3. Bodies without Voices: Reclaiming Female Subjectivity in Anna Furse's *Augustine(Big Hysteria)*[1]

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Abstract

This article explores the reclamation of female subjectivity in Anna Furse's *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* through a critical examination of how the play reconfigures the historical narrative of female hysteria. Centering on the dramatization of the real-life case of Augustine, a 19th-century patient at the Salpêtrière Hospital under the supervision of neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, Furse's work interrogates the patriarchal dynamics that rendered women's bodies hyper-visible while simultaneously erasing their voices. Drawing upon feminist theory, the article argues that *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* functions as a radical intervention in the medicalized spectacle of female suffering by foregrounding the silenced subjectivity of Augustine. Through non-linear dramaturgy, embodied performance, and strategic metatheatricality, Furse exposes the mechanisms of gendered objectification and challenges the historical complicity of science and art in the construction of the "hysterical woman." The article further situates Furse's play within broader feminist efforts to re-narrate histories of medical violence and explores how performative strategies can restore agency to historically marginalized female figures. By reimagining Augustine not merely as a pathological case but as a resistant subject, Furse reclaims a space for female integrity—an integrity grounded not in compliance with normative discourses of health, rationality, or femininity, but in the assertion of bodily autonomy and narrative authority. The article concludes by reflecting on the significance of reclaiming such voices in contemporary feminist theatre and the ongoing relevance of critiquing institutional frameworks that continue to silence women.

Keywords: Hysteria, female body, feminist theatre, subjectivity, female integrity

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Sessiz Bedenler: Anna Furse'un *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* Oyununda Kadın Öznelliğinin Yeniden İnşası[3]

Öz

Bu makale, Anna Furse'un *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* adlı oyununda kadın öznelliğinin nasıl yeniden kazanıldığını inceleyerek, kadın histerisi tarihine dair anlatıların nasıl sorgulandığını ele alır. Oyun, 19. yüzyılda Salpêtrière Hastanesi'nde ünlü nörolog Jean-Martin Charcot'nun denetimi altında bulunan gerçek bir vaka olan Augustine'in hikâyesini sahneye taşırken, kadın bedenlerinin tarihsel olarak nasıl aşırı görünür kılındığı, buna karşılık seslerinin nasıl bastırıldığı sorunsalını merkeze alır. Feminist kuramdan yararlanan bu makale, *Augustine (Big Hysteria)*'nın, kadınların acısını tıbbi ve sanatsal bir gösteriye dönüştüren ataerkil yapıya karşı radikal bir müdahale olduğunu öne sürer. Furse, doğrusal olmayan bir dramatik yapı, bedensel performans ve metatiyatral stratejiler yoluyla, cinsiyete dayalı nesneleştirmenin araçlarını açığa çıkarır ve "histerik kadın" imgesinin oluşumunda bilim ve sanatın tarihsel işbirliğini sorgular. Makale, Furse'un oyununu, tıbbi şiddet geçmişlerini feminist bir perspektifle yeniden anlatma çabalarının bir parçası olarak konumlandırır ve performatif stratejilerin tarihsel olarak bastırılmış kadın figürlerine nasıl yeniden özne konumu kazandırabileceğini tartışır. Augustine'i yalnızca patolojik bir vaka olarak değil, aynı zamanda direniş gösteren bir özne olarak yeniden tahayyül eden Furse, kadın bütünlüğünü yeniden tanımlar. Bu bütünlük, normatif sağlık, akıl veya kadınlık anlayışına uyum sağlamakla değil, bedensel özerklik ve anlatısel yetkinlik iddiasıyla kurulur. Makale, bu tür seslerin günümüz feminist tiyatrosunda yeniden duyulur kılınmasının önemine ve kadınları susturmaya devam eden kurumsal yapıları eleştirmenin güncelliğine dikkat çekerek sona erer.

Anahtar kelimeler: histeri, kadın bedeni, feminist tiyatro, özneleşme, kadın bütünlüğü.

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Introduction

Throughout history, the female body has been subjected to a range of regulatory discourses and institutional practices that have sought to define, control, and often pathologize women's behavior and identity. Among these, the medical diagnosis of hysteria stands as one of the most enduring and symbolically charged mechanisms through which patriarchal power has exerted control over female subjectivity. Rooted in classical antiquity and reaching its most codified form in 19th-century medical institutions, hysteria has historically functioned not merely as a clinical category, but as a cultural narrative—one that casts women as unstable, irrational, and in need of male interpretation and intervention.

Feminist scholarship has long interrogated the gendered nature of such diagnostic frameworks, arguing that hysteria reflects not a medical reality but a sociopolitical construction—an attempt to silence female voices by pathologizing their expressions of agency, desire, and dissent. As Elaine Showalter, Susan Bordo, and Hélène Cixous, among others, have demonstrated, the label of hysteria has often operated as a means of disciplining women who resist normative gender roles or who express emotional, sexual, or intellectual autonomy. In this context, hysteria becomes emblematic of a broader cultural strategy: the reduction of women to bodies without voices, to spectacles of suffering rather than subjects of experience.

