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# The Abjection of the Pythia

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The Abjection of the Pythia

by

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## Abstract

Recent academic research has garnered considerable popular interest on the matter of whether the Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi, was high. Current findings aim to prove that vapors emitted from beneath the tripod on which the Pythia prophesied were intoxicating, thereby causing her frenzied state and statements. Contemporary scientists' intense interest in proving that the Pythia was not prophetic evokes the question of why the once widely accepted, now generally rejected, idea that a female body can serve as a vessel for the words of the immortal deity holds such significance for modern science. When this curiosity is considered in light of Julia Kristeva's writings on abjection, numerous possibilities are made available. At its simplest, examining the abjection of the Pythia could explain why the voice of modern science is so interested in the words of these ancient women. At best, to consider an active process of abjection nearly three millennia in the making provides an opportunity to expand understandings and interpretations of both the Pythia and her role in the world, past and present, and the abject and its role in abjection beyond literature and theory.

## Voices

At the axis of the ancient Mediterranean world, the Word became flesh. Within a stone sanctuary sat a living temple: a female body that housed the spirit and spoke the words of the divine. She was not one woman, but a sisterhood of numinous vessels over the centuries bound by the sacred space and the sacred stone. She sat not on any stone, but within the navel of the petrified Goddess whose body was the living earth. From these women came words that shaped the ancient world: from this Omphalos came the maternal nourishment that kept alive this sacred space for a millennium.<sup>1</sup> The divine embodiment that served as the temple of the god Apollo was the body of a woman known to us only as the Oracle of Delphi: the Pythia.

There was no debate surrounding the importance of the Oracle to the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean. Kings and kingdoms could rise or fall based on her prophecies, and they did. The Delphic Oracle played a role in the Trojan War, the Theban War, the Argonautic voyage, and the deeds of Herakles and Theseus among other revered events in the lives of the Hellenes.<sup>2</sup> Her place in classical life, myth, literature, and history is documented well. Rich and poor embarked on journeys to the sacred center she anchored at Delphi in efforts to hear and heed the words and warnings of the divine.

Further there was no debate surrounding her credibility in the ancient world. Neither the fact that she was a woman nor the fact that she could foretell the future and speak for god were grounds for rebuke or dismissal . . . until they were.<sup>3</sup> With the deaths

of Alexander and Aristotle, the decline of Greece and Delphi, and the rise of Rome and Christianity, the status of the Pythia slowly shifted from subject to abject.

Earlier cultural transitions had already repositioned the role of the Pythia within her world. Once the home of the Earth Goddess, the Oracle at Delphi was a goddess herself, but when the young god Apollo violently took possession of the sacred site, the Pythia remained as a human vessel: no longer did she speak for the Goddess and no longer was she a divine daughter. Little is known of the Oracular center before the introduction of Apollo, but this intentional change in the location's function was only the beginning of a long journey in what would become and remains the abjection of the Pythia.

As new cultural constructions and norms evolved, the ground of the Oracle at Delphi remained sacred, but the place of the Pythia came into question, shifting repeatedly. Incoming social structures and beliefs offered no definition for this prophetic Priestess: she was without identity. Absent a clear role, the Pythia became abject. Beyond subtle cultural shifts, conscious attempts were made to reduce her influence and recreate her as other.

Numerous vehicles were employed in the process of abjection; she was deified, she was demonized, she was sexualized, she was defeminized, she was educated, she was made ignorant, she was forced down, she was raped, and she was transcribed and prescribed and proscribed by Priests among other attempts to eject her from a privileged place in the ancient world. Surviving multiple attacks, the final blow to the Pythia was to violate the sacred space that connected her to the divine source.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Christian leaders deemed the vapors that penetrated the Pythia evil by exploiting their connection with a Pagan god. While she was still seen as speaking for the immortal, now the Pythia was inhabited by the vile vapors of Satan instead of the words of Apollo or the breath of the goddess: Christianity stripped from the son of the Pagan god what he ripped from the Goddess as the church convinced the masses to abandon their faith in the site and their desire for the prophecies. Because the powerful role of the Pythia and the vapors could not be rejected outright, they had to be made taboo; the villainous vapors offered evidence to finalize and concretize her place and her identity, thereby removing the need to continue the process of abjection.

Her threat mitigated, the Pythia lay dormant for a millennium until the catalyst of abjection was rekindled: Desire. She was born again, people became interested in her, and the creative process of abjection resumed and continues today. While this new cycle of abjection maintains the vapors as the major device, the subjects rely on the authority of science instead of the rhetoric of religion to continue to (re)create the Pythia as abject.

The abjection of the Oracle of Delphi spans thousands of years, but to offer a new insight into Kristeva's reading of literary abjects, it must first be established that the Pythia's abjection remains active. Once the contemporary abjection proves that the Pythia is not a static source, Kristeva's understanding of abjection must be explored and connected to the overall abjection of the Pythia. From this foundation of the Pythia as a paradigm of ancient and active abjection, the Pythia can be read through the lens of Kristeva's theory in an effort to expand understandings of both. To begin, Kristeva's reading of literary abjects must be surveyed.

## Verses

These different literary texts name types of abjects that are answerable to, this goes without saying, different psychic structures. The types of articulation (narrative and syntactic structures, prosodic processes, etc. in the different texts) also vary. Thus the abject, depending on the writer, turns out to be named differently when it is not merely suggested by linguistic modifications that are always somewhat elliptic. In the final part of this essay I shall examine in detail a specific articulation of the abject—that of Celine. Let me just say at this point, as an introduction, that contemporary literature, in its multiple variants, and when it is written as the language, possible at last, of that impossible constituted either by a-subjectivity or by non-subjectivity, propounds, as a matter of fact, a sublimation of abjection. Thus it becomes a substitute for the role formerly played by the sacred, at the limits of social and subjective identity. But we are dealing here with a sublimation without consecration. Forfeited.<sup>4</sup>

According to Kristeva, contemporary literature is a surrogate for the sacred: for that process dwelling at the margins of communal and individual identity. The resulting “sublimation without consecration” exists because the ritual purification of the taboo is concretized through literature and the cycle of abjection is forfeited and the abject fortified. These are the limiting perimeters Julia Kristeva recognizes as a disclaimer to her reading of Céline, Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Dostoyevsky, et al., in the *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. To search for names, types, and articulations of the abject in a

source that is active, even sacred and ancient, would provide an in-depth reading of abjection free to move beyond the bounds of literature and the bonds of language.

Language, for Kristeva, affords the sublimation of desire and aggression caused by an encounter with the abject.<sup>5</sup> Stated simply, the abject is that which cannot be assimilated and must be ejected.<sup>6</sup> The complicating factor prohibiting the subject from straightforward dismissal of the abject is desire. To face the abject, therefore, causes the subject to (re)initiate the process of abjection in an effort to r/eject that which is unnamable and unattainable.

Sublimation through language and literature is one possible and perhaps productive outlet for the aggression associated with the inexplicable, unstoppable desire incited by the abject. Other methods, of course, are available, as well. These processes, especially when active, allow insight into the cycle, individual and communal, of abjection that keeps subjects safe within the boundaries of definition.

What is found in literature is not abjection; while beyond a simple sighting/citing of an abject and advancing toward viewing abjection as a creative process, it is the sublimation of abjection: Forfeited. Unfulfilled rituals profane the sacred. The result is a substitute for the sacred—which would fulfill, not forfeit, the process. Sublimation, rather, transforms the taboo into art. But it is still unfulfilled, incomplete, thereby offering a snapshot of a petrified moment in which the abject existed without allowing an encounter with or participation in the partial catharsis that reignites the process of abjection.

As an extension of the necessary step of surveying a substitute, the creative understanding of abjection as practice beyond theory requires the examination of active

abjection. Because the status of an abject and the resulting process of abjection are defined by social constructions and expectations, neither the abject nor the abjection can be divorced from its role within time and space. An abject's required liminality is culturally constructed by a society that has no space for the abject as subject or object. Further, the societal status of the abject shifts across time and space as societies' view of it d/evolves.

Just as the initial abjection of mother begins the cycle of abjection, initial cultural abjection initiates a process that must be sustained over time. Once a society has established an abject, the cycle of abjection begins with desire. When desire encounters the taboo—the abject—the resulting dissonance becomes fear as the subject realizes that the abject cannot be possessed. This meeting of desire and fear results in the ejection of the abject: it is spewed. Yet the desire does not cease or dissipate.

Catharsis cannot be achieved because the abject is neither possessed nor rejected in full: it cannot be assimilated and is expelled but does not cease to stir. Despite the abjection process, the abject still remains the object of desire, just as it remains taboo. And the cycle begins again. For Kristeva, this energy can be sublimated through literature. Abjection, otherwise, may be engaged and enacted through various practices and processes that sustain the cycle across time and space.

Sublimation is a creative and productive process that channels anxiety into action. Perhaps less positive but as possible and plausible is the use of other defense mechanisms to deal with the production of fear through an encounter with the abject; alternatively, the fear of facing the abject can be directed into the abjection process instead of being avoided or transferred. Societally engaged abjection affords the opportunity to allow

many within the process to seek individual outlets through which to transfer their own personal processes of abjection.

Literature and the arts are only a few of the human creations that may result from abjection or the sublimation thereof. The concrete nature of literature allows it to be stable, solid, and studied. In exchange for the static state, however, the *process* of abjection cannot be considered. Instead, only the aborted or sublimated results exist—a noun in place of a verb. And so all that remains is the action elicited by the art: the response to the literature. The horror.

For abjection to exist without petrification, fortification, or sublimation, it must be active. Within the process, other major articulations Kristeva uses to define and attempt to name numerous types of abjects and abjection can be sought: liminality, desire, taboo, unfulfilled catharsis, etc. To consider these characteristics of abjects while activated instead of sublimated into the perimeters of literature can enhance the work of Julia Kristeva and open understandings of the Pythia and her role in her world and in ours. To that end, to extend and expand Kristeva's study, the abjection process instead of the abject itself must be read; to view abjection in lieu of the abject requires above all else that the abjection be in process at present.

Such evidence is alive and available in the ancient and active abjection of the Delphic Oracle. As society transformed and no longer maintained a defined space for her, the Pythia was abjected; yet because she was still desired and thus could not be rejected completely, she maintained liminality. When she was no longer abject, she was no longer abjected. As desire for her reignited in space and time, the process of making her taboo reinitiated causing the reaction of fear. Because the desire remained, the

abjection was once again enacted and tailored to the new milieu. Ancient devices wed modern insights and bore new incarnations of old beliefs. The current publications stating and citing the vapors as the cause and the false prophecies as the effect serve as the current abjection of the Pythia and the history of the process that led the Pythia to this place in time detail the abjection process from its inception.

