "is open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, attempting to speak the body, i.e., the unconscious, involving science, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed to or clearly different from pre-conceived, oriented masterly or 'didactic' languages" (Baym 49). Baym rejects this assertion, saying that "rational discourse" is available to everyone, not just males. Women, she argues, do not decide to become men by merely using reason in their communication. Thus, in Baym's argument, the traditional feminist

[2] Contemporary literary criticism affirms the internalized misogyny that Baym identifies in her theory, however critics have further complicated this understanding of Bertha's role within *Jane Eyre* by also considering her racially ambiguous, Creole descent and its impact upon her space within the discourse and plot of the novel. In Patricia McKee's 2009 criticism, "Racial Strategies in Jane Eyre" from *Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, United States), she seeks to "clarify the use of ambiguity to the narrative's racialism" (67). McKee takes the position that despite Bertha's phenotypical whiteness, Jane treats her as a "dark primitive," using Victorian discursive practices, such as her descriptions of Bertha's perceived "madness," that connote "biological darkness," thus racializing Bertha by way of her Colonial descent. Jane does this rhetorical violence on Bertha as a means of subverting her own past disadvantages and raising herself to a higher position within the Victorian social hierarchy of whiteness (70). With this argument, McKee asserts that the constituents of social identity extend beyond the scope of the male/female gender binary, particularly in terms of how race, class and ethnicity intersect with gender to produce a nuanced discursive practice that assigns socially constructed, arbitrary labels to those in the category of "other" as a means of reinforcing and justifying the dominance of the hegemony.

theoretical notion of “female speech” actually reinforces and contributes to traditional patriarchal definitions of women as the “hopelessly irrational, disorganized, ‘weaker sex’ desired by the masculine other. The theory leads to a language that is intensely private, politically ineffectual, designed to fail” (50). Overall, Baym’s analysis tends to highlight the disagreement and uncertainty that accompanies feminist literary theory and criticism, particularly when it comes to analyzing the figure of the “madwoman.” Her work sends a message of caution to those who contribute to this field of study by showing that critics engaging with themes of female madness should be mindful not to inadvertently reinforce patriarchal ideology through their analysis.

In Elaine Showalter’s 1985 book, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (Virago Press, London), she presents “both a feminist history of psychiatry and a cultural history of madness as a female malady” (5). She supports this claim of a “female malady” with multiple examples of “the pervasive cultural association of woman and madness” (4). When Showalter published her work, Gilbert, Gubar and Baym had already contributed their above criticisms to the academic conversation, however *The Female Malady* widens the existing breadth of exploration, examining madness not only within literary practice, but also in other forms of popular culture, in social structure, and in psychiatric rhetoric and procedure. She traces the interaction of woman and malaise across three phases of English psychiatric history: “psychiatric Victorianism (1830-1870), psychiatric Darwinism (1870-1920), and psychiatric modernism (1920-1980)” (17). During each of these periods, Showalter argues, the cultural and psychiatric spheres consistently used a variety of ideological justifications to reinforce the link between women and madness. Dominant

understanding has historically connected malaise to female sexuality, feminine nature, female delicacy and emotion, and violence against men (7-8). Overall, then, rather than attempting to identify the "cause" of female madness in individuals, Showalter's research traces patterns within her cultural framework in regard to the ideologies that have defined and constructed social and clinical considerations of the female malady. Importantly, this approach continues the first-wave trend of viewing gender as a binary and neglecting to consider other elements of identity that also contribute to the representations and experiences of the subjects. As a result, Showalter's work constructs an implicit category of "female" which, despite the nonspecific nature of the word itself, refers almost exclusively to white, English females and exemplifies the lack of representation and nuance in this first body of criticism.

Second Phase: The Femininity/Patriarchy Binary

Following the fundamental debate initiated by Gilbert & Gubar, Baym and Showalter, a main area of analysis on which literary criticisms in the field tended to focus was the idea that female madness within literature serves as a response to, or rejection of, patriarchal structures and the male gaze. In Allen Thiher's 2004 book, "Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature," (*University of Michigan Press*) he notes the then-recent development of narratives which support this view. He says:

> Only in contemporary texts have women asserted that madness is a product of woman's condition—and have made this assertion in order to express a revolt that refuses sanity, or at least the sanity that requires integration into the patriarchal cybernetic system called culture. For this reason contemporary culture demands that one contrast male and female understandings of madness in literary texts (Thiher 294).

Thiher's observation demonstrates the importance of analyzing first-person, nonfiction narratives in this area of study; by understanding women's own interpretations of their mental state and their position in society, critics can be better informed on this relationship between female madness and the patriarchy. In terms of applying this observation to his own analysis of literary texts, Thiher points to French feminist writer, Marguerite Duras' 20th-century texts. Within Duras' work, Thiher recognizes that madness does not exist in relation to biological womanhood, but rather in conjunction with the role of the female in society. Similar to Thiher's argument here, Baym also points out in her counterargument towards Gilbert and Gubar that, because femininity is socially considered the opposite of masculinity, patriarchal hegemony dictates that madness is the contradiction of "masculine reason" and "male language" (Thiher 305). Thiher's analysis therefore highlights just how critical this relationship is between societal structure and understandings of madness, both within those who experience it and from the hegemonic outward perspective.

Third Phase: 21st Century Understanding of Nuance

In the third and current phase of criticism in the field, critics have moved beyond examining female literary madness as a mere intersection between gender and mental state into a more comprehensive discussion that incorporates other aspects of cultural identity such as race, class, sexuality and psychiatric patient history. In Yu Yan's 2016 paper, "Madness and Woman: A Feminist Interpretation of Madwomen in *Woman on the Edge of Time*," (*Higher Education of Social Science*, Canada) she points to Michael Foucault's 1964 philosophical and sociological text, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* Not only is Foucault's text

influential in many disciplines, it is particularly important within the specific context of the topic at hand and is cited by many relevant papers. Yan describes Foucault's definition of madness as "the outcomes of supreme reason discourse, that is, the arbitrary judgement made by the rationalists who have the power of discourse against those inferior people" (Yan 32). In other words, to Foucault, madness represents the relationship between those in power and those who are powerless. In Yan's study, she goes on to evaluate how Foucault's theory interacts with the madness of Marge Piercy's protagonist, Connie Ramos, using this dualism between the powerful and the powerless to understand how her madness exists in relation to the society she occupies. Despite the fact that Foucault's work exists outside the realm of literary analysis, it becomes foundational for Yan's analysis of Connie's character, though she also complexifies Foucault's interpretation of madness by examining gender as an intersecting factor more closely than he does in his work.