Anna Furse's *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* engages directly with this legacy, dramatizing the real-life case of Augustine—a teenage girl institutionalized at the Salpêtrière Hospital under the care of neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot in the late 19th century. Augustine's body was photographed, displayed, and studied, yet her voice remained silenced under the weight of medical and patriarchal authority. Furse's play offers a feminist reimagining of this history, seeking to restore narrative and bodily agency to a figure long confined to the margins of scientific spectacle.

This article situates *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* within the broader discourse of feminist theatre and medical humanities, exploring how Furse reclaims female subjectivity from the historical weight of the hysteria diagnosis. By examining the interplay between theatrical form, embodied performance, and feminist critique, the article argues that the play functions as a powerful intervention in patriarchal narratives that continue to regulate and suppress women's voices. In doing so, *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* challenges not only historical understandings of hysteria but also contemporary frameworks through which female identity and integrity are still negotiated.

Historical Background of Hysteria

Etymologically, the word *hysteria* stands for the Greek word *hysteron* meaning womb, the female genitalia. In antiquity, Hippocrates defined hysteria as "the disease of the wandering womb" (Wald, 2007, p. 28) and that was the reason of some hysterical symptoms like hallucinations, loss of sense in any part of the body, fainting. Haute and Geyskens explain the definition of hysteria and its roots:

> Hysteria is characterised by convulsive attacks, mysterious pains in various parts of the body, an inexplicable loss of functions (speech, for instance) and conversion symptoms: corporal symptoms such as paralysis for which no clear organic cause can be found. This syndrome was already known to the Greeks. As the name 'hysteria' indicates, they linked this syndrome with the 'agility of the uterus'. The Greeks viewed hysteria as a typically female problem: the uterus travels throughout the whole body, and in this way constantly causes different symptoms in different locations (globus hystericus, pains in various parts of the body and so forth) (2012, p.11).

Hysteria was attributed to the female alone and it was believed to be caused by the lack of sexual intercourse (Wald, 2007, p. 28). According to the patriarchal thought, it was against the nature of woman because the woman is the one who is supposed to marry, bear a child and live a domestic life. Such expectations from woman were to pull her into the patriarchal order (Devereux, 2014, p. 20). After the rise of Christianity, the ancient ideas about the cause of hysteria gave place to the beliefs that hysteria was an "indicator of evil possession" (Wald, 2007, p. 28). At these times, hysteric women were regarded as witches and they were punished and even burned. Giving them immediate labels as witches, nobody was bothered to give the hysterics appropriate treatment. In the seventeenth century, hysteria was thought to be a disease to be treated, and the brain and the nervous system were the cause of it. In the eighteenth century, hysteria was feminised again (Ibid., p.28). This time, it was comprehended that women's weak psychical nature was the reason because they did not have the strength to overcome hysterical symptoms as the men did. Christina Wald states this in her book:

> The feminine norm prevalent in the eighteenth century is the sensitive, excessively refined woman who is too frail and too easily impressionable to resist the hysterical symptoms of her own body and, by extension, morally dangerous influences from the outside. Because of their weaker physical constitution, women are considered more prone to hysterical symptoms and attacks than the physically and mentally more robust men (Ibid., p.29).

Wald asserts that according to eighteenth century understanding of hysteria it was not only caused by woman's physical weakness but also by her mental fragility. Its relation to the womb was relinquished. Instead, both physical and psychological state of woman became the reason.

19th Century Approaches of Hysteria: From Hypnosis to the Talking Cure

In the nineteenth century, the studies on hysteria reached the top. The lectures of Professor Jean Martin Charcot were famous as he was using hysterical women using hypnosis on hysterical women on the stage. He worked at the Salpêtriére where he began his study of hysteria. He claimed that hysteria was a hereditary disease and had psychological origins. Besides this, he maintained that although the symptoms were caused by emotions, hysterical patients did not have control over their situations. Furthermore, he thought that hysteria could also be seen in men (Showalter, 1987, p. 147-148).

The Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris served as a pivotal institution in the late 19th century for the study and treatment of hysteria, particularly under the leadership of neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot. At the time, hysteria was considered a predominantly female disorder characterized by a variety of physical symptoms without apparent organic cause, such as paralysis, fainting, and hallucinations. Charcot sought to document and understand these manifestations using a clinical and visual approach. He employed photography and public lectures to present his female patients—especially Augustine, one of his most famous subjects—as cases of medical curiosity and scientific investigation. These displays often reduced the women to passive bodies subjected to male observation and control.

Charcot also experimented with hypnosis as a therapeutic and diagnostic tool, believing it could unlock the psychological mechanisms behind hysterical symptoms. His work had a significant influence on the young Sigmund Freud, who visited the Salpêtrière in 1886 as a student and was deeply impressed by Charcot's innovative approach to neurology and the mind-body connection. However, Freud later moved away from Charcot's hypnotic techniques and, in collaboration with Joseph Breuer, developed what would become the foundation of psychoanalysis.