Just as Kristeva sought major elements of abjection in literature, the Pythia offers these features of the abject in an abjection process that is active and ripe for exploration and analysis. Once the active process of the Pythia's abjection has been evidenced and Kristeva's understandings of abjection have been revealed, qualities of the abject can be identified and examined from within the living, breathing body of the process instead of the cold, silent corpse that remains. An awareness of Kristeva's reading of literary sources makes it clear that a major limiting factor was that the sources were not active; as a result, Kristeva's reading is of the abject and not abjection because absent the active process, only the fortified abject remains. For a reading of the Pythia to move beyond these boundaries, it must be established that the abjection of the Pythia is active and therefore offers an expanded view of reading abjection.

While desire, liminality, and the other traits of abjects noted in Kristeva's literary exploration are important and will play a role in reading the Pythia as abject, to view the active role of abjection it is necessary to craft a wide angle view of the overall process of abjection as connected to the Pythia. And so once the abjection of the Pythia is established as active, a larger understanding of Kristeva's theories must be offered so that in the shift from reading the literary abject to reading the active abjection of the Pythia, elements Kristeva revealed in her literary sources are expanded by tying them to the

overall theory of abjection and including conditions of the process not simply aspects of the result. But before Kristeva's broader theory of abjection is considered, the abjection of the Pythia must be established as active.

## Verbs

In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task—a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct—amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless ‘primacy’ constituted by primal repression. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, ‘subject’ and ‘object’ push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminates, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.<sup>7</sup>

Abjection is the process of (re)creating an abject. When an object is not being abjected, it ceases to be abject and returns to subject. An abject is not defined; it is not static or always already or being: It is ever becoming. As a result, what can be seen and studied is process and progress, not conclusion, consequence, or corollary. The abject can speak only through its abjection and in the voice of the subject who or that abjects. The process of abjection, therefore, allows the abject to exist. This symbiotic relationship maintains subject, object, and abject as intact and individual.

The process spans individuation and enculturation and stirs beneath location and situation. Conscious and unconscious, abjection is the source and site of creation. Sightings of the abject are commonplace—spewed milk, marginalized minorities, othered mothers, cold cadavers—but these are mere reflections: A corpse is but a dead subject when separated from the horror it creates. The horror, however, is a simple reflection, or Form, and the corpse, a mirror. It is the process that creates: the process of abjection is the Idea while the others are mimetic. In effect, the dead body is the abject and the

horrified person is the subject, but it is the process that causes the horror, not the horror itself, that speaks and creates; it is the abjection.

When the abject ceases to be abject/ed, such instances and individuals return to the subject status and fall from view. We do not question what we do not notice. So this process of abjection not only creates the abject, it is embodied by the abject, which is allowed to speak through the process and that which creates and continues the process. Just as indifference opposes love instead of hate, ignorance of a subject dismisses while abjection animates.

To that end, abjection also individuates the subject who/that abjects. The child's process of abjecting the mother creates not only the child but also the m/other. The process is necessitated by all involved. As in the process of judgment, a judger and a judged are born only through the act of judging, without which neither would be; likewise, without subject, object, and abject, the process is inert. And so it is with abjection; the process allows the abject to speak through the active (act of) abjection. Effectually, the m/other is known through the child's abjection before which the two were one.

Cultural creation requires the process equally. Without sin there is no (need for) law; without law there is no sin. It is the process of viewing an action as taboo that creates the crime and necessitates the law to define it as such. Whether individual or societal, then, the process of abjection creates the subject, the object, and the abject, and they reveal the abjection. Not necessarily separate, the individual may abject parts of herself; the abjection, nonetheless, discloses that part of the individual that is doing and that is being.

Because Freud's individuation is the result of a process, it can be housed in the product. Kristeva's abject exists in the creative space of liminality, and as a result must be located within its abjection. It is not the abject, therefore, that can serve as a paradigm for Kristeva's concept; the abject can only be heard through the active process of abjection. That active process that leads to the embodiment of abjection can be found at the center of the civilization, old and new. Historical and mythical, literal and literary, the Oracle of Delphi provides an established and credible illustration of Kristeva's concept of abjection as an active process.

Textual and material evidence of the Oracle of Delphi predates the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>8</sup> The site remained active and sacred until the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE; then for nearly a thousand years, the springs that served as the source of the spirit stayed silent and still. The place of the Pythia was rejected and her status was stable; abjection was unnecessary. With the reintroduction of the Classics in the late middle ages, interest in all things ancient began to surface. Scholars from Freud to Fromm (re)considered the Oracle.<sup>9</sup> As intrigue increased, debates emerged and resumed. This rekindled interest fostered numerous conversations, many of which continue and have evolved into recent scholarship. Despite the fact that the presence of vapors was not debated in ancient texts, they were the crux of the argument that finally dismissed the Pythia and closed the Temple at Delphi.<sup>10</sup> When contemporary conversations resumed, the existence and implications of the vapors became the major point of contention among modern scholars. While two camps emerged concerning the vapors and the Pythia, both served equally the purpose of continued abjection.

The Oracle of Delphi became theoretically thrilling along with all things ancient in the middle ages, but initial interests were more mythical and mystical than material. As desire for this pagan icon and the goddess in her closet rekindled, abjection became necessary. The religious rejection that had stabilized her sinful status for a millennium was not sufficient for the liberated and curious minds breaking from the church and seeking enlightenment. New methods were necessary to taboo this enticing idea of the ancient pre-God Goddess and the female body as vessel. Armed with the previously successful device of dismissal, the vapors, the newly honed guns of science were brought to bear.

The first excavation of Delphi, conducted by a French team in 1892, reported that there were no vapors and no chasm under the temple. Numerous scholars agreed with the findings, but few took the argument so far as to deny even the existence of the Pythia.<sup>11</sup> The vapor refuters had won a pivotal battle, but the war raged on as the search for intoxicants served to divide the community. In his seminal 1978 book, *The Delphic Oracle*, which remains a landmark work on the subject, the preeminent scholar on the Oracle of Delphi, Joseph Fontenrose, defines and addresses the two main camps in reference to the contemporary debate surrounding the Oracle.

On one side Fontenrose situates those who seek to credit the Oracle by means which he “deems beyond the bounds of the credible or even the commonplace” thereby coloring them as True Believers.<sup>12</sup> In response to the proclaimed proclamations of the Oracle, these advocates suggest that “[i]f the Pythia could speak prophecies like these, marvelous indeed was her prophetic skill, so marvelous that even yet scholars have recourse to occult powers as the only possible explanation of the phenomenon.”<sup>13</sup> Instead

of simply denying the influence of vapors, Fontenrose suggests that these scholars went too far by asserting that the absence of vapors necessarily presumes the omniscience of the Pythia. In this camp Fontenrose situates Meyers, Dempsey, Dodds, and Knight.

And True Believers there were. The claims of early Christian fathers that the Oracle was prophetic but possessed by the devil were no longer enough to convince against her intoxicating ways and wiles. While many scholars, such as those Fontenrose deemed Believers, argued for the legitimacy of the Oracle in light of her miraculous powers, others used the regenerated interest and the new material and textual evidence to revisit old theories. Consideration was given to the ancient assertion that before Delphi was the home of the god and his conduit, the Pythia, it was home to the Great Goddess, who spoke for herself. According to Joseph Fontenrose, support for the existence of the Oracle before the introduction of Apollo comes only by way of myth: “In the earliest account we have of the Delphic Oracle’s beginnings, the story found in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (281-374), there was no Oracle before Apollo came and killed the great she-dragon, Pytho’s only inhabitant.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, later myths suggest that the serpent was guarding the Pythia, and Fontenrose admits that the average Hellene “firmly believed that the Oracle had been active in the later Bronze Age.”<sup>15</sup> These assertions opened many avenues of exploration concerning the possibility that early civilizations worshipped the Great Goddess before the God and that such shifts occurred in conjunction with societal movements toward patriarchy (thereby implying that females were the leaders of early civilizations).<sup>16</sup> Although once supported by numerous scholars and material evidence, the ideas surrounding Mother Right and the ancient existence of a ruling Goddess are not generally accepted today.

In opposition to the True Believers, Fontenrose locates the “rationalists,” whose views he considers equally incredible, asserting that their “belief is about as strange as their unbelief.”<sup>17</sup> Fontenrose defines these scholars based on the fact that “[t]hey want to believe in toxic gases or vapors rising from a chasm (their non-existence was demonstrated over seventy years ago), a frenzied or drugged Pythia talking incoherently, cleverly ambiguous prophecies, and remarkable predictions that prophets or attendant bards expressed in dactylic hexameter.”<sup>18</sup> In this group Fontenrose includes Legrand, Farnell, Parke, and Delcourt.

Just as her devotees re-envisioned her as evidence of the primordial goddess, detractors painted the rediscovered Pythia as a drugged or calculated scam artist and tourist trap. The rationalists generally sought an explanation for the claims regarding the Pythia’s abilities. The devil no longer sufficing, science was conjured and vapors remained a main suspect. And yet, in light of Kristeva’s ideas surrounding abjection, it becomes clear that each side offered a different means, albeit through the same device of the vapors, to the same end: the abjection of the Pythia.

Each faction displayed what Fontenrose called “a kind of Delphic Piety.”<sup>19</sup> Through this construction, Fontenrose positioned himself as other: as the moderate voice in the wilderness tethered neither to belief nor disbelief. Rather he anchored himself to what he considered objective—the words of the Oracle. After segregating the rationalistic and the supernatural, Fontenrose reunited them as his opposition in that their “explanations are alike based on a misconception of the kind of response that was actually spoken at Delphi in historical times.”<sup>20</sup> And so Fontenrose reorganized the archive of prophetic responses known or believed to have been generated by the Delphic

Oracle.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the full title of this work is *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations With a Catalogue of Responses*. Fontenrose used his compendium to support his re/assertion that the Oracle of Delphi, as she was consistently portrayed in ancient accounts, presented prophecies in her own words intelligibly and of her own accord.