Before moving into her more progressive analysis of Piercy's work, Yan engages with the already-established practice of examining the relationship between madness and hegemonic masculinity in the work at hand. The story begins when, after losing custody over her daughter, Angelina, Connie is committed to a mental hospital for the second time. The doctors at the hospital only view her in terms of the medical notes from her first incarceration and, despite her excessive efforts to subvert the narrative that professionals have established around her and tell her own story to justify her actions, Connie is unable to escape notions that she is mad. In relation to this part of the plot, Yan says "Her madness is an indictment of the patriarchal notion on what is a woman. It is an indictment of a system that insists so blindly on defining Ramos as

violent and dangerous that it eventually makes her that way." (Yan 39). Yan implies here that Connie is not "mad" in the beginning of her story. In fact, it is not until her doctors have repeatedly denied her of her own voice that she actually begins to adopt the qualities they impose upon her in the first place. Yan's analysis, that Connie's madness is first a construction by, then a response to, patriarchal expectations of women, parallels much of the rhetoric that exists within literary criticisms in this field of study.

Yan later moves away from understanding Connie only in terms of her madness and her womanhood when she states that:

> Marge Piercy's participating in some social movements and the progress of feminism have already made her realize that the issue of women is far more [than] a gender issue, but also a complicated social and cultural problem. In order to make this point clear, Connie is represented as a woman, an ethnic and a once-claimed mad person at the same time in the novel, which helps to make the contradictions more acute, the conflict more fierce and the problem clearer… The three kinds of disadvantaged role[s] of Connie interact with each other, co-contributing to her madness" (39).

By pointing out that the poignance of Piercy's narrative stems not only from Connie's womanhood, but also from her status as an ethnic woman, a woman of color, and a woman with a documented psychiatric history, Yan acknowledges that the construction of madness is founded and developed not only through gender, but also through other elements of social identity which strengthen the societal view of the madwoman as "other." Though Connie attempts to avoid being labeled as "Mexican-American" through her white-sounding nickname (short for her Mexican-sounding given name, Consuelo) and her deliberate use of the English language to set herself apart from other Mexican Americans (Yan 37). Regardless of these attempts to conceal her ethnicity, however, Connie is still an "other" due to the color of her skin, noting that she feels the

"'shame of being second-class goods'" (37). The resulting racial exclusion she faces within the social system in the text contributes both to the non-normative behavior she later exhibits as well as the labels that other characters and mental professionals apply to her. In addition, Yan notes that Piercy uses her understanding of the multifaceted framework of identity to challenge existing psychiatric practices by creating the utopian communal society, Mattapoisett. She says:

> Under Piercy's pen, all people in Mattapoisett are respected and loved, and they are all equally treated, regardless of their gender, race, or other differences. In a word, as an egalitarian society which especially comes to women's rescue, Mattapoisett accepts and even welcomes precisely the 'madness' that have marginalized Connie in the actual world, which powerfully questions and even deconstructs the dominant knowledge of madness in a certain society (Yan 40).

Albeit a fictional utopia that Piercy creates in order to contrast the repressive society in which Connie begins her story, Mattapoisett, through Yan's interpretation, can serve as an allegorical suggestion for the "treatment" of psychological difference. Rather than otherizing those who live with mental "disorder," the practices in Mattapoisett demonstrate the functionality that accompanies the acceptance of human beings' various aspects of identity.

Yan's work effectively concludes the review of relevant literature through its recognition of the social complexities that underlie both Connie's psychological discomfort and the various ways in which others apply labels to her. A particular contemporary theoretical framework that can assist critics in understanding and addressing these complexities as they appear in primary texts is that of phenomenology. The concept of phenomenology is rooted in philosophy and grapples specifically with the relationship between the "self" and the "world," stressing the value of "lived experience" as a crucial source of information in regard to individual and societal

consciousness. As far as evaluations of madness in contemporary literature, the practice of phenomenology is a productive means of analyzing psychological difference as it appears in various texts so that criticisms can base themselves on the actual experience of psychological non-normativity rather than traditional, hegemonic understandings of madness.

Chapter 2: Phenomenology

Hornstein's Theory of Phenomenology

American psychologist Gail Hornstein's 2013 essay in the journal *Feminism and Psychology*, entitled "Whose account matters? A challenge to feminist psychologists," (Massachusetts) incorporates the phenomenological approach with feminist, psychological and literary theory in order to evaluate first-person consciousness and how it applies specifically to nonfiction narratives by those who experience, or have experienced, psychosis. Hornstein's overarching conviction centers around the dissonance between medical and first-person descriptions of psychological "disorder," highlighting the violence that the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) and its derived practices inflict upon subjects of psychiatric evaluation. Hornstein says:

> Consider hearing voices, which the DSM calls 'auditory hallucinations.' People who have this experience often find the content of their voices – i.e. what the voices are actually saying – to be crucial to understanding and coping with them. But the DSM focuses solely on whether the voices are audible to others, and denies entirely the existence of positive, non-pathological voices (Corstens et al., 2008; Romme and Escher, 1989; Romme et al., 2009) (Hornstein 31).

Hornstein's assertion through this quotation demonstrates the function of juxtaposing memoir-style narratives featuring psychosis against traditional, clinical expectations of the same. Just as Yan challenges the "dominant knowledge of madness in a certain society," Hornstein's theory implores its readers to find cultural significance in peoples' lived experiences (Yan 40).