Freud and Breuer's alternative approach, known as the "talking cure," shifted the understanding of

hysteria from a neurological disorder to a psychological one. Instead of hypnotizing patients, they encouraged them to speak freely about their thoughts, memories, and dreams. This method allowed repressed emotions and traumatic experiences to emerge, thereby uncovering the unconscious causes of their symptoms. Freud theorized that hysterical symptoms were symbolic expressions of unresolved inner conflicts, often related to sexuality and early childhood experiences. This marked a critical transition in the history of psychiatry and feminist thought, as the focus turned to the meanings behind the symptoms rather than the symptoms themselves.

In *Augustine (Big Hysteria)*, Anna Furse references this historical shift by staging Freud as a character who uses the talking cure in his sessions with Augustine. However, the play does not merely recount the clinical process—it also critically examines the gendered power dynamics involved. Although Freud's methods sought to give voice to the unconscious mind, they still operated within a patriarchal framework that interpreted female speech and behavior through male-defined norms. Furse's portrayal of Freud and Augustine brings these tensions to the forefront, highlighting how even therapeutic innovations like the talking cure could reinforce dominant gender ideologies unless questioned through a feminist lens.

Augustine (Big Hysteria)

In this section, Anna Furse's *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* is examined in relation to the objectification of the female body within patriarchal medical discourse and the strategies of resistance the play offers through theatrical performance. Based on the real-life case of Augustine, a teenage girl institutionalized at the Salpêtrière Hospital in 19th-century Paris and exhibited as a model of hysteria by neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, Furse's play critically engages with how women's bodies have historically been pathologized, studied, and put on display, while their voices and subjectivity have been systematically silenced. Rather than presenting Augustine as a passive victim, Furse portrays her as a figure of resistance, reclaiming agency through bodily expression. Drawing on feminist and psychoanalytic theory—particularly Lacanian concepts of the phallogocentric Symbolic Order—the play suggests that Augustine defies her prescribed gender role and invents an alternative, embodied language to communicate what cannot be spoken. Through this reimagining, *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* exposes the intersection of gender, power, and medical authority, and offers a critical feminist intervention into the historical narrative of hysteria. This section of the article will explore how the play challenges patriarchal constructs by giving voice to a historically silenced figure, and how it reclaims female subjectivity through the medium of performance.

In *Augustine (Big Hysteria)*, the author takes the female body and its association with hysteria as a starting point and rewrites the story of Augustine. She gives us a triangle of real life characters in the play which includes Charcot, Freud and the patient, Augustine. She creates fictional versions of these real life personalities to criticise the ideas which have been taken for granted throughout history. The play takes place in the nineteenth century but it was produced in 1991. She brings forward an issue that belongs to the previous century so that the twentieth century audience can compare and contrast what has changed till then. The nineteenth century was an important era for the studies of hysteria. It was a time when Professor Jean-Martin Charcot became famous for his studies and lectures on hysteria. He was the first European theorist working on this branch. He was regarded as "the Caesar, or the Napoleon, of hysteria" (Showalter, p. xv). According to him, hysteria was a hereditary disease caused by psychological origins (Showalter, 2004, p. 147). He carried out his researches at the Salpêtriére Hospital which was the heart of the study of hysteria in that era. He developed a hypnosis technique in order to find a cure for hysterical symptoms. Sigmund Freud, who was a student at the time, had a chance to

work with him in the Salpêtriére Hospital in 1886. Freud was attracted by Charcot's lectures. However, he chose to use a new technique developed by his colleague, Joseph Breuer which was called talking therapy. By listening to patients and recording, the doctors could explore what had been hidden in the patient's mind which enabled them to reveal the patient's subconscious (Furse, 1997, p. 8). In the play, we can see Freud practicing this therapy on Augustine. As Furse explained in the introduction of the play, after reading the real life accounts of Augustine in Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985), she decided to go to the Salpêtriére Hospital in Paris to make further research. She found the genuine copy of the *Iconographie Photographie de la Salpêtriére* which included the case studies of hysteria with sketches, photographs and written accounts. Among the patients, Augustine was the one who was photographed the most and that even caused her to become colour blind. According to the iconographies that were searched by Furse, Augustine's life story was a tragic one. At an early age, she was left with her relatives who gave her to the convent. She was exposed to harsh punishment by priests and nuns there because as "a bright, rebellious and precocious child" (Ibid., p.2) she was believed to be possessed by the Demon. When she was just thirteen, she was raped by her employer Monsieur C who threatened to kill her. The exploitation of her body continued through the years within her mother's knowledge. Her abuser was also her mother's lover. She could be considered as a child woman who suddenly found herself as sexually matured even before she had her menstruation. With a close look at her life story, it is obvious that sexual abuse that she has gone through in her past makes her hysterical. Therefore, her situation is an example of trauma. For Freud, trauma is caused by an unpleasant event that has been experienced in the past which goes back to childhood (Mollon, 2000, p. 18). He claims that sexual abuse that has been gone through in the childhood has traumatic effects on one's psychology and it results in hysterical situations. Similarly, Wald states that:

> Freud's therapy uncovers that in many cases, the psychic trauma instigating hysteric conversion was caused by sexual child abuse, often by a close relative or a friend of the family; he therefore comes to develop a theory that acknowledges the importance of sexual traumata for the aetiology of hysteria (2007, p. 35).