Despite offering his scholarship as a settlement to this quarrel, Fontenrose stated that he was “aware that [his] argument, however well-founded, [would] not prevail against the will to believe.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, Fontenrose proffered his own prophecy: “Probably two centuries from now readers will pick up a new book or article that will tell them about the toxic gases, the chasm, the frenzy, and the ambiguities. We shall never get rid of the ‘mephitic vapors,’ whatever geology has to say.”<sup>23</sup> Not only did his prophecy materialize, it foreshadowed the fate that would once again visit the Pythia. As Plutarch before, Fontenrose purported to aspire to create a center where the Oracle need not be demonized or deified but simply placed in historical context, but he was correct that the will to believe, or not to believe, would prevail. Beneath what Fontenrose saw as a debate of will is the less conscious need to abject. The creation of a defined place for the Pythia would allow catharsis and render abjection unnecessary, and so the uncertain status required to maintain liminality remained and remains necessary for abjection to allow the ancient words to speak.

Twenty years after Fontenrose warned of the continuation of the vapor debate, his prophecy has been firmly fulfilled. The bulk of contemporary research concerning the Oracle of Delphi, in fact, revolves around the central question of whether or not the Pythia was intoxicated. This most recent scholarly debate, when viewed in context and

retrospect, reveals itself to be anything other than new and perhaps anything other than a debate. The details have shifted, with ethylene as the modern name of the ancient suspect, but the age-old assumptions and assertions remain at the center of the conversation concerning the Oracle of Delphi. Where there were two sides arguing over the details that would support the abjection of the Pythia, there is becoming one, and the argument is now being framed to suggest that proof of intoxication from the previously-accepted vapors would discredit the Oracle. And so it has.

The crux of the current scientific research on the Oracle began in 1980 when Jelle de Boer, Wesleyan University geologist, discovered a fault line that appeared to run under the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and suspected that it might have been the source of the gaseous vapors long discussed as the basis of the Pythia's prophetic powers. In 1995, de Boer met University of Louisville archeologist John Hale; they decided to collaborate on an interdisciplinary scientific exploration of the possibility that vapors from the fault line were seeping into the temple and intoxicating the oracular Pythia housed there. And so the new tools of research reinforced the old tools of rhetoric in a shared effort to prove that the bodies of the ancient women who changed the course of history were inhabited by the vapors of science as opposed to inspired by the words of god.

At a 1997 scientific meeting in London, de Boer revealed that the Temple of Apollo was located on a thick bed of bituminous limestone, a known source of intoxicating gases. The academic community became fascinated by a renewed hope that concrete proof of an intoxicated Oracle of Delphi might soon be offered. De Boer, Hale, and associates then created a contemporary canon of evidence to support their suspicions. De Boer and Hale published their first article supporting their vapor theory in 2000.<sup>24</sup> In

this publication, de Boer and Hale simply suggest that a fissure in the adyton below the Temple of Apollo created faults in the bituminous limestone that released hydrocarbon gases capable of inducing mild narcotic effects and that the inhalation of such light hydrocarbon gases was a likely cause for the intoxication of the Pythia. Claims of inspiration-inducing ground gases have been recorded since the earliest writings regaling and reviling the Oracle and Delphi. The article, in effect, offered little support to the claims of de Boer and Hale; it did, however, serve to reignite the debate over the existence of gases that had been in hibernation.

In 2001, Hale and de Boer released their first article with Jeff Chanton, a forensic chemist from Florida State University.<sup>25</sup> With the help of Chanton, who tested the water supplies surrounding the temple site at Delphi, de Boer and Hale offered geographical and chemical data to support their claim. The interdisciplinary study located young faults surrounding the Oracle site and recorded light hydrocarbon gases in the underlying strata of bituminous limestone. Henry Spiller, a medical toxicologist, then joined the team. The results of Spiller's studies suggested that the lucid but intoxicated state of the Pythia described in the ancient records could, in fact, have been produced by inhaling a mixture of ethylene and ethane from a naturally occurring vent of geological origin such as the springs and faults present at the temple site of Delphi.<sup>26</sup> In 2003, the culminating multidisciplinary article detailing the teams' findings concerning the fault, the gases, and the effects was published in *Scientific America*.<sup>27</sup> The article asserts that the temple was deliberately placed on the site and that the Pythia was purposefully located over a known vent of toxic gases. Armed with the evidence of the most advanced weapons of science, technology, and research, an archeologist, a geologist, a chemist, and a toxicologist had

amassed concrete evidence to support a claim proposed and accepted by the locals who inhabited the site over 2,500 years ago.

While such evidence legitimizes the stories that surrounded the Oracle, whose mere existence was debated for centuries, it offers support to both sides of the argument concerning her authenticity. Early texts assert the fact that the site was chosen for its sacred gases and that the Pythia was influenced by these gases: to accept that the earth was the cause for her powers of prophecy in no way discredited the authenticity of the Oracle in antiquity. Today, however, the evidence of gases is being used to dismiss the Oracle as a fraud—claims also asserted by the ancients who did not accept the place of these powerful women who spoke for the god. While the effect of the vapors is still questioned, albeit by few, no credible current scholars in the Arts or the Sciences are arguing that the Pythia is or was the legitimate source of prophetic wisdom. Yet the contemporary scientific communities' shared goal of seeking out logical explanations for the possibility that the Pythia was somehow influenced by something other than a deity is proof of her abjection not simply because there is no defined place for her, but more so because it validates the fact that she is still desired.

This academic desire for the Pythia has spread to the popular community. While it can be argued that the academic debate over details continues, within popular culture, news that the long suspected secret truth of the Oracle's intoxication had been revealed spread quickly and appears to be facilitated by the academic desire to abject her. In fact, our team of scholars seems well aware of popular opinion and its power to spread the word of their findings. All four members contributed to the efforts of William Broad, the *New York Times* writer who published *The Oracle: The Lost Secrets and Hidden*

*Messages of Ancient Delphi* following the modern exploration of the Temple site at Delphi.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, when I personally asked John Hale which major sources I should consider for my thesis, he suggested Broad alone, stating that it was the most comprehensive source available, offering no segregation between popular and academic works on the matter.

Broad went so far as to insist that the Pythia's place in history must be reconsidered now that we know she "got high."<sup>29</sup> This suggests that popular sources are applying the academic findings to dismiss the Pythia in a fashion more extreme than intended by her greatest detractors in the academy. De Boer even asserts that the findings serve to credit, not discredit, the role of the Pythia. The voice of the Oracle, nonetheless, is heard by most people through the popular stories that speak for, or against, her. Still the lack of discrediting on the part of some scholars should not be seen as a lack of abjection. In fact, to discredit the Pythia in full would end the need for abjection, and so it is important that she remain in the undefined balance for the process to continue.

As for our multidisciplinary team, they continue to publish support for their claims (or the claims of the ancients, depending on perspective). In 2009, they released "Gaseous Emissions at the Site of the Delphic Oracle: Assessing the Evidence" in *Clinical Toxicology*. And while recent publications by de Boer, Hale, and other scholars appear convincing enough to have quieted the academic debate regarding the vapors, they have spurred the public interest, which will stir the desire needed to sustain the abjection of the Pythia.

This active process reveals that the abjection of the Oracle began in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE and continues today: She has devolved from a young virgin, to a crone, to a taboo in

need of purification, to vessel of Satan, to a tourist trap, to a hoax, to a pawn in an academic debate, to a frenzied intoxicant—each another step away from the revered status she once held. Contemporary scholarship regarding the Oracle aims to repeat and reinforce this abjection. In his comprehensive compilation concerning the current findings regarding vapors in relation to the Oracle, Broad blends the popular and the academic to assert that “[t]he Oracle is back today because a team of American scientists managed to uncover one of her greatest secrets . . . It turns out that she got high.”<sup>30</sup> Reports of the intoxicated Pythia are now generally accepted in the mainstream media and in the academy as long as they agree that the ethylene would have allowed the Pythia to remain lucid and clear, albeit inebriated.<sup>31</sup> And so the modern picture of the Oracle has become one of a Pythia who was high on gas and therefore infused with the spirit of neither the god nor the devil.

Silenced with the debate is the idea that the Pythia might serve as evidence of a world where the Great Goddess ruled supreme or where god could speak through a woman. Whether new conversations will emerge from this conclusion is unknown, but it appears that there was never a legitimate debate surrounding the Oracle; rather, the questions of the vapors routinely functioned to desacralize the Pythia: If there were no vapors, the ancient texts were not to be trusted and perhaps there never was a Pythia, but if there were gases, then the Pythia was simply intoxicated not inspired. The vapors, like the debates before, are a smokescreen, albeit perhaps primarily unconscious, to disguise the lack of real debate concerning the issue and thereby serve only to continue the abjection of the Oracle of Delphi. Abjection, nevertheless, is serving to keep the Oracle alive; I, too,

am abjecting her. It is only through this process that she can speak. And so the intoxicating vapors remain the source of her voice.

While the vapors are the device used to discredit the Pythia, it is not actually she who is under attack; it is the sacred site as a sacred source. In the ages that have passed since the 4<sup>th</sup> century dismissal of the Pythia, the question of whether or not a woman can speak for god has been so fully rejected that it need not be questioned in the abjection process, but the Pythia cannot be discredited fully because she is still desired; some must still want to believe, even if only subconsciously, that the female body maintained a special connection to the male god that extended beyond the logic of the priest and of science, or perhaps that it may still. Also alive, although only a whisper, is the possibility that before the God, there was the Goddess. It is the modern abjection of the Pythia, in fact, that serves to allow such whispers to be heard.

When the modern discussion ends, as it did in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the status of the Pythia will again be solidified and her abjection will cease. The recent revival of the debate that allows for the abjection of the Pythia may be coming to a close if she is written off as high, but for now, her abjection remains active and alive, allowing her to be seen and heard in the present time and space. As stated, to examine the abjection of the Pythia might explain why the voice of modern science is so interested with the voice of this ancient woman. The explanation I offer is that the Oracle has been abjected anew by numerous assertions and arguments in an effort to reenact ritually the original abjection of mother, which will become more evident once Kristeva's concepts have been glossed and connected to the overall abjection process.

While it is important that the active status of the Oracle be established, as it has, the richest terrain in which to seek abjection is that which resides deeper in the process and might be revealed by “retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless ‘primacy’ constituted by primal repression.”<sup>32</sup> And so the importance of the fact that the Pythia provides a view of abjection that is both ancient and active becomes clear in that both can be accessed and included; instead of being frozen in time and space, the contemporary process is available and the ancient abjection still accessible.