Phenomenology in *The Center Cannot Hold*

As Hornstein points out, phenomenology in the context of madness in literature is most effective within first-person narratives, such as Elyn Saks' 2007 memoir*, The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness* (Harper & Row, New York). In her work, the Associate Dean and Orrin B. Evans Professor of Law, Psychology, and Psychiatry and the Behavioral Sciences at the University of Southern California Gould Law School describes her simultaneous experiences of living with paranoid schizophrenia and working her way through elite academic institutions such as Vanderbilt for undergraduate study, Oxford University for her master program as a Marshall Scholar, Yale Law School for her JD, and the New Center for Psychoanalysis for her Ph.D.. Saks' dual description of her academic achievement and her psychosis is significant in that this combination of qualities negates the dominant clinical and social narrative which asserts that those who experience psychosis are incapable of "rational" comprehension and speech. By demonstrating the invalidity of such widespread beliefs in her case, Saks develops a foundation for using a phenomenological approach alongside her narrative as a means of forming a progressive interpretation of her psychosis.

One aspect of Saks' work that emphasizes the tension between clinical and first-person understandings of psychosis is her battle with weight fluctuation throughout her life. In her narrations of her adolescence, Saks notes that she starves herself with the specific intention of losing weight as a result of her parents' fixation on weight loss and maintaining slim figures, then, after close monitoring from her parents in response to her evidently poor health, returns to a normal weight until her later experiences with

psychosis. After her first institutionalization during her master program at Oxford, when she goes to visit her parents in Paris, they again notice her frailty and encourage her to eat, after which she tells herself "*I am bad. Only good people get food. I deserve to be starved. I deserve to be tortured. Starvation is a fitting torture for me*" (Saks 75). By exposing the internal dialogue that drives her weight loss, Saks demonstrates the value of her psychological thoughts. As Hornstein asserts in her article, the "content of the voices" is "crucial to understanding and coping with them." Saks' narration of her own thoughts demonstrates a potential path towards treatment of her weight loss.

Rather than engaging with these inner workings of her psychosis to combat her malnutrition, the professionals Saks encounters in medical settings base their advice off of the limited psychological knowledge of eating disorders that exists at the time. At MU10, the teaching hospital in New Haven where she receives inpatient treatment during her time at Yale Law, she speaks with fellow patient, Susan, who is being treated for bulimia and recounts that her doctor told her she should "just stop" binging and purging. In response to this revelation, Saks states that "I remembered when my parents, and Dr. Hamilton, said the same thing about my anorexia. 'You know, it's my opinion that 'just don't do it' is usually said by somebody who just doesn't get it'" (164). This quotation, which references the instruction she receives earlier from Dr. Hamilton, one of her doctors at the Warneford in Oxford, to "for now, just eat more," both illuminates the problematic and seemingly routine practice of advising mere willpower to victims of eating disorders as well as providing an example of the rift between institutional understandings and personal experiences with psychological difference (Saks 164). Other advice from Saks' medical professionals includes taking antidepressant

medication and focusing on how to make her “negative thoughts and feelings… go away” rather than “delving into [her] past or [her] unconscious” (Saks 70). Though Saks ultimately works through her internal unrest through a combination of psychoanalysis and medication, this moment in her narrative exposes the importance of listening to patients’ thoughts in order to form a foundational understanding of their condition.

When Dr. Anthony Storr, psychoanalytic and psychiatric consultant for the Warneford, refers Saks to a psychoanalyst as an alternative to spending more time in inpatient treatment, her narrative shows the utility of using phenomenology to confront the underlying anxieties that form the foundation of her psychosis. In regard to her first psychoanalyst, she states that:

> Elizabeth Jones… was a ‘Kleinian’—she practiced an offshoot of Freudian analysis developed by Melanie Klein, an Austrian psychoanalyst who immigrated to London in the late 1920s. Unlike Freud (and later, his daughter Anna), Klein believed that people with psychosis *could* benefit from analysis and that the necessary transference would develop. It was her theory that psychotic individuals are filled with (even driven by) great anxiety, and that the way to provide relief is to focus directly on the deepest sources of that anxiety” (Saks 90).

Hornstein’s psychological theory aligns strikingly with Mrs. Jones’ Kleinian approach. In her article, she references the Hearing Voices Network, an organization whose purpose is to assist those who suffer from psychosis in its many forms to “[use] the content of the voices to understand and modify the [peoples’] response to the experience… By focusing on the function that the voices serve—rather than on trying to stop them from occurring— HVN’s approach is starting to reshape standard assumptions about hallucinations” (Hornstein 34). Essentially, both Hornstein and Jones/Klein operate by the phenomenological principle that the various elements of psychosis serve a specific and healing purpose if and when professionals actually *listen*

to their patients rather than writing their experiences off as “insanity.” Where the DSM cites delusions and hallucinations as two primary characteristic symptoms of schizophrenia, implying a separation from “reality” and “reason,” Mrs. Jones’ approach disregards these outside, third-person labels and analyses of psychotic behavior in favor of listening to the inner dialogue which actually contributes to Saks’ psychological discomfort.

In addition to the misjudgment Saks experiences in clinical settings, she also notes that these narrow outside understandings of psychosis permeate the various spheres she occupies during her lifetime and even infiltrate her own consciousness, causing her to feel alienated from her peers. She says during her time in New Haven that:

> One of the worst aspects of schizophrenia is the profound isolation-the constant awareness that you're different, some sort of alien, not really human. Other people have flesh and bones, and insides made of organs and healthy living tissue. You are only a machine, with insides made of metal (Saks 193-194).

By comparing herself to a machine and an alien, Saks not only emphasizes her otherness in contrast to behavioral norms, she also expresses a feeling of dissociation from her own body. Her work with Mrs. Jones addresses this very discomfort: “As my sessions with Mrs. Jones increased, and I became accustomed to spooling out the strange products of my mind, my paranoia began to shift… the actual human people in my daily comings and goings seemed less scary and more approachable,” heavily implying a causal effect in the transparency between herself and Mrs. Jones and her increased ability to feel comfortable in human interaction (Saks 93). The success Saks finds in the Kleinian approach reveals the validity of phenomenology in her case. As Hornstein points out in her article, “First-person narratives of madness contradict many

of the key claims about psychosis held by psychiatrists and psychologists, and these differences cannot just be ignored" (34). The reader's intimate exposure, both to Saks' positive experience with psychoanalysis and to the misunderstanding she feels from traditional medical professionals, support Hornstein's claim. Works like Saks', though often inadvertently and implicitly, call into question the dominant practice of reading and understanding psychosis from a third-person perspective.

