

**POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN HELENE CIXOUS' *LA –THE*  
(*FEMININE*)**

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Language occupies a special position in the realm of feminist literary theory. It is in language that femininity and masculinity disclose themselves. The poststructuralist emphasis on the importance of language in structuring our experience of the world is also taken by the feminist critics. Poststructuralist “reject the concept of the subject as a fixed entity, they deny any notion of essence at the heart of the self, but argue that we only come to know ourselves through the medium of language” (Jane, Imelda:112). This perspective is well revived by the French feminist theorist in the wake of Second Wave of Feminism. In between 1970-80 some major feminist critics from France wrote certain texts where they talked about a new kind of language, a way of new writing which they think will defy the patriarchal discourse. Gayatri Spivak's accounts of three major French feminist critics, Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray in *French Feminism in an International Frame* shows how these critics employ psychoanalysis and deconstruction theories in their approach to women issues.

Helene Cixous through her works analyses that woman's difference from man is both sexual and linguistic, and her aim is to speak and write about a positive representation of femininity in a discourse which she terms 'écriture féminine'. Cixous' aim of writing in a new style opens up new vistas for the later feminist theorists. In this paper, it will be shown through Cixous critical essay *La –The (Feminine)* how language works as a tool to defy the patriarchal discourse and free women from the binary culture.

Kari Weil in an essay *French Feminism's Ecriture Feminine* talks about French feminists' emphasis on language as “both the ultimate tool of women's oppression and a

potential means for subverting the binary discourse” (Weil: 152). In this case, Cixous’ notion of ‘écriture féminine’, the English translation of which is ‘writing the body’, articulates her “utopian desire” to see “a new form of writing that would express the feminine, defined in feminist psychoanalytic terms as what has historically been repressed by the masculine libidinal economy manifest in dominant patriarchal structures” (Sartori: 211). In *La*, Cixous employs this new form of style which seeks to draw on the possibilities of writing itself. From the translators note, we can get the idea that the first of three passages of *La*— offers a portrait of the feminine writer and feminine writing. In the second passage, Cixous gives a comic account of woman’s role in instituting man as god and she asked her to come out to defend herself against this discourse which is further analysis in the last passages of the essay. In the essay, Cixous’ unique style of language, her intertextual citation and her transformation of bodily experience into text through language can be understood in her symbolic method of writing. Cixous begins her essay with a short sentence ‘her affirmation’ which ends without a punctuation mark. This new kind of writing seems to be connected with ‘streams of consciousness’ narrative technique which shows long sentences full of hyperbolic metaphors and non-chronological paragraphs. Some of the words in the essay, ‘scene of wild writing’, ‘inexhaustible source of humour’ which have their metaphorical meanings ends without completing the sentence. It is as if Cixous wanted her reader to find the meaning themselves.

If we look at the other texts of Cixous, we will find that the majority of Cixous texts reinforce the impression that it “is the specificity of the female body and the diffuse...which will, through a new order of writing, change the old order of life” (Lindsay:48). Cixous pathbreaking essay for écriture féminine *The Laugh of the Medusa*, advocates new ways of thinking and writing about women and literature. In this essay, she is arguing for women to reclaim their bodies, and by extension, their desires and identities through writing. Cixous argues that a woman must “write herself” and “put herself into the text –as into the world and into history –by her own movement” (Cixous: 875). Like the classical figure of Medusa, Cixous, in *La* – refiguring the myth of ‘fall’ that has been represented through the ages. She challenges the biblical account of the fall as an excuse for inaction and inertia and writes:

...there we are, side by side in the moist force of our  
nudity...walking, through the rooms without hesitation, without lowering

our head...without shame, without confusion. Without provocation, without repetition. We will not return. No exhibition, nor inhibition.  
(Cixous: 471)

By challenging the myth, Cixous calls into question and breaks from the existing literary and social order and embraces a new vision for women and literature through the form and content of the essay. The woman figure in the essay confronting the possibilities of a newly envisioned idiom challenges both the structures of language and knowledge. Cixous talks about the difference between men and women. She sees masculine and feminine in men and women and attacks a language which maintains the conventional concepts and dichotomies. She pleads woman in the essay to stop following the myth of instituting man as god: would you be able to stop yourself? One day? One moment? ” (Cixous: 467). Cixous thinks a new way of writing can bring the body into the language, make the woman able to use her unconscious resources in a continuous exchange between conscious and unconscious.

In her essay, Cixous envisions an alternative insight and ways of understanding the world and acknowledging the difference between the sexes. Cixous suggests that feminine writing will bring about alternative forms of relation, perception and expression. It is in this sense that Cixous believes writing is revolutionary. In *La* – she focuses on an inner liberation, obtained by transgressing the limits of woman: “abandon yourself to anyone but yourself” (Cixous: 466 ). Her project of liberating women seems to be two-fold. She wants to liberate by reclaim to write themselves and liberate women from the image of “women” in our culture.

Toril Moi in a section on Cixous in her *Sexual/Textual Politics* rightly observes: “her style is often intensely metaphorical, poetics and explicitly anti-theoretical” (Moi: 102). She says:

Her whole theoretical project can on sense be summed up as the effort to undo this logocentric ideology; to proclaim woman as the source of life, power and energy to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallogentrism in an effort to oppress and silence. (Moi: 103 )

By taking Moi's comment on Cixous as a way of understanding her writings we see that she wants to communicate her readers as she comes up with and finds the ways to do as she does. The women she talks about her readers, women like herself. Thus she is deconstructing the definition of woman in our culture.

Cixous' politics of language in the essay can be seen as a way of rethinking the dichotomies of man/woman, female/male, and feminine/masculine by employing a new style of writing. By newly coined words, unusual collocations, unconventional syntax, she tries to prove that no one can exclude woman from language. The woman is freer than the man because she has no responsibility for the norms and terms of writing language. In this way, Cixous employs a language that is communicative and connective rather than definitive and divisive. She wants women's history must be presented not represented.

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