Sexual trauma that she was exposed to in her childhood is what Augustine tries to express through semiotic language in the play. In order to reveal her suffering caused by the tragic circumstances in her childhood years, she uses her body as a mode of writing as Cixous defines it (Gamble, 2001, p. 140). Joanna Townsend mentions the relationship between hysterical action and memory in her article "Remembering the Performing Body":

> The conflict between memory and the repression of memory which is at the core of the hysterical condition is thus through bodily symptoms by means of what Freud and Breuer termed as 'conversion': the hysterical symptom acts out repressed memories through the disguised, performative language of the body (2000, p. 128).

In this sense, we can say that fictional Augustine's suppressed agony in her subconscious finds a way through her hysterical actions. These actions turn into a body language for her. Although phallogocentric discourse excludes woman from the centre, woman's body can speak for itself and tells woman's own story. For example, in the lectures of Charcot, Augustine is shown as if she was the embodiment of hysteria. From time to time, she loses control of herself. Moreover, she loses some of her senses and becomes paralysed. Her grief unveils through her body movements and performance. Her mind is converted to her body and she expresses herself in an unconventional way. Similarly, Showalter considers hysteria as an emotional stress and mental conflict and she explains that the ones who are in a hysterical condition cannot find the right words to express themselves. Therefore, she maintains that they use their bodies as a way of communication (Young, 2000, p. 135).

Together with the characterisation of the reowned neurologist, Charcot, the play uncovers the patriarchal imperative who subordinates women. At the beginning of the play, Furse describes him as "witty, arrogant showman" (Furse, 1997, p. 16). As a spokes model of the male discourse which associates man with the mind and reduces woman to the body, Charcot, unrelentingly, emphasises the presupposed relationship between the body and hysteria throughout the play. For instance, he tells Freud initially:

> My dear Herr Doctor. The first thing you must learn about our hysterics is that they may have particularly lively minds, excited no doubt by reading cheap novels and romances! Then they come here and spend a lot of time lying on their backs – fiction affliction! Now the disease is precipitated by some trauma no doubt and of course we cannot ignore a predisposition to hysteria, nor its hereditary basis, true. Madness breeds madness! And the past may shape the present! But we won't find the answer in her chattering, Herr Doctor. And certainly not in dreams! No, the answer lies IN THE BODY [...] (Ibid., p.34).

In this conversation, Charcot, as a representative of the patriarchal medical community, claims that madness is a hereditary disease. Although he does not directly say that it is peculiar to women, his actions show that he uses the (female) hysterics' bodies as objects of his lectures.

According to the phallocentric ideology, women are supposed to be weak and emotional whereas men are the strong ones. However, it is only a social construction for the appropriation of woman's body standing for madness. That is how patriarchy sees the female in terms of gender as language reveals binary oppositions constructed by patriarchy which gives one superiority over the other such as mind/body, culture/nature, father/mother, sun/moon, active/passive. The female and the objects associated with her occupy the right side which makes them the other (Cixous, 1998, p. 578-84). According to the patriarchal binary thought as Cixous calls it, woman is supposed to be irrational. In order to reveal these binaries, Furse tries to show us how patriarchy subjugates woman by "creating a hospital setting with all female hysterics and all male spectators" (Aston, 2002, p. 79). In Charcot's lecture, Augustine is presented like an actress who gives us hysterical performance as a resistance to her objectification. Charcot uses her body as an object of the male gaze. Thus, Furse chooses to open the play with one of Charcot's lectures in which he attracts public attention due to his use of hypnosis and the reactions of the patients to his techniques. In the amphitheatre full of spectators, she is like a "showgirl" (Furse, 1997, p. 1) on the stage. Her body is the focus of the lecture. Charcot thinks that the hysterical body should be examined in detail as a first step to understand what hysteria is. It is clear from his words:

> [...] Now all diseases come from Nature and Nature is most certainly Divine. Severe, cold, heat, wet, the restlessness of winds, all play their part in weakening the human body. There's no need to ascribe a special divinity to one disease over another. Each has a nature, power and intrigue of its own; none is hopeless or incapable of treatment, HYSTERIA INCLUDED! But firstly, WHAT IS HYSTERIA? We must begin by exploring the territory of the hysterical body, then, like cartographers, we must chart it, map out its contours, possess its enigmas... (Ibid., p.18).

We can say that he associates all diseases with the nature. He claims that nature weakens the human body. According to Cixous' explanation of the aforementioned binaries, the patriarchal ideology considers nature related to woman. In this sense, although he tries to defend that he is just "a visionary", he is the one who uses female body insensibly as a map in order to define hysteria. For example, when he is explaining the hysteria, he shows the part of Augustine's body which is through the womb. His treatment of Augustine is as if her body is the object that can be exhibited in a gallery. He explains this saying:

> […] I am a visionary! Mine is a SCIENCE of looking (and I know hose artists amongst you, will vouch for the deep revelations the mind's eye can bring forth); art has its basis, observation, experience, and reasoning. My method is a form of vivisection if you like – and these slices of life conjure answers BEFORE MY VERY EYES! […] (Ibid., p.18).