Phenomenology and Feminism

Saks' work does not mention feminism nor feminists, nor is it outwardly conscious of the interaction between her status as a woman and the way she and others understand her psychosis. As Hornstein points out, the approach of the HVN is not "explicitly feminist" either—but it "has had special appeal to the thousands of women who have finally had the reality of their own experiences… taken seriously and used as a source of insight into what might actually help them" (35). One major example of the specific potential that phenomenology holds in terms of helping women specifically occurs during Saks' adolescence, when she discovers Sylvia Plath's poetry, finding that she relates to it entirely. She says:

> *That's me,* I thought. *She's Me!* I guess Plath affects a lot of teenage girls this way, depicting as she does the sense of isolation and disengagement (and not a little fear) that typifies this time of life, especially for those who are sensitive and often lost in the world of their books. For days afterward, I couldn't stop thinking about the girl in the novel, and what she went through—for some reason it made me restless, distracted. One morning in class, with Plath on my mind, I suddenly decided that I needed to get up, leave school, and walk home. Home was three miles away (Saks 29).

This moment in Saks' life demonstrates the clear causal link between her psychosis and her anxieties about moving through the world as a young woman. Though she

normalizes the way the poetry resonates with her by saying that “a lot of teenage girls” have the same experience due to the challenges of adolescence, she certainly diverges from the norm in her subsequent fixation on Plath’s work and the stress she feels as a result—and, of course, her encounter with Plath is unique in that her first real experience with psychosis occurs on this walk home from school, where the neighborhood houses tell her she is “*especially bad*” (Saks 29). Saks does not attribute her initial bouts of psychosis to her status as a teenage girl, but this moment in the text exposes the reader to the ways in which one’s status or position within society might aggravate or interact with their unique experience of the world. Overall, the interaction between Hornstein’s theory and Saks’ narrative demonstrates the severe misguidedness of traditional clinical language when juxtaposed with first-person descriptions of psychosis. In a broader context, this argument lays the groundwork for an exploration of discourse, its role in social structure, and how this interaction can inform analyses of primary texts.

Chapter 3: Speech, Noise, and Psychosis

Ranciere's *Disagreement*

French philosopher Jacques Ranciere's book, *Disagreement* (1999, Regents of the University of Minnesota), provides a theoretical model which allows for an effective exploration of the relationship between speech and institution. Ranciere creates radical definitions for two terms, police/policing and politics. He says the words police and policing represent an accounting-based understanding of society. The police, Ranciere states, "is, essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party's share or lack of it" (Ranciere 29). Essentially, then, Ranciere understands the police to represent the overarching mold of society in its current state, cemented not only by governmental systems, but also by the ways in which members of society uphold and enforce this system of counting. Ranciere also notes that the police establishes the social norms, defining "ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying," further justifying the unequal allocation of resources by creating a system of implicit laws that define which parties are consistent with dominant norms, and thus "*[have] a part*" (Ranciere 29). However, not only does having a part mean being familiar with dominant practices, it also means having one's own practices recognized and legitimized. On the other hand, then, those whom the police excludes become the "part of no part," meaning their practices are not visible to, nor validated by, the police.

According to Ranciere, the antithesis of the police is politics. While the term "politics" traditionally represents the governmental operations of society, by Ranciere's definition, the government is actually the police. The police exists as an illusion which constructs a society that caters to certain groups. The example Ranciere uses to illustrate

this phenomenon is that “one kind of police may be infinitely preferable to another. This does not change the nature of the police” (31). In other words, although some systems of policing or elements of policing might be more inclusive than others, arguing about them only distracts from the true problem: that a system of policing exists at all. Conversely, politics in Ranciere’s philosophy represents the *interruption* of policing, where there is no part of no part—nor any parts at all. Strictly speaking, politics and equality are inseparable; politics does not enforce nor create equality, it *is* equality to its very core.

Speech, Noise and Schizophrenia

As outlined above, Ranciere’s distinction between policing and politics relies heavily upon the semiosis of speech and the way the police uses it to determine one’s role within a society. In terms of the way this concept actually operates, he says that “bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise” (Ranciere 29). From Ranciere’s perspective, then, those who conform to the dominant, albeit constructed, practices of speech and behavior, secure for themselves a “part”—and, conversely, those who do not conform do not have access to a “part.” The DSM-V describes schizophrenic speech as “disorganized,” “derailed” and “incoherent” (U.S. National Library of Medicine). Per Ranciere’s framework, this verbiage is consistent with the objectives of the police. Its third-person description of what psychosis entails lacks any acknowledgement of the internal experience of a person deemed schizophrenic. If a person’s speech does not match the constructed expectations of traditional discourse, then by the standards of the

DSM, it is merely a “symptom” of their madness and thus a foundation for denying them of their “part.”

Speech and Noise in Saks

In Saks’ work, her use of language clearly demonstrates her subject position, moving the reader’s understanding of her condition beyond the police-based binary of madness and sanity. She writes during her time at Oxford that “I knew… not to share my ongoing delusions of evil, in particular the part about my being evil and my total certainty that I was capable of horrible acts of violence… I believed everyone thought this way, but just knew better than to talk about it” (Saks 95). Here, Saks’ experience challenges the DSM’s definition of madness. By using the word “delusions” in her recollection of her life events, she acknowledges that her belief that she is evil is misconceived. However, by noting that she holds his belief with “total certainty,” Saks gives her reader the opportunity to form a new conceptualization of reality. Her convictions about herself and those around her may diverge from typical modes of thinking, but she does not doubt them; they are *her* reality, *her* truth. She is the subject of the discourse that takes place inside of her psyche. By divulging her honest reading of herself and the world during this time, she provides the reader with a blueprint for developing a socially just interpretation of her dialogue during episodes.

Much of Saks’ dialogue which startles and alarms her classmates, professors and friends connects directly to her belief that she is evil. Just after the above quotation where she discusses her “delusions of evil,” she describes an interaction with her friends:

> As hard as I tried, I'd sometimes find the wrong words coming unbidden to my lips—for example, the memorable night we all sat on the roof and I casually mentioned having killed many children.
>
> "It's a joke!" I quipped as fast as I could, noting with alarm the expressions on their faces—uncertainty at first, and then, slowly, a hint of horror. "A stupid joke! Oh, come on, everybody wants to kill kids once in a while, don't they? Except of course they don't—hey, it's not like I actually did that! Or would do that, you know that, right?" (Saks 95).

