

A VOICE FOR EURYDICE
APPROACHING THE ORPHEUS MYTH
FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

HANDE YALINATEŞ BİLGEN

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Hande Yalınateş Bilgen

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Thesis Abstract

Hande Yalınates Bilgen, “A Voice for Eurydice: Approaching the Orpheus Myth
From a Feminist Perspective”

This study argues that the Orpheus myth is originally a transition between goddess cultures and patriarchal religions by revealing the in betweenness of the myth and to what purpose it serves through the works of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Book X, Fable I-II; Book XI, Fable I) (8 AD), Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes” (*Neue Gedichte*) (1904), Kathy Acker’s play *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997) and Sarah Ruhl’s play *Eurydice* (2003) which all use the Orpheus myth as their basis. This thesis also attempts to scrutinize the dual nature of the myth between Apollo-representing patriarchy and Dionysus-bearing characteristics of matrilineality. In this respect, this study extensively borrows from feminist theories of matrilineality which, it is assumed, respect the female and the concepts related to her yet do not degrade the male and the notions associated with him.

Tez Özeti

Hande Yalınates Bilgen, “Euridike’nin Sesi: Orfeus Mitine Feminist Açıdan Bir Yaklaşım”

Bu çalışma, Orfeus mitinin, temelde tanrıça geleneği ve ataerkil dinler arasında yer aldığını, miti temel alan, Ovid’in *Metamorphoses* (*Book X, Fable I-II; Book XI, Fable I*) (8 AD), Rainer Maria Rilke’nin “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes” (*Neue Gedichte*) (1904), Kathy Acker’in *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997) ve Sarah Ruhl’in *Eurydice* (2003) adlı eserleri aracılığıyla, mitin arada kalmışlığını ve bunun hangi amaca hizmet ettiğini ortaya koyarak, tartışmakadır. Bu tez, ayrıca, Orfeus mitinin, ataerkil dinleri temsil eden Apollon ve anasoyluluk geleneğinin etkilerini taşıyan Dionysus arasındaki çift yönlülüğünü de irdelemektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, kadın ve kadınla ilgili kavramlara saygı gösterdiği ancak erkek ve erkekle ilgili nosyonları da aşağılamadığı düşünülen, anasoyluluk üzerine yazılmış feminist teorilere dayanmaktadır.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The myth of Eurydice and Orpheus has been a lure for innumerable poets, novelists, dramatists, artists, composers and theorists. The aim of this thesis is to present an analysis of four different versions of the Orpheus myth which are Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book X, Fable I-II; Book XI, Fable I) (8 AD), Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." (from *Neue Gedichte*) (1904), Kathy Acker's play *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997) and Sarah Ruhl's play *Eurydice* (2003). The versions of the myth in this study will be analyzed from an innovative point of view which assumes that the Orpheus myth is originally a transition between goddess cultures and patriarchal religions. The examination of the myth from this perspective brings the study further to argue that it is also a blend of Dionysian and Apollonian characteristics as Dionysian rituals are taken as remnants of the goddess tradition in a world which became increasingly Apollonian and patriarchal. This approach to the myth as a transition story also entails a further examination of such issues as death and life, femininity and masculinity.

The framework of this thesis is largely based on feminist theory as, from the beginning, Eurydice, the main character in the myth, represents the gradual silencing of women throughout history. The treatment of Eurydice as an 'archetypal' nobody has in fact attracted the attention of many writers such as Helen Sword:

Bearing none of Orpheus' symbolic baggage, defined and manipulated by his powerful gaze, Eurydice is, comparatively speaking, a mythological nobody. Her only obvious archetypal significance resides in a negative role: that of woman-as-Other, woman-as-death, woman as the 'dark continent' that Freud found both so threatening and so irresistible. (Sword 408)

Yet the main thrust of this thesis is, in fact, to defy the traditional nothingness of Eurydice, by assigning her the role of the long-lost goddess vilified by patriarchal religions by using the goddess theories which are highly valued by the feminists. However, since they are based on archaeological evidence and new materials are added to these studies each day, the validity of the theories is always open to question. Besides this, there is also a debate between the goddess scholars about the term that is used to describe the goddess-centred belief because the general term, 'matriarchy' is the opposite of 'patriarchy' and thus imply yet another "dominator mode of a society" (Eisler 29). Therefore, the societies in which goddess religions are observed are not called 'matriarchal' by the scholars but they are generally named as 'matrilineal' suggesting that the parentage is determined through female line. For instance, Gimbutas and Eisler use the term 'matrilineality' in their works *The Living Goddesses* (2001) and *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987). Moreover, Eisler uses the term 'partnership' instead of 'matriarchy' in her work *The Power of Partnership: Seven Relationships That Will Change Your Life* (2002). 'Matrifocal' is another term that is used to describe the matrilineal societies. For example, Carol Christ uses it to describe the matrilineal societies in her book *The Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (1988). Therefore, since the term 'matriarchy' connotes domination, matrilineality is preferred to be used throughout this study.

Although the scholars dealing with the goddess tradition can be accused of creating a twentieth century myth of a perfect society, the only rule of which is matrilineality, some of the goddess theories contribute to the main argument of this thesis. According to the goddess theory, as Marija Gimbutas, a feminist archaeologist, in her *Goddesses and the Gods of Old Europe* (2007) discusses that there was a time of peace and harmony when all people respected the female as she had the power of regeneration and renewal. This period was destroyed by the patriarchal power in successive waves of conquest in the years 4400 BC- 4300 BC AND 3000 BC by the Indo-Europeans. The patriarchy, then, imposed its own values on the goddess worshipping society and although there are remnants reminding the goddess tradition, Europe gradually became patriarchal (Gimbutas 17-33). Just like Gimbutas, Eisler, also relying on archaeological evidence claims that Indo-Europeans structured a patriarchal society "... in which women and anything associated with the 'feminine' is held in contempt and relegated to subordinate and subservient position" (Eisler 28). Despite the obdurate stance of Gimbutas and Eisler, it is understandable that although patriarchy opposed everything related to the female as it tried to win over that tradition, it is undeniable that the remnants of the goddess tradition are still perceived as Elinor W. Gadon states in her *The Once and The Future Goddess* (1989) while

[o]ld European civilization was destroyed by patriarchal Indo-European invaders, ... the mythology, imagery and the practices of their goddess religion survived as fertile substratum underlying later European cultural developments that continued to enrich the European psyche as well into Renaissance. (Gadon 106)

The archaeological studies on the matrilineal societies, mentioned above, influenced feminist scholars and the goddess-centred feminist criticism started to

become influential in the nineteenth century as evident in the works of a first-wave feminist Matilda Joselyn Gage (1826-1898). In her book *Woman, Church and State* (1893), she talks about the effects of the goddess belief on the patriarchal religions which support the main argument of this thesis. Rosemary Radford Ruether in her *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (2006) states:

Gage finds remnants of the feminine even in the Jewish and Christian views of God, however. She cites the Jewish Shaddai ('the Breasted God') and the Christian Holy Spirit as representing continued elements of goddess worship, although these were denied and repressed by the church. (Gage 269)

However, especially with the start of the second-wave feminism, the influence of the goddess tradition increased. For example, Elizabeth Gould Davis (1910-1974), an influential second-wave feminist wrote *The First Sex* (1972) in which she analyzed matriarchy as opposed to patriarchy. She argued that equality, development and peace were the characteristics of the goddess religions and those are exactly what the second wave feminists were struggling to get back:

The most visible recent partnership resurgence in the West occurred during 1960s. This was a time when the second phase of modern feminism gained unprecedented power as the 'woman's liberation' movement, and many women and men rejected the violence of war and unjust and oppressive economic and political system ... (Eisler 35)

Nevertheless, Riane Eisler argues that despite the massive efforts of the feminists, patriarchy backlashed: "But once again, the partnership thrust was met with dominator resistance. The progressive sixties were followed by regressive years" (Eisler 35) Thus even so long after the rule of the matrilineality, the ideas associated with it are still used but resisted by the patriarchal power.

It is believed by the goddess theories that although patriarchal power operates in the world, matrilineal influences are still perceived and this is in line with the claim of this thesis. Thus the characteristics that are attributed to the goddess religions and that are seen as repulsive by the patriarchy are significant to analyze in this study. As opposed to the patriarchal religions, the goddess tradition “is that of embracing and accepting continual growth and development” (Stone 19). In the goddess-centred religions “[s]tages such as birth, maturation, decay and death are all seen as natural parts of life cycles leading many women to feel that rebirth is equally as natural” (Stone 20). Carol Christ also discloses the ethics of the goddess tradition in the following lines:

Nurture life; Walk in love and beauty; Trust the knowledge that comes through the body; Speak the truth about conflict, pain, and suffering; Take only what you need; Think about the consequences of your actions for seven generations; Approach the taking of life with great restraint; Practice great generosity; Repair the web. (Christ “Rebirth of the Goddess” 167)

Elinor W. Gadon also states that “Goddess religion is earth-centred not heaven centred, it is worldly, it is body-affirming not body-denying and there is an idea of an immanent goddess who is within every human being, not transcendent ...” (Gadon 208) and she adds that life and death are not seen as dichotomies in the goddess centred belief but they are regarded as complementary (Gadon 208). Besides, while the underground is seen as a feminine realm in the matrilineal tradition, the patriarchy regards everything related to the feminine as inferior and attributed negative meanings to death (Gadon 139).

The characteristics of the goddess tradition discussed above can be perceived in all the works, analyzed in this study. To begin with, the body-affirming quality that is attributed to the goddess religions in the statements of

Christ and Gadon can be traced both in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Kathy Acker's play *Eurydice*. Maenads referred in the Ovidian version of the myth who want to have sex with Orpheus and who are not accepted are related to the body-affirming quality of the goddess tradition. Sexuality in the goddess tradition is not erotic but it is a life force. If that's so, by rejecting the Maenads, Orpheus rejects life, regeneration, renewal which results in his being killed by them since he acts contrary to the rules of the matrilineal religions. Kathy Acker's Eurydice in *Eurydice in the Underworld* perceives sexuality as the only thing which can prevent her from dying and thus she adopts the ethics of the goddess tradition which sees sexuality as a life force but by denying death she enhances her in-between state since patriarchal notion perceives death as a negative concept.

Secondly, the perspective of the goddess-centred belief towards the issue of death which is argued by Stone and Gadon, draws the Orpheus myth and its retellings closer to the matrilineal tradition. It is significant that the first person who dies in the myth is a female figure, not a male one because death is considered as feminine. Moreover, the snake symbol found in Ovid's version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth is also related to the goddess religions. Both the snake and the female are associated with the moon. As Linda Foubister states "The moon undergoes periodic rebirth in the sky every twenty nine and a half day, much as the snake undergoes rebirth when it sheds its skin and women shed menstrual blood in a lunar cycle" (4). Besides, "the spiral and serpent imagery represented rebirth and was thus associated with the Great Goddess" (Foubister 5). Eurydice's death by a snake is meaningful since snake is one of the symbol of the goddesses which is seen seen "as an expression of a unitary Goddess who

governs birth, death, and regeneration” (Ruether 23). The idea of death and rebirth, inherent in the snake symbol contributes to the idea that Eurydice shares certain characteristics with matrilineality. However, the snake symbol is turned into a potent symbol of evil temptation and destruction after the establishment of patriarchy. That’s why; the snakes are also exiled to the underworld, just as Eurydice, the female principle who is sent to the underworld, symbolizing not just the overthrowing of the goddess traditions but of the transitory Dionysian beliefs as opposed to the newly-emerging fully Apollonian worldview.

Just like the Ovidian version, Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes” carries both the characteristics of matrilineal and patriarchal perspectives towards death. Rilke’s Eurydice is depicted as a female who is content with her death unlike the silenced Eurydice of Ovid. Rilke’s Eurydice seems to adopt the realm of the dead since as Ruether claims the female “need to accept their own finitude and integrate themselves into the cycles of life rather than trying to resist death” (291). By being dead, Eurydice frees herself from Orpheus and the patriarchal subjugation. “... Being dead/ fill[s] her [like] fulfilment ...” (Lines 62-63) says Rilke which corresponds with the idea of death found in goddess religions. However, Rilke’s Orpheus tries to defy death which is always treated as something negative in the patriarchal system and thus epitomizes the patriarchal perspective towards death.

In Kathy Acker’s play *Eurydice in the Underworld* the attitude towards death is ambivalent since Eurydice seems to be both attracted and repulsed by it. She is portrayed as in between the matrilineal and patriarchal perceptions of death. In the play, Orpheus clearly reflects the patriarchal view of death like

Ovid's and Rilke's Orpheus since after his descent he says he hated being "in the middle of that dirt" (Acker 46). However, Eurydice seems to embrace death in the scenes where she can get away with the impositions of patriarchy upon her.

In Sarah Ruhl's play, Eurydice's position once again proves the ambivalent nature of the myth just like the other versions. Eurydice is in between patriarchy through her Father and her husband and matrilineality which can only be attained through death. The water imagery used in the play is significant to analyze in terms of the goddess tradition since the goddesses "ruled all the water sources ... The fact that the goddess birthed new life into existence explains the water symbols ..." (Gimbutas "The Goddesses" 12). Whenever Eurydice wants to get away from the patriarchal power, she wants to go into water and she descends into the underworld, the feminine realm by water, the symbol of the goddesses. However, the patriarchy operates in the underworld in the figure of the Father and thus it is impossible to be in a fully feminine realm. But in the final scene of the play, all the characters forget everything that is associated with the patriarchal upper world in the River of Forgetfulness and adopt death with all its feminine connotations.

The influence of the goddess tradition is observed in all the works analyzed by the present study especially in terms of sexuality and death. However, the patriarchal perspective towards these issues is not also cast aside. Therefore, I have chosen goddess studies as a base for my study as it contributes highly to the aim of the thesis which is to disclose the transitory character of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth between goddess traditions and patriarchal religions.

As it is discussed above, in terms of the bodily power associated with the female and the idea of death as an empowering end for the female, the ideas of the goddess scholars and the French feminists correspond with each other. French feminists believe that only if the female adopt her own body, she can subvert the patriarchy and gain subjectivity just like the claim of the body-affirming quality related to matrilineality. They also argue that the ‘Imaginary’ stage of Lacan is feminine (Millard 156) as opposed to the ‘Symbolic’ Stage which is totally patriarchal. Thus silence and death which are associated with the female and seen as inferior by the patriarchy are placed in the ‘Imaginary’ stage. Therefore, the theories of the French feminists, the source of which is Lacanian Psychoanalysis, is used within the framework of this thesis as they extend the ideas of the goddess-centred theories on sexuality and death and adds the issue of language to the discussion.

As French Feminism has developed from Lacanian theories on language, it is important to look into the Lacanian perspective and its reflections in the works, examined in this study. Lacan divides the language acquisition into three periods, namely, the ‘Imaginary’, the ‘Symbolic’ and the ‘Real’. (Lacan “The Mirror Stage” 1281). The Imaginary Stage is the period before the infant learns the language and in which she/he is one with everything around her/him. In this period, the child considers herself/himself as a part of her/his mother (Booker 35). For instance, when Ruhl’s Eurydice forgets the language and dies she is in the ‘Imaginary’ stage. Since death means severance from the bonds of language and the patriarchy, it brings her close to the archetypal mother. In the ‘Imaginary’ Stage, the child cannot differentiate herself/himself from the others until the

‘Mirror Stage’ in which the infant starts to decipher the division between her or his self and the others. Thus the identity formation starts with the ‘Mirror Stage’. However, since in the ‘Mirror Stage’, the child does not achieve to have a clear cut identity, in order to become a subject, she/he should separate herself/himself from the mother (Lacan “The Mirror Stage” 1283). Therefore, it is claimed that only if the infant recovers from his oedipal conflicts, he may become a real subject (Moi 99). What Eurydice’s father does in the play *Eurydice* is bringing her into the ‘Symbolic Order’ by excluding the mother figure from the life of her and by teaching her the language. ‘The Symbolic Order’ is the realm of language and it is associated with the ‘Law of the Father’. It is the realm of consciousness, rules, order and power in contrast to the imaginary realm of the unconscious with its anarchic and uncontrolled desires (Robbins 115). Language is controlled by ‘The Law of the Father’ so it is a patriarchal order, and the female is always cast aside within the ‘Symbolic Order’. Therefore, in order to impose patriarchy upon Eurydice, the Father directs her into the language in Ruhl’s play. The ‘Real’ stage of Lacan is related to such themes as death and sexuality that can reach consciousness in moments of short term or transitory enthusiasm and violence that Lacan calls “Jouissance” (Booker 135). Although the ‘Real’ stage cannot be represented, through the themes of death and sexuality, the characters in the works, analyzed within the thesis, can be observed to be experiencing the ‘Real’ stage. The sexuality and violence are inherent in Ovid’s version where Maenads take part and in Acker’s version in which Eurydice perceives sexuality as an outlet and violence as a part of the underworld thus the ‘Real Stage’ can also be scrutinized within these particular works.