He is just interested in the symptoms of the disease, so he uses Augustine's body as a way of proving his scientific research. He does not listen to her story. When she speaks, he immediately labels her speech as "Much ado about nothing" (Ibid., p.20). In his book, *Assault on Truth*, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson frames this issue through Freudian psychoanalysis and refers to Freud's work in Paris:

> In 1895 and 1896 Freud, in listening to his women patients, learned that something dreadful and violent lay in their past. The psychiatrists who had heard these stories before Freud had accused their patients of being hysterical liars and had dismissed their memories as fantasy. Freud was the first psychiatrist who believed his patients were telling the truth. These women were sick, not because they came from "tainted" families but because something terrible and secret had been as children (2012, p. 27).

Although Freud remains under the influence of Charcot at the end of the day, at least he tries talking therapy on Augustine. In this sense, Freud can be considered as the victim of the system too as he cannot get over Charcot. However, it is obvious that Charcot degrades hysterical patients by ignoring what they are saying. Similarly, in her article "Remembering the Performing Body", Joanna Townsend asserts that patriarchy rejects the memories of woman and her explanation about her suffering, she says that:

> […] the memories of hysteric women have reached us only via the frame of their doctors […] The woman's voice was itself hardly ever heard or when recorded, was denied importance […] Furse seeks to reclaim and most vitally to perform the hysterics memory for their audiences, not through the doctors' words by which these patients' stories have reached us, but from the perspectives of the patient themselves (2000, p. 127).

In the play, as Augustine feels that she is ignored even by Freud who seems to be listening to her at the first glance, she starts struggling to speak after a while. However, to create an alternative language which Julia Kristeva calls the semiotic dimension of the language (Butler, 1989, p. 109), she finds another way to express herself. For her, language contains two dimensions: the symbolic and the semiotic. The symbolic consists of words and meanings attached to them. However, the semiotic is made of sound, music, rhythm and the body language. The semiotic reflects the way we speak rather than what we articulate. The symbolic orders what we are expected to do in the society while the semiotic is more driven by our instincts so it becomes a way out through the patriarchal system of language as Tyson states:

> It is noteworthy, Kristeva observes, that both our instinctual drives and our earliest connections to our mothers are repressed by our entrance into language. For, language is the dominion of patriarchy, which controls its symbolic, or meaningmaking, dimension. The semiotic, however, remains beyond patriarchal programming, and whatever patriarchy can't control outright, it represses (Tyson, 2006, p. 104).

In this sense, we can say that Furse presents us the Violinist as Augustine's alter ego in order to show that through music, Augustine can express her feelings within the male discourse which subjugates her. For example, whenever she has hysterical attacks, she becomes the Violinist playing her tune according to her feelings as her doppelgänger. Furse describes the Violinist saying: "Light up on Violinist in a tight overhead light. She shifts the vibrato note into painful, high-pitched playing" (Furse, 1997, p. 35). For example, in a gloomy atmosphere of the Salpêtriére Hospital, with the noises of a group of people attending Charcot's lectures and the scream of hysterics, a girl child's voice is heard singing a song. In pursuit of this children's song, Augustine's reaction is seen:

> Oh, there's something pulling my fingers, pulling my tongue, there is something in my throat… MAMAN!!!!!!!! (*She weeps.)* My neck, oh, my neck, my neck hurts, I can't, can't breathe… MAMAN!!!! (Ibid., p.17).

This scene, which opens with one of Augustine's hysterical situations, is accompanied by violin in the background. Throughout the play, Furse lets violin play according to Augustine's condition. For instance, when Augustine's words are independent of each other and sometimes unfinished, her situation seems to show an ordinary hysterical symptom. However, when music plays in the background, it reflects her mind and stands for her psychological state. This can be considered as an approach that represents psychoanalysis. In conventional psychoanalysis method, patients talk in order to reveal their repressed feelings (Barry, 2009, p. 92). Thus, the secrets lying under their subconscious are revealed. Louis Tyson, in his book *Critical Theory Today*, addresses the origins of the unconscious to comprehend Freud's theory of psyche (2006). He asserts that human beings are affected by desires, fears, needs and conflicts and they are not aware of these motivations. The unconscious occurs at a young age through the repression due to these painful experiences and emotions. However, we cannot get rid of these unhappy psychological events by repression. On the contrary, it accelerates the current experience to happen. In this stage, our conflicting feelings about these unhappy events come to surface. If we consider this for the play, we can say that revealing of the unconscious is a Freudian approach while the Violinist playing music in the background as a doppelgänger of Augustine turns that into a feminist criticism. In the introduction of the play, Furse explains that she wants to match the Violinist with Augustine as her doppelgänger so that the Violinist can uncover the reason of Augustine's hysterical screams, her worries, in short all of her diseased psyche (Furse, 1997, p. 10). Furthermore, in one part, Augustine's nightgown falls on her shoulders when she is photographed and this scene is accompanied by the Violinist playing music. According to Furse, this scene is a criticism of female body's turning into an instrument for science whose limits are determined by patriarchy. In this sense, while there is a reference to Freud's psychoanalytical approach through Augustine's hysterical condition and music, there is also a reference to Lacan's psychoanalytical thought. It is because Lacan associates psychoanalysis with language. Moreover, points that remain in the subconscious are shaped by language (Barry, 2009, p. 106). Whereas this approach becomes a subject of multiple studies by Feminist theoreticians afterwards, it is reflected through music by Furse in her play.