This quotation reinforces Hornstein's argument that first-person accounts of madness demonstrate the nuance of non-normative psychological experiences, nuance which medical terminology and interpretations often fail to encapsulate. Saks' friends are, of course, justified in their uneasy response to her violent suggestions here. However, by pairing her narrative recounting of this event with the beliefs that underlie the language she uses, she proves that her dialogue is not just "noise." Rather, her beliefs that she has "killed many children" and that "everybody wants to kill kids," when placed within the context of her subject position, demonstrate that her dialogue is not "incoherent," nor "disorganized," nor "derailed," as the DSM would describe it, nor is it "noise," as the police would describe it according to Ranciere. Instead, it highlights how very real Saks' experiences are, even if they are not visible to others. Both Hornstein's phenomenological theory and Mrs. Jones' Kleinian approach align with this perspective. Rather than policing Saks' existence and defining her dialogue as "noise," they fall under the category of politics by assigning validity to her reality and understanding its relation to her discourse. Furthermore, through the act of writing itself, Saks makes a case for Ranciere's critique of the "speech/noise" binary by demonstrating that the internal narrative of her psychosis is entirely intelligible to others as she recounts it.

In contrast to Mrs. Jones' psychoanalytic work, the text also includes strong examples of police-like practices in response to Saks' mental state, moments in which the medical system denies her of her "part." When she is involuntarily committed to Yale-New Haven Hospital during her law school days, "The Doctor," whom she never names, discovers she has stowed a nail in her pocket for protection from the "people" who "are trying to kill [her]" and after confiscating it, he places her into restraints:

> "Please," I begged. "Please, this is like something from the Middle Ages. Please, no!" Somewhere in the midst of the chaos, a single thought occurred to me: If Mrs. Jones were here, this would not be happening. She would never have allowed such a thing. With Mrs. Jones, the tools we worked with were words, not straps. She never would have stood by while someone hurt me, terrified me, or made me feel helpless and alone" (Saks 145).

This quotation is particularly powerful in that it mentions Mrs. Jones, producing a direct juxtaposition between her approach and that of The Doctor. Mrs. Jones, of course, enacts political justice for Saks by using "words" as a "tool." The Doctor, however, represents the police. Despite the sharp object in her pocket, Saks does not physically threaten anyone with it and even specifies that it is only for her own protection. Based only upon her possession of the nail and her "non-rational" discourse, The Doctor denies her of her "part"—in this case, that means not only her freedom of location, but also her bodily autonomy and even her own consciousness, as The Doctor's next step is to force antipsychotic medication down her throat, despite her resistance and her response of "choking" and "gagging" (Saks 145). Where Mrs. Jones' interest is in understanding Saks' experience from the first-person perspective and helping her to work through her psychological discomfort, The Doctor's approach serves to subdue Saks, regardless of the psychological *and* physical discomfort he might cause in the

process. For this reason, his work serves the outside perspective of merely putting a halt to Saks' non-normative behavior, thus reinforcing a police regime.

Language in Novel Form

Where Saks' narrative is especially pertinent to the exploration of female literary psychosis due mainly to its autobiographical nature, the narrative freedom of the novel form in areas like perspective and narrator omniscience can provide a more powerful insight into the nuances of language as it pertains to psychosis. Mira T. Lee's 2019 novel, *Everything Here is Beautiful* (Penguin Books, New York), tells the story of two sisters, Miranda and Lucia Bok. The work, whose perspective changes from character to character throughout the story, interweaves various themes, such as immigration, race, gender, and motherhood. Most importantly, the plot engages with themes of madness, centering around the younger sister, Lucia, whose psychosis impacts each character in a different way—and, as a result, each character understands Lucia's condition differently. The dedication page of the work reads:

> *For the Families*
>
> Empathy: because the commonality among human beings is emotion, and the only way we can bridge our vast discrepancies in experience is through what we feel. Let us be humbled in the knowledge that one may never fully understand the interior lives of others—but let us continue to care (Lee).

By highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of each individual's experience in the world as well as the importance of caring for others regardless of the inherent human inability to fully identify with one another, the language in this dedication prefaces the novel in a way which suggests its relevance to Ranciere's philosophy. In the body of the work, Lee's formal decision to use multiple perspectives allows for the effective exploration

of various theoretical concepts, such as the “speech/noise” police binary which Ranciere deprecates in *Disagreement* and Judith Butler’s modern work with Foucault’s “politics of truth.”

The changing perspective throughout the novel allows different voices to describe the same events, offering the opportunity to juxtapose Lucia’s firsthand bouts of psychosis with the way others describe them. For example, when Manny, the father of Lucia’s daughter, Essy, calls Miranda to convey his concern with Lucia’s behavior, he says: “Crazy… she was crazy. *Loca*. I was scared… She was sitting all day in her room like a zombie, wearing socks on her hands. When she talked, she didn’t make any sense. She wouldn’t let anyone watch the TV, kept turning it off, but then sometimes, she turned it on full blast” (Lee 131). By using the word “crazy” and saying “she didn’t make any sense,” Manny outlines Lucia’s departure from discursive norms, or in Ranciere’s terms, his interpretation of her dialogue as “noise.” Furthermore, by saying he was “scared,” he articulates his own confusion and discomfort with Lucia’s non-normative behavior. “Doing Justice to Someone,” (*GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, North Carolina) a 2001 essay by American gender theorist, Judith Butler, evaluates the “allegories of transsexuality” using Foucault’s philosophical-theoretical concept of the politics of truth. Butler summarizes her interpretation of the politics of truth by stating that:

> When we ask what the conditions of intelligibility are by which the human emerges, by which the human is recognized, by which some subject becomes the subject of human love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all (621).

This understanding strongly suggests that Manny's anxiety towards Lucia's speech lies in its divergence from socially constructed "conditions of intelligibility." Lucia is the subject in the scene he describes, and her departure from normative discursive intelligibility confuses his view of Lucia as human and fosters this anxiety within him.