Because Kristeva’s literary reading of the abject was limited by its solid state and because the Pythia is not static and may serve as an ancient but active source from which to read abjection, Kristeva’s ideas surrounding abjection should be stated and connected to the Pythia in order to validate the initial premise that the Pythia can be seen as abject. Further, to broaden our search from the elements Kristeva sought in literature to include steps Kristeva noted in the overall process of abjection would open our reading of the Pythia by allowing active qualities not available in literary sources to be sought in the Pythia as well. To do so requires the fundamentals of Kristeva’s theory of abjection to be made clear. Further, facets that Kristeva notes in active abjection can be added to the attributes sought in the literary sources (liminality, desire, taboo. . . ) to determine a list of components that might be identified in the abjection of the Pythia.

## Validation

Julia Kristeva re-examines and re-envisions Freud's psychosexual stages of development by reconsidering the pre-Oedipal shift from the subject's objectification of mother to identification with father and the sociocultural ramifications and extensions. As a result, Kristeva proffers a contemporized and feminized reinterpretation of the foundational events of individual and societal development through the lens of her theory of abjection. Kristeva builds her theory of abjection on the foundation of Freud's psychosexual stages of development, which serve to define and catalogue the basis for individual human development in light of the sexual theory. Successful progression through these developmental stages results in the realization of a fully-developed individual person/ality.

Failing to transition through and beyond a stage is defined as arrested development and renders the individual undeveloped as a human and bound to the stage through which s/he has not progressed fully, resulting in individual repression as evidenced through neurotic behaviors ranging from aberrant to abhorrent. Symptoms of an arrest in development are fixation, regression, homosexuality, gender confusion, issues of identity, and numerous other examples of active neuroses (many of which produce behaviors that might lead an individual to be abjected). A goal of psychoanalysis, therefore, is to guide the supplicant through the stage in which s/he is arrested with the aid of the subconscious and unconscious as accessed through dreams, associations, and other psychotherapeutic tools.

While Kristeva accepts the assumptions of Freud's process of individual psychosexual development (that arrested psychosexual development results in neuroses as displayed through active fixation and regression), she re-imagines and expands the Oedipal complex by diverging from identification with father as the primary action toward individuation, suggesting instead that the abjection of mother precedes the identification with father. This process of recognizing or creating a boundary between self and mother as the primary step toward individuation and the introduction to the individual stages of psychosexual development is the initial abjection from which all subsequent abjections derive. Whereas it is the interrupted or unsuccessful realization of the Oedipal phase that leads to repression and fixation for Freud, it is within this abjection of mother that repression originates and resides for Kristeva; both, however, result in neuroses. Neglecting to recognize and/or categorize this pre-Oedipal abjection of mother creates numerous theoretical and/or individual problems.

The Oedipal complex constructs the female as always already inferior; she is, in fact, a castrated male: a categorization not different from the widely-accepted classification of female as deformed male that dominated the period from which Freud draws his tragic referent, *Oedipus Rex*. Equally, all individuation is in relation to the assumed superiority of male as identified through the father. Further, all individuals (or objects or actions) who fall outside of the heteronormalization of individual identity and the social construction as determined by language are deemed mentally ill and their actions dismissed as neurotic: they are abjected.

To identify with, or to be identified with, any action or classification between or beyond the constructed duality of male/female, mother/father, human/animal is to be

incomplete as a human due to the lack of a wholly-developed identity or ego, the outcome of which is to be an othered non-person, non-being. If there is no language for an object, no residence for it within the existing linguistic structure, it is abject/ed. This model requires Freud and Kristeva and all subsequent adherents and analysands to accept the underlying assumption of dualism without which there would be no subject-object binary. This assumed, the abject is that which is outside of the socially-constructed duality structured/sustained through language.

Consequently, the nascent ego hinders the abject non-person from achieving an individual or social identity, leaving her or him (or whatever definition s/he creates for the abject space beyond language neither she nor he is inhabiting) unable to exist within the defined norms that society enacted to protect against precisely the abjection that s/he now embodies.<sup>33</sup> In order to reach the status of a fully-developed human as defined by the complete resolution of the Oedipus complex, individuals who do not fit within the narrow construction of gendered identity or sex roles or any socially-accepted duality are in fact forced toward repression and abjection of self by Freud's model, not freed from neuroses.

It is this unspeakable space between the subject and object that Kristeva defines as the abject. To be in this between, definable as neither object nor subject, is to be the abject. To inhabit this space inside the clearly defined boundaries from within a social system that defines the space between the assumed duality as abject is to be abjected. Being defined as abject says nothing of the abjected, only that language cannot categorize it as subject or object: the abject has no required quality that defines it as such except the inability to be linguistically defined as either/or. In fact, to abject another allows the

abjected to find a sense of identity. Defining something else as abject is to define self as subject, separate from that which has been defined as abject, thereby creating what Kristeva defines as “the place where I am not and which permits me to be.”<sup>34</sup> And so it is with mother: abjection of mother creates self as subject.

It is for this reason that the abject is so frightening: it represents in others what it represents in self—a failed separation from mother and a lacking development of ego/identity; that is, “the abhorrent, the intolerable and absolutely-to-be-excluded is a representation of a problematic separation of self from mother, and thus of the terrifying threat of otherness to one who is uncertain of one’s own boundaries.”<sup>35</sup> Seeing the abject outside of ourselves, therefore, brings to light the fearful abject within ourselves.

The source of abjection is known, made visible and definable in language, only through its manifestations and symptoms: *viz.*, horror, vomit, fear, etc. The abject itself is that which incites the reaction of horror or nausea. The primary examples are the corpse and specific foods. The reaction to the abject, therefore, serves as a guide to the source of the abjection/repression from which these symptoms/reactions stem. While Freud employs dreams and associations to seek the unconscious repression responsible for the neurosis that is symptomatic of fixation in an effort to realize completion of the psychosexual phase and progress beyond the neurosis-inducing fixation, the abject serves this purpose for Kristeva, albeit in a potentially more complex linguistic construction in that the abject is the representation of repression and the manifestation of repression and thereby serves as the path to the source of repression yet at the same time is also that which is being abjected.

Further, to embrace this now-defined, previously-indefinable source of repression and abjection is to progress beyond it by shifting it to a space within the boundaries where a linguistic definition may be found: To embrace that which we so fear (as a lingering symptom of our repressed abjection of mother) is to remove the fear leaving only a definable, previously abject, now object or subject. Once embraced, the abject can be resolved. Kristeva describes this process as “coming face to face with the unnamable.”<sup>36</sup> Standard psychoanalytic practices serve this end. While Freudian psychoanalysis stems from the foundation of the Oedipus complex and the search for the stage in which this process has been arrested, Kristeva varies in that the underlying cause stems from the abjection of mother as the source for repression and further abjection. Once the lust for mother has been assimilated, she is no longer abject and other areas of repression and abjection may be sought and realized to completion.

Stated specifically, in Kristeva’s extreme extenuation of the Oedipus complex, the father/male body is subject (an individual human person with ego and will), while the mother/female body is abject (a sub-human, intrinsically loathsome entity). The result of this pre-Oedipal abjection is that femaleness, and female body itself, becomes liminal and physically/psychologically repugnant; so while the act of identification with father remains a main tenet of Kristeva’s theory, the result of this Oedipal process shifts from the desire to possess the mother and subvert the father to the desire to extrude the feminine, constructing not only the male body as pure but also the female body as dirty, perverse, abject: in need of purification. This horrifying image of femaleness (or of self for females) as the abject is repressed in the id and often enacted in social behavior. This

individual process enters the cultural collective through civil and religious codifications of this repression as evidenced in purification rituals and dietary restrictions.

Freud extends his Oedipal complex from this individual process to society as a whole in an effort to explain the origin of civilization and the basis of law and religion as a reaction to the initial, literal enactment of the Oedipal phase. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud articulates the basis of the Oedipus complex and asserts that religion and civilization are a result of the original sin of patricide and the attempted absolution in an effort to assuage the subsequent guilt. Imagining a primal horde as the setting for this incident, it is only the superior male who has full sexual access to the females of the horde. Further, Freud imagines that in this archaic, immemorial, constructed memory a group of young, subservient males (sons), in an effort to afford themselves unhampered sexual access (to mother), consciously and collectively kill the dominant male (father).

The guilt produced by this original sin of patricide instigates the repression of the sexual desire for the mother in light of the realization that the power of this sexual drive, or mother lust, is so deeply rooted and overpowering as to cause a son to murder his father. The communal expression of this guilt is the establishment of the first two laws: those against incest and murder. This collective codification of accepted norms serves as the basis of civilization, society, law, and religion.<sup>37</sup> (It is worth noting, however, that in this model it is wholly acceptable for the males to have sex with their sisters and daughters and perhaps even mothers before the dominant male is killed. It is the murder of the father, then, not the sexualization and abjection of the mother that creates the guilt. Consequently, the now necessary laws against incest are formalized in an effort to protect the males from other males [or to protect the rule of the dominant male and guard the

subservient males against the guilt of disobeying this rule], not to protect the females from the males [or perhaps it could be interpreted as protection of the males from the females whose sexuality may incite murder]. Further, that the horde already exists provides evidence that some communal arrangement is in place prior to the murder of the father.)

Freud also equates the individual identification with father to the communal identification with the imaginary father, or God the father. Accordingly, this theoretical extension of the individual Oedipal phase as a stage of psychosexual development to the collective development of societal law and religion as a result of a literal Oedipal action serves as an explanation, or perhaps a justification, of patriarchy and misogyny.

Likewise, Kristeva expands her concept of the abject to society at large. As the abjection of the mother precedes identification with the father on the individual level, so “[t]he maternal body *prefigures* the Law of the Father. . .” on the societal scale.<sup>38</sup> This abjection of mother serves not only to create the self as a subject separate from the mother, by extension it serves to separate humans from animals/nature and from other humans: “by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder.”<sup>39</sup> The result of the abjection of the mother, therefore, is the law of the father: laws that are set in place to protect from the abjection that is so feared. Similarly, while God serves as the cultural expression of the imaginary father, the Goddess embodies the immortal mother.