Depending on Lacanian idea of language, Helene Cixous supposes that an alternative language for the female is possible if the patriarchal impositions of the 'Symbolic Stage' can be thwarted. In her article "Sorties", she puts forth binary oppositions such as "Activity/ Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature" (146) and claims that these divisions are related to the fundamental dichotomy between Man/Woman. Cixous challenges these oppositions since one term of a pair is privileged over the other and the imposition of these hierarchical divisions creates unequal power relations. Thus she argues for 'bisexuality' which embraces plurality and it is described as the blend of femininity and masculinity within individual subjects. The hierarchical perspective of masculinity which subordinates the female corresponds with the treatment of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth by Ovid as Eurydice is treated as a passive object by Orpheus and she does not have existence in the text except for the scenes of her death. In Rilke's poem, "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes.", Eurydice subverts the hierarchy between the male and the female and by her death she prevents the operation of these divisions since death is embraced in the goddess traditions and adopted in the 'Imaginary' stage of the French Feminists where the female is located. In Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, Orpheus is portrayed as a narcissistic hero which is in compliance with the ideas of Cixous as the patriarchal power always perceives itself superior to the female due to the enforcements of the dichotomies it has established. Cixous in her "The Laugh of the Medusa" also argues that now that patriarchy is constituted through oppositions, women should start to subvert it, especially by getting rid of the language of patriarchy or creating a new language for the female. Therefore, the subversive text of Kathy Acker, *Eurydice in the*

Underworld seems to be compatible with the claims of Cixous since the play challenges the patriarchal language. She writes without a time sequence, she does not limit her work to only one genre and thwarts the expectations of the reader who is used to the patriarchal language putting emphasis on order. She also deliberately uses the terms which are seen as derogatory by the patriarchy to describe the female in order to subvert patriarchal mentality and her female character of Acker adopts her body and sexuality which is oppressed for a long time by the patriarchy.

Along with Cixous, Luce Irigaray also deals with the issue of language and attempts to find a way to subvert the patriarchal power. Some of her ideas are applicable to this study. For instance, especially in her “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine” she discusses that the inferiority of woman arises due to the patriarchal discourse and the female, defined by the male is always condemned. The strategy of ‘mimicry’ which can be used by the female to subvert the patriarchal discourse from within is also suggested in this particular article. In her other article “Penis Envy” Irigaray discusses that the language which is totally patriarchal eliminates the woman from the discourse and they are externalized since the ‘Symbolic’ stage is marked by ‘The Law of the Father’. In Acker’s *Eurydice in the Underworld*, Eurydice seems to be affected by the discourse of patriarchy since she does not like the smell of her genitals thus she does not fully accept her sexuality and she also cannot adopt death, easily. The effects of the male discourse can also be observed in Ruhl’s *Eurydice* since she cannot free herself from the boundaries of patriarchy because she is either with her husband or with her father. Her use of mimicry is not helpful for her because

although she imitates her husband or her father, she eventually finds herself within patriarchy until her second death. Irigaray in her “The Bodily Encounter with the Mother” suggests woman that they should turn back to their mothers as they are severed from them by their fathers as Lacan claims. Due to patriarchy, the female does not have a “female genealogy” (423) and in order to destroy patriarchy the female need mothers. Since only by turning to mothers, the female can reach the ‘Imaginary Stage’ and subvert ‘The Law of the Father’ which subjugates the female by imposing patriarchal discourse. In this article, the issue of naming which imprisons the female within patriarchy is also argued. Sarah Ruhl’s *Eurydice* does not have a mother figure and the mother is also deliberately ignored by the father figure and *Eurydice*’s name’s being given by her father is also mentioned in the play and thus “The Bodily Encounter with the Mother” contributes well to analyze the text.

Julia Kristeva is another French feminist whose studies depend on Lacanian psychoanalysis. The Lacanian ‘Symbolic’ stage oppresses the ‘Imaginary’ and the ‘Real’ stages and these stages are under the reign of the father and in the name of him, the patriarchy. However, like the other French feminists, mentioned above, Julia Kristeva also locates the feminine “at the level of the Imaginary” (Millard 156). Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva all believe in the opportunity of the female to go back to the ‘Imaginary’ since they cannot have a place for themselves in the fully patriarchal ‘Symbolic’ stage. Thus they cannot fully own the goddess belief. According to Julia Kristeva, since the female is placed in the ‘Imaginary’ stage, they are accessible “only at the point of contradiction, meaninglessness and silence” (Millard 157). Kristeva puts forward

that the place inscribed for the woman is the 'semiotic' which is parallel to the 'Imaginary' stage of Lacan. The suppressed feminine can be found in the 'semiotic' stage which is "[m]arked by the rhythms and patterns of sound that are the basic pulsions of the oral and anal drives" (Millard 158). According to Kristeva "[i]f the Symbolic embodies The Law of the Father, then the semiotic is that which may disrupt that order from within ..." (Millard 158). Therefore, it is possible to argue for an alternative language for the female, the source which is no longer the 'Symbolic' but the 'semiotic' which is in line with the language that is created by Kathy Acker as discussed above.

As the issue of death is significant to analyze in the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, the ideas of Kristeva on death are also important within this study in addition to her theories on language. The theme of death inherent in the Orpheus and Eurydice myth can be perceived both as a return to the goddess or the womb of the mother and to the 'Imaginary' stage where the patriarchal discourse cannot operate. Death is not a destruction but an empowerment in the myth since it implies the unchaining the boundaries of patriarchal language. Kristeva generally connects the concept of death with that of language. However, when death as a subject is singled out, it is inferred that death for Kristeva is an opening to the void, infinity where there is a plurality of opportunities to flee from all the restrictions of patriarchal institutions, especially language. ("Black Sun" 3-30). Kristeva shares the point of view of matrilineality which never sees death as a negative concept. According to her, the only outcome for the melancholic or the depressive is to die because the bonds and feelings are so absurd that it is not necessary to be a witness of the meaningless life ("Black Sun" 6). She also quotes

Freud with regards to his idea of 'Thanatos' and she supports the idea of a specific drive "which tended toward a return to an earlier state" ("Black Sun" 16). When both the matrilineal perspective towards death and the theories of Kristeva are taken into account it is seen that while the Ovidian myth takes death as a source of grief, an end and something to be mourned for, and the place of dead either as a centre of curiosity or a place to be reached in order to have access to eternal love for Orpheus, Rilke's poem represents death as the only positive outcome for Eurydice, the woman who can only be free in death. In addition to these works, in Kathy Acker's *Eurydice in the Underworld*, death is fearful for an ill woman and in order to escape death, 'Eros' is the only way, however, in Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, death is embraced by the woman and 'Eros' is rejected in order to reach the Father and at last the void and the infinity.

As it is observed sexuality and death are the shared points of discussion for both the goddess scholars and French feminists. In addition to these theories, some of the characteristics attributed to the god Dionysus on the issue of death and sexuality overlap with the ideas inherent in matrilineality and French Feminism. Firstly, the ability of Dionysus to preside over communication between the living and the dead (Marlow 141) brings him closer to the character, Orpheus and the myth. Helene Deutsch says, "Dionysus is a god of death as well as of life" (Deutsch 27) just like the goddess figure who adopts both death and life.

Secondly, Orpheus was regarded as the originator of a religious tradition called Orphism which is related to the god Dionysus. As Eric Werner states:

In the seventh and sixth centuries BC Orphism arose, a mystic movement taking as founder the fabled musician Orpheus. Closely related to

Orphism, and also originating in Thrace, was the cult of Dionysos, which worshipped with wine and singing in wild Bacchanalia god Dionysos-Bacchus. (Werner 6303-6304)

and this religion that is attributed to Orpheus shares certain characteristics with matrilineality and French feminism in terms the idea of death. As Micheal Grant states that “[t]he most original feature of Orphic doctrine was its much increased emphasis on the judgements and reward awaiting mankind in the afterlife” (Grant 274) and adds that in this religion “... dying may be a blessed release, the death is swallowed up in victory ... just like it is in the goddess tradition and French feminism.

However, although the Dionysiac tendencies of Orpheus are seen as the feminine aspects of him, the religion that is attributed to him, the source of which is Dionysus, carries some patriarchal implications. In this religious teaching “Orpheus [is said to be teaching] men could purify themselves of this taint of original sin by proper ritual practices and an ascetic lifestyle, including vegetarianism, celibacy and avoidance of women ...” (Geoffrey 62). Therefore, Orpheus’ not wanting to be with the Maenads in Ovid’s version or his not wanting to save Eurydice from death in Acker’s version can be associated with the religion he is claimed to be related to. Besides, his gaze at Eurydice can be interpreted as his intentional way of leaving the world of the woman behind when the religious teachings of him are taken into account. Although the Dionysiac tendencies of Orpheus are seen as the feminine aspects of him, the religion that is attributed to him, the source of which is Dionysus, seems to have some patriarchal traits implying that Orpheus is a transitional character between matrilineality and

patriarchy which this study attempts to reveal. Within the time, he may have turned into a patriarchal power leaving his matrilineal traits behind.

Bearing patriarchal aspects, Orpheus also shares some of the traits of the god Apollo who is considered to be the opposite of Dionysus in Greek mythology and neither Apollo nor Dionysus can have a complete meaning without the other one. Helene Dutsch comments on this by saying:

This feminine world (of Dionysus) is confronted by the radically different masculine world of Apollo. In this world not the life mystery of blood and the powers of earth but the clarity and the breath of the mind hold sway. However, the Apollonic world cannot exist without the other. This is why it has never denied it recognition. (Deutsch 142)

Unlike Dionysus, Apollo is inclined towards patriarchy. The mythology perceives Apollo as the god who saved “ancient Greek world from the darkness of matriarchy to the light of the rule of the Sun” (Deutsch 27) because Apollo is believed to be the founder of patriarchy by the destruction of the goddess shrine in Delphi (Parke, Wormell 309). As Budin also puts forth, “... Apollo was the only male god associated early on with temples may derive from the fact that he displaced/absorbed some earlier Greek goddesses ...” (Budin 267). Therefore, Apollo is closely associated with the patriarchal religion which is even believed to have been constituted by him by bringing the matrilineality down. Orpheus is claimed to be close to Apollo and thus patriarchy as he is believed to be his son (Bullfinch 223, Anagnostou- Laoutides 387). Michael Grant also states that Orpheus was related to Apollo as he was a servant of the god in Delphi (Grant 273). Therefore, the patriarchal perspective towards death which is utterly negative, perceived in the works examined in this thesis in opposition to the well

receiving point of view can be associated with the vantage point of Apollo. Thus the myth of Orpheus and its retellings blend both the Dionysian and Apollonian traits, especially in terms of the conflicting idea of death between the two gods.

Besides, in terms of the idea of art, Orpheus, as an archetypal artist shares characteristics with both Dionysus and Apollo since the gods are both the gods of art. However, while Apolline art demands harmony and order, Dionysian art is discordant. Nietzsche's fundamental work *The Birth of Tragedy* deals with the Greek tragedy by making use of the Apollonian and the Dionysian characteristics which are seen both as oppositional and collateral forces. As Nietzsche states:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its continuous development from the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*, just as the reproduction of species depends on the duality of sexes, with its constant conflicts and only periodically intervening reconciliation ... (14).

Since Dionysus represents the matrilineal influences and Apollo is considered to be fully patriarchal the Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics are relevant in analyzing Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Firstly, Orpheus, by his journey into the underworld implies that he is in between the patriarchal-Apollonian upper world and matrilineal-Dionysian underworld. In order to take Eurydice back with him, he descends to the underworld so he ignores human restrictions. He acts against the Apollonian idea of moderation (Nietzsche 26) but by his looking back at Eurydice, he turns to his patriarchal, Apollonian realm where reason reigns. On the other hand, it is also possible to argue that Orpheus' weakness that leads to his losing Eurydice can be the result of his immoderate emotions which cannot be controlled, thus by these characteristic traits, it is not very difficult to argue that

Orpheus has Dionysiac inclinations. The Maenads who take part in the myth are members of the retinue of Dionysus and their madness in murdering Orpheus is closely associated with Dionysus in addition to matrilineal and feminist theories, discussed before. The madness which is always associated with the effeminate part of Dionysus (Otto 143) is also seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and strengthens the idea that the myth represents a transition between the myths of Apollo and Dionysus.

In terms of the conflicting perspectives towards death, Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." is also claimed to be in-between Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies. Rilke's poem delineates the realm of the dead as its main background. His Orpheus seems to know what he has to do in order to take his wife back to his Apollonian realm where death is a repellent concept; however, the wife is not interested in life, any more.

Kathy Acker's Eurydice is attributed with the characteristic of madness which is highly related to Dionysian madness as Dionysus is the god of "madness, intoxication, ecstasy" (Carlevale 364). Nevertheless, embracing the characteristic of madness of Dionysus, Acker's Eurydice is also portrayed in between the perspectives of patriarchy and matrilineality in terms of the idea of death since there are scenes, revealing how she rejects or adopts her death in the play. Besides, Acker's Orpheus does not want to die which reveals the Apollonian traits in the text. Therefore, by analyzing the views of the characters on death, it can be argued that Kathy Acker's *Eurydice in the Underworld* has a dual position between Apollo and Dionysus.

Sarah Ruhl's play *Eurydice* includes the element of water which is both a goddess and Dionysian symbol. The water is the getaway for Eurydice so as to save herself from the Apollonian and patriarchal enforcement. Although, throughout the play Eurydice sways between her father and her husband characterizing patriarchy and thus Apollo, the end of the play suggests that Eurydice's choosing death with all the characters represent the effects of goddess religions, feminist theories and Dionysus since death is a well-received concept for both of them.

The ambivalence of the myth stemming from its characteristic as a transition story provides ample potential for writers to approach the original story from different perspectives. In the light of the studies on the goddess religions, appropriate feminist theories and the gods Dionysus and Apollo, four particular works are analyzed in an attempt to reveal that the Orpheus and Eurydice myth is in between matrilineality and patriarchy.

The first chapter of this thesis attempts to analyze Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book X, Fable I-II; Book XI, Fable I) by way of close reading so as to trace the transitional character of the myth. Ovid's version is preferred to be used within this study since the myth has been conveyed to the modern readers through *Metamorphoses*. As a male writer, writing centuries before the other writers, included in this study and being the source of them, his point of view is significant to be examined. Ovid's Eurydice is totally silent, different from all the other retellings of the myth, scrutinized in the study and her passivity as a female is contextual when the time period of Ovid is taken into account. Unlike Eurydice, Orpheus is represented as a hero who tries to defy death and thus shares

patriarchal views of death as it is also perceived in the other works except for Acker's Orpheus who is not depicted as a hero. The scenes in which Maenads take part are only observed in Ovid's narration of the myth within this study and they reflect the views of matrilineality, French Feminism and characteristics of the god Dionysus as opposed to the patriarchal and Apollonian views especially on death and madness. Because of these stark differences and resemblances between Ovid's version and the other works, included in this study, *Metamorphoses* (Book X, Fable I-II; Book XI, Fable I) is rich in details to interpret in terms of the main argument of this study.

Rainer Maria Rilke is another male writer who is drawn to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice centuries later than Ovid. His poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." will be analyzed within the frame of this study as his approach to Eurydice is ground-breaking. The Ovidian version in which the male character is central is challenged by Rilke who gives Eurydice a voice. Although Eurydice in Acker's and Ruhl's version is not without a voice like Rilke's Eurydice they are always under the hegemony of patriarchy. But Rilke's Eurydice dissolves all limitations that suppress her sex in the upper world by ceasing to live. Thus Rilke's Eurydice is closer to the matrilineal perspectives of death. Since Rilke creates a subjective Eurydice as opposed to the object positioning of the other Eurydices in the works within this study, the poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." is attempted to be interpreted in the second chapter of this thesis.

As a female writer in the twentieth century, Kathy Acker creates a passive Eurydice just like Ovid. Acker's Eurydice is repulsed by the idea of death especially in the scenes where patriarchal authorities are observed. What is new

about Acker's Eurydice is that, she is no longer a mythical figure as she is in Ovid's and Rilke's versions. She is turned into a real woman with cancer, living in the twentieth century. Traditionally, Orpheus is represented as a hero, trying to save Eurydice from death as he is in Rilke's and Ovid's versions but in Acker's version, this idea is challenged by a new Orpheus who does not want to get his beloved, Eurydice back to the upper world. In fact, by Eurydice's death he feels himself freed from death, as represented by her. The scenes taking place in the underworld include violence, murder and sexuality which are not observed in the other versions and these can be interpreted by using the theories discussed before. Thus this retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth by Acker is examined in the third chapter of this study since just like the other writers, her point of view is also innovative.

Sarah Ruhl, writing in the twentieth century just like Acker also creates a passive Eurydice who is subordinated by the patriarchy although Ruhl tells the story from Eurydice's point of view. Besides, Ruhl's Eurydice is portrayed as torn between her father and her husband, Orpheus which brings the myth a new dimension. She elopes to death where her father waits for her which lets her escape from the hegemony of her husband but which brings her under that of another male who has primarily repressed her subconscious and led her by 'The Law of the Father' and continues to do so in the underworld. The issue of language is included in the play different from the other works in the frame of this thesis and the theories of the French feminists, especially on language contribute well to scrutinize the text. Since the patriarchal language is imposed upon Ruhl's Eurydice and the mother figure is excluded from the play, Eurydice is under the

hegemony of patriarchy. However, in the final scene of the play, she chooses erasing her memory that is subjugated by patriarchy and reaches a state where she can unite with the mother. Due to the new dimensions added to the myth, Sarah Ruhl's play *Eurydice* is examined in the fourth chapter of this study. After the analysis of this work, the conclusion chapter will briefly highlight some of the observations made throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER II

THE ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE MYTH IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

Ovid is a canonical Roman writer who incorporates the Orpheus and Eurydice myth within his work *Metamorphoses* (*Book X, Fable I-II; Book XI, Fable I*). The positioning of the female within the Roman society in the period of Ovid is important to analyze in order to interpret the myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. During the time *Metamorphoses* was written which was about 8 A.D (Ovid x), while masculinity was clearly constructed, femininity was perceived as what the masculinity was not. (Sharrock 96). The woman was defined as "... the opposite of the Ideal Man ('soft, passive, and silent')" (Sharrock 96). Eve D'Ambra argues referring to ancient Roman women that "... it was their dependence on fathers and husbands that [had] obscured their identities" (D'Ambra 2) and she adds that "[a]lthough Roman woman [had] citizenship and powers over their property, their freedom and well-being were contingent on their relationship with husbands and fathers and their social class; in other words, they were not free agents" (D'Ambra 3). In the Ancient Roman society "Gender fit into a hierarchical system in which the male was superior, the female inferior and likened to other weak and wayward creatures such as the non-Roman, the young, the untamed animals, all of whom required the firm hand of Roman male authority" (D'Ambra 12) and this reflects the silenced, passive representation of Eurydice within the narration of Ovid. As marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice is the starting point of Ovid, the place of marriage in the society is also of crucial importance. "Female sexual desire was considered as dangerous, antisocial force by the male authorities who saw it as a base appetite better suited to animals than humans. Yet female fertility was crucial

to a society ...” (D’Ambra 12) so marriage is seen as the best solution as it “completed the female, invested her with a social presence and saved her from her innate incompetence” (D’Ambra 12). Besides, since Ovid is the male author of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, it is significant to note that:

The male authors of the texts that have dominated our view of Roman women advanced standards of womanly behaviour that best served the interests of patriarchy. Such representations of women deployed a conventional or stereotypical language that cast women as weak, vain and inherently amoral creatures” (D’Ambra 6).

which highly corresponds with the portrayal of Eurydice in Ovid’s narration.