Lee repeats the scene that Manny describes later in the novel, this time from Lucia's own perspective, allowing for a rewriting of subject position that is unique to the author's multi-perspectival form. Lucia explains her own behavior by stating that, when Essy is born, two serpents emerge in her mind and tell her things like "*If you touch your baby, she will die*" (Lee 149). In response to this psychological experience, Lucia says:

> I didn't tell anyone. First, it was a secret. Second, I was ashamed. Third, I couldn't stand to hear the human population's efforts to convince me it wasn't true—*you're sick! you're sick!*—that was all part of the plot. So I wore thin cotton socks over my hands, dressed my baby in layers, cocooned her in blankets, avoided her skin coming into contact with mine. If I did as I was told, I hoped they might spare her (Lee 149).

Here, Lucia uncovers the internal narrative which has contributed to the "crazy" behaviors Manny describes. Her subject position develops out of the discourse from the serpents, which she believes to be real, rather than the discourse she predicts other humans will use if she shares her delusions with them. Similar to the moment in Saks' work where she disturbs her friends with her violent speech, by clarifying Lucia's subject position for the reader, Lee shows that there is a clear impetus for her actions which, in terms of Manny's description alone, are seemingly random and erratic. By contrasting third-person and first-person narrations of the same event, Lee "does justice" to Lucia by allowing the reader access to her subject position.

In Butler's text, she shares the story of a person named Joan/John, born intersex and surgically altered to have only female biological characteristics. Eventually, she grows up to identify as male and has a phallus surgically constructed on his body. All throughout his life, doctors, psychologists and other professionals poke and prod at him, demand to see him naked, and ask him invasive questions regarding his identity and anatomy, all to try and understand what gender and/or sex he "really" is. After his transition to masculinity, Joan/John points out that there is much more to him than "'what I have between my legs'" (Butler 633). According to Butler, in this statement from John:

> He positions himself, knowingly, in relation to the norm, but he does not comply with its requirements… John's discourse puts into play the operation of critique itself, critique that, defined by Foucault, is precisely the desubjugation of the subject within the politics of truth. This does not mean that John becomes unintelligible and, therefore, without value to politics; rather, he emerges at the limits of intelligibility, offering a perspective on the variable ways in which norms circumscribe the human (635).

Just as John, despite his divergence from gender norms, uses dominant discourse to maintain his intelligibility while still challenging the structures that attempted to take this intelligibility away in the first place, Lee's narrative decision to write from Lucia's first-person perspective has a similar effect. Through her non-normative behavior, Lucia is unintelligible in Manny's eyes when she experiences psychosis, hence the anxiety he describes. However, by recounting in the first-person the similarly non-normative psychological processes that spur her "crazy" behavior, Lee does justice to Lucia by allowing her to "[emerge] at the limits of intelligibility," helping the reader to understand her subject position and view her discourse as "speech" rather than "noise." Overall, Ranciere's understanding of social structure and Butler's work with Foucault's

“conditions of intelligibility” illuminate the multifacetedness of human identity and the inherent intricacy of psychosocial factors like sex, gender and psychological condition, which, as Butler shows, act as a fluid spectrum rather than mere binaries between the categories of “man” and “woman,” “male” and “female,” or “crazy” and “sane.”

Chapter 4: The Complexities of Identity

Feminist-Disability Theory and Female Literary Madness

One academic area of inquiry that is relevant both to the specific study of female psychosis in literature and the general theoretical notions of the intricacy of identity is feminist disability theory. In Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's 2002 work, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory," (*National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Illinois) she seeks to explore the relationship between feminist studies and disability studies, stating that:

> Feminist theories all too often do not recognize disability in their litany of identities that inflect the category of woman… The most sophisticated and nuanced understandings of disability… come from scholars conversant with feminist theory. And the most compelling and complex analyses of gender intersectionality take into consideration… the ability/ disability system—along with race, ethnicity, sexuality and class (1).

Garland-Thomson points out here that feminist theory, despite its now-standard practice of recognizing feminist issues as a field more complex than the binary opposition between femininity and the patriarchy, tends to overlook disability as one of the factors that intersect with gender to influence the feminine identity and experience. She argues that recognizing this conundrum creates a new opportunity for academic inquiry wherein disability studies can mobilize feminist theory into becoming a more progressive and deeper-nuanced discipline. "Female, disabled and dark bodies are supposed to be dependent, incomplete, vulnerable and incompetent bodies," Garland-Thomson says, highlighting not only the significant impact disability can have on one's identity and experience, just like race and gender, but also that these various characteristics can incite similar kinds of social discourse and expectations for those

who possess them (7). She argues that “Femininity and race are performances of disability. Women and the disabled are portrayed as helpless, dependent, weak, vulnerable, and incapable bodies,” demonstrating the utility of integrating feminist-intersectional theory and disability studies as a means of informing one another in regard to the subjects’ experiences in the world (Garland-Thomson 7-8).

Garland-Thomson’s work serves as a compelling framework for understanding Lee’s novel due to the unique collection of identities that exist in Lucia’s character. She is a woman, she is Chinese-American, and she is of non-normative psychological condition. These elements of Lucia’s person become especially influential upon her experience in the world when she and Manny take Essy to live in Martez, a small village in Ecuador, with his family. Despite the possibility the couple discusses before their move of opening a business in town, Lucia finds herself increasingly frustrated with the expectations Manny and his family impose upon her. When she suggests moving to town and opening a laundromat as a means of making money and saving the time of the women in the area, he says:

> ‘But then what would the women do?’ he asks.
>
> He is looking straight at her, but there’s no wink, no grin, no hint of humor on his face. She swerves her gaze to the floor.
>
> Something in Manny has shifted, she can tell. He’s confident in a way she has never seen before—the way his shoulders sit back, how he walks with a slight swagger… She wonders: *Who is this man?* (Lee 212).

This conversation with Manny parallels Garland-Thomson’s argument that femininity is a performance of disability. Where, within the context of New York City, Lucia has access to a world of professional opportunity, in Martez, the social structure mandates specific roles for men and women—and anything outside of the predetermined female duties is simply not an option for women. In this case, that means Lucia cannot be a

business-owner and that a laundromat cannot exist at all as it will strip the women of their designated roles.