Furthermore, as Freud’s psychosexual stages of development focus on the identification with father as the impetus for individuation from mother and the onset of

the Oedipus complex while neglecting to consider the preceding abjection of the individual mother, the cultural identification with God the father equally ignores the initial identification with and consequent abjection of Goddess the mother. By extension, the cultural equivalent to the abjection of mother is the abjection of the Goddess and the cultural correspondent of the identification with the father is the acceptance of the God. In light of this oversight and in objection to Freud's claims in *Totem and Taboo*, Kristeva is suggesting that the distinction between sacred and profane, the development of religion and law, and the origins of civilization are not a result of patricidal guilt but rather are an extension of the abjection of mother. (Could this explain why incest was acceptable and why a community was in place before the patricide?). That is to say that the female, the mother, the imaginary immortal mother, is the original state, not the deformed other in need of abjection. For Kristeva, "[e]very god even including the God of the Word, relies on a mother Goddess. Christianity is perhaps also the last of the religions to have displayed in broad daylight the bipolar structure of belief."<sup>40</sup> Kristeva considers at length the evidence of this large-scale abjection of Goddess, an abjection that can be seen clearly in the Oracle of Delphi and her role as abject.

By reviewing the highlights of Kristeva's theory, more characteristics that may be found in the abjection of the Pythia are revealed. Because the Pythia's abjection remains active, these components may be added to the elements recognized in literary sources. Further, the aforementioned features that Kristeva sought in literature become more clear within a broader understanding of Kristeva's ideas: liminality, desire, catharsis, etc., are central in reading the abjection of the Pythia. A closer look at the foundations of Kristeva's theory reveals numerous aspects of abjection that may be added to the traits

gleaned from *The Powers of Horror*: the role of the abjection of mother in the process of identification with father, the purpose and power of language, the display of symptoms of abjection (such as fear), the cultural ramifications of abjecting the goddess as a step in the creation of patriarchy, the resulting arrest in development, the cultural construction of the abject as insane, the use of abjection as a mirror for societal and personal reflection, and the function of abjecting the Goddess to create and sustain the God. These concepts will be added to the aspects Kristeva recognized in her reading of literary abjection so that all these major points and reflections of abjection may be sought in the abjection of the Pythia.

To catalogue these elements and find the corresponding instance(s) of each characteristic in the Pythia's abjection would require the reader to have a working knowledge of the chronology of major events surrounding the Oracle as place and person. Assuming an absence of a comprehensive understanding of the subject, the story of the Pythia will be recounted as history while recognizing and responding to the aspects of abjection that Kristeva notes as they appear. When the story of the Oracle of Delphi is considered through the lens of Kristeva's construction of abjection, it becomes clear that the Pythia fits well the definition of an abject. The origins and intentions of the Oracle and the unfolding of her relationship with the society she represented illustrate the process about which Kristeva theorizes and offer strong support for the basis of viewing the Oracle of Delphi as abject. In effect we can see that the abjection of the Pythia is valid and active. Ideas and items from both Kristeva's specific reading of literary sources and from her overall exploration and explanation of abjection and abjects reveal the depth and breadth of the connection between the Pythia and Kristeva's work.

## Vessel

On the trail of my fear I meet again with my desire, and I bind myself to it, thus leaving stranded the concatenation of discourse with which I have built my hallucination, my weakness and my strength, my investment and my ruin.<sup>41</sup>

Before Delphi housed the god, it was home to the goddess, and before the mouth of a mortal woman spoke the words of the god at this site, the goddess spoke for herself. According to ancient myths, Themis, the goddess of justice and the daughter of Ge, was the original Oracle.<sup>42</sup> Themis spoke for her mother, the Earth Goddess. It was believed that at some point before the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Apollo killed the serpent(s) who guarded this sacred space and the goddess and encased the stone of the goddess within the shrine of the god. Also within this temple of stone was housed the living temple of the body of the Oracle. Subsequent myths suggest that the site was offered to Apollo by Themis, not taken from her by force. Regardless, all agree that Apollo, the son of Zeus, silenced the mother Goddess and that whether by personal persuasion or physical force, the young god overcame and replaced the old goddess. Because the site of the Temple was sacred, it was necessary that this new god sustain its location. Further, because the use of the female body was known and accepted as the conduit for the voice of the deity who inhabited this space, a female body must also remain; nevertheless, that is all she was: a utilitarian body through which the god spoke instead of the divine daughter who spoke for the mother and the Earth she inhabited and animated.

The role of the Oracle was well known and therefore visitors (and their money) expected to hear the words of god in the voice of a woman; further, to be intoxicated, and therefore out of balance and control, was considered unmanly and so the hysteria of the inspired prophecy required the irrational state of the female body. As a result the Pythia maintained her place, but she was only a shell—the empty female body Kristeva defined as abject. While the feminine form as vessel remained, along with the Goddess perished the powerful and positive serpent symbol that provided her protection. The Homeric Hymn to Delphic Apollo, dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, tells the story of how Apollo killed the serpent at Delphi. In order to make amends for killing Pytho, the child of Ge, Apollo was required to spend nine years in the service of king Admetus. Apollo's encounter with the taboo rendered him impure and in need of cleansing redemption.

Upon Apollo's return, he led the first priests to Delphi from Knossos by transforming into a dolphin and guiding the ship to the place that promised rich offerings. Because Apollo's cult title is *Delphinios*, derived from dolphin or porpoise, Homer's explanation of this as the origin of the name Delphi, albeit debatable, is generally accepted.<sup>43</sup> Similar uncertainty surrounds the source of the term Pythia: while Python is translated as serpent, *pythao*, to rot, is another potential origin based on stories suggesting that Apollo left the body of the defeated snake to decay, perhaps producing the smells or vapors associated with the site. This idea allows for the possibility that the defeated goddess continued to speak through the Pythia in the form of the vapors. This argument for the vapors as a source of intoxication was not considered in conversations concerning the gases. Nevertheless, the use of the word Pythia serves as a reminder by connecting

the woman who remained as vessel to the goddess and her serpent servant who were replaced long ago by priests and dolphins and the god they represented.

While the dates and details will likely remain uncertain, the place of the Oracle and its early association with the maternal divine feminine is largely accepted as is the following attack and acquisition of the site by Apollo and the followers of the paternal divine masculine. As the mother is abjected by the son in order to identify with the father, the process Kristeva discusses begins to unfold. Within these origins alone, numerous elements of abjection identified in Kristeva's writings are made available for analysis.

As noted, to destroy Ge, Apollo first had to kill Pytho, the python protecting the goddess and her sacred site. Pytho was not simply the daughter of Ge who guarded the sacred site of her mother; Pytho was the chthonic female divine who became the enemy of the Olympian gods, represented by their son Apollo in this fight. Apollo, in effect, individuated himself by abjecting his mother. In all ways, this is the defeat of the old Goddess by the son of the new God.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, that the son invades the sacred navel of his mother through penetration with his sword maintains Kristeva's connection to Freud's ideas of repressed maternal eroticization.

It was not enough to kill the goddess; the serpent who connected her to the power of the animal, the Earth, and the past must be detached from her and overcome as well. Long a pagan symbol of the divine feminine, myths desacralizing the snake, and by association the goddess and women, are found within numerous ancient cultures.<sup>45</sup> To reject the snake serves to set humans apart from and above all other(ed) animals.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps before Ge inhabited the sacred site, it was Pytho alone who was sought as a source of insight. Regardless, the move away from animal (and animism) and the

goddess was a clear and complete rejection that did not require the active process of abjection to maintain; the female body, on the other hand, was still trapped between the past and the present, between the mythical and the material, and between the subject and the object.

This process, as spoken and written method, is the cultural manifestation of the individual abjection of the mother and identification with the father. On a societal level, this is the reflection of the god's triumph over the goddess. According to Kristeva: "Abjection accompanies all religious structuring and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse. Several structurations of abjection should be distinguished, each one determining a specific form of the sacred."<sup>47</sup> It is through abjection that desire gives way to the creation of defilement and the rituals of purification that construct the sacred. Had the Oracle been replaced and rejected in full, the abjection process could have reached catharsis returning the Pythia to the status of subject and freeing her from the cycle of abjection just as the Goddess and the Python, who had been rejected outright, were released and no longer in need of specific abjection.

The Pythia becomes a relic tied to the sacred spot, a common concept in her time and space.<sup>48</sup> The site of the Temple of Delphi is a sacred convergence of place and space. Because the location itself is sacred, the Oracle must literally be tied to place; the Pythia cannot prophecy without her connection to place. Space, as social construction, however, requires her as well. Kristeva insists that "[b]efore any relation to an other is set up, and as if underlying it, it is the building of that archaic space, the topological demarcation of the preconditions of a subjectivity, qua difference between a sub-ject and an ab-ject in the be-spoken being itself, that takes over from earlier Levitical

abominations.”<sup>49</sup> And so the Pythia creates the space as sacred and the sacred space creates that Pythia as such just as the subject creates that abject and the abject the subject. Time, equally, creates and abjects the Pythia to fit the needs of each society she inhabits. Time and space, therefore, must be given consideration as indivisible from that which abjects both the woman and the sacred space across time.

Once nothing but flesh, this ejection of abjection instead of rejection and catharsis is what keeps the Pythia, and by extension the goddess, alive and vocal. Nevertheless, it is what Kristeva would deem unfulfilled abjection of mother and Freud would cite as arrested development and incomplete progress through the stages of psychosexual development. Just as is the case in individual development, such social dissonance is a reflection of a failed separation from mother, or divine mother in this case, and results in a lacking development of ego/identity. The communal manifestation of the individual abjection of mother is not complete because while the goddess is dead, her corpse remains and is animated by god. To secure this taboo requires purification and maintained abjection. And so ritual purification was introduced to cleanse Apollo from his encounter with the abject. Once sanitized and returned to subject status, Apollo remains so, but in time, the purification process is displaced to the female body so that it can remain taboo but desired. For Kristeva, “[a]bjection persists as exclusion or taboo . . .”<sup>50</sup> The active process of creating the sacred is ritual. Purification allows the desired abject to avoid becoming wholly mundane and continue to inhabit the space between sacred and profane.

As stated, while the act of (active) identification with father remains a major tenet of Kristeva’s theory, the result of this Oedipal process shifts from the desire to possess

the mother and subvert the father to the desire to extrude the feminine, constructing not only the male body as pure but also the female body as dirty, perverse, repugnant, abject: in need of purification. Desire is the beginning of the cycle but not the end. Mother must be made dirty so that father can be perfect. The mother must be ejected so that the father can be accepted. The goddess must be abjected for God the Father to stand alone. Yet neither can be simply rejected in full because it is the abjection of the goddess and the female that creates and sustains the rule of the god, the father, and the world upon which (patriarchal) civilization is built.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud imagines the origin of civilization, law, and religion as a reaction to the guilt of patricide that must be assuaged through purification and dissuaded by law. Here it is the guilt of matricide that creates a similar need, only while the response to the shame created by killing the father results in his deification and protection, the result of the murdered mother is to see her as impure and even as contaminating the father through contact; if deified, she could not be abjected and individuation could not result. Consequently for each human to develop an individual ego, s/he must abject mother and therefore taboo her, and for society to abject the Goddess and accept the God, it must defile the divine feminine.