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice spans the Books X and XI of *Metamorphoses*. Ovid in Book X starts the story of Orpheus and Eurydice with the depiction of their marriage ceremony. After the ceremony, Eurydice is bitten by a snake while dancing with the Naiads in the forest and dies. Orpheus is so sad after his wife’s death that his mournful songs make every living and non-living being on earth cry. In order to take Eurydice back to life he travels to the underworld and by his music he makes Hades and Persephone agree to allow him to take Eurydice back only if he walks in front of her and does not look back until they both reach the upper world. Nevertheless, he fails to conform to the rule of Hades and Persephone and looks back at his wife and thus he loses her for a second time. The only thing he does after his failure is to mourn perpetually over his twice-lost wife. Enraged at his indifference to their sexual advances, Maenads tear Orpheus into pieces and throw his head into the river Hebrus, which takes place at the beginning of Book XI of *Metamorphoses*. The river carries his head to the Lesbos Island and Apollo saves Orpheus’ head from the wounds of a snake there by turning it into a stone. Eventually, his soul achieves to return to the

underworld, where he is re-united with his beloved Eurydice. The story in Ovid's version ends with the punishment of the Maenads by the god Dionysus. They are "forced deep into the firm soil" (Ovid 87) by the god at the end of Book XI.

The very first lines of Ovid's Book X imply the ambivalent nature of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth by the figure of Hymen, the Roman god of marriage who attends the ceremony. Although he is generally believed to bring holy omens to the marriages, what he foretells, in this case, is tragic as Ovid says "True he was present but no hollowed words/ he brought no happy smiles no lucky sign" (Ovid Lines 4-5) which reveals that the unique example of the marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice is not an ordinary marriage which brings happiness, on the contrary, it is carrying the bad omens of the god Hymen, foreshadowing the tragedy in the marriage in which the husband loses his wife, twice.

While the description of Hymen exposes the inherent tragedy in the myth, the hierarchical opposition between the masculine and the feminine is disclosed by the treatment of Eurydice by Ovid. The position of Eurydice in the myth goes hand in hand with the patriarchal perception of the feminine. Ovid, in his version dwells greatly upon the male character, Orpheus. Eurydice does not have an individual existence without Orpheus. She is introduced to the reader only as the wife of Orpheus, therefore just the possession of a male figure. There is not a hint of her subjectivity in the myth. Her physical appearance, familial background and her whole past is omitted in the narration of Ovid. By having no past, she can no longer have an individual identity and hereditary features. She is not a subject herself but an object in a fully patriarchal age. She has been kept voiceless all through the narration of *Metamorphoses* since silence is always associated with

the female as Helene Cixous states ‘silence’ is “the place reserved for her in and through the Symbolic” (“Sorties” 153). As analyzed in the introduction of this present work, historically, before the takeover of the patriarchy, or psychoanalytically before the ‘Symbolic Stage’ in which the female is brought under ‘The Law of the Father’ and imprisoned in the patriarchal language, the female did have a voice. However, Eurydice is muted while the male is given voice which shows the authority of patriarchy over the matrilineality. Dispossessed of the power to speak, the woman is left with nothing to claim herself.

The ever-silent Eurydice only takes part in the story with her scenes of death. As discussed in the introduction, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is really that of death as after the ceremony, “[r]oaming with her gay Naiads through the grass” Eurydice “[falls] dying when a serpent [strikes] her heel” (Ovid Lines 10-11). The serpent is a symbol inherent in the goddess religions as discussed in the introduction. The snake goddess is considered as the “cosmic creator, guardian of life-giving waters above and below, the rains and the underground streams” (Gadon 23). Furthermore, the powerful image of the snake is strongly associated with life, death, immortality and the regeneration of life as Elinor W. Gadon states that the snake is “a vehicle of immortality” (Gadon 46) and adds that “The mysterious dynamism of the snake, its extraordinary vitality and periodic rejuvenation must have proceed a powerful emotional response in the Neolithic agriculturalists and the snake was consequently mythologized, attributed with a power that can move the entire cosmos” (Gadon 46). Therefore, Eurydice’s death by a snake symbolizes the fact that goddesses, by the bite of the snake

which is the symbol of their power, call Eurydice back to their own realm, which is the underworld since Eurydice is a nobody in the upper world. In order to be 'one', she has to turn back to a realm where there are no limitations of patriarchy since the rulers of the underworld are Hades and Persephone who have equal powers as equality is a significant characteristic of matrilineality. Eurydice is nothing more than a mere decoration in the story of Orpheus as Donna Rosenberg and Sorelle Baker state in their work *Mythology and You* "[i]t is interesting to note that although the myth contains the names of both lovers, Eurydice is virtually a concept rather than a flesh and blood woman" (Rosenberg, Baker 174). Therefore, in the patriarchal world where Orpheus is the one who reigns, the only escape for Eurydice is death in which she can claim her feminine power since her passivity in the upper world "... is partly bound up with death. But there is a nonclosure that is not submission but confidence and comprehension; that is not an opportunity for destruction but for wonderful expansion" (Cixous, "Sorties" 149). Thus the death of Eurydice which brings about her empowerment is achieved with the help of the snake, the most powerful symbol of the goddesses. Since the goddess tradition sees death as "a venture into the void, into the dark womb of the inner earth for the wisdom it holds" (Gadon 130) the death of Eurydice is not a negative end but a positive beginning.

After the death of Eurydice, Orpheus cannot bear living without her and descends into the realm of the dead. The descent of Orpheus to the underworld has an irrefutable significance in order to analyze the text as a myth in between death and life, femininity and masculinity. His going into the underworld may have various meanings as Lorena Stookey states "The descent into the realm of

the dead, also known as the harrowing of hell, is most commonly undertaken as a quest, either a search for knowledge, wisdom, or advice, or as an endeavour to rescue, visit, or avenge people who have died” (Stookey 63). Orpheus, in Ovid’s version, after mourning for the deceased Eurydice, seems to go down to the underworld in order to unite with his beloved. “He dared descent through Taenarus’ dark gate” (Line 16) narrates Ovid, implying the bravery of Orpheus, so the decent of Orpheus is delienated as the outcome of his courage, not love. While courage is a patriarchal attribution of masculinity, love is totally feminine. He takes action to prevent the extreme passivity of Eurydice in her death since passivity is seen as something negative in the patriarchal notion as it will also be perceived in Rilke’s and Ruhl’s version of the myth. Helene Cixous in her work *Sorties* puts forth that “Male privilege [is] shown in the opposition between *activity* and *passivity*, which he uses to sustain himself” (147). Nevertheless, this passivity in death, which is associated with negativity by patriarchy can be empowering for women by opening up a realm for the female principle, the only place where she can get rid of the patriarchal impositions.

This aspect of Eurydice’s death may be attributed to the ambiguity in analyzing Orpheus’ motives in his descent to the underworld. While at the outset, the aim of Orpheus seems to be bringing back Eurydice either out of courage or love in Ovid’s version, Helen Sword argues that “Orpheus, as archetypal male poet, descends into the underworld in hopes of capturing and bringing to utterance all the secrets of the unknown” (Sword 412) because under the hegemony of patriarchy, the underworld is forgotten and set aside as it is the ‘unknown’, the ‘mysterious’ just like the female principle. Death is no longer seen as

‘regeneration’ or ‘renewal’ but as complete loss, passivity and void which are associated with the female body in many masculine myths Julia Kristeva writes that death is:

... the last resting place for dead souls, in the beyond-which, for mythical thought, is constituted by the female body. The horror of castration underlying the anguish of death undoubtedly accounts in large part for the universal partnership with death of the penis-lacking feminine. (Kristeva, “Black Sun” 27)

So the descent of Orpheus to the underworld may very well symbolize the fact that Orpheus, leaving the patriarchy behind, travels to the land of the matrilineality, the unknown territory for the males which is hidden due to the triumph of patriarchy over the matrilineality. Besides, the adjective “dark” (Ovid Line 16), used to describe the gate of Taenarus brings to minds the “dark continent” of Freud which is used to denote the female which “is still unexplored only because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable” (Cixous, “The Laugh of Medusa” 325) and this idea can easily be related to the underworld since it is always seen as the feminine. So the journey of Orpheus to the darkness can be interpreted as his journey to the feminine, to the Dionysiac Cthonian world from the upper world where patriarchy in the name of Apollo reigns. Therefore, Helene Cixous’ claim “*The dark continent is neither dark nor unexplorable*” (“The Laugh of Medusa 325) is proven by the attempt of Orpheus to explore the underworld. This notion further strengthens the claim that Orpheus is an intermediary between death and life and the patriarchal and matrilineal notions. Although the matrilineal understanding of the underworld is always embracing, patriarchy is repulsed by the idea of death and the underworld as Gadon also mentions “From the vantage of the goddess, the underground is the primal womb, the matrix of all

being, but to patriarchy the underworld is an alien place of horror and death” (Gadon 139). Similarly, in Ovid’s version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, Orpheus is at first repulsed by the death of his wife since “As death, she is all destruction and chaos. Monstrous to patriarchal, heroic worldview with its emphasis on rational order and control” (Gadon 140). Moreover, Ovid describes the underworld as “... regions filled with fear/ ... huge chaos, these vast silent realms” (Lines 34-35). The words “fear”, “chaos” and “silence” are all derogatory. So death and the underworld are illustrated as repugnant concepts in these lines. Furthermore, talking about Persephone, the underworld goddess, Ovid refers to her as “Pale Persephone/ Lord of the shades, who rules the unlovely realm” (Lines 17-18). She is pale as opposed to the brightness of the God Apollo, hence she is his negative. Ovid continues his narration by the description of the death of Eurydice and tells “In whom a trodden viper poured his venom/ and stole her budding years” (Lines 27-28) which undoubtedly reveals a masculine perception of death and since the female character is inaccessible within the narration of Ovid, it is impossible to grasp what Eurydice thinks of death.

Bataille claims that “On the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other, an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly” (Bataille 46). Accordingly, in contrast to the overreaching patriarchal perspective foregrounding the negativity in death, the Ovidian myth, nevertheless also includes the praise of death by Orpheus which once again reveals the ambivalence of the myth positioned between the matrilineal and patriarchal notions of death. By saying “... here one road leads us all; / Here in the end is home; over humankind” (Ovid Lines 40-41) Orpheus begs to the

gods to see Eurydice. Orpheus' determination to go to the underworld is so strong that it shows as though death is as attractive as Eurydice, his longing is not just for her but for what she represents which is the ultimate end for all. Orpheus says "... if the fates will not reprieve her, my resolve is clear/ Not to return: may two deaths give you cheer" (Ovid Lines 45-46). By uttering these lines, he does not seem to be repelled by the idea of death for it seems to be the only way for him if he wants to reach his love. Death is seen as the only outcome for Orpheus as Freud also argues in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He, as the title of his study implies, looks for what is beyond the pleasure principle and argues that there is an instinct to access "inertia inherent in human beings" (30). He further comments that "the aim of all life is death" (32) and "... the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state" (32). Thus in line with Freud's claims Orpheus seems to embrace the idea of death as the ultimate end.

Although Orpheus is allowed to go down to Hades and take Eurydice back, he does not obey the only rule which is not looking back at her. Orpheus' looking back at Eurydice at the expense of losing her is another issue which discloses the contradictory character of the myth particularly between the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies. The gaze of Orpheus is represented by Ovid as the consequence of his impatience to behold her just like it is in Rilke's version. However, his looking back at Eurydice despite being warned against doing it has also been interpreted in various ways. Orpheus looks back at Eurydice because according to Rosenberg and Baker "Orpheus believed because he loved Eurydice, the inevitability of death should not apply to her" (Rosenberg, Baker 171). This brings about the idea of 'hubris' or excessive pride in the case of

Orpheus. Excessive emotions are always attributed to the god, Dionysus so the hubris of Orpheus is in conflict with Apollo's idea of moderation as Nietzsche states "[a]nd thus the admonitions 'know thyself' and 'nothing to excess' coexist with the aesthetic necessity of beauty, while hubris and excess are considered the truly hostile spirits of the non-Apolline realm ..." (Nietzsche 26). The temporary diversion of Orpheus from the rational realm of Apollo makes him forget his limitations as a human being and he looks back and loses Eurydice as Rosenberg and Baker also argue "[h]e abandoned the golden mean when his emotions usurped the powers of rationality, intellect and reason" (Rosenberg, Baker 171). There may also be another underlying aim of Orpheus in gazing at Eurydice. He may have wanted to see the Infernal Regions and to face death and a dead person by the use or the abuse of Eurydice as a tool because of his irrepressible curiosity, which is an example of excessive emotion. Here the gaze can also be taken as the representation of his yearning to attain the knowledge of the dead and the death if the instinct of attraction towards death is taken into consideration. The gaze can also be interpreted as something deliberately done by Orpheus. Because after the patriarchal religion was formed, goddess religion was always seen as heretic. That's why; Orpheus lets Eurydice, his female counterpart, live in the underworld. He looks back at her and buries her eternally so he hides his Dionysian part as it is threatening to the established order, to his Apollonian side.

The gaze of Orpheus can also be interpreted in further ways. For example, Lacan elaborates on the idea of "gaze" when he writes about "desire". The objet petit a (the object of our desire) can never be reached, it always looks back at us and reminds our lack and this makes the desire persist (Žižek 91). Lacan further

points out that“ ‘experience of reality’ depends on the exclusion of what he calls the *objet petit a* from it: in order for us to have normal ‘access to reality’, something must be excluded, ‘primordially repressed’ ” (Zizek 91). Thus the gaze of Orpheus can be intentional, since Orpheus wants his desire towards Eurydice to continue and the persistence of the passion will come out. In addition to Lacan’s concept of gaze, the issue of “gaze” is also very important in the feminist film studies. Laura Mulvey by using psychoanalysis, especially Lacan’s theory, wrote a work titled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and in this work she examines the power relations between the male who gazes and female who is gazed. Mulvey writes “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning” (439). She further states “In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (442). Accordingly, in the gaze of Orpheus at Eurydice, Eurydice is a nobody manipulated by the gaze of Orpheus and she is objectified and this leads to her second death after which she “made no complaint” (Ovid Line 71) as she is not a subject to complain about herself, she is only an object suppressed by the patriarchal gaze.

In addition to being the object of a male gaze, Eurydice is also the object of an artist’s gaze. Orpheus is not only the husband of Eurydice but he is also “... the archetypal poet and the archetypal musician, beyond that he can be seen as

the embodiment of 'art' in its widest sense, ..." (Geoffrey 61). Therefore, the artist, Orpheus makes Eurydice the immortal object of his art whereby his art comes into being out of his continuous lacking of her as Maurice Blanchot also states "Eurydice is ... the greatest extreme that art can attain, she is, beneath a name that conceals her and a veil that covers her, the profoundly obscure point toward which art, death and night seem to strain" (qtd. in Sword 409).

The issue of art is not only important in terms of the gaze of Orpheus but it is also significant in revealing the ambivalence of the myth since the art of Orpheus carries the characteristics of both the Apollonian and Dionysian art. One of the sources of Orpheus' art is his supposed father, Apollo as stated in the introduction. As Lippmann states "[t]he natural order is so vital in ancient Greece not only within the bounds of natural philosophy but also in man, society and art" (Lippman 1) and accordingly, order is an attribution to the god Apollo in Greek mythology and orderliness brings to mind the issue of harmony in musical theory. In ancient Greece "[t]his generalized order was distinguished by a musical character and was typically thought of as harmonic" (Lippmann 1). As far as the orderliness and harmony is considered, it can be stated that Orpheus shares the characteristics of Apollo since "Socrates points out to the fact that Apollo is the god of harmony ..." (Lippmann 19). On the other hand, "Duality is a universal motif of myth; in Greece the duality issues in harmony, which is revealed as the outcome of opposed but reconciled forces" (Lippmann 3). Thus as the archetypal musician, Orpheus embodies the opposites in himself. The other source of Orpheus' art is Dionysus since music is not an attribution only to the god Apollo,

but also to Dionysus. Because while the lyre, one of the musical instruments is of Apollo, the other one, aulos is attributed to Dionysus and Lippmann claims that:

In a musical symbol aulos and lyre express the two fundamental attitudes of Greek philosophy, and if the ethical force of music comes to reside in the lyre and to disdain the Aulos, this represents to some extent the entrance of the rational element of universal order into human character and emotion. (Lippmann 87)

So while the Apollonian music is believed to bring order to the society the Dionysian music and dance are the expressions of “[t]he deep emotion with which this madness announces itself” (Otto 140). In addition to this “all intoxication arises from the depths of life which have become fathomless because of death. From these depths comes music- Dionysiac music- which transforms the world in which life had become a habit and death a threatening evil” (Otto 140) and thus the art of Dionysus is related to the Orpheus myth, the pervading theme of which is death. Consequently, since Orpheus is the son of Apollo and “... his rites were linked or identified with those of the Thracian god Dionysus- Bacchus ...” (Grant 273), he seems to combine the characteristics of both as argued in the introduction part of this thesis.