Charcot gets the hysterics' photographs taken in the Salpêtriére Hospital and calls the asylum "a living museum of suffering" (Furse, 1997, p. 17) because it was used as a saltpetre store making gunpowder at the age of Louis XIII. He claims that the hysterics have such energy that they are ready to explode. He makes a connection with the saltpetre and "the arsenal of women" (Ibid., p.17), which contains their repressed feelings about incest, rape, etc. When they try to unfold these reminiscences as it is in the personification of Augustine, they are just ignored by their doctors. Therefore, their feelings are trapped inside ready to be relieved by the hysterical actions. In the play, it is obvious that as a representative of patriarchy Charcot wants to shape them. For example, his assistants take Augustine's photographs. Once he turns her into a holy image by folding her arms in prayer as Furse describes: "He is moulding her body and she is free associating with the physical cues he gives her, now with gestures. He folds her arms in prayer. Augustine's whole body becomes suffused with saintliness. Her eyes gaze heavenward" (Ibid., p.27). In order to avoid this cultural shaping which regards the hysteric as a misfit, Augustine uses her body for communication. For Cixous, hysterical symptom is a reaction just like the paralysis of a limb. The body represents a repressed idea so the body speaks out what a conscious mind cannot say. In a way, unconscious thoughts are written out through the body itself (Tyson, 2006, p. 150). Within this argument, we can consider her idea of é*criture féminine*, feminine writing, and hysterics because Augustine has the effects of the unconscious and she uses her body as a mode of writing. Cixous says:

"Write yourself: your body must make itself heard" (Cixous, 1998). Then the huge sources of the unconscious will burst. Finally, the inexhaustible feminine imaginary is going to be deployed" (Wald,2007, p. 35). For Cixous, if woman writes through her body, she will get rid of the appropriation inflicted upon her and the limitation of her voice. In the play, although the doctors, Charcot and Freud are indifferent to her condition and her story, we see her resistance to patriarchy when she dances, and her alter ego when the Violinist plays music according to her mood.

Augustine's language is childish and descriptive. She often uses the word "maman" which refers to her mother. As a child woman, we can say that it is normal to articulate this word. Although the play is written in English, the word "maman" is French. In this sense, it can be considered an indicator of her childhood memories because she is French. It can be thought that she remembers her traumatic past. In the book *Trauma Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth defines the post-traumatic stress disorder:

> [...] there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event (1995, p. 4).

Caruth's definition of trauma is related to unpleasant past experiences recurring through hysterics' actions. Similarly, in Augustine's hallucinations, she continually talks with her mother because she recalls her problematic childhood. Yet the word "maman" is also the indication of her bond with the mother. In her essay "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother", Luce Irigaray describes the child's lifelong relation with his/her original place in the life as "nourishing earth, first waters, first envelopes, where the child was whole, the mother whole through the mediation of her blood" (Furse, 1997, p. 39). When the child is born and the umbilical cord is cut, that wholeness is broken down. Then when the child grows up and starts to speak, he/she begins to be exposed to the Law of the Father as Lacan calls because once we as human beings become "the speaking subject" (Tyson, 2006, p. 143) of the symbolic order, we begin to define our identity. In this system of the society, the father decides what we believe, value, respect or love because men create the culture, women stay at home. We are introduced to these rules which are created by men. In fact, they are not unique, they are socially constructed. In relation to this point, we can say that Augustine is in the Real stage related to the mother that shows us that she is resisting to the Symbolic order because although she speaks nobody listens. Her situation is deteriorated after Freud who seems to be listening to her at first misunderstands her and implies that she can be in love with the doctor or maybe she is the reason of her suffering. The most important symptom is that she feels suffocation while speaking. It indicates that the Symbolic order limits her speaking. She is literally struggling to speak. For instance, at the beginning, the play opens with a lullaby which is again the presentation of Augustine linked with the mother. There is girl child's voice along with the invisible Violinist. The child sings and goes like: "Oh my pretty Augustine, Augustine, Augustine/Oh my pretty Augustine, everything's cracked. /Eyes are cracked, head is cracked, /Hand is cracked, heart is cracked, /Oh, my pretty Augustine, everything's cracked" (Furse, 1997, p. 17). It looks like a lullaby but in fact, it is a way of telling a story. In the play, it actually reflects Augustine's suffering about her past, the times she is raped and her mother remains indifferent to her situation. It shows how everything is shuttered in her life due to sexual abuse. The lullaby is one of the best examples of Kristeva's semiotic which is "the poetic flowof the language" (Butler, 1989, p. 104).