Further, while Freud's Oedipal Complex constructs the female form as always already inferior, Kristeva's abjection asserts that such a taboo against the female body is not innate and must be constructed individually and culturally. This process of tabooing the female seen in Apollo's need to purify himself after contamination through affiliation with the goddess serves to corrupt the body of the goddess on a cultural level. Through the desacralization of the Pythia and her female form, the adulteration of the goddess is

extended to the tabooing of the female body. As a result, the Goddess is defiled and the God is deified while the male is made subject and the female abject.

Nonetheless, because the desire for the female body remained, the abjection was sustained. It was necessary then that the Pythia be kept alive, both as a failed separation of mother and as a fulfilled promise of Apollo: The rich offerings guaranteed the priests who followed Apollo's avatar to Delphi were realized. The site became a cultic center of undeniable economic proportion, thereby providing material rewards beyond the individual and cultural results of abjection, just as the female body of mother provides nourishment for the child who must abject her. The fact that the female body reaped large fiscal gains for the men who managed the women who were penetrated and intoxicated by the God speaks for itself.

Also worth notice is that Themis was the goddess of Justice. And so that she spoke for her mother allows for the association of the words of the mother Goddess with the statement of justness. By extension it could be suggested that through the mouth of the Oracle, the Great Goddess spoke the words that modified and maintained moral and common law, which if codified (and in the future, the words of the Pythia would be written down) would provide the structure of civil law. If entertained, this possibility suggests that early laws were handed down from the Goddess through the Oracle. Even without such projection, it is clear that once the god spoke through the Pythia, his words and her voice influenced greatly the military and civil rulers who constructed societal regulations and cultural expectations.

By the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the sacred stories of Delphi spread from myth to history when Hesiod recorded seeing the omphalos for himself.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, local

legend also had its say in the origins of the Oracle. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, Diodorus Siculus recorded the story of a goat herder who watched one of his goats act erratically and then fall into a crack in the earth.<sup>52</sup> Also affected by whatever had intoxicated his goat, the herder felt the presence of the divine and was filled with the ability to see both the past and the future. Many began to visit the site and experience the sensations for themselves, but eventually the villagers decided to select one young female as the Oracle through whom the deity would speak. These much discussed vapors were never denied, dismissed, or demonized; until the point when they became an active tool in the process of abjection, in fact, the vapors added to the lore and lure that enticed a variety of visitors.

Male and female, rich and poor, young and old alike, supplicants from throughout the entire Mediterranean made pilgrimage to Delphi in search of a message from the god through the Pythia. They offered sacrifices, riches, faith, and doubt to the temples of flesh and stone. Even during the dates when the Oracle herself was unavailable for consultation, seekers visited to ask questions of the priests who were credited by their association with the oracular Pythia.<sup>53</sup> Colored beans were tossed by the priests to reveal a yes or no answer. Such practices were common for male Oracles and priests at Oracular sites.<sup>54</sup> When God spoke through a man, he was defined as a priest or a prophet, not an empty, indefinable body. God even spoke through nature to men, which did not result in the demonization or dismissal of the nature or the male. As is the case with Christ and other avatars, the divine masculine could inhabit a man fully. But the Pythia was only flesh that the God would penetrate and use temporarily; she was neither avatar nor prophet. She was only a female.

Very little is known of these and other divination practices possibly employed at Delphi during the seasons when the Pythia's access to the divine was disallowed, and it is clear that she was the main draw to the Temple because the female body alone could serve as an empty vessel through which the spirit could communicate, an act made possible only by her liminal status. Over time, the role of the priest increased greatly. The Pythia was initially possessed by the god and his words flowed through her, but by the classical period, it was the priests who rendered the words she uttered into written prophesy, often in excessively complex hexameters as juxtaposed to the spoken words of the Oracle, which became incoherent and indecipherable.<sup>55</sup> While the female body remained the desired draw, her role lessened as it was usurped by men. Whether through the translation of the priests or the vessel of the Pythia, the prophecies were generally open to interpretation: a main reason it was important to Know Yourself before entering. Vague meanings that often led to disasters may have cast doubt on the prophecies. Throughout the classical period, rumors circulated that the temple was a tourist trap and the Oracle a charlatan whose favor was for sale. Or perhaps these, too, were attempts to discredit the female who reminded men of the goddess they slew.

Regardless of the story and origin of the sacred location of the Oracle, her presence was well established by the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and remained intact, albeit under attack, for over a thousand years. It is clear through these cultural connections that the role of the Oracle can be associated with Kristeva's abject, but the faceless, nameless, individual existence of the women who served as a vessel enhances the connection with the Pythia's abject status. The role of the Oracle was known widely through the ancient Mediterranean, and yet little remains to inform contemporary seekers of her life.

It has been established that the Pythia was chosen from the women of the village, but little is known of the selection process or the procedures used to ready the girl or woman once selected. It is likely that the Pythia were chosen from the Temple Priestesses, but equally little is known of their lives. According to Diodorus, the Pythia was originally a chaste and pure young virgin. This practice changed over time, however. Diodorus offers a potential explanation of the cause for such a shift:

Echecrates the Thessalian, having arrived at the shrine and beheld the virgin who uttered the oracle, became enamored of her because of her beauty, carried her away and violated her; and that the Delphians because of this deplorable occurrence passed a law that in the future a virgin should no longer prophesy but that an elderly woman of fifty would declare the Oracles and that she would be dressed in the costume of a virgin, as a sort of reminder of the prophetess of olden times.<sup>56</sup>

The Mother Goddess and her protector, Python, both dead, the virgin body of the Pythia became so desired that she was raped.

As Freud suggests in *Totem and Taboo*, the result of the Father's violation was the introduction of law to protect the violated and guilt to punish the violators. In this case, on the contrary, the blame fell upon the Pythia, who was too tempting to resist. Kristeva reminds us that "[i]t is within that undecidable space, logically coming before the choice of the sexual object, that the religious answer to abjection breaks in: *defilement, taboo, or sin.*"<sup>57</sup> When the Father is killed due to the sexual desire for the female body, laws and civilization are required to protect him. When the Mother is killed

and her representative ravaged, the reflection of the goddess through the female body is forced into modification in the hope of mitigating male desire.

This step helps to segregate the process Kristeva studied in literature from what we seek in the Pythia. For Freud, sublimation is very specifically the transformation of libido drive into socially useful actions, such as art. Kristeva agrees that the literary construction of the abject serves as sublimation in place of active abjection. In effect, had Echebrates the Thessalian sublimated his desire into literature, a novel would replace Diodorus' record. The novel, however, would divorce the abject from the process of abjection: Forfeited. Instead, the violation of the Pythia offers direct active abjection through the shifting of the abjects' status and therefore the maintenance of her liminality.

To suggest that the violation of the Father results in law and the violation of the Mother results in her abjection would simplify and limit the understanding of the process of abjection as a creative force. The efforts to taboo the female body can also be seen as protective in that they create the body, and in this case the body of the Pythia, as sacred. While it is the sublimation of sexual energy that drives the creation of art for Kristeva, the sublimation (instead of repression or another defense mechanism) of that sexual energy that created art is the same sublimation that creates the sacred, and it is the process of abjection that enacts the sacred to move it through and out of the body physically.

Consequently, to taboo the abject both soils and sanctifies. Kristeva explains that “[a]bjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant surviving matrilinear character. It takes on the form of *exclusion* of substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which

coincides with the sacred since it sets it up.”<sup>58</sup> Purification rituals create and maintain the sacred; othering, in effect, can result in protection from the desire for the abject. To make the Pythia abject provided motivation not to violate her. When that incentive proved insufficient, however, laws were not created and enacted to support and protect her; attempts were made to render her less, but not wholly un-, desirable.

While the exact reasons are unclear, it is known that the Pythia did change from young virgins to respectable, married women of Delphi. The requirements that she come from a family of good character and status and that she give up her responsibilities and identity to serve as Pythia remained: These characteristics directly align the Pythia with the definition of the abject. Late in the cultic life of the Oracle, however, it appears that another shift occurred when peasant women begin to serve in the role of Pythia.

The level of education of the Pythia also varied widely over the centuries.

According to archaeologist John Hale:

Sometimes the Pythia was a noble girl of aristocratic family, sometimes a peasant, sometimes rich, sometimes poor, sometimes old, sometimes young, sometimes a very lettered and educated woman to whom somebody like the high priest and the philosopher Plutarch would dedicate essays, other times a girl who could not write her own name. So it seems to have been aptitude rather than any ascribed status that made these women eligible to be Pythias and speak for the God.<sup>59</sup>

More telling than the details is the repeated use of *sometimes*. This reinforces the instability of the Pythia on an individual as well as an institutional level. Specific requirements varied and aptitude informed, but aptitude for what? If her role changed across time in relation to the level of priestly activity, aptitude was a very varied variable

as well. The lack of available material in conjunction with the numerous and significant shifts in the Pythia make any generalizations of the women who served in this capacity overwhelmingly difficult. Most noteworthy, however, is that the place of the Pythia did not remain stable or secure. Her role fluctuated greatly over time as the attempts to define a place, or to maintain an undefined place, for her continued.

What is somewhat more clear than who served, is when she served. The Pythia prophesied once a month during the nine warmest months of the year (although she was known to have been forced down at other times). During the three remaining months, Apollo left his temple in the hands of his brother, Dionysus. During this period, it is possible that the Pythia and the other priestesses to Apollo served the secret rites of Dionysus.<sup>60</sup> This practice further connects Apollo to the Goddess, who previously held this mythic role, and perhaps reflects the continuation of an older tradition that occurred before Apollo inhabited the Temple. When Apollo returned on his birthday in the Spring, the Oracles would reconvene the offering of prophecies. Without the presence of the god, the Pythia had no role or voice. Without the animation of the divine male, the female body was a corpse.