Although the gaze of Orpheus may have several reasons, following his gaze, he loses Eurydice. The mourning of Orpheus after the second death of Eurydice, which he, himself, is responsible for, continues for a long time and as Ovid mentions although all the women want to unite with the bard, he rejects them which implies the prevailing mode of the passionate and impatient love of Orpheus towards Eurydice. Julia Kristeva mentions sadness, mourning and melancholy are all “supported by *intolerance for object loss* and *the signifier’s failure* to insure a compensating way out of the states of withdrawal in which the

subject takes refuge to the point of inaction (pretending to be dead) or even suicide” (Kristeva, “Black Sun 10). Thus Orpheus’ only love becomes his art, his songs act as compensation for the lost object as the story tells “There was a hill, and on the hill a wide/Level of open ground, all green with grass. / The place lacked any shade. But when the bard/ The heaven-born bard sat there and touched his strings, / Shade came in plenty. Every tree was there” (Lines 91-95). These lines also imply that the only possible way of fully understanding of death can be experienced by way of literature as Bataille states “Poetry leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity” (Bataille 24). Death is an inescapable fact of life although we, human beings, tend to ignore and deny it since death is something impossible to experience. However, by the use of literature and art death can be perceived. Therefore, Orpheus uses his art of music and poetry to get close to death which is the only way available for him after his second loss of Eurydice.

The effects of the goddess traditions in the name of the god Dionysus reach its peak in the Book XI of *Metamorphoses* in which the murder of Orpheus by the Maenads, the female followers of Dionysus is narrated. Other than being a character in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus was also believed to be a real person and a religious teacher. Orphism is a religion which Orpheus is said to have been the leader (Geoffrey 62). As it is stated in the introduction, Orphism advises its followers to avoid women. Thus it is not surprising to see that in Ovid’s version Orpheus acts indifferently towards the woman as Ovid tells “Three times the sun had reached the watery fish/ that close the year, while Orpheus held himself/ Aloof from love of women ...” (Lines 93-95). So Ovid’s treatment of

Orpheus as a misogynist after his failure to reach Eurydice is not coincidental. His refusal of the advances of the women may also be the outcome of his leaving his feminine, goddess-like and Dionysian characteristics in the name of Eurydice in the underworld. Since, in contrast to Orphism, the characteristics of goddess tradition include “Sexual worship, celebrating the erotic, embracing all that is alive, renewal, regeneration of life” (Gadon xii). Thus Orpheus acts against the laws of the womanhood and his punishment by the Maenads, the female retinue of Dionysus, follows his preferred avoidance of the women.

His declining the Maenads may also be due to the depression he feels after the loss of Eurydice as Kristeva tells “Knowingly disinherited of the Thing, the depressed person wanders in pursuit of continuously disappointing adventures and loves; or else retreats, disconsolate and aphasic, alone with the unnamed Thing” (“Black Sun” 13). Thus Orpheus turns down the Maenads and prefers loneliness and this becomes the cause of his own death. For the melancholic who is “unable to find a compensation for the loss the only way to get out of the labyrinth is death” (“Black Sun” 10). So Orpheus’ death may also be intentional since he cannot find comfort in the upper world without Eurydice so he looks for “The Thing” in Julia Kristeva’s words. The ‘Thing’ that she reveals in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* is described by her “as real that does not lend itself to signification, the centre of attraction and repulsion” (“Black Sun” 13) and “Thing is an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time” (“Black Sun” 13). This description can easily be taken as death since death can also not be signified as it has never been a lived experience, it is always an issue of wonder but also sometimes feared and denied, it is always imagined and fictionalized and thus it

is always ambivalent, both bright and black. Kristeva also describes the death for the depressive people as “the non-integrated self’s lost paradise, one without others and limits, a fantasy of untouchable fullness” (“Black Sun” 20). Thus the rejection of the Maenads by Orpheus may be taken as a deliberate attempt for Orpheus who wants to reach “The Thing”.

Maenads murder Orpheus; they dismember him and throw his head into a river. As Donna Rosenberg and Sorelle Baker state “His violent death may indicate that Orpheus was either a sacred king in a matrilineal society or a youth who represented Dionysus in the ritual drama of the wine god’s death and rebirth. In either role, Orpheus would have been dismembered and eaten” (Rosenberg, Baker 172). Thus the Maenads also have a significant role for the analysis of the myth in terms of its in-betweenness. Although the pervading religion seems to be patriarchal, it is not surprising to see some cults and rituals practiced by women in ancient Greece since “... desire for escape, its cult of madness, mania and its quest for individual salvation manifests itself in social groups that are themselves peripheral to the city and its normal institutions” (Vernant 118). Thus rejecting the laws of the womanhood, Orpheus becomes the object of the anger, madness and the torture of the Maenads, the women who are marginal to the norms of the society. In this particular case Orpheus symbolizes the patriarchy while the Maenads symbolize the rebellious females against this patriarchal authority.

The scene of the murder of Orpheus by the Maenads further reveals how death and sex are interrelated. In order to possess Orpheus, which they cannot achieve by their sexuality, the Maenads violently murder him to make him silent as “... Bacchic screaming drowned the lyre” (Ovid Line 20). Julia Kristeva talks

about the relationship between the urge to possess and to kill in her *Black Sun* “Psychoanalysis-A Counterdepressant” and writes as the mouthpiece of a melancholic which seems to throw further light on Orpheus’ torture by the Maenads:

... the intolerable other that I crave to destroy so as to better possess it alive. Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested than lost. The melancholy cannibalistic imagination is repudiation of the loss’ reality and of death as well. It manifests the anguish of losing the other through the survival of self, surely a deserted self but not separated from what still and ever nourishes it and becomes transformed into the self- which also resuscitates- through such a devouring (“Black Sun” 12)

Ovid writes “... their fury knew/no bounds: stark madness reigned” (Lines 16-17) about the Maenads. The madness associated here with the Maenads is the madness of the god Dionysus as Walter F. Otto states “[t]he bloodthirstiness of the Maenads is the bloodthirstiness of the god himself” (Otto 133). The passionate madness of the Maenads which leads to the murder of Orpheus is closely related to Dionysus as the god “is life which, when it overflows, grows mad and in its profoundest passion is intimately associated with death” (Otto 141). However, his madness is not negative since “it is no sickness, no disability in life but a companion of life at its healthiest. It is the madness inherent in the womb of the mother” (Otto 143). The madness of the Maenads against Orpheus is definitely associated with life itself since by rejecting the sexual advances of the women, Orpheus rejects the life force and he is tortured to death as a punishment.

The aim of Maenads is to possess Orpheus and because they cannot achieve this by their sexual advances, they dismember him and this brings the myth closer to Dionysus as “killing is dismemberment and with it at the height of the frenzy comes the devouring of the flesh” (Otto 109) for Dionysus. After the

Maenads has torn Orpheus' head from his body, they throw the head and his lyre to the river and they "are carried out to the sea/ and gained Methymno's shore on Lesbos Island" (Ovid Lines 64-65). The sadism inherent in "Thanatos", the death instinct, which is seen in the tormenting Thracian women, is also an object of discussion for Freud in his article "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in which he asks:

But how can the sadistic instinct, whose aim is to injure the object, be derived from Eros, the preserver of life? Is it not plausible to suppose that sadism is in fact a death instinct which, under the influence of narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego and has consequently emerged in relation to the object. (48)

Therefore, it can be deduced that the Thracian women, after having understood that they are unable to possess Orpheus, make use of violence in order to satisfy their desire to own Orpheus through sadism.

Although these scenes of torture show the overthrowing of the patriarchal power, the epitome of which is Orpheus, his dismemberment does not signify the end of the story. Although his head is torn apart from his body and is thrown into water when it reaches the Lesbos isle "... a fierce snake/ threatened, until at last Apollo came/ to thwart, as it struck and froze to stone/ That serpent's open mouth and petrified" (Lines 67-70) which is the last attempt to silence the patriarchy by the power of matrilineality, the symbol of which is the snake. Nevertheless, the epitome of patriarchal religion, Apollo does not let it happen and the power of the female is subverted at the end of the poem. The desire of Orpheus to unite with his lover, which means to die, is satisfied by the women who murder him violently since they could not satisfy their sexual instincts and consequently, they are punished by the god, Dionysus who turns them into trees, which reveals the

triumph of patriarchy since a tree can be considered as the symbol of patriarchal oppression whereby women, like trees do not have voice to speak nor are given the chance to move but tied down to the earth.

CHAPTER III

RAINER MARIA RILKE'S "ORPHEUS. EURYDICE. HERMES."

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was born in Prague and "he grew up during the last quarter of the nineteenth century" (Freedman 6). He was a journalist and a writer of poems, novellas as well as plays (Freedman 35). He repeatedly uses Greek mythology in his poetry. As Michael Grant states "Rainer Maria Rilke enjoyed the special power of reliving myths and infusing them with a new, personal meaning; and the story of Orpheus, in particular, is one which provides the framework for many of his private symbols" (Grant 283). His *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922) including fifty five sonnets contains twenty six poems that are addressed to Orpheus "whose music breaks down rigid forms of nature, lending them new rhythms and dimensions" (Grant 283). His poems that are related to Orpheus are not only limited to his book *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922). "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes.", one of the poems in which he deals with the Orpheus myth is included in his *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*).

Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." was first published in 1904 in his *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*). The poem starts when Orpheus has successfully achieved to be in the underworld. The scenes of marriage, the death of Eurydice, the mourning of Orpheus and the reunification of the lovers in the underworld by the death of Orpheus are omitted in Rilke's poem since he may want to dwell more upon the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice in the underworld as he tries to challenge the classical Ovidian view in which Eurydice has no part. After a depiction of the underworld, the account of

how Orpheus in the front and Eurydice and Hermes on the back walk on the path towards the world of the living is given. During the walk, the feelings of both Orpheus and Eurydice are unveiled in the lines of Rilke. The climax of the poem is the gaze of Orpheus at Eurydice although he is warned not to do it unless he wants to lose Eurydice for the second time. Although the divergence of the myth from the classical Ovidian version starts with the incorporation of Eurydice's feelings, it reaches its peak after the gaze of Orpheus since in Rilke's unique representation of the myth, Eurydice is indifferent to the gaze of Orpheus and when Hermes says "... He has turned around" (Line 84), the only question Eurydice asks is "Who?" (Line 86).

The status of the female has definitely changed since the time of Ovid and the female gradually gained their voice at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries in which the poem was written. Women started to gain equal rights of employment, voting and education in this period. Therefore, Rilke's giving Eurydice a full presence as opposed to the original myth is not surprising when the more active position of the women in Rilke's time is taken into account. Thus unlike Ovid's narration of the myth, Rilke's representation merges the story of both of the lovers, Orpheus and Eurydice.

The poem starts in the realm of the dead. Thus the underworld imagery is of high significance and Hades is described in a very detailed manner. The ambivalent nature of death is evident even in the first line of the poem in which Rilke writes "That [is] the deep uncanny mine of souls" (Line 1). The term "uncanny" used in the poem brings to mind Freud's idea of the "uncanny". Freud states in his article "The Uncanny" "... for this uncanny is in reality nothing new

or foreign, but something familiar and old- established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (166). Death’s being both familiar and unfamiliar, attractive and repugnant as argued in the introduction is reflected in the poem of Rilke since while the realm is described nearly as a life-like realm by saying “There [are] cliffs there,/ and forests made of mist” (Lines 6-7), it is also delineated in an almost grotesque manner:

Like veins of silver ore, they silent
[Move] through its massive darkness.
Blood welled up
among the roots, on its way to the world of men, and in the dark it [looks]
as hard as stone.
Nothing else [is] red (Lines 2-6).

Apart from being “uncanny”, the depiction of the underworld also carries some matrilineal implications. The realm of the dead is described as a place where “There [are] bridges/spanning the void, ...” (Lines 7-8). The usage of the word “void” strengthens the fact that the underworld is a feminine territory. Since Sjöö and Mor states “[t]he void of the Goddess is the real energy potential of the as-yet unmanifest; and it is the ultimate relation or union of all manifest energies” (Sjöö, Mor 222) which brings the underworld, the feminine and the goddess tradition closer to each other as stated in the introduction. The empowerment of Eurydice in the void also supports the idea of Sjöö and Mor who claim that the void is the source of the potential of women.

As it is seen, from the beginning of the poem, the reader is drawn into the realm of death in which the heroic attributions to Orpheus are set aside since it excludes the scenes revealing how Orpheus succeeded in convincing the rulers of the underworld to take Eurydice back from the realm of the dead which are

incorporated in the narration of Ovid. This omission implies the fact that the courage of Orpheus to descend to the underworld and the success as an artist attributed to Orpheus are subverted in the poem of Rilke. The portrayal of Orpheus as a "... slender man in the blue cloak-/ mute, impatient, looking straight ahead" (Lines, 15-16) is also in contrast to the brave artist in Ovid's version. In the Ovidian narration, Eurydice is the one who is represented without voice but in Rilke's poem it is Orpheus who is mute like Eurydice, who is silenced by patriarchy in Ovid, Orpheus in Rilke is also silenced by other powers who are the rulers of the underworld. Besides, his depiction as a slender man draws him away from his image as a hero.

Although Rilke's Orpheus is not the same as Ovid's, in terms of the issue of gaze, both of them resemble. His being impatient to look back at Eurydice just like in the Ovidian version is highly emphasized in the poem. He is so restless that he walks very fast and his steps are resembled to "unchewed bites" (Line 17) and his walking is described as "devouring the path" (Line 18). While his uneasiness on the path to the upper world can be taken as the outcome of his love, there may also be other reasons. For instance, as a patriarchal power in the macrocosm of the upper world or in the microcosm of his marriage as the husband figure, he cannot stand the helplessness of himself in the underworld because of the rule established to take his own possession back to his own realm. Therefore, he is portrayed as a nervous man in their walk to the upper world. Besides, his impatience may also imply the fact that without the object of his art, Orpheus means nothing and thus needs to see Eurydice.

When Orpheus is the subject, the issue of art is inevitable to analyze. When the art of Orpheus is taken into account, Eurydice is directly objectified. Metz argues that "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." dwells upon gendered power relations and he claims "... poem has at least in part to do with the formation or self-construction of the male artistic subject in relation to--or "over and against"--the female body/corpse at which he/ Orpheus gazes" (Metz 10). Eurydice is represented only as a female muse, inspiring the art of Orpheus and how much she is loved by Orpheus is depicted not by making Eurydice the subject of that love, but on the contrary objectifying her as a muse of art: "[a] woman so loved that from on lyre there [comes]/more lament than from all lamenting women" (Rilke Lines 47-48). Besides, when Orpheus has lost Eurydice, the most significant possession of Orpheus as an artist which is his lyre does not mean anything without the object of his art. So it is forgotten by him in the presence of his other belonging, Eurydice which emphasizes her object position when the art of her husband is the subject. Orpheus is "no longer conscious of the delicate lyre/ which [has] grown into his left arm, like a slip/ of roses crafted onto an olive tree" (Lines 20-22). In Rilke's poem, apart from the fact that the power of Orpheus as a husband is taken away from him since he is not even allowed to gaze at his wife he is not also represented as a brave male, who tries to achieve to outwit death by his music, on the contrary, he is presented as an incapable artist since even his lyre is consigned to oblivion.

In the following lines, the helplessness of Orpheus is emphasized and he is characterized as a person who cannot control his senses:

His senses [feel] as though they [are] split in two:
his sight [races] ahead of him like a dog,
stop, come back, then rushing off again
[stand] impatient, at the path's next turn,-
but his hearing, like an odor, [stays] behind (Lines 23-28)

As these lines imply, Orpheus tries to direct his gaze to the front but his hearing is focused on what is at his back. The relationship between the voice and the gaze is the main theme in Slavoj Žižek's article "I Hear you with my Eyes" in which he claims:

We have thus arrived at the formula of the relationship between voice and image; voice does not simply persist at a different level with regard to what we see, it rather points toward a gap in the field of the visible, toward the dimension of what eludes our gaze. In other words, their relationship is mediated by an impossibility: *ultimately we hear things because we can not see everything* (Žižek 93).

Although the power of his gaze is bereaved from Orpheus, he turns to another one of his senses which is hearing. However, he does not seem to be capable of handling that either.

Helene Cixous states in her "Sorties", "[a] woman by her opening up, is open to being "possessed" which is to say dispossessed of herself" (149). However, by the closing up, by her death, Eurydice will never be owned by any men, again which Orpheus is unaware of. He desperately wants to hear the footsteps of Eurydice and Hermes but the only thing that he hears is the sound of himself which enhances his anxiety:

Sometimes it [seems] to him as though it [reaches]
Back to the footsteps of those other two
who [are] to follow him, up the long path home
But then, once more it [is] just his own steps' echo.
Or the wind inside his cloak, that [makes] the sound. (Lines 28-32)

These lines do imply the fact that Orpheus is a narcissistic, self-absorbed character, the only aim of whom is to attain Eurydice for the continuity of his art. He is unaware of the fact that death has severed them, it is impossible to contact with the other, the only thing that is continuous is death.