In addition to the rigidly gendered duties that Manny emphasizes in this conversation, the "shift" Lucia notes in his behavior exhibits another manifestation of gender roles in Martez: machismo. Where, in New York, Manny is an "other" due to his nondominant ethnicity and undocumented status, upon to his return to Martez, he reunites with his family and reintegrates into their culture, which causes him to move, through behaviors like "the way his shoulders sit back" and his "slight swagger," into a performance of the hyper-masculine conduct that fits with the norms in their new locale. Accompanying this shift in Manny is a change in his expectations for Lucia. For example, when Lucia runs into an old friend, Jonesy, in Cuenca and he offers her a job at the English newspaper there, Manny disapproves of her desire to accept the position:

> 'Writing is part of who I am,' she says. In her voice, thin and sharp, a portent of danger, like a hairline crack in a glass.
>
> He looks up, finally. Frowns, perplexed…
>
> 'It's important,' she says. 'I need to work. Writing is good for me. It's good for my health.' She knows, with those dog eyes, he does not want a fight.
>
> 'Lucia,' he says. He inhales, sighs. 'You do what you have to do.'
>
> You could say: This is the way people drift apart (Lee 228).

In New York, Lucia and Manny can make decisions somewhat independently of one another, both because they each need to support themselves in the capitalist economy, and because it is not unusual for women to operate in a professional sphere in the United States. In Martez, however, Manny's family's livelihood is mostly self-subsistent and gender roles are much more rigid, leading them to view office jobs, especially for women, as unnecessary. That Lucia's professional aspirations stimulate

an emotional distance between herself and Manny further emphasizes Garland-Thomson's claim that femininity is a performance of disability—her professional goals are at odds with the constructed limits of female ability that exist in Ecuador, and by disregarding the norms in such a way, Lucia creates discomfort within Manny.

By placing Lucia into a society where feminine repression is especially forceful and where her Chinese-American appearance and values lead the Ecuadorian characters to define her as "other," Lee's narrative draws a salient connection between otherness and psychological unrest, supporting Baym's argument against a limited understanding of female madness as a resistance to the patriarchy. After Lucia's return from her first week staying in her own apartment in Cuenca rather than commuting from the countryside every day, the limited-omniscient narrator notes all the frustrations she has internalized: men cat-calling her in the streets, rubbing against her and calling her *Chiquita Chinita*, Manny's family's invasive urges for her to have another child, and their vocal disapproval of her interest in journalism and decision to work (Lee 235). The narrator notes that, in response to these circumstances, "she starts to fray" and she begins to sense the return of the serpents (Lee 239-240). Here, Lee illuminates a direct correlation between Lucia's otherness in Ecuador and the heightened internal malaise she begins to experience. As Garland-Thomson notes in her theory, as an "other" in more than one aspect of her identity, Lucia is "supposed to be dependent, incomplete, vulnerable and incompetent" (Garland-Thomson 7). By developing her subject position and resulting behavior out of her experiences in the United States rather than the behavioral expectations that Manny and his family attempt to impose upon her, which

resemble the qualities Garland-Thomson outlines, she renders herself unintelligible in their eyes and as an “other” she becomes “Unhappy. Trapped inside” (Lee 244).

The Laugh of the Medusa

In Hélène Cixous’ 1976 French feminist theory work, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” (*The University of Chicago Press Journals*, Illinois) she discusses female writers and the function of their work as a weapon in their eternal struggle against the patriarchy. Second-wave French feminist theory is relevant in the exploration at hand due to its unique combination of literary, philosophical, semiological and psychoanalytic considerations. Furthermore, in this work, Cixous defines the practice of *écriture féminine*, or “women’s writing” as an act of resistance to male literary domination. In her work, Cixous likens the historical suppression of female authorship to the repression that the patriarchy has imposed on their bodies. She states that “A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor—once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction—will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language” (Cixous 885). Cixous’ claim here is not only that women’s writing operates as an instrument of resistance, but also that by accessing bodily and discursive freedom, women will revolutionize writing by breaking the binds that subjugate them, the male language that has failed to allow them their true potential, with a force much greater and more colorful than history has allowed or expected of them. To elaborate on this claim, Cixous says:

> If woman has always functioned ‘within’ the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different

> sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you'll see with what ease she will spring forth from that 'within'—the 'within' where once she so drowsily crouched—to overflow at the lips she will cover the foam (887).

Cixous' argument here involves semiology; she contends that male discourse is the signifier which exists to represent society and the world. Female attempts to use this discourse have been futile due to its very purpose of exclusively allocating power to men in the first place. By "dislocating" this system of signs, however, Cixous asserts that women can spring free from the system of domination in place.

Cixous vs. Baym

Baym's argument discussed in the literature review, which postdates Cixous' work by nine years, argues that to invent a female mode of discourse merely reinforces the patriarchal ideology that attempts to define women as the "hopelessly irrational, disorganized, 'weaker sex' desired by the masculine other. The theory leads to a language that is intensely private, politically ineffectual, designed to fail" (Baym 50). Cixous' argument, however, is not that women simply stray from male discursive tradition to create their own language that is unintelligible to others. Rather, she says "Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible. When id is ambiguously uttered—the wonder of being several—she doesn't defend herself against these unknown women whom she's surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability" (Cixous 889). Thus, just as women will restructure the hegemonic patriarchy by reclaiming and redefining their bodies in a way that resists the male mandate, by articulating the truth of their unconscious, a truth which dominant discourse has denied and erased for so long, they will "fly" through

and beyond these constructed limits to restructure this very discourse and make it their own (Cixous 887).

On the eve of Lucia's planned escape to New Jersey with Essy, Miranda's surprise appearance at her apartment in Cuenca brings the repression she feels to a head, causing her experience to duplicate that which Cixous describes in her theory. When Miranda arrives, Lucia's limited-omniscient narrator describes the situation:

> "She recalls what happens next as a jumbled dream: the figure pushing at the door, crowding into her room, all mouth: *You. You. You.* Commands and accusations. The crescendoing voice, buzzing of mosquitoes, everything too loud, too many words, and she covers her ears to stem the drain of energy from her head, because this is what they want: to drain her, to muzzle her, to take away her power, her feelings, her desires, her will, to shut her up and stuff her into a shoe box and stick it on a high shelf, where she will sit and sit and gather dust quietly like the mental patients of yore" (Lee 260).