To prepare for her descent, the Pythia would undergo ritual purification and fasting. After bathing in the Castalian Spring and drinking the holy waters of the Kassotis, the Pythia would descend into the *adyton*, the inaccessible place that should not be entered (perhaps previously associated with the womb of the Goddess or cave of the Python), holding laurel leaves and a bowl of water from the Kassotis, into which she would gaze. Here the Pythia would mount a tripod near the omphalos. As she inhaled the sacred Pneuma, she exhaled the words of god. But before the Pythia could serve as a

vessel for the voice of god, she had to be cleansed. The natural state of her body, as Kristeva notes of all female bodies in relation to abjection, was unclean and taboo—in need of purification.

Just as ancient purifications sullied and sustained the Pythia, contemporary explanations keep her both active and passive. The scientific search for vapors also suggested that the waters ingested by the Pythia were another likely source for her intoxication. These arguments can be seen as a justification to excuse what some consider her erratic behavior and protect against assertions that she was a calculated fraud, but they could just as easily be viewed as a dismissal of her personal agency and prophetic power. When detached from either camp, it becomes possible to perceive both as the process of abjection that ejects and preserves, creates and destroys, in an effort to avoid but allow desire. And there was great want for the Pythia's form and function.

International fame and renown gave the Pythia a special place in the misogynistic Greece of this period. She was considered and discussed by the most famous thinkers of the age.<sup>61</sup> Further, the role of priestess was the only respected, powerful role for women in all of ancient Greece, and while the Pythia cannot be generalized to the other priestesses throughout the period and region, it is unlikely that the Pythia did not enjoy many of the standard rewards and liberties widely associated with the role of priestess in many of the more well-known cultic centers: status, payment, housing, jewels, legal rights, and tax exemption to note a few.

These professional privileges did not come without a personal price. Plutarch believed that the life of the Pythia was often cut short due to her service to Apollo. The job itself was exhausting, and the pressure was thought to affect the health of the Pythia.

At the height of the activity and popularity of the center, up to three Pythia served simultaneously so that a replacement could rotate in when the first Pythia was too exhausted to stand or speak. More than one account reports the death of a Pythia during or within a few days of her descent.

In one edition from Plutarch, the reading of the liver of the sacrificial goat, used to ensure an auspicious sign before the oracular reading was advised, showed unfavorable outcomes. The priests insisted that the session proceed and that the Pythia descend, but she became hysterical and died within two days of the reading. In other cases, the Pythia was pushed down at a time other than the seventh day of one of the nine months: Alexander the Great is even said to have forced the Pythia down once. These instances often had disastrous results. While ancient accounts blame a breach in sacred protocol, John Hale suggests that this may have been because the lack of ritual fasting as preparation caused the Pythia to vomit repeatedly and choke from inhaling the gases.<sup>62</sup>

The current conversation concerning vapors, in fact, assumes that the Pythia was hysterical—widely accepted despite objections from Fontenrose, Plutarch, and more recently Lisa Maurizio who insist that the Pythia is consistently presented as speaking coherently and independently in ancient sources.<sup>63</sup> The much-noted frenzied state of the Pythia could not be fully segregated as part of the position instead of the person. As Kristeva recognized, individuals (and abjected entities) who fall outside of the perimeters of cultural identity and the social construction determined by language are deemed mentally ill and their actions dismissed as neurotic. The contemporary canon surrounding the vapors as inducing her frenzy seems to forgive her mental state in

exchange for accepting the abjecting idea that she was intoxicated instead of crazy; nonetheless, she was anything but stable.

This lack of a stable status, an absence of place in society, is what most clearly and easily identifies the Pythia as abject. In every way, the Pythia displays the characteristic of liminality by existing between or beyond the constructed duality of culture that leaves the abject othered. Neither object nor subject, the abject cannot be defined or named; Kristeva asserts that “on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. . . . It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master.”<sup>64</sup> While it is desire for the taboo that initiates the abjection, it is the abject’s liminal status that determines its place as abject. If the abject were not liminal, caught between subject and object, it would be one of the two. As seen with the Pythia, when an abject earns the distinction of subject or object, it ceases to be abject and the process of abjection becomes unnecessary. Both as a function and a female, the Pythia lived outside of the mainstream reality of her world. Even today she inhabits the unspeakable space between subject and object, god and goddess, Earth and other, past and present, gas and solid . . .

Yet all we know of her comes from the subjects who inhabited the world that abjected her. While it is her words that speak in the form of recorded prophecies, they were recorded, and often interpreted and translated, by non-othered others. Just as the writer writes out the dissonance of desire, spoken words also create and expel. Language, in fact, may be employed to take the conversation of the Pythia and abjection in any number of directions. The Pythia’s power of language could be seen as affording

agency and moving her from the place of a subaltern. Language creates and defines. Equally, language abjects; Kristeva exclaims: “Through the mouth that I fill with words instead of my mother whom I miss from now on more than ever, I elaborate that want, and the aggressivity that accompanies it, by *saying*.”<sup>65</sup> The want of desire and the fear of anger are expelled and in so doing, expel the mother. To speak therefore is to abject, and as stated it is through the spoken word that we find the abjection because it is the act of speaking that abjects. And so does speaking then mark the Pythia as subject who abjects? Perhaps but Kristeva does not neglect to emphasize the limit of language.

In a way, the Pythia was creating herself and her world with her words. But they were not her words; they were the words of the god. Further, it was not her language; it was the language of the time and space and people who abjected her: Kristeva writes that “[i]f language, like culture, sets up a separation and, starting with discrete elements, it does so precisely by suppressing maternal authority and the corporeal mapping that abuts against them.”<sup>66</sup> The Pythia had no voice. She had no language. She was only a form and function of the god and the culture who abjected her because they desired her as much as they feared her. From inside this fear, her words were crafted by the culture she mirrored.

Fear was also the language of those who tried to describe and perhaps define her. Roman writers made attempts to try to understand and explain the Oracle and her sacred space; such practices, while commonplace to the Greeks, were foreign to the Romans. As discussed, Diodorus told of the mountain goats who discovered the sacred spot through spasm. Strabo spoke of the opening under the temple that emitted a divine frenzy-inducing pneuma. Lucan brought to life the heaving bosom and foaming lips of

the Pythia. Plutarch, who served as high priest of Apollo at the Temple in Delphi, attempted to explain without explaining away.

Plutarch recorded the Oracle's origin, character, and method; he also discussed in depth the decline of the Pythia and the Oracle. The Pythia was no longer tutored and her responses were no longer in verse. Further the questions presented her continued to move away from the political and international and toward the personal and superficial. While Plutarch blamed Pax Romana, he did not worry that the Oracle would face ultimate decline: he simply used the vapors which inhabited the temple as an explanation for the cycles of interest in the Oracle. While each Pythia varied in her ability to attain the required state necessary to be affected by the power of the deities as displayed by the sacred surroundings, the role of the gods as offered through the sacred space the Pythia occupied also varied in degree. Perhaps, while Rome was at peace and less in need of military and political guidance, the Pythia and/or the divine source of her prophetic powers shifted to match the needs of the people who travelled to her with concerns of marriage and money and crops and cattle.

With the rise of Christianity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, real efforts were made to discredit and dismiss pagan deities and practices just as the Olympians had displaced the spirits who preceded them; the Oracle of Delphi was attacked in particular. Christian writers and bishops did not question the ability of the Oracle to offer miraculous prophecies but rather insisted that her power came directly from the devil who offered real prophecies in an effort to trick seekers into following the pagan ways. As the sphere of Christian influence broadened, Clement of Alexandria wrote that the fountain of Castalia had been silenced, and despite Julian's efforts to reinvigorate the site, Clement

was correct.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, Clement reminds us that to at least some degree the source of the Pythia's inspiration was, as Plutarch noted, the springs and vapors that surrounded this sacred space.

The role of the vapors, therefore, was never denied or debated in antiquity. The Oracle of Delphi was not discredited because she was high on toxic gas and therefore never a real source of inspired prophecy. Her demise was based on the fact that she was a pagan female in a world coming under the rule of Christian males. Perhaps gender was irrelevant: if a male were in such a role, he too would have had no choice but to face conversion, cloture, or closure as well. Or perhaps gender was of great importance given that the Christian hierarchy was removing women from positions of power and influence and firmly enacting male dominance on earth under a singularly dominant male above. Regardless, numerous factors and influences discredited and dismissed the Oracle and her role, resulting ultimately in the disappearance of the women who served as the mouthpiece of god.

The Great Goddess already petrified, the many goddesses and the women who spoke the words of the god were now similarly relegated as relics. The Christian church dominated Western culture for the next thousand years, and the focus of abjection was shifted to other liminal elements in society or even marginal aspects of Christianity itself. It is possible to consider the role of Mary within the Christian church (who like the Pythia was virgin/mother) an effort to keep alive the female divine as vessel or mouthpiece, but her function was as a physical vessel and her words could only intercede not prophesy; so while completely inverted, the role of the Oracle was again beyond debate. With Christianity firmly in power in the West, questions and inquiries for and about the Oracle

were absent for centuries, until her resurrection. When the process of abjection attained catharsis, the Pythia's status was defined, and she was no longer abject and in need of abjection. With her abjection, however, died her voice. The abjection of the Pythia had sustained and purified her enough for desire to remain.

The Oracle of Delphi was perhaps the most venerated sacred site on Earth for hundreds of years, and the words of the Pythia are known to have changed the world, yet we do not know one name of one woman who spoke for the god. We know little of how they were chosen or of how they lived. The only thing that remains of the Pythia is her role as a vessel. And while little is certain with regard to these women whose voices changed the world, their words will live on forever in the approximately 600 oracular statements from Delphi still in existence today. The role of these powerful women survived empires, invasions, fires, and fear, but they could not survive the final blow from a new Christian god. And yet rejection could not defeat the underlying desire for what the Pythia represented. As a result, she was born again within a new time and space and to a renewed abjection. Perhaps to see her function as an abject in the process of abjection that both maintains her voice and creates the voice of god will provide an avenue for her to move beyond her current singular service.

The desire for the Pythia functioned and functions on multiple levels. Individual sexual desire for the female body despite its connection to god is displayed in the struggle throughout the existence of the Pythia as reflected in the shifting of her age, marital status, and dress in efforts to reconstruct her and release desire. On a psychosocial stage, desire ranges from the longing for the absent divine feminine to a communal manifestation of the individual abjection of mother. Cultural desire for the Pythia might

have been as simple as the fact that her body supported a village of patrons, parishioners, and priests by offering financial substance. All these potential incarnations of desire served to maintain the need to abject the Pythia as a reflection of the female body, the mother, and the goddess. The result of this desire for the abject was the need to place it off limits—to make the other taboo. Still the desire remained for both the function and the form of the Pythia.