The issue of gaze also reveals both the Dionysiac and Apollonian traits of Orpheus. Orpheus, impatient to look back at Eurydice, seems to look for a reason to gaze and he starts to justify himself and by only hearing the footsteps of the two behind him he thinks that “[t]hey [have] to be behind him, but their steps/ [are] ominously soft ...” (Lines 35-36). Although these lines point at his emotional side which contributes to his reasoning to look back, his rationality is also in action and he seems to convince himself to conform to the rule of Hades and Persephone as he is said to know that “... (but looking back/ would ruin this entire work, so near/ completion) ...” (Lines 38-40). Therefore, it is not wrong to claim that he is in-between Apollonian and Dionysian traits. Because as Jung states in his “Psychological Types or the Psychology of Individuation” Apollo is “... is measure, number, limitation, the mastery of everything savage and untamed (Jung “Psychological Types” 172) but the Dionysian is described as “... on the contrary, is the freeing of unmeasured instinct” (Jung “The Spirit” 173). The ambivalent nature of Orpheus between Apollo and Dionysus is also emphasized by Helen Sword, she says “Orpheus is the ultimate go-between, the fallible hero who nonetheless attempts to fuse irreconcilable opposites and to bridge the gap between the possible and the forbidden” (Sword 408). This statement of her clearly supports the idea that Orpheus wants to do what is prohibited since he

carries Dionysiac characteristics, however, he also knows what is logical if he really wishes to take his wife back, demonstrating his Apollonian traits.

Although, the thoughts of Orpheus seem to be in the forefront in the poem Eurydice's silence does not make her a subordinate character as it does in the Ovidian version. Her silence is definitely different from the silence of Ovid's Eurydice whose impotence is emphasized by her being a silent figure as opposed to the empowering silence of Rilke's Eurydice. She seems as if she has embraced the void, the infinity, actively unlike the Ovidian version in which Eurydice's perspective is totally lacking. Her being greatly loved by Orpheus is underlined; however, her response to that love cannot be inferred from the poem. "The state of inertia" (Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle 30) is reached by Eurydice as "her steps constricted by trailing grave clothes, / uncertain, gentle and without impatience" (Lines 57-58). Death, the only escape for her from the world of the male in the name of Orpheus is achieved. She embraces her death, wilfully, it is engrossing to her. Orpheus and her life with Orpheus have vanished for her. She is no longer interested in him or life because

... Being dead
[Fills] her [like] fulfilment. Like a fruit
suffused with its own mystery and sweetness,
she [is] filled with her vast death, which was so new,
she [can] not understand that it [has] happened. (Lines 62-66)

She is in the realm of death where there are no restrictions, no bonds. She is even free of her sex as it is said in the poem; "[s]he [has] come into a new virginity/ and [is] untouchable, her sex [has] closed/ Like a young flower at nightfall ..."
(Lines 67-69). She does not want a man around even the god Hermes' "touch of guidance/ [hurts] her, like an undesired kiss" (Lines 71-72). She can no longer be

raped psychologically or physically within the male world as she has gotten rid of all the limitations of the system of patriarchy by her death. Dead Eurydice is no longer a possession of Orpheus. Death has released her from the prison of him. She is not an object of his art any more as Rilke says “[s]he [is] no longer that woman with blue eyes/ who once [has] echoed through the poet’s songs” (Lines 74-75). She is so into herself, so into the immensity of death that she even could not understand who has turned around to see her and asks “[w]ho?” (Line 85) to Hermes who says “with sorrow in his voice: He has turned around” (Line 83). Orpheus is not a subject for her to see since she has become a part of the structure of the underworld, nothing more or less.

Hermes is the third character included by Rilke among the other leading characters of the myth. He is described as:

The god of speed and distant messages,
a traveller’s hood above his shining eyes,
his slender staff held out in front of him,
and little wings fluttering at his ankles;
and on his left arm, barely touching it: she (Lines 42-46)

The inclusion of Hermes into the poem is meaningful in a number of ways. C.M. Bowra states that Hermes is actually incorporated in the myth as in an Attic relief dating back to 5th century B.C:

... in Naples, are inscribed the names of Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes, and there is no good reason to dispute what they say. On the relief are three stand- ing figures, of whom the man on the right, with a lyre and a Thracian cap, is Orpheus. With his right hand he turns back the veil from the face of Eurydice, who looks at him and lays her left hand on his shoulder. Behind her is Hermes, who is about to take her right hand with his left. (Bowra 409)

It is also believed that “[a]fter burial, the souls of the dead are led by the god, Hermes, the psychopomp, to the great river that marks the border of Erebus, the

upper region of Hades” (Stookey 202). Therefore, the inclusion of Hermes into the poem is not groundless. Besides, as the lines of Rilke on Hermes also suggest, he is the god of “distant messages” thus in this particular poem, his duty as a messenger between the gods and human beings, Eurydice and Orpheus is observed. Besides, Orpheus is an artist and Eurydice is represented as his muse, so it is an inevitable fact that the poem of Rilke about Orpheus and Eurydice is about poetry and art and the significance of Hermes is analyzed in this respect by Metz as he claims:

... it is only fitting that the mediator or messenger between Orpheus and Eurydice--two avatars of poetry--should be yet another figure for semiosis ... patron god of writers and, in his role as messenger-intermediary, god of medium (and, thus, god of that ultimate medium of communicative exchange, language itself). (Metz 14)

In addition to these, Hermes is a male god and Eurydice as a female is not fully independent in the underworld, the realm of the female as argued in the introduction. Eurydice is under the guidance of a male which strengthens the mediary nature of the myth between patriarchy and matrilineality. Additionally, Hermes is the god guiding the souls to the underworld so bringing Hermes to the myth enhances the claim of the study that it is in between life and death.

Although why Hermes is included in the poem is not clear, it obvious that by his claim it is understood that Orpheus has looked back at Eurydice and lost her for the second time. The reason why Orpheus gazes at Eurydice is ambiguous. Orpheus becomes unsuccessful to take what he possesses to the upper world with him so he can not achieve to conquer the land of the female which is the underworld. On the one hand, as a male, the wish of Orpheus to possess his woman is expectable. On the other hand, his yearning to get rid of the female by

looking back is not contrary to the patriarchal ideologies as Metz claims “[m]apped onto the "modernist" story, we find a gender story: the story of the male speaker's wish both to exile and to colonize "woman" at the same time” (Metz 18). Another reason of the gaze of Orpheus is his art. Because by looking back at Eurydice, as argued before, Orpheus creates a perpetual object of desire and this lack will always remain as a void to be filled with art and thus art will persist although Eurydice is lost forever.

The poem “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes.” greatly deviates from the Ovidian version since Eurydice does not seem even slightly interested to return to the world of the living. The poem does not also deal with the scenes in which Maenads take part. This is because of the fact that the only female character the work focuses on is Eurydice who is on the path to become an autonomous female. She deliberately chooses death, it is her own choice and this suits well to the traits in the goddess traditions since “[m]atriarchies are not built on dominance principles, ... Women owned their bodies, their children and their living properties; women made vital decisions affecting the survival and well- being of their people” (Sjöö, Mor 19) unlike the Ovidian version of the myth in which there is not a Eurydice but only an archetypal woman who is tried to be saved by a male figure. Therefore, in this poem, Eurydice is empowered and gets her own body and decides for herself. At the end of the poem, Eurydice is seen walking calmly to her death and the gaze of Orpheus will remain unanswered eternally.

Not the origin: she doesn't go back there. A boy's journey is the return to the native land, the *Heimweh* Freud speaks of, the nostalgia that makes man a being who tends to come back to the point of departure to appropriate it for him and to die there. A girl's journey is farther- to the unknown, to invent (Cixous “Sorties 153)

The lines of Helene Cixous quoted above elaborately frames the idea inherent in Rilke's poem. As Cixous' claim also supports, the aim of Orpheus is going to the origin and reach his goal yet Eurydice's walking to her own death is "... without impatience" (Line 96) since her travelling has just started and the void is hers to be filled, to be invented. Death is the only way out for the woman, Eurydice suppressed by Orpheus and the male-oriented world in the world of the living and by her death she becomes successful in her personal overthrowing of patriarchy. While Eurydice adopts death which is a well-received concept in matrilineal perception, Orpheus wants to defy death as it is repulsive for the patriarchy, highly corresponding with the main argument of this study which discusses the in-between nature of the myth.

CHAPTER IV

KATHY ACKER'S *EURYDICE IN THE UNDERWORLD*

Kathy Acker (1947-1997) lived through a very significant period in the history of feminism. The situation of the woman was definitely different from that of Rilke's time in which women fought for equality and achieved to gain some rights in terms of employment, education and voting. Theoretically, in Rilke's time, the women seemed to achieve their goal of equality and thus from the standpoint of a male who is outside the ongoing oppression in the social lives of ordinary women who are excluded in the feminist movement of his time, the female seemed to be empowered. Therefore, Rainer Maria Rilke creates a mythical Eurydice who is an autonomous female character. However, starting with the 1960s, the feminist movement started to embrace not only the upper class women but it also "drew on the dissatisfaction felt by many middle class housewives" (Nicholson "The Second Wave" 1) and also lesbians, women of color, working class women, etc. (Nicholson "The Second Wave" 3). In addition to this, although feminist movements still tried to gain more rights, in the 1990s, they tried to develop "understandings of 'woman' that fell outside of such phallogocentric or logocentric worldviews" (Nicholson "The Second Wave" 4). Thus they started to fight for the rights of the female in the social life which was totally under the reign of patriarchal mentality which perceived women as subordinate. Therefore, Acker, a feminist experiencing this patriarchal subjugation, created a passive Eurydice who rarely acts as a subject in her *Eurydice in the Underworld* since although the female was empowered by the help of feminist activities, struggling for official equality, a total subjectivity for

each and every woman in the social life could not still be provided after about a century.

Kathy Acker (1947-1997) was an influential American writer whose early death is seen as a significant loss since she was one of the few intellectuals who “combined a forceful intellectualism with an understanding of popular culture” (MacDonald 105). Her style of writing is distinctive and inventive as Helene Cixous states “[a] feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there is no other way” (“The Laugh of Medusa” 326). She deliberately plays with the language in order to overthrow the patriarchal impositions on it. Language is her tool in order to win over the patriarchy, however, while using this instrument, she is utterly aware of the fact that she is in a territory conquered by the male long ago. Thus she comments on language by saying “[i]s it possible that the girl can find her actual body, and so what gender might be in language? ... I’m Alice who ran into a book to find herself. I have found only reiterations, the mimesis of patriarchy or my inability to be” (qtd in Chissolm 51). Thus it is evident from her statement that she is aware of the fact women could not achieve to claim for themselves due to patriarchy and so she creates a passive Eurydice in her play. Being conscious of the fact that the language is not her own realm, she tries to make a new language that is not tailored for her by the patriarchy. As Chissolm states “Acker initiates a phase of finding resources of language that disrupt, exceed and precede phallic mimesis” (Chissolm 53) and in this way she tries to become her own self. Although she is criticized of numbing the readers by her radical use of violence and sexuality, she

is also commended by her unfolding what has been done to the women within the patriarchy by several forms of oppression, the mostly used form of which is sexual subjugation (Chissolm 53). In her writing, she tries to challenge the authority of the patriarchal language and thus achieves to give voice to the silenced figures within the language. Acker does what Cixous offers to female writers in the article called “The Laugh of Medusa”:

I shall speak about women’s writing. About what it will do. Woman must write her self. Must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement. (316)

Acker as a writer tries to defy the patriarchal literary tradition and unveil the undercurrent misogynist culture. Therefore, Greek literature, a fully patriarchal realm, offers unrefutable sources for a writer like Acker. Greek literature has significance for Acker not only because of its inherent patriarchy but also because:

To Acker, the world of Greek myth was one filled with sexuality and violence, a sense of the marvellous and the inexplicable, of the ‘Other’ with an approach to pain and trauma which she could associate with the rituals of sadomasochism or tattooing-‘rites of passage’ as she called them, ways of mastering emotional pain through bodily pain, ways of textualizing the body itself. (Scholder, Harryman, Ronell 11)

For such a writer, the Orpheus and Eurydice myth offers a rich tapestry of details to write over and over again since the myth is originally about a passive

female enslaved within patriarchy. This particular myth is also a story of death and Acker as a woman with breast cancer on the brink of death blends her own story with Eurydice's and writes the play *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997). The play is about a woman's journey to death. As it is stated in the work called *Lust for Life: On the writings of Kathy Acker* "In *Eurydice in the Underworld*, published in 1997, myth becomes a way of exorcizing the fear of death itself" (Scholden, Harryman, Ronell 11).

The play *Eurydice in the Underworld* combines drama, diary and epistolary fiction. Acker divides the play into chapters and in three worlds: the over world, the underworld and the dead world. Eurydice, in this play is not a mythical, supernatural figure. She is a woman with cancer, in love with a man and thus she does not want to die. The narrative, however, moves the reader to an unknown world, the realm of death by Eurydice. In the classical myth, Eurydice is only present on the verge of the underworld. Nevertheless, the innovation in Acker's play is that she brings Eurydice into the beginning, middle and the end of the story. She tries to represent what the major female character is doing in the myth, which remains hidden for centuries.

First of all, it is important to note that the names of Eurydice and Orpheus are altered in Kathy Acker's *Eurydice in the Underworld*. After the description of Eurydice and the room, Eurydice is given voice but the character is named as "YOU" by Acker. The generic *you* or the indefinite *you* pronoun chosen by Acker to name Eurydice cannot be coincidental. Since Eurydice is the epitome of a human being between life and death, each reader can easily feel herself/himself in the shoes of Eurydice who is called by a pronoun which is used to refer to an

unspecified person. Orpheus with the name of OR comes into the picture later than YOU. The name given to him presents him as an archetype of a male who can either be Orpheus or any other.

The play *Eurydice in the Underworld* starts with a quotation taken from Assia Djébar: “[a] little Arab girl going to school for the first time one autumn morning, walking hand in hand with her father. A tall, erect figure in a fez and a European suit, carrying a bag of school books” (Acker 1). By this particular quotation, the reader is introduced to the childhood of Eurydice in which the great influence of a father figure can be seen. Eurydice is not a figure on her own right but her earliest memory is of a father figure and that father figure is the epitome of in-betweenness with a fez and a European suit just like Acker is a blend of Eurydice and the little Arab girl. The quotation is taken from Djébar’s book *L’Amour, la fantasia* (1985) (tr. *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, Heinemann 1993) and as Priscilla Ringrose puts forward:

The opening chapter of *L’Amour, la fantasia* weaves together the conflicts of a young girl at the boundaries of two worlds, maternal and paternal, of two languages, French and Arabic, and of two eras past and present, held together precariously by the act of writing in the language of the oppressor. (Ringrose 59)

Therefore, the quotation reflects the in-betweenness of the story of Acker even from the beginning. As Ringrose further states “[f]or Djébar, the entry into the French language brings about athetic crisis by which she is transposed into a man’s world – the paternal order” (Ringrose 59). Same is valid for Acker and also her character Eurydice since both Acker and Eurydice speak the language of the patriarchy. In Lacanian terms, in order to have a place in the ‘Symbolic’, they act within ‘The Law of the Father’ but the story of Eurydice by Acker tries to thwart

the limitations of the 'Symbolic' which is a patriarchal territory as it is argued in the introduction. So just like the girl in Djébar's quotation, Eurydice is also in between two worlds, the overworld and the underworld; two languages, the one manipulated by 'The Law of the Father' and the one trying to challenge that patriarchal language. Besides, what is distinctive about Acker's Eurydice is that her past is also revealed different from Ovid's and Rilke's versions.

Kathy Acker starts the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in the overworld. The first chapter or the act, called "THE OVERWORLD" takes place "fifteen years later" (Acker 1) and it takes place in an apartment. The depiction of Eurydice in this room reveals some matrilineal implications. The colour red pervades the whole set. Eurydice is portrayed sitting on a red bed and having "flaming hair, so flaming that you can't see anything else of her, much less anything else around her" (Acker 1). She is not a character, herself, she is hidden under a colour, she is covered by red and she is invisible except for her red hair. The colour red symbolizes passionate love and danger both of which frame the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Through her love towards Orpheus, Eurydice thinks that she can escape from the dangers of her illness and death but these expectations of her are thwarted. The depiction of Eurydice continues by portraying her as a woman of the void. "She takes up too much space. Also, she's mad. Which has nothing to do with anything. She lives in her own world because she makes the whole world hers" (Acker 1) which brings Acker's Eurydice closer to the goddess tradition. Eurydice is represented just like the goddess who was believed to have been inpenetrated into every single thing, into a continuous,

general whole. As Rosemary Radford Ruether claims in her work *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History*:

We live on in the many new beings that arise from the disintegrating bodies of dead animals and plants and in the spirits and memories of those who come after us— in other words, we live on in the ongoing body of Gaia (Earth)-Goddess. We need to accept our own finitude and integrate ourselves into the cycles of life rather than trying to resist death. Life goes on precisely through the rhythms of birth, growth, disintegration, death, and rebirth. The Goddess lives in this cyclical rhythm of life. (Ruether 291)

Helene Cixous in her “Sorties” also defines woman as a whole when she says:

If there is a self proper to woman, paradoxically, it is her capacity to deappropriate herself without self-interest- endless body, without ‘end’, without principal ‘parts’; if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are wholes, not simple, partial objects but varied entirety, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where eros never stops travelling, vast, astral space. (151)

Besides, the madness that is associated with her also relates her to the god

Dionysus in contrast to the god Apollo who is the god of reason and order since

“Dionysus embodies the watery depths of madness and death” (Otto 140).