In the play, Augustine's body is regarded as the archetype of the disease and Charcot as a male voyeur like the other male spectators in his lectures, objectifies her body. Furse describes him as a TV reporter as he shows the parts of her body especially her womb area. He also uses methods like ovarian

compression with his fingers hurting her. He touches the parts of her body, for example, under the breasts. He is totally obsessed with the body using her like a model to his lectures. However, he does not care if he hurts her body or not. He is like her rapist; he uses her body for a purpose. That's why; we can say that Charcot is a similar name with her rapist Carnot. Charcot ignores her words; he only sticks to his research. He is not able to recognise that illness does not have to be physical and the problem with the doctors is that they are very scientific. Especially Charcot is very obsessed with the idea that hysteria is a physical illness. Therefore, the patient is just a subject for them. They cannot see Augustine as she is. We can understand that in his conversation with Freud:

> CHARCOT: See how hysterics scream and shout? Much ado about nothing! [...]
>
> FREUD: Herr Professeur, you know you were talking of the adventure, the courage to see the new?[...] Couldn't it all be an antic disposition an outward performance if you like...of some deeper story trying to be told? Of a sexual nature... I have noticed, with Mlle Dubois, whose words during an attack I have been documenting as you asked.
>
> CHARCOT: Herr Freud, I merely asked you to record what occurred, physically and vocally...[...] we none the less adhere stringently to the ethics of our profession, namely: it is inappropriate, not to say inadmissible, to develop particular affectionfor the patients. [..] Our job is to step back, take a look, keep our minds clear for our scientific purpose (Furse, 1997, p. 31).

Charcot does not even know his patient Augustine's name. When Freud asks if he remembers or not, he just calls her as their young pearl. That indicates that he is not aware of her identity. Until Freud tells him who she is, he takes her as an object, a pearl. In fact, in the play, both Charcot and Freud dehumanise her. In the scene, when Charcot pricks her body with a pin, he makes an association between hysterical body and witch's body because her body does not respond to his pricking. Seeing that she does not sense, he labels her as a witch. He tells the audience:

> You see, I have pierced the skin or slightly drawn a little blood, and yet there is absolutely no sensation. We are reminded of the skins of sorceresses. Prick a stigmata diaboli, there will be no sensation. Indeed the comparison between hysterics and witches is not to be passed over lightly. Scratch a hysteric, find a witch! (Ibid., p.24).

That reminds us of how women are blamed for witchcraft in medieval times. If a woman is found guilty of witchcraft, she is burned alive in public or if she cannot untie her hands and feet in the water, she will be drowned. In *Augustine,* Charcot considers hysterics as evil creatures as he says "The demon has entered the demon has left" (Ibid., p.24), when the attack of hysteria occurs. From the medieval times to the late nineteenth century when the play is set, the fate of the woman has never changed because witches and hysterics are actually women who can think. Especially hysterics bring out what they repressed in their actions. In the play, Augustine's destiny which is determined by patriarchal medical community is similar to these women. She is condemned by patriarchy as a misfit and her fate is punishment or can be even death. For example, Augustine tells about how Sister Jeanne reacts, she tells Augustine about her situation: "God will punish you for this, my child. The flames of hell burn all sinners! The devil has got into you! You are unclean. They threw ice water in my face. The next day I was put in the slammer again." (Furse, 1997, p. 28). Here, Sister Jeanne represents the patriarchal thought, the Law of the Father because she reveals how society sees her because the religion is also shaped by patriarchal language. In this sense, she explains that society regards her as devil and that she has to be punished.

In the play, even though nobody listens to her and for this reason her attacks happen more frequently than before, Augustine uses symbols while telling her story. She explains how her mother ignores the rape of her daughter by her lover. Even as an act of resistance to the patriarchal medical community, she

tears her straitjacket. In fact, she is acting out against phallocentric ideology which regards her as hysterical. In order to show her defying to patriarchy, she tells her story by using symbolical words standing for the phallus and the rape scene. For example, she describes phallus as snake, rat etc. and this is constantly repeated throughout the play. She describes rape scenes and her rapist as follows:

> Pig! Pig! You are HURTING ME! Pig! Catch the rats, catch the rats! The rats are getting bigger! My throat! Oh my throat hurts...Something pulling my tongue. I won't uncross my legs! [...] You are so heavy [...] Put that snake back in your trousers! Oh the peacocks, the peacocks with their big tails cluttered with eyes! Get your rat out of my botto... Maman! Oh, the pig! The pig!... No, I didn't know that's how babies were made...it made me cry then[...] (Ibid., p.40).

Through her use of symbolical words, we can understand what kind of abuse she has been inflicted upon. The rapist uses her for his desires, for example; he probably forces her to an oral intercourse so she feels that she cannot breathe and that she is suffocated. Becoming a woman child who is forced to do a man's wishes is so hard for her. It is obvious that what she has been going through is a torture. However, in the asylum, she does not get better either as the doctors do not care about her condition. Instead, she begins to resist in a frenzied fashion. For example, she dances tarantella which takes its name from a poisonous spider tarantula in the South of Italy (Mızıkyan-Akfıçıcı). It was commonly believed that the person who was bitten by this spider can get rid of the poison with a frenzied dance (Moeggenborg, 2000). When she dances tarantella, she creates her own way of expressing herself as a woman who is not understood by man. She dances in the rain referring to nature which is supposed to be related to woman. Furse describes her dance:

> AUGUSTINE: I love you trees! I love you! You are all right side up! I am all upside down. [...] I am the impossible dance! [..] I am the flood! [...] I am sour milk! [...] I am a bird and I am a snake![...] (Furse, 1997, p. 46).