Purification was employed to allow the Pythia to avoid total rejection, but it also made clear the fact that she was impure. The only reaction to the uncanny that attracts and repels equally is fear. It is this fear that creates language in an effort to spew the abject. For Kristeva, “we are all phobics in the sense that it is anguish that causes us to speak . . .”<sup>68</sup> Still this process is a necessary function and can work on a therapeutic level, as well as a theoretical level, individually and communally. The goal of Kristeva’s work includes but exceeds personal psychotherapeutic analysis; for Kristeva, the abjection of the mother is a shared experience in all cultures and serves as a source of misogyny. The Oracle has been abjected anew by numerous assertions and arguments in an effort to reenact ritually the original abjection of mother and creation of father as subject. Tracing the history of the Oracle and the reasons for and results of her reincarnations in the context of Kristeva’s theory reveals many possible purposes and patterns for the recurring abjection.

Exposing and confronting the abject can offer self reflection by shedding light on individual developmental arrests and the resulting neuroses; as a communal mirror, revealing abjection can also unearth the substructure of patriarchy upon which the superstructure of misogyny is built as evidenced through the restrictive laws that guard

society from the abject: the female body in particular. Kristeva asserts that once embraced, the abject can be resolved by facing and naming the unnamable.<sup>69</sup> Once the lust for mother has been assimilated, no need to abject her remains and progress through the developmental stages may be freed from arrest and resume progression.

In an effort to support such cultural development, the Oracle of Delphi may serve as a cultural reference and referent for abjection thereby supporting and supplementing the existing (or emerging) discourse by broadening understanding and interpretations of the Oracle and serving to advance Kristeva's theory: Just as Freud employed *Oedipus Rex* to develop the Oedipal complex as an unmistakable cultural touchstone through which his theory could be more easily understood and disseminated, the Oracle can serve as the embodiment of abjection thereby producing a clear and concise cultural exemplar with which the theory of abjection may be merged to create the catchph(r)ase Oracular complex as a referent and reference point from which abjection can be more clearly accessed and applied.

The Oracle of Delphi, as both an individual and an institution, serves as an elegant and effective active case of the individual process and the cultural manifestation of Kristeva's abjection. Numerous characteristics and events in the existence of the Pythia align with those noted by Kristeva to support the identification of the Pythia as abject. The overwhelming connection between Kristeva's explanation of the process of abjection and the story of the Pythia offers sufficient evidence to convince readers that the Oracle of Delphi was abjected, that the process of abjection was made unnecessary in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE when she was finally rejected and defined as a subject, that the abjection was necessitated again when desire rekindled for her, and that this process of abjection

continues today. Just as Kristeva studied the sublimation of abjection through literature, the life of the Pythia serves well to fulfill such extended study by offering an instance of active abjection in which the elements of abjection might be sought from within the living process instead of the static state of history or literature.

## Vestiges

The story of the Pythia is a cultural manifestation of Kristeva's individual and communal incarnation of the abjection of mother. By applying Kristeva's theory of abjection to the major arguments surrounding and elements encasing the Oracle of Delphi, it becomes clear that regardless of theory or thesis, each individual or collective is reconsidering the Oracle from a different angle with the same result: the repeated abjection of the Pythia. In effect, arguments old and new become one central canon with one intention. The resulting abjection, however, has served to sustain the voice of the Pythia across time and space. As an individual, the Oracle of Delphi, the Pythia herself, is nothing more than an abject vessel—an unknown, unnamed body used for possession by Apollo. As a cultural expression of abjection, the Oracle of Delphi is nothing less than the literal abjection of the Goddess by the God. Apollo, the son of the God Zeus, abjects the mother, even to the extent of matricide, to identify with the father.

Questioning the past and present discourse surrounding the Oracle of Delphi suggests that there is no debate and in doing so, creates one, thereby resurrecting her role as a sacred vessel of knowledge and truth. When the current conversation concerning the vapors is placed in context, it becomes less a contemporary revelation of science than a rhetorical device of abjection. Recognizing the link between the Pythia and abjection opens an avenue for further future conclusions, connections, and connections creating access for other contemporary theories to intercede into classics.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> The Omphalos was the scared stone navel that was the center of the Earth.
- <sup>2</sup> Joseph Fontenrose. *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations With a Catalogue of Responses*. (Berkeley, University of California press, 1978), 4.
- <sup>3</sup> Not even the most advanced in science doubted her; Aristotle developed a theory of telepathy, and the Oracle became more revered as myths began to tell of the Goddess who had originally inhabited the sacred space.
- <sup>4</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 26.
- <sup>5</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 43.
- <sup>6</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 1.
- <sup>7</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 17-18.
- <sup>8</sup> As stated by Aeschylus in the prologue of the *Eumenides* and supported by substantial material evidence
- <sup>9</sup> Even today, the Oracle has made a place for herself in two of the most revered institutions in the contemporary West; she played an important role in the film *The Matrix* and serves as the namesake of a major brand of computer software.
- <sup>10</sup> Roman Emperor Theodosius the Great closed the Temple in 395 CE.
- <sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that Fontenrose is among these scholars, along with Dodds and others he categorizes as True Believers in an attempt to segregate himself.
- <sup>12</sup> Fontenrose, 6.
- <sup>13</sup> Fontenrose, 6.
- <sup>14</sup> Fontenrose, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> Fontenrose, 4.
- <sup>16</sup> Bachofen, Stone, Campbell, Neumann . . .
- <sup>17</sup> Fontenrose, 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Fontenrose, xiv.
- <sup>19</sup> Fontenrose, xiv.
- <sup>20</sup> Fontenrose, 7.
- <sup>21</sup> Although Parke and Wormell had already offered such a catalogue, Fontenrose suggested that their chronological method of arrangement was subjective, unlike his catalogue, which he considered objective because while Parke and Wormell offer only Historical and Fictitious categories, he added the classifications of Quasi-Historical and Legendary.
- <sup>22</sup> Fontenrose, xiv.
- <sup>23</sup> Fontenrose, xiv.
- <sup>24</sup> De Boer, Jelle, and J. R. Hale. "The Geological Origins of the Oracle at Delphi, Greece." *The Archeology of Geological Catastrophes*. W. J. McGuive et al., eds., London: Geological Society. Special publication number 171 (399-412), 2000.
- <sup>25</sup> De Boer, J. R. Hale, and J. Chanton. "New Evidence for the Geological Origins of the Ancient Delphic Oracle." *Geology*. Issue 28, no. 8 (707-710), Aug. 2001.
- <sup>26</sup> Spiller, Henry A., J. R. Hale, and J. Z. De Boer. "The Delphic Oracle: A Multidisciplinary Defense of the Gaseous Vent Theory." *Journal of Clinical Toxicology*. 40 (189-96), 2002.
- <sup>27</sup> Hale, John, J. Z. Boer, H. A. Spiller, and J. Chanton. "Questioning the Delphic Oracle." *Scientific America*, (66-73), 2003.
- <sup>28</sup> Broad, William. *The Oracle: The Lost Secrets and Hidden Messages of Ancient Delphi*. New York: Penguin Press, 2006.
- <sup>29</sup> Broad, 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Broad, 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Hale and Piccardi, 2000; Spiller et al., 2000; De Boer, et al., 2001; Hale et al. 2003; Etiope et al., 2006; Piccardi et al., 2008.
- <sup>32</sup> See the Kristeva quote introducing this section.
- <sup>33</sup> This is not a contemporary problem. See "Male Splendor" to discover how Rome created a third sex to linguistically and legally define Eunuchs.
- <sup>34</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Crownfield, David. *Body/text in Julia Kristeva: religion, women, and psychoanalysis*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) xvi.

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- <sup>36</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 58.
- <sup>37</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo: resemblances between the psychic lives of savages and neurotics*. London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1919.
- <sup>38</sup> Oliver, Kelly. "Kristeva's Imaginary Father and the Crisis in the Paternal Function." *Diacritics*, 1991, 1.
- <sup>39</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 12-13, (emphasis in original).
- <sup>40</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Tales of Love*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 252.
- <sup>41</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 42.
- <sup>42</sup> See Ovid, Apollonius Rhodius, Servius, pseudo-Apollodorus, Pausanias, or Aeschylus.
- <sup>43</sup> Forthcoming etymological scholarship by Dr. Niki Kantzios, however, will shed light on the difficulties with such a claim.
- <sup>44</sup> Zeus, also a chthonic god, made the transition to the Olympians. Python did not survive the social transition.
- <sup>45</sup> The Biblical Garden in the second creation account (Genesis 2:4) provides an accessible referent. See also: Enuma Elish.
- <sup>46</sup> Another common mythical and psychological theme also easily accessed in Genesis.
- <sup>47</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 17.
- <sup>48</sup> Just as a henotheistic patron deity tied to a city might remain associated after the practice is no longer active—Athens after monotheism dismissed Athena.
- <sup>49</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 117.
- <sup>50</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 17. She continues . . . "It finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness—but always nameable, always totalizable." Interesting but not germane enough to expand.
- <sup>51</sup> In *Theogony*
- <sup>52</sup> In *Bibliotheca historica*
- <sup>53</sup> Broad, 38-40.
- <sup>54</sup> Such as reading blowing leaves, burning bushes, or other signs.
- <sup>55</sup> In *Moralia*
- <sup>56</sup> Broad, 31.
- <sup>57</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 48.
- <sup>58</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 17. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>59</sup> Interview with Rachael Kohn: The Ark, Radio National <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/ark/stories/s1266794.htm>
- <sup>60</sup> Plutarch, in *Moralia*, notes that his friend Clea was both a Priestess to Apollo and to the secret rites of Dionysus.
- <sup>61</sup> Herodotus, Thucydides, Euripides, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Pindar, Aeschylus, Xenophon, Diodorus, Strabo, Pausanias, Plutarch, Livy, Justin, Ovid, Lucan, Julian, and Clement of Alexandria, among others.
- <sup>62</sup> Hale told this story when he spoke at USF in 2010..
- <sup>63</sup> Fontenrose 1978, pp. 196-227 and Maurizio, Lisa, "The Voice at the Centre of the World: The Pythia's Ambiguity and Authority," pp. 38-54.
- <sup>64</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 2.
- <sup>65</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 41.
- <sup>66</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 72.
- <sup>67</sup> "The Castalian spring [of Delphi], at least, is all silent": *Exhortation to the Greeks (or Exhortation against the Pagans)*, Book II.
- <sup>68</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 42.
- <sup>69</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, 58.

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