Following the portrayal of Eurydice, the representation of the room reflects the in-betweenness of the myth in terms of life and death; upper world and the underworld. The room of Eurydice and Orpheus is described as “[t]he room [overlooking] the world” (Acker 1) and this intensifies the intermediary nature of the myth as it brings Orpheus and Eurydice in between the over world and the underworld. While, with the view, the room seems to be in the over world and even in the heavens with the scenery of the world, the stuffed animals in the room symbolize death and these dead animals are given life again by being stuffed and thus just like Eurydice, they are in between life and death. Eurydice likes her

dead animals as “[t]here she rolls onto her left side and encounters a wolf. Puts her arms around him, as she’s accustomed to do because he’s faithful to her and because she knows he won’t leave her” (Acker 1-2). The connection between the characters and the underworld is also made apparent in by resembling OR to Hades even from the start “... this one’s the spitting image of Hades” (2), Acker writes. With a woman taking up too much space with her dead animals and the colour red pervading the room which overlooks the world, the over world is just like the underworld under the reign of Orpheus and Eurydice in the roles of Hades and Persephone.

Other than implying the in-betweenness of the play, one of the stuffed animals referred in the work which is the wolf further implies the influence of the goddess religions on the myth. “Sometimes known as 'Mother of Wolves', [the goddess] was also the divine midwife and mother of the ancestral spirits” (Rank 45-46) Rank writes describing the Roman cult of Lupa or Feronia. The recurrent link between goddesses and wolves is also made apparent by Neumann as he states “it was women rather than men who first established relationships with wolves and eventually domesticated them” (Neumann 275). Thus the wolf, an animal that lusts for blood but also suckles human babies as in ancient Roman mythology becomes a symbol of the goddess, the bearer of life and death. Therefore, the tender relationship between Eurydice and the wolf is suggestive as Eurydice can be said to carry goddess-like qualities since she embraces a wolf, in a way domesticates it by stuffing and it can also be stated that a wolf that is frequently associated with death is a symbol of the upcoming death of Eurydice, herself.

The idea of in-betweenness in the play is strengthened by the ‘abjection’ which has a great role within *Eurydice in the Underworld*. The illness of Eurydice is mentioned in the play by YOU saying “I’m going to be sick” (Acker 2). She is going to vomit and wants OR to help her but he is so confused that he does not know what to do and as OR can not help YOU, she has to swallow her vomit and “[s]he hates more than anything else, the smell of vomit. Doesn’t smell like her own cunt?” (Acker 2) which brings forth the idea of abject. As it is described in the book *Beauty and the Abject : Interdisciplinary Perspectives* Julia Kristeva’s term of:

abject threatens to dissolve the boundaries separating self and other, the clean and the filthy, the living and the dead, thus causing a reaction of nausea and vertigo. The sight of a corpse, of menstrual blood, of excrement and sewage all produce a violent reaction associated with abjection. (ix)

It is not surprising that her feelings toward her cunt is repulsive. Because although the cunt is the reproductive organ of a female and does not carry any negative meanings, the patriarchy does not attribute any positive meaning to it. As Luce Irigaray comments “[t]here are no words to talk about it, except filthy, mutilating words. The corresponding affects will therefore be anxiety, phobia, disgust, a haunting fear of castration” (“The Power of Discourse” 419).

Additionally, not only because of the vomit but also because of her illness, YOU is an abject as Julia Kristeva states:

[t]he body’s inside, in that case, shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s ‘own clean and proper self’ but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. (“Powers of Horror” 53)

So the abjection strengthens the in-betweenness of the work since the term itself is arbitrary as it challenges the borders. Although the cunt is a life force for Eurydice, as it is sexuality that binds her to life, she says that she is disgusted by her vomit as it smells like her cunt. Vomitting is associated with filth and decomposition, thus death so the idea of decomposition is as related to life as death. Since without disintegration, there is no hope for renewal. Therefore, Eurydice is in between the matrilineal and patriarchal perspectives towards sexuality and death as discussed in the introduction.

The helplessness of YOU due to her disease makes her a doubly passive character. She is not only a female, but an ill female in need of a man. The illness of YOU becomes more evident when she is trying to clear the vomit since she cannot move her left arm, OR states “[y]ou only had the operation five hours ago” (Acker 3). However, due to the operation she can no longer unbutton her shirt herself and needs the man, desperately and it is revealed that her breast is taken off because of the bandages.

YOU seems to adopt the patriarchal attitude towards death which perceives it as a negative concept. She believes in the life, love, she believes that ‘Eros’ can win over ‘Thanatos’, she says “... [w]e love each other very much. That’s the main thing. We found each other when both of us had given up. From here on it’s life” (Acker 4) and OR seems to share the same idea as he says “[t]he death part is over” (Acker 4). However, ‘Thanatos’ is as powerful an instinct as ‘Eros’ as Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* stated. Freud argued that the aim of all is to reach “inertia inherent in human beings” (30) despite the fact that

sexual instinct also pervades human psyche. Thus it is impossible for YOU to escape from death with love since Eros and Thanatos are not conflicting but complementary instincts.

YOU's passive positioning against the patriarchal hegemony in the name of OR is also emphasized in the play. OR tries to touch YOU at the end of this scene but the response of YOU emphasizes her passive situation in front of a man because she states that "I'll be able to be touched in a day or two" (Acker 4). However, Orpheus insists and asks when they can have an intercourse and YOU offers to try it but this is an unsuccessful attempt since YOU sleeps when OR is over her, "[a]mong all the stuffed animals who, now like her, live in another world" (Acker 4) says OR which stresses that death is the reality for YOU which she tries to escape and which OR is highly aware of. This foreshadows the idea that Orpheus adopts the fact that Eurydice will die although he acts as if he believes that she won't die.

The passivity of Eurydice is observed in the scenes where there is a patriarchal authority, subjugating her. When OR and YOU are at the doctor's office to learn the outcomes of the operation, both of them seem hopeful, yet the result is that she has cancer that is spreading. YOU is devastated. The doctor's room is a place where a patient is made passive by an institutional authority. In that room, Eurydice accuses doctors for making her ill, she is against the institutionalized logic of medicine. She thinks that doctors think that she has cancerous lymphs because her anti-oxidant diet has helped her and the lymphs are now "... registering cancer, because they are doing what they are supposed to

doing, cleaning out the system?” (Acker 6). However, the medical authority strongly opposes this. In the institutionalized logic of medicine, the patient is always a passive recipient and YOU tries to challenge the passivity imposed upon her by trying what alternative medicine offers and believes that it contributes to her health and makes her an active subject in her illness and thus the decision is not left to another person or institution but herself. Although she tries to subvert the passivity imposed upon her as a patient, she cannot escape from the patriarchal impositions which prevents her from becoming a subject. When the two males remain at the office after YOU goes out, the doctor says “[n]ot many men would do this ... Remain with a woman in her condition. I admire you” (Acker 6). Thus the patriarchal attitude comes forefront. As Luce Irigaray comments “[s]cientific discourses and serious practices are still the privilege of men, ... Everywhere and in all things, they define women’s function and social role and the sexual identity they are, or are not, to have. They know, they have access to the truth; we do not” (“The Power of Discourse” 415). Therefore, a woman is seen as inferior because of her sex and an ill woman is doubly inferior in a fully patriarchal world.

After learning the results of the operation, the only thing YOU has in mind is not to die and in order to reach her aim, she uses Eros. OR and YOU are seen at home after meeting the doctor and YOU is not ready to die. When OR says that she is not going to die YOU wants to hear this over and over again but OR suggests having an intercourse and during the sexual relation YOU says “I’m not going to die, am I?” (Acker 8). This way, by the power of Eros, she tries to overcome Thanatos. When OR answers that she is not going to die, she comes and after the intercourse, she wants to do it, again and in the third time she says “If we

keep on fucking, I'm not gonna die" (Acker 9). Because she wants to get in touch with her body, she cherishes her senses and she feels more alive when she has sex. Her sexual attitude carries the characteristics of the goddess tradition since "... sexual excitement is inclusive, it is a creative energy in the Goddess tradition" (Gadon 292). However, unlike what matrilineality suggests, YOU is always in need of a man, OR. Therefore, she can not fully embrace either the goddess centred beliefs or the patriarchal perceptions. While she seems to hold on to life by the use of sexuality as in the goddess traditions, she always acts under the hegemony of Orpheus and they have an intercourse only when Orpheus wants.

Although YOU is repulsed by the idea of death in the scenes mentioned before, there are also scenes revealing that she is in between the matrilineal and patriarchal perceptions. The operation scene of Eurydice shows what has happened during the operation of YOU. YOU does not want to be in the hospital. After nurses prepare her for the operation:

... she tries to escape from the reality by being dead. She turns her head to one side, lays it on her shoulder, as far as she can, closes her eyes and as many of her other senses as she can. But she can still hear. After a minute, she's bored. (Acker 12)

This acting dead is ambiguous when the mentality of YOU who does not want to die is taken into account because this reflects the fact that although she tries to escape death, she still acts as a dead person. This may imply that she knows that the reality, her sickness is what is hurting her and when reality is left behind, she will be in peace. However, this does not last long and she turns to reality and chooses life once more. In this scene, the matrilineal perspective towards death is

observed but it ends with the victory of patriarchy which considers death as a repellent concept.

In the next chapter called “Diary Written by Eurydice when she’s dead” shows how she is trapped between life and death. She does not embrace death. The realm of death is “... the middle of dirt” (Acker 15) for her. Violence is observed in the realm of the dead and two girls have been murdered and the sexes of the murdered and the murderer are significant. YOU writes in her diary “[t]he following’s all that is known about this murderer: male” (Acker 15). The only thing explicit about the murderer is his sex, his features are ordinary “... no redeeming features. Face not yet known-faceless-as-if-sheet-over-face” (Acker 15) so the male is a stereotype who murders the girls and this may imply that the male is the epitome of patriarchy and because of the authority associated with him, he puts an end to the feminine power. The patriarchal power even tries to conquer the realm of the dead, so the goddess realm is no longer a release for the female as it is under the hegemony of patriarchy. Thus Eurydice cannot accept death as her end.

The apartment in which the girls are murdered is surrounded by water as it is stated “[w]ater surrounds the house. As if it’s on stilts. The bodies are thrown into the water” (Acker 15). Dionysus is the god who “comes out of water and returns to it. Water has a dual nature. Joyous, vital/dark, mysterious, dangerous, earthly” (Otto 162) and Otto further discusses that “[w]ater has always been felt to be the element of the women” (Otto 171) and this accentuates the idea that the underworld is a feminine realm. Thus the water imagery and also the place of the scene which is the underworld bring the story close to the god Dionysus.

Nevertheless, although water symbolizes matrilineal tradition and Dionysus, the violence against the female reveals that the underworld is started to be occupied by the patriarchal hegemony, disclosing why YOU is portrayed indecisive about whether to adopt death or not.

Although YOU does not want to be dead in the previous chapter, she suddenly says “I’m starting from nothing. So slowly” (Acker 16) which conjures up the idea that death is not an end but a beginning of regeneration and her positive attitude towards death extends by the rose imagery as she describes the surroundings she writes “[t]wo white roses rise out of the small squares of wet soil placed in the concrete” (Acker 16). Rose like any other plant symbolizes growth and renewal and by seeing rose in the underworld, it can be inferred that YOU starts to internalize the idea that death is not an end but a beginning; it is the only way to regenerate. Other than the rose, the ivy is another symbol which illustrates her changing attitude towards death. She says “I see ivy is crawling like fungus like over the nearest road. There is no more difference between what I’m seeing and who think I am” (Acker 16) which suggests that she is becoming a part of the underworld that she has been running away for a time. Ivy symbolizes eternity, life and immortality. The idea of death is closely associated with immortality and regeneration and thus ivy can be taken as the symbol of the positive perspective of YOU towards death. However, ivy also represents dependence since it needs trees or buildings to reach the sunlight to grow so ivy may also symbolize that Orpheus is the male that Eurydice attaches herself to and thus her stance towards death is ambiguous. Since in one way, she seems to embrace death, in another way, the only thing she wants is Orpheus and in order to escape death, she needs him. She

seems to fear death because as a patriarchal concept death is something dark and negative while it is a well received concept in the matrilineal tradition. YOU is imprisoned within the patriarchal concepts which externalize death and thus she does not want to experience it but then she sees the rose and the ivy and her negative attitude towards death alters within this scene as it does not have any clue about the patriarchal hegemony in the underworld as in the previous chapters in which she strongly opposes death.

In the chapter called “in the courtroom of the dead”, she strong-mindedly wills to flee from death in contrast to what she feels towards death in the previous chapter. She takes a taxi to the airport but she cannot go since she has forgotten to take anything to wear and they turn back, however, she loses her way in that realm since there are no clear directions there. Instead of the airport, she goes to the NatWest, a bank within which there are many “women tailored in business suits, cigarettes between fingers, drinks in hands ...” (Acker 17). While YOU thinks that she is in a bank and has come there for a loan, a woman introduces herself and takes her into the building to meet others so she “will feel right at home” (Acker 18) and YOU is suprised since “no special bank employee ever rushed forward” (Acker 18) to do anything for her. These female characters imply the fact that the underworld is welcoming for YOU just like any other female since it is their own realm where they can feel “right at home” (Acker 18). YOU feels that these women are waiting for her and this is a destination for her and in the underworld, she has a place to go. We realize that this is not a bank, they are in the courtroom of the dead and YOU is judged there because of a murder associated with her. She gets away with it by her insanity. Madness becomes her

power since YOU says that one of the judges “... notices that I’ve become insane and remarks to the rest, “[w]e’ve got to do something about ... ” (Acker 19). After the hospital, the courtroom is the second place where there is an authority and YOU tries to challenge that authority. Escaping from being judged, she starts talking about a poet, Tsvetaeva and quotes from her “*It begins like a chapter in that novel Jane Eyre. The secret of the red room*” and thus the importance of the red room increases and it becomes evident that it is based on the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte. The red room in that novel symbolizes the limitations and obstacles that Jane Eyre will face throughout the novel until she frees herself. She is initially imprisoned in that room and all through the novel, the red room image is repeated whenever she is hindered by an authority that she must challenge. Similarly, the red room in *Eurydice in the Underworld* can be viewed as the symbol of the constraining atmosphere in which YOU tries to live and the reason for this restricted environment is patriarchy in the name of OR.

Acker continues with the chapter called “in the school of the dead” and the plaque over the door of the school writes “The lover’s betrayal” (Acker 21) and it is relevant because OR has left YOU in the underworld, he let her die. Besides, in this chapter, it is exposed that YOU has actually murdered someone and she is escaping from the authorities. A guide shows her a place where she can be safe. She cannot be caught there. But some boys in early twenties enter the building and these boys are members of a travelling performance group and YOU has a sexual intercourse with one of these boys which demonstrates that she has done away with the bonds that tie her to OR. YOU starts to embrace death and she sees “... a rose above the earth” (Acker 22). The hospital, the courtroom and the school

are examples of discipline and order which are imposed by patriarchy and either by sexuality or madness; she frees herself from the bonds of those patriarchal institutions. The sexuality, in this scene, is different from the other scenes of the intercourses in the play since not a male but YOU decides to have an intercourse in this scene.

The chapter “letter found from Orpheus after his death” summarizes what OR thinks about YOU and their relationship. In this chapter, it becomes evident that OR has deliberately left YOU in the underworld and it is not because of his cowardice as Plato says or for the sake of his art in Blanchot’s view but because of his real feelings towards her. He writes:

I love you and at the same time I was unhappy at every moment when I was with you. I could never, and I still don’t, even though I’m dead, understand how these two emotions, opposing each other could both be in me. (Acker 24)

In the part called “After he’s returned to the realm of the living, Orpheus says this:” he expresses his feelings about the realm of the dead and says:

I hated being down there. I’m just telling you everything I feel. I get high and drink, that’s just what I do, and you can’t do that when you’re dead. I hated being down there, in all that muck, I have no interest in having anything to do with death anymore. (Acker 25-26)

His hate of the underworld highly corresponds with the Apollonian and patriarchal view of death as discussed in the introduction. The moment he sees Eurydice in the underworld has changed everything for Orpheus. He says:

I had thought since she was wealthy and famous, she was going to turn my life, which back then looked like an abyss, into paradise; I had thought we would always be drunk, in the limelight; I had thought that she was my beginning. I had wanted to believe all this so much that I couldn’t see what was in front of my eyes. Until I turned around and looked at U. Down in that hole.

I saw her and I didn't want what I saw.
I've returned back here. I'm glad that I met U because now I know I can
love again. (Acker 26)

Orpheus does not want to die or he does not want to take Eurydice back to the
overworld. Because of his feelings towards death and YOU, he chooses life and
his looking back at YOU provides him opportunity to evaluate YOU and their
relationship and decide. His gaze is neither out of curiosity or passionate love but it
only contributes to his decision to leave YOU behind and have a new life without
her. Orpheus draws a boundary between them since he is the male, the epitome of
patriarchy and thus Apollonian since Apollo is the god who "sets boundaries and
keeps distances" (Carlevale 372). He does not want to be in that realm, he chooses
the overworld, because his power as a male operates only in the overworld.

Although Acker gives voice to Eurydice and includes her perspective
within her play unlike Ovid, the character she has created is also a passive
character. Due to her illness and her love towards Orpheus, she is an object in the
patriarchal world. Her stance towards death is ambiguous unlike the decisive
attitude of Rilke's Eurydice who embraces death. Acker's Eurydice rarely seems
to adopt the idea of death which is an utterly positive concept in the goddess
traditions because both the underworld and the idea of death seem to be seized by
the patriarchy as the hegemony of masculinity is observed in the scenes taking
place in the underworld. Although the issues of sexuality and madness bring
Eurydice close to the matrilineality and Dionysus, her strong attachment to life
and Orpheus, her hate towards the realm of death suggest that she has patriarchal
and Apollonian inclinations. Acker's Orpheus is not a hero like Ovid's or Rilke's
who tries to challenge death. He rejects to save Eurydice since he simply does not

want to be with her. Thus by leaving Eurydice, who can not adopt death since her mind is formed within the patriarchal discourse in the overworld which perceives death as a negative concept, Orpheus contributes to Eurydice's gaining her freedom in death but the end of the play does not suggest any clue about whether Eurydice is as content with death as Rilke's Eurydice or not and thus Acker's play ends in between.