In this dialogue, with the word "flood" Furse refers to the Great Flood in the Bible. As commonly known, God punishes human race with the flood in order to wipe the wickedness off the face of Earth. Then, by regarding herself as a snake, Furse gives the implication of Adam and Eve story in the Bible. In the story, snake represents Satan and Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit due to Satan's deception. Depending on these negative accounts, it can be said that Augustine as an hysterical woman is considered a destroyer like flood and Satan by the system and her body represents a misfit. Flood destroys the world and Satan in disguise of a snake demolishes the blissful life of first human being and paves the way for the eternal punishment for human beings. By considering herself as a snake, in a sense, she identifies herself with Satan. Satan rejects God's orders, he is the rebellious one. Therefore, as this identification also supports, Augustine rejects her role as a hysterical woman and a misfit forced by patriarchy as well by using semiotic language revealed through her hysterical acts, singings and dances. Then, Furse gives the audience the image of Virgin Mary stepping on a snake in the visions of Augustine. Virgin Mary symbolises the appropriation of female image by the system. She can be regarded as a proper patriarchal ideal for women. By stepping on Satan in disguise of a snake, with which Augustine identifies herself, in fact, Augustine's visions reveal how she feels crushed under the patriarchal medical society. In a hopeless situation like this, Augustine searches for her identity through an alternative language. For example, she is relieved through dancing tarantella in the last scene of the play. In the end, she escapes from the asylum and takes Charcot and Freud's clothes. In a way, she takes their identities as men as we see the situations change in the end because Augustine dances her frenzied song and she gets away from the asylum with men's clothes. When she escapes, the Violinist plays a lullaby again with "the sound of a heavy, purgative rainfall breaks" (Ibid., p.49). The men are left there without their identities as their clothes representing their manliness are taken by Augustine. However, this causes a problematic

situation as well: running away from the institution in disguise of a man reveals that Augustine's only way out from the asylum is through taking up a man's role using men's clothes. This again makes one think about the possibility of liberation from patriarchy for women.

However, the play closes with the water imagery, the rain, which is attributed to femininity and the lullaby which are the examples of semiotic language as an alternative way of expressing feelings for the issue of woman. In a sense, Augustine is celebrating her femininity by dancing tarantella in the rain (Mızıkyan-Akfıçıcı). It can be related to Dionysiac mystery-cult as well. To begin with, Dionysos is an ancient Greek god of wine, ecstasy, chaos, tragedy, frenzy and community. According to Richard Seaford who is the author of the book called *Dionysos*, Dionysiac ritual is defined as a place where "the paradoxical union of life and death, dominated by life, is realized" (2006, p. 9). The ritual reflects human beings' irrational side because people drink wine at the rituals and go mad. They become intoxicated. They sing and dance till their entire subconscious has been prevailed. In a way, they are purified from repressed emotions and fears. Seaford gives example from Plato as follows:

> Plato notes that mothers calm their babies not by stillness but by rocking and a kind of singing, and compares this, as a cure, to the effect of dance and song on those who are 'out of their mind' in a Dionysiac frenzy. In both cases the state to be remedied is a kind of fear, which is by external motion transformed into peace and calm in the soul (2006, p. 106).

Like a baby crying, person in frenzy calms his soul after the dance. We see Augustine reach ecstasy in the tarantella dance. In this sense, by placing a frenzied dance scene in the play, Furse tries to show how Augustine gets rid of her past and her subordination by phallogocentric discourse after running away from the asylum.

Conclusion

Anna Furse's *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* presents a powerful re-examination of the historical and cultural construction of hysteria as a tool of patriarchal control over the female body. By dramatizing the real-life story of Augustine, a young woman pathologized and objectified within 19th-century medical institutions, Furse confronts the ways in which patriarchal systems have silenced women by interpreting their bodies through male-dominated discourses. Drawing on feminist theory and performance studies, the play reveals how the female hysteric has been framed not as a subject with agency, but as a spectacle to be read, diagnosed, and displayed.

Furse subverts this dynamic by granting Augustine a form of narrative and embodied resistance. The hysteric, once defined by her silence and submission, is here reimagined as a figure who reclaims her voice—not through conventional language, but through the performativity of the body. As Elaine Showalter argues, hysteria is both a female malady and a form of resistance; Furse embraces this paradox by showing how the hysterical woman, though named and shaped by male discourse, can rewrite her own narrative through non-verbal expression and somatic language.

Ultimately, *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* becomes a space where feminist theatre challenges historical narratives, reclaims silenced subjectivities, and confronts the ongoing implications of medical and cultural power over women. The play not only revisits the past but also encourages contemporary audiences to rethink the frameworks through which female identity, voice, and agency continue to be negotiated.

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