This quotation simultaneously parallels Cixous' argument and complexifies it. When Cixous describes the patriarchal repression that plagues the female gender, she says that "We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies—we are black and we are beautiful" (Cixous 878). Cixous' words here relate markedly to the discomfort Lucia feels upon Miranda's arrival. She has nearly escaped the ties that bind her in Ecuador and her sister, her lifelong keeper, has come to tighten them. The narrator does not define the "they" that wants to "drain" her, "muzzle" her, "take away her power," but this verbiage is synonymous with Cixous' assertions in regard to the experience of the repressed subject. However, while Cixous' argument operates in specific relation to women and the patriarchy, the "otherness" that Lucia experiences extends beyond this scope to also encapsulate her psychological, racial and cultural identities.

Lucia's response to the despotism she feels to be closing around her in this climactic moment aligns once more with "The Laugh of the Medusa" in its production of an "utter[ance]" of her "id," as Cixous puts it. The narrator says:

> *Where are the pills?* Pills, pills, pills. Always the pills. The pills like a leash around her neck and everyone with a hand to pull… Too loud, too electric, she lashes out, all arms and fists. You want pills, here are the pills, and she rushes forward, thrusting the pills in the monster's face as it gags and spits… And then she hears her daughter's name and she goes blind with rage, GET OUT, yes, goddammit, yes, I am taking the goddamn pills (Lee 260-261).

The formal quality of the text here, wherein Miranda's dialogue manifests through italics and the narrator interweaves Lucia's verbal responses with her thoughts and description of the event, indicates that this segment of text serves to represent the inner workings of her mind in this moment. That Lucia's behavioral non-normativity is apparent enough for Miranda to question whether she has been taking her medication demonstrates that, from an outside perspective, she is "psychotic," "crazy." However, by writing this section of the plot in such a way, Lee allows Lucia to "spring forth from that within," using language nontraditionally to effectively communicate the anger, the fervor and the internal unrest that has resulted from the unrelenting repression others have imposed on her for the duration of her life (Cixous 887).

Cixous' criticism also sheds light upon the function of the literary devices Lee uses in this passage. By analogizing Lucia's pills to an animal's leash, on which everyone around her pulls, the narrator highlights the dehumanization and constraint the other characters have thrust upon her and the agency they have taken away. Then, in calling Miranda "the monster" and using the pronoun "it" to describe her, the text suggests that the Lucia directs the fury she exhibits in this scene not just towards Miranda, but towards this larger collective, towards all those around her who have a

“hand to pull” on her leash. The narrator’s tone and diction here effectively convey Lucia’s feelings of entrapment, her lack of control and her utter despair. In Cixous’ words, she is “biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of” (Cixous 887). Contrary to Baym’s argument that a female discourse will be “politically ineffectual,” Lee’s structure and syntax, as shown, is entirely intelligible to the average reader despite its idiosyncrasy. The discourse here is uniquely feminine, uniquely Chinese-American, uniquely Lucia, not in its “privacy” nor in its lack of clarity, but in its ability to effectively represent the emotional unease that this kind of repression manufactures within its subject. Lucia does invent her own language here, for she communicates an experience with language that those who occupy the hegemonic majority simply cannot access from a creative standpoint; it is birthed from the convergence of all her identities and the repression she has encountered as a result.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

As evidenced by the sheer disciplinary variation in the theoretical framework of this paper, the issue of female psychological condition is widely relevant within academia and society as a whole. Though, in terms of topics like gender and madness, literary criticism may not hold the same cultural weight as "controlled" scientific disciplines such as neuropsychology and behavioral study, by considering literary works as cogent representations of human experience, scholars can develop socially sensitive practices of understanding female madness. *The Center Cannot Hold*, for example, describes interactions which embody Ranciere's concept of the police as well as interactions which exhibit a political approach. This juxtaposition of moments where professionals deny Saks her "part" and moments where other characters enact politics through their phenomenological understanding of her psychological condition proves the invalidity of so-called "empirical" interpretations of difference. Similarly, in *Everything Here is Beautiful*, when Lee uses nontraditional language à la Cixous to narrate Lucia's experiences with psychosis, she implements politics into her text through the heroine's simultaneous discursive resistance and intelligibility. Despite lacking the advantage of entirely representing real events, the creative quality of the novel form allows Lee to carefully craft her narrative language and use multiple perspectives in a way that helps the reader comprehend Lucia's seemingly inexplicable behavior. For this reason, *Everything Here is Beautiful* extends beyond the scope of the memoir genre by enacting politics through fictional form without needing to represent real-life events.

Lee's novel is also particularly significant in its engagement with intersectionality. She crafts a central character with several non-normative sociocultural identities and effectively represents the specific kinds of repression that accompany each. By doing so, she creates the opportunity to utilize various theoretical modes of recognizing social and discursive interactions between dominant and nondominant groups. Butler's "Doing Justice to Someone" highlights the structured social practices that assert unintelligibility upon people who fall under the category of "other." In conjunction with Lee's work, this theoretical approach helps to explain the frustration and subjugation Lucia feels in relation to the constant invalidation that the other characters impose upon her. Garland-Thomson asserts that the qualities traditionally associated with disability also correlate with existing societal expectations for those who occupy any category of "other," such as women and people of color. This argument bolsters an analysis of Lee's work by underscoring the weight of the oppression Lucia faces as a person with non-normative gender, race, ethnicity and psychological condition.

In general, this literary exploration exposes the ways in which Western medicinal practices and cultural structures have enacted violence upon the female psychological condition. Not only does the hegemonic makeup of society repeatedly ignore the experiences and emotions of the "other," the presiding discourse consistently discounts and denigrates the merit of nondominant speech. Through theoretical inspections of difference and close readings of relevant texts, however, it becomes clear that psychosis and reason are not antithetical. Rather, using a socially just means of literary analysis urges an evolution in Western perceptions of, and engagements with,

non-normative psychological condition. Saks and Lee both develop political approaches to discussing madness by redefining intelligibility, illustrating the institutional oppression of the “other” in Western social structures, and displaying the merit of methods like phenomenology. In so doing, the authors of these primary texts move their readers towards adopting compassion as an impetus for creating a community with equality at its core, dismissing the myth that the “part of no part” is inevitable and encouraging the advent of a world where everyone has a “part.”

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