CHAPTER V

SARAH RUHL'S *EURYDICE*

Sarah Ruhl (1974-) has experienced the same important period as Kathy Acker in terms of the feminist movement. As discussed in the previous chapter, the third-wave feminists try to reveal the fact that although equality for women is gained in terms of official rights, the patriarchal point of view which considers women as inferior does not change. Thus women continue to perform the roles given to them by the patriarchy as Judith Butler states gender is constructed by “the tacit collective agreement to perform, to produce and [it] sustain[s] discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions ...” (Butler 178). So both Acker and Ruhl create a passive Eurydice reflecting the general patriarchal point of view. Sarah Ruhl, by including a father figure and the issue of language into the play, increasing the passivity of Eurydie, implies that if a woman cannot get rid of “The Law of the Father”, she cannot achieve to be a subject and thus brings a new dimension to the myth. Nevertheless, although both Acker’s and Ruhl’s Eurydice live under the hegemony of patriarchy, the hopeful end of the play *Eurydice* in which she embraces the matrilineal realm of the dead is distinctive.

Sarah Ruhl chooses the Orpheus and Eurydice myth as the backbone of one of her plays since she believes that in order to subvert something, it is important to go back to the origin as she states in an interview she has had for the Bomb Magazine with Paula Vogel:

I think our generation has to look at Freud and Freud’s impact, and many of us say, Oh, maybe Freud didn’t have it right. Something that he was right about he got from literature: the Oedipal complex, from the Greeks.

So maybe we ought to go back to the Greeks instead of back to Freud on the Greeks.

Upon her choice of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, she writes that “I always found that troubling—[Eurydice] is the one who dies and takes a journey before Orpheus, but we don’t really see her experience” (qtd in Weckwerth 30). In her version, she tells the whole story from Eurydice’s point of view. Ruhl emphasizes the role of Eurydice which is always cast aside, she in her play *Eurydice* “is musing over her tendency to focus on what’s usually “the second string character” in a play and thrust him or her to the front of the stage” (Wallenberg 2). Besides, the central male character is not unique in this play unlike in various other versions which dwell on the myth. Sarah Ruhl adds a father figure to the story in her play and Eurydice is portrayed in between her father and her narcissistic husband, Orpheus.

The play emphasizes the role of the father in a daughter’s life and the inclusion of the father figure into the play is not without purpose. First of all, the play is dedicated to Sarah Ruhl’s father and it is explicit from the interviews of Sarah Ruhl that it consists of some autobiographical details. John Lahr in his article “Surreal Life” that is based on an interview with Sarah Ruhl points out:

Each Saturday, from the time Ruhl was five, Patrick (Ruhl’s father) took his daughters to the Walker Bros. Original Pancake House for breakfast and taught them a new word, along with its etymology ... Patrick died of cancer in 1994, when Ruhl was twenty. (Lahr 2)

Just like Ruhl’s father, in the play *Eurydice*, the father figure also teaches her daughter vocabulary that she has forgotten. For instance, in the Scene 9 of the Second Movement of the play Father teaches Eurydice words like “ostracize” (373) or “peripatetic” (374). Secondly, by including the father figure, Ruhl

decentralizes the myth. Because unlike the the other versions of the myth, scrutinized in this study, Ruhl's *Eurydice* is not only about the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice but it is a play of a daughter and a father. Thirdly, the father in the play, having the power of the language takes the role of a language teacher in the underworld and thus the play raises questions about language acquisition and the role of the father in a daughter's life. Due to the father issues of Eurydice, she is in between becoming a subject herself or an object in the patriarchal world because of the impositions of a husband and a father figure. Because in order to be a subject, Eurydice should free herself from the language which is a totally patriarchal concept as Luce Irigaray states in her article "Penis Envy" in *Speculum of the Other Woman* about the system of discourse that its "meaning is based exclusively on a phallic standard" (56).

When the effects of the patriarchal language on a female are analyzed within the framework of Sarah Ruhl's play *Eurydice*, it becomes evident that she is in between patriarchy and matrilineality. Other than the father figure, there is not a mother in the play which highlights the fact that, due to the enforcing discourses of patriarchy, Eurydice does not have a "female genealogy" (Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter" 423) and in order to overthrow patriarchy she should go back to matrilineality as Irigaray points out:

Humanity might begin to wash itself of a sin. A woman celebrating the Eucharist with her mother, sharing with her the fruits of the earth she/they have blessed, could be delivered of all hatred or ingratitude towards her maternal genealogy, could be consecrated in her identity and her female genealogy. ("The Bodily Encounter" 423)

Therefore, in the end Eurydice decides to forget everything and die, she chooses peace and quiet and forgets, going back to the womb of the mother who is not a

particular mother but the archetypal one, the mother goddess.

In addition to the father issues, since most of the play takes place in the underworld, it is not surprising that the subject of death is diffused into the play. The in-betweenness of the play in terms of the idea of death is reflected even in the character list. The name of the god of the dead is changed into “A Nasty Interesting Man”, “Man” and “Child” (Ruhl 328). The name “Hades” is ignored either to create a comic effect or to highlight that while death implied by the name “Hades” is repulsive, when it is altered, it turns into something interesting, attractive. Besides, the adjective may also be used because death itself is not only a repugnant concept but it is also alluring hence ‘uncanny’. This uncanniness brings the play in between the goddess-centred beliefs which sees death attractive in contrast to the patriarchal view of death. The notes to the play also include that “[t]he set should allow for fluid transitions from moment to moment- from underworld to overworld and back again” (332) and these transformations of space contribute to the theme of in-betweenness of the play. Furthermore, Ruhl states in her notes to the play, “the underworld should resemble the world of *Alice in the Wonderland* more than it resembles Hades” (Ruhl 332) freeing death from the negative implications and creates a matrilineal realm of the dead.

The influence of *Alice in the Wonderland* is observed all through the play as there are some resemblances between the story of Alice and Eurydice since Alice is directed into a hole by a rabbit which she finds interesting since it has a waist pocket and a watch (Carroll 2-4) just like Eurydice who is led into the underworld by a Man who tries to attract her by inviting her to an interesting party with interesting people. The voyage of Alice to another land is provided by water

which is the pool of her own tears (Carroll 24) which goes hand in hand with the story of Eurydice who descends into the underworld by rain.

The stage directions to the play state “[t]hey wear swimming outfits from the 1950s” (Ruhl 333) revealing the position of woman. In the 1950s, there was the image of the ideal woman defined, especially through the media and literature on marriage. Women’s magazines were influential sources in imposing these images. The stories and articles published in these magazines, such as, *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *McCall’s* presented housewife-and-mother as the only acceptable role for women (Sinfield 211) and basically focused on marriage as the only possible career for a woman (Gale 28). Thus when the period in which the play takes place is taken into account, the oppression of Eurydice by Orpheus is not surprising.

The play starts with a Eurydice who is suppressed by a narcissist artist who only cares for himself and his music. For instance, when Eurydice asks Orpheus what he is thinking, his answer is music (334). However, Eurydice wants to assert herself and says “I read a book today” (335) and wants Orpheus to be interested in what she has read and she tries to talk about what she is reading about. When Orpheus asks why she loved the book (335) she says “[i]t can be interesting to see if other people- like dead people who wrote books- agree or disagree with what you think” (336). But Orpheus asks “[w]hy?” (336) again and Eurydice claims that “[i]t had very interesting arguments” but Orpheus thinks that the point of Eurydice is not strong since he says “I didn’t know an argument should be interesting. I thought it should be right or wrong” (336) and by this statement, he imposes his own ideal logic on her, he regards her thoughts as

completely insignificant. Finally, Orpheus makes Eurydice feel that reading does not mean anything at all for Orpheus since he says “[m]aybe you should make up your own thoughts. Instead of reading them in a book” (336). So she tries to justify herself to Orpheus since she is influenced by what he says as she is in a passive position and says that “I do. I do think up my own thoughts” (336). However, Orpheus does not seem very interested and says “I made up a song for you today” (336) which stresses the self-absorbed character of Orpheus. Cixous states in her “Sorties” “the self-absorbed, masculine narcissism, making sure of its image, of being seen, or seeing itself, of assembling its glories, of pocketing itself again” (153) highly corresponds with the traits of Orpheus as he can not stand talking about something other than himself or his music even when he is with his love. In this relationship, Eurydice seems to be in between her own self and her love. While she wants to maintain her own thoughts, she also needs her ideas to be approved by Orpheus. The obsession of Orpheus with music also objectifies Eurydice. He wants her to remember a melody although she is not good at it and he makes her practice the melody until she remembers it right. He makes her “clap it out” (338) and although “she tries to imitate” (338), “she is still off” (338). She is off the tune because she does not want to know about the rhythm, she loves her books (338). Irigaray points out in her “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine” that “[t]here is an initial phase, perhaps only one ‘path’, the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it” (570). The imitation is always attributed to woman since they are thought not to have the ability to do

something themselves and according to Irigaray, this role of imitation that is used to subordinate woman should be subverted and should become a weapon of the female. However, Eurydice in this scene is not aware of her power as a female and she still insists in being herself and can not mimic Orpheus. But mimicry can easily be turned into a strategy in order to overthrow the patriarchy.

Eurydice, however, cannot achieve to subvert the patriarchal hegemony of Orpheus. Thus Orpheus does not perceive Eurydice as a subject. For example, he starts talking about a song of him but does not play the whole song because only when he gets the twelve instruments he can sing (338) and Eurydice is curious about when he will get the twelve instruments and he says: “I’m going to make each strand of your hair into an instrument. Your hair will stand on end as it plays my music and become a hair orchestra. It will fly you up into the sky” (339). Eurydice is nothing but a muse for him, a tool to achieve his art. There is no one who asks Eurydice if she wants to be an instrument but she has questions in mind and asks “[w]on’t I fall down when the song ends?”(339). This question of her implies the fact that she is aware of the thoughts of Orpheus who only by his music makes her go upwards and without the notes of Orpheus she will fall. Although Eurydice has suspicions about whether to be an instrument of Orpheus or not, Orpheus wants to guarantee that she will be a tool for him and in order to make sure that she will always remember to love him, he puts a string on her fourth finger. The string ties her to Orpheus, it strangles her identity. This string also brings the marriage idea forefront and they decide to get married and the good wish of Orpheus about their marriage is “[m]ay our lives be full of music” (342) which lays his obsession bare. Although marriage is a bond between a wife

and a husband, the only thing Orpheus cares about is his music. After their decision to marry, Eurydice asks what Orpheus is thinking again and the answer is not surprising since he says “[m]usic” and “*her face falls*” (342) as it is stated in the stage directions. Orpheus, then, changes his answer and says “[j]ust kidding. I was thinking about you. And music” (342) but this answer could not satisfy Eurydice and she chooses to escape again and suggests going in the water (342).

On the one hand, Eurydice seems to adopt the ideas of Orpheus, but on the other hand, she wants to escape from the situation in which she is objectified by going in water. Her only passageway which is water can be taken symbolically because as argued before “waterways, rivers, especially streams and wells are sacred to the Goddess. Bodies of water represent the flowing fluids from her celestial body” (Brondwin 51). Thus she wants to be in water, the symbol of femininity, in order to be freed from patriarchy.

Although the water image brings about some matrilineal implications in the fully patriarchal upper world, the second scene of the play takes place in the underworld and includes another patriarchal figure, the Father. “*The Father, dressed in a gray suit, reads from a letter*” (343). The letter that he reads is written for his daughter, Eurydice and it includes advice for a girl to marry like “[c]ultivate the arts of dancing and small talk” “[e]verything in moderation” “[k]eep quiet about politics, but vote for the right man” (343). This letter highly suits to the age that is written since the characters are in 1950s and some of the books on marriage as an art were *Living Alone* (1956) by Beryl Conway, *The Sexual Responsibility of Women* (1957) by Maxine Davis, mainly defining the ideal wife as subordinate, knowing how to ‘keep their men’ and being concerned

only about their families and familial responsibilities (Wilson 94). This letter also shows the mentality of the father who identifies woman as objects for the male desire. The Father also adds to the letter that “[a]lso, I am one of the few dead people who still remembers how to read and write. That’s a secret. If anyone finds out, they might dip me in the River again” (344). He is dead and in the underworld but he has the power of the language. The Father’s having the power of the language is not coincident as Elaine Millard puts forward:

It is not however, until the acquisition of language, when the child can make its desires explicit to another and enter into social exchanges, that this self becomes formulated, that is, named and defined by its entry into the Symbolic Order. The Symbolic is marked by the law of structuration of meanings which Lacan calls ‘nom-du-père’: the Law of the Father. (157)

Thus he is in between the two worlds, he does not belong to either of them but he also belongs to both of them. The Father from the universe of death takes his part in the play by his letter implying that although he is in a state of non-being, his language and the tool of it, the pen, are still in his hands. The language operates under the hegemony of the patriarchy since only through ‘The Law of the Father’, the child has the opportunity to enter into language. Since there is language in the underworld, it is impossible to talk about a fully feminine realm since language is an utterly patriarchal concept.

The father issues of Eurydice are apparent as Eurydice says in her wedding party: “[a] wedding is for a father and a daughter. They stop being married to each other on that day” (345). In this scene, Hades with the name of “Man” comes to attract Eurydice. Finding the letter of her father, he decides to use it in order to allure her and achieves to do so as he takes her to his apartment. Although Man wants to get close to her, the only aim of Eurydice is to see the letter of her

father. Finally she achieves to get the letter from his pocket. She runs to the stairs and “*she wavers, off-balance, at the top of the stairwell*” (356) . “She follows the letter, down, down down ... Blackout” (356).

Eurydice descends to the underworld by an elevator and “[i]nside the elevator, it is raining” (359). Sarah Ruhl herself comments on her using the elevator in one of her interviews and says:

I think it’s something about contemporary alienation: the experience of going to the underworld involves an alienation or unfamiliarity. Not in a devilish or horrible way, but in a contemporary way. Like when you go to a mall and you’re in an elevator. It smells funny and it’s tiny. Then you walk out and you’re in a corporate hell. I was thinking about that sort of moral neutrality in the underworld I was creating. (Weckwerth 29)

Therefore, the elevator image connecting the upper world to the underworld is the symbol of in-betweenness. In the elevator, Eurydice is not in the upper world where patriarchy reigns or in the underworld where her Father tries to challenge the rule of matrilineality and constitute patriarchal power. The rain inside the elevator symbolizes the River of Forgetfulness in which the memory is erased and in this way all the traces of the patriarchal subordination are eliminated for Eurydice. The water is also clearly related to the femininity and the cult of Dionysus as Walter Friedrich Otto points out “[w]e have found the origin of the Dionysiac women in the element of water from which the womanliness rise, together with the magic of beauty, motherliness, music, prophecy and death” (Otto 175). Moreover, by water, Eurydice descends to the realm of the dead which is generally considered as a feminine realm as discussed in the introduction. However, because of the language operating in the underworld, it is not possible for Eurydice to reach the matrilineal realm of the dead.

Descending to the underworld, Eurydice “carries a suitcase and an umbrella” (359). This is significant because it can be interpreted as a symptom of her in-betweenness. She is washed in the rain and forgets everything that has imprisoned her within the discourse of patriarchy but she also uses an umbrella to protect herself from that rain. She has left everything behind and she is on her first step to become an autonomous female in a feminine realm but she has a suitcase that she carries from the upper world which still ties her to that realm.

She walks toward the audience and opens her mouth, trying to speak. There is a great humming noise. She closes her mouth. The humming noise stops. She opens her mouth for the second time, attempting to tell her story to the audience. There is a great humming noise. She closes her mouth-the humming noise stops. She has a tantrum of despair. (359)

She does not have an access to language because she is in the Pre-Symbolic stage and until her father teaches her the language, she is between ‘Imaginary Stage’ and ‘The Symbolic Stage’ as Elaine Millard states:

Imaginary can not find expression in words is repressed in the unconscious. This repressed ‘experience’ is a key to understanding what Kristeva terms the ‘semiotic’ (or the area of unconscious on which conscious speech depends). In the Lacanian account of language acquisition, the phallus is the master signifier, in the face of which the feminine can be defined only as lack. Woman is a gap, a silence, invisible and unheard, repressed in the unconscious. Kristeva argues that this ‘feminine’ remains at the level of the ‘semiotic’, accessibly in patriarchal discourse only at the point of contradiction, meaninglessness and silence. (157)

Therefore, the voice of Eurydice can not be heard. She does not know the language of the patriarchy, any more. She seems to be her own realm which is the ‘semiotic’. Nonetheless, she is still in-between her own femininity and the patriarchy that is inflicted on her. Because while she says “[w]hen I got through the cold, they made me swim in a river and I forgot his name. I forgot all the

names” (361) she remembers that she has a husband although she can not remember his name. Following this, “*Eurydice’s father approaches and takes her baggage*” (362). However, Eurydice does not recognize her father and she thinks that he is a porter. The father calls her name but she does not remember her own name and says “[w]hat is the language you’re speaking? It gives me tingles. Say it again” (363). The father repeats her name and Eurydice says “[o]ooh- it’s like a fruit! Again!” (363). Because, without the meaning that is attributed to the names, they are nothing more than mere sounds. Father says “Eurydice- I’m your father” (363). Eurydice imitates him “Eurydice- I’m your father! How funny! You remind me of something but I can’t understand a word you’re saying. Say it again! (363). By imitating her father, Eurydice learns the language, again. However, this mimicry can be taken as a deliberate attempt of Eurydice to undermine the authority of patriarchy from within. Since as Irigaray comments “[t]o play with mimesis is thus, for a woman to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it” (“The Power of Discourse” 570). The Father continues to explain the concept of a father to her daughter and says “[w]hen you were alive, I was your tree” (364) which means that the Father is the male that she is attached to when she was alive. In this way, Eurydice starts to remember and she says “[m]y tree! Yes, the tall one in the backyard! I used to sit all day in its shade!” (364) which highlights the fact that Eurydice is under the influence of her Father in the upper world.

The naming issue in addition to the teaching the language subordinate the female character in the play since naming is a process which reveals the initial power struggles in the identity of a person. Eurydice’s Father says “I named you

Eurydice. Your mother named all the other children. But Eurydice I chose for you” (364). Luce Irigaray states in her article “The Bodily Encounter with the Mother”:

when a child is given a proper name, it already replaces the most irreducible mark of birth: the *navel*. A proper name, even a forename, is always late in terms of this most irreducible trace of identity: the scar left when the cord was cut. A proper name, even a forename, is slipped onto the body like a coating- an extra-corporeal identity card. (418)

Therefore, by naming Eurydice, the Father overpowers Eurydice and takes her into his own patriarchal discourse. The mother figure is excluded from the play and she is also cast aside in the naming process of Eurydice because

by denying the mother, her generative power and by wanting to be the sole creator, the Father, according to our culture, superimposes upon the archaic world of the flesh a universe of language (langue) and symbols which can not take root in it except as in the form of that which makes a hole in the bellies of women and in the site of their identity. (“The Bodily Encounter” 419)

Thus by teaching Eurydice the language and by naming her, the Father severs the bond of Eurydice from her mother and inhibits her becoming a subject. Without the language and the name, Eurydice is close to her mother and in the name of her, the archetypal mother, but when she starts learning the language, she moves away from her and the language draws her close to patriarchy which was established long ago by the god Apollo as stated in the introduction of this thesis.

After learning the language, Eurydice wants a room for herself in the underworld. Although this is impossible, the Father makes a room for his daughter by using strings and this room built by the Father may imply that the Father puts Eurydice behind the bars that he makes. He imprisons his daughter in the underworld by teaching her language through which a patriarchal discourse is

conveyed. While she is tied to a male figure, Orpheus in the upper world by a string ring, she is bound to her Father in the underworld by a string room.

Imprisoned within the patriarchy by her father, Eurydice becomes aware of the fact that she also has a husband. Orpheus writes a letter to Eurydice and says “I love you. I’m going to find you ...” (368) and the letter arrives the underworld and Eurydice “*opens it. She scrutinizes it. She does not know how to read it. She puts it on the ground, takes off her shoes, stands on the letter, and shuts her eyes*” (369). Her father asks if she would like him to read the letter (369) and takes the letter he reads “it says: I love you” (370) but Eurydice can not understand who says this and the Father tries to portray the man who has written the letter and says “[i]t’s like your tree” (370) “[i]t’s like sitting in the shade” (370). However, this is the same depiction of the concept of the father and so as to make Eurydice distinguish between a father figure and a husband he adds “[i]t’s like sitting in the shade with no clothes on” (370). So by adding nakedness implying sexuality to the picture, the Father explains the husband figure with the same symbol of tree which he uses to describe himself. The letter ends with the name of Orpheus and Eurydice says “[t]hat word! It’s like- I can’t breathe. Orpheus! My husband” (371). With the names she starts to remember because through the names the person takes her/his place within the discourse as Lacan states in his “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud” “[t]hus the subject too if he appears to be the slave of the language is all the more so of a discourse in the universal movement in which his place is already inscribed at birth, if only by virtue of his proper name” (447). With the help of the names and

the language she starts to remember and she becomes a slave to the language as she was in the upper world.

After remembering the name of Orpheus, Eurydice becomes curious about the other names and their stories, she says “[t]ell the names of my mother and brothers and sisters” (372). But the father does not want to tell the names of them. He does not want to remind her anything about her mother because “[t]he social order, our culture, psychoanalysis itself, want it this way: the mother must remain forbidden, excluded. The father forbids the bodily encounter with the mother” (“The Bodily Encounter” 418). However, “[n]either little girl nor woman must give up love for their mother. Doing so uproots them from their identity, their subjectivity” (“The Bodily Encounter” 422) as is the case of Eurydice who becomes the object of the Father who achieves this by cutting the bond between the mother and the daughter and assigning Eurydice a passive role within the man’s discourse. This deliberate casting the mother figure out by the Father of Eurydice moves her away from the matrilineality since it can not operate where the patriarchal impositions are at work.

Teaching language also includes teaching how to read. Taking the books that Orpheus has sent from the underworld, Eurydice does not know what to do since she does not remember reading and “[t]he *Father teaches Eurydice how to read*” (377). In this way she becomes the possession of her father. In the upper world, Eurydice has liked reading books, she has asserted her own views to Orpheus about reading although Orpheus has not seemed to be interested. Reading is her own realm that she has tried to protect in the upper world but re-learning it from the Father makes the Father capable of conquering the territory of Eurydice,

herself. She can only act within the man's discourse by learning the imposed language and in order to have a place of her own as a female she has to own that discourse as Cixous states:

If woman has always functioned 'within man's discourse, ... , now it is time for her to displace this 'within', explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, take it in, take it into her women's mouth, bite its tongue with her mother's tongue with her women's teeth, make up her own tongue to get inside it. ("The Laugh of Medusa" 155)

Nevertheless, although this the way out for her, she always acts in-between the imposed objectified role and the subjectivity.

In addition to the powerful image of the Father in the underworld, Orpheus' power as an artist is not also omitted in Ruhl's play as it is in Ovid's and Rilke's versions of the myth. Orpheus in this play seems to believe that he can save Eurydice by his music but the lord of the underworld does not share the same idea. He says if he wants to take his wife he "will have to do more than sing" (390). He informs Orpheus about the rule if he wants to get Eurydice. He says "[s]tart walking home. Your wife just might be on the road behind you. We make it real nice here. So people want to stick around. As you walk, keep your eyes facing front. If you look back at her-poof! She's gone" (391). Simultaneously, Eurydice is seen telling her Father that "I hear him at the gates! That's his music. He's come to save me! (382). Nevertheless, what Orpheus will save Eurydice from is ambiguous. In order to reach her Father, she has deliberately chosen death. But she could not free herself from the patriarchal authority in the realm of death. Even if Orpheus manages to save her from death, she will eventually find herself imprisoned in patriarchy. When the Father asks whether she wants to go with him or not and Eurydice says "[y]es, of course"(392) but she still thinks about her

Father “[o]h- you’ll be lonely, won’t you?” (392) and the Father says “[n]o, no. You should go to your husband. You should have grandchildren. You’ll all come down and meet me one day” (392) and the father says “I’ll take you to him” and “[h]e takes her arm. They process, arm in arm, as at a wedding. Wedding music” (392). Her attitude towards going back to the upper world, to Orpheus or staying in the underworld with her Father is ambivalent. While taking his daughter to her husband, the Father informs Eurydice about the rule and he says “If he turns around and sees you, you’ll die a second death. Those are the rules. So step quietly. And don’t cry out” (393). The Father also warns his daughter about her second death “[d]on’t let them dip you in the river too long, the second time. Hold your breath” (393). Because, if she holds her breath, she will not lose her memory. Although Eurydice thinks she will be saved by Orpheus, she cannot leave her father. She says to her father; “I’ll come back to you. I seem to keep dying” (393) and in order to go back to her first love, her father, she seduces Orpheus to look back at her and thus returns to her father. As both Orpheus and Eurydice are on their way back home she says “I want to go home! I want my father!” (395) which reveals her deep bondage with her Father. So, during the walk “[s]he makes a decision. She increases her pace. She takes two steps for every step that Orpheus takes. She catches up to him” (396) and she calls him and “Orpheus turns toward her, startled. Orpheus looks at Eurydice. Eurydice looks at Orpheus. The world falls away” (397). In this scene, the gaze which is associated with the male is subverted. Laura Mulvey states “[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (442), however, by taking an active part in the gaze, Eurydice reaches her aim to go back

to her father and thus challenges the male gaze. Although she seems to challenge the patriarchal authority in this scene of gaze, the realm that she yearns is not the underworld which is considered as feminine by the matrilineality yet it is a territory of the patriarchal power.

The paternal love of the father of Eurydice continues after she goes with Orpheus since he does not know the fact that she will return. Because of losing the object of his love, he chooses forgetting, which is the ultimate end, which is the final and the starting point of every being. When there is nobody left to impose the language on, it is the best to erase the memory. As the Loud Stone, one of the member of the chorus of the stones which direct people in the underworld and comment on the happenings, says “[h]e wanted some peace and quiet” (Ruhl 404) so he forgets and goes back to the origin. Since Colin MacCabe states in the introduction to Bataille’s work *Eroticism* “[f]or Bataille, ... by the death of an individual, the continuity of existence is confirmed” (Bataille x). The only one who remains with the language is Eurydice in the underworld. Now, the female has the control over the language and by taking a pen, a ‘metaphorical penis’ (Gilbert 91) in Sandra Gilbert’s terms, she writes a letter to Orpheus. She claims in this letter that she loves him and she is not worthy of him and she gives advice to her husband’s next wife since he cannot look after herself because “he is a young prince and his robes are too heavy on him, his crown falls down on her ears” (Ruhl 411). This statement of her indicates that she is aware of the weakness of Orpheus and in the name of him the weakness of the male authorities, the patriarchy. After writing the letter, like her father, she chooses “peace and quiet” and forgets. She reaches the ultimate aim of the life as in Freud’s words:

... it is possible to specify this final goal of organic striving. It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an old state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. (32)

Finally, Orpheus is seen on the stage, he cannot read the letter left by Eurydice, “he scrutinizes it ... he stands on it” (Ruhl 411) so it is understood that he has also forgotten. Lastly, the stage is pervaded with silence which embraces all the characters and which is deliberately chosen especially by Eurydice and her father so as to free themselves from living through the impositions of language on them. Thus all the characters embrace death in the end which is a path to the silence, to the void and through these to eternity, immortality as it is perceived in the matrilineal tradition.

In her play *Eurydice*, Sarah Ruhl vastly explores the theme of in-betweenness which has a more or less role in nearly all of the adaptations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. Eurydice’s perspective is taken into account in Ruhl’s play as in Rilke’s and Acker’s works. Unlike Acker’s Eurydice who fears and escapes death, Eurydice wants to die, intentionally in order to unite with her lost Father. So what is distinctive about Ruhl’s play is that she includes a father figure to the myth and enhances the theme of in-betweenness and this figure also brings the issue of the language which imprisons the female within the patriarchy. Patriarchy operates even in the underworld as it is observed in Acker’s version of the myth. Although Eurydice wants to free herself from the patriarchy which is imposed upon her by her husband who sees her as an object for his art, the Father, in the realm of death has his own sovereignty because the language is under his control and by making use of the language, he subordinates his daughter. In order

to defy the patriarchy, Eurydice should overthrow the language and turn back to the 'Imaginary' stage or the 'semiotic' which is considered to be the place of the feminine within language as discussed in the introduction. Orpheus' descent to the underworld to take Eurydice back makes the Father, having lost his object of paternal love, choose eternity. Nonetheless, by making Orpheus look back at herself Eurydice regains her death and becomes the only power with the language in her hands by the death of her father. Choosing the real death herself she forgets everything just as her Father. She chooses to be one with the archetypal mother just as Rilke's Eurydice because death brings about the "matriarchal consciousness" (Gadon 139) in which death is seen as a part of "the continuum in which different states are experienced as transformations of one energy" (Gadon 139). Eventually, Orpheus, who has the language in his power in the realm of the living, is seen on the stage with eternal forgetfulness. Thus with all the characters embracing death, the play ends in the feminine realm of the dead.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The transitional character of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth between patriarchal traditions and matrilineality is observed in all the four works analyzed within the study. The works that are examined also support the argument that the myth is in between Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics and while the Apollonian characteristics represent the patriarchy, the Dionysian traits are perceived as the effects of the goddess tradition. The theme of death, the status of the female, art and the gaze are also the shared issues of the works. Therefore, I intend to display the similarities and differences between these works in terms of these arguments and themes.

The effects of the goddess tradition are observed in all of the works that are scrutinized in this study in one way or another. Sexuality is seen as a life generating force by matrilineality and this characteristic of the goddess-centred belief is seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Kathy Acker's play *Eurydice in the Underworld*. In both of these works, while the female, the Maenads in the Ovid's version and Eurydice in Acker's handling of the myth insist on sexuality, the male, Orpheus rejects sexuality and thus life in *Metamorphoses* and although he has a sexual relationship with Eurydice in Acker's play, he does not let her hold on to life by the use of sexuality. The issue of death which is noticed in all of the works can also be examined in terms of the matrilineality. On the one hand, in *Metamorphoses*, death is perceived as something to defy by the patriarchal figure, Orpheus and Eurydice does not have a stance towards death, on the other hand, in

“Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes.”, although Orpheus, similarly struggles to outwith death, Eurydice adopts death and does not seem to want to go back to the upper world. While in Rilke’s version the male symbolizes the patriarchal notion of death and the female represents the matrilineal view on death, Kathy Acker’s Eurydice blends the two conflicting point of views, since she does not want to die and try to sustain her life by clinging to Orpheus but in some of the scenes taking place in the underworld, she seems to accept death. However, Orpheus does not digress from the patriarchal attitude towards death and cannot bear it as it is seen in the other retellings. Sarah Ruhl’s Eurydice is portrayed in between the patriarchal and matrilineal perceptions of death as Acker’s Eurydice since until the end of the play she can not escape from the influence patriarchy due to her father and husband, nevertheless, she, her father and husband reach the matrilineal underworld by erasing what patriarchy has enforced upon them in the overworld.

The conflicting Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics are also seen in these four particular works. In Ovid, Rilke and Ruhl’s version, Orpheus descends into the underworld although it is not allowed for an alive humanbeing and he cannot conform to the rule of the underworld deities and looks back at Eurydice and loses her. Thus he acts against the Apollonian worldview since he seems to challenge the limitations and to be enslaved by his feelings. Therefore, he acts closer to the traits of the god Dionysus. The madness is related to the god Dionysus as discussed in the introduction part of the thesis and in Ovid’s version the Maenads and in Acker’s play Eurydice carry this characteristic of madness.

The approaches to the issue of death are distinctive in the works dealt with in this thesis. The Ovidian myth casts out Eurydice and Orpheus sees the descent

into the underworld as an adventure to save his love since her death is mournful for him whereas Rilke includes the perspective of Eurydice towards death which is embracing. Acker's Eurydice is portrayed in between 'Eros' and 'Thanatos' and for the most part of the play, she wants to escape from death by using 'Eros', however, in some other parts of the play she accepts it. Just like Acker's Eurydice, Ruhl's female principle is also between life and death until she reaches death by her forgetting everything that is associated with life.

The positioning of the female is different in the works analyzed in the study. Carrying the characteristics of the age it was written, Ovid's Eurydice is voiceless, she is characterized as a totally subjugated female, however, Rilke's Eurydice has her own decision to stay in the underworld since the status of the women has changed since Ovid's time and women have started to struggle for their rights. When it comes to Acker's Eurydice, although she has an existence within the story other than his death unlike in Ovid and Rilke's versions, she can not fully leave the patriarchy behind just as Ruhl's Eurydice who is oppressed by her husband in the upper world and her father and the patriarchal language which is at the hands of him in the underworld until her second death which enhances the in-between state of the female who can not totally achieve to win over patriarchy.

The issue of art is perceived in all the works except for Acker's version of the myth as Orpheus is considered to be the archetypal musician. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus uses his art in order to save Eurydice from the underworld or for mourning but in Rilke's version in which Orpheus's convincing Hades and Persephone to allow him to take Eurydice back is omitted, he seems to

forget about his art in the poem because Eurydice is the object of his art and without her, it becomes meaningless. The art of Orpheus is highly emphasized in Ruhl's play since Orpheus in the play *Eurydice* cannot think of anything but his art and Eurydice is seen as nothing but a muse for his art.

In all the works analyzed in this study, Orpheus looks back at Eurydice and leaves her in the underworld. The aim of the gaze of Orpheus can not be fully understood in Ovid's version as it can be out of curiosity to see the realm of the dead or out of love as he cannot wait to see her and although they break up because of the gaze of Orpheus, by the death of him, they re-unite and continue as lovers. In Rilke's poem, why Orpheus looks back at Eurydice can not also be clearly interpreted but the recipient of the gaze is represented as content by her eternal death without Orpheus since she cannot even understand who has looked at her. The gaze of Orpheus in Acker's *Eurydice in the Underworld* helps him decide to leave Eurydice since he understands that he does not want her by his looking back and the gaze in Ruhl's *Eurydice* is the result of the deliberate call of Eurydice at Orpheus since she does not want her husband but her father who waits for her in the underworld.

In conclusion, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book X, Fable I-II; Book XI, Fable I) (8 AD), Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes" (from *Neue Gedichte*) (1904), Kathy Acker's play *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997) and Sarah Ruhl's play *Eurydice* are all distinctive in their handling the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. The theme of death, the issues of art and gaze and different positioning of the female principle have all been analyzed and the dual nature of the myth between Apollo and Dionysus has also been attempted to be uncovered

in these works in order to throw light on the transitory character of the myth between the matrilineality and patriarchy which is the main purpose of this thesis.

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