

Ecriture Feminine ----- Helene Cixous

According to Helene Cixous the use of the words 'feminine', 'femininity' or 'woman' have become a burden and a curse for women. These words have been violently forced on women, because it is society which give the gender specifications. Every human being is born bisexual, though gender identifications might be present at birth. It is only when the children grow up they learn to identify themselves with the adult model of man or woman.

Ecriture feminine or femininity is defined by Helene Cixous in terms of economy, of production and of bodily effects. Gender is not determinedly anatomy, not by the roles played by man or woman but by society.

There are various levels of relationship between body and language. Women's writings too have been written according to man's expectations and dictates. Women write in the language of the man. Yet there can be traced in their writings, certain unuttered questions, which are well disguised by the themes. As Kafka said "One can however not not live." All women who have had access to writings have done so in the classical mode, by following the mainstream patriarchal writings. Yet there are writers who have broken the barricades and have written like women. Colette and Virginia Woolf belong to this category. Cixous herself is powerfully spurred by her desires to write from the woman's point of view because as she says the one who gave her her life is a woman.

Women have been told to idolize man if they cannot brandish the so called power of the phallus. Yet men are not without a fear. Freud has observed that in men there is the castration anxiety, or rather the fear of being weak or of being a woman. Men say that there are two unrepresentable things---- death and feminine sex. Cixous says that men are in reality afraid of women and of their feminine powers. But there are few men who are not afraid of femininity. They look straight into Medusa's face and discover that she is not deadly, but that she is laughing. The laughter which mocks and ridicules man's false pride in his power of the phallus. Freud said women are weak and powerless and dependent on men, because they are castrated and lacking. Cixous vehemently refutes this by pointing out that it is not gender but social conditioning which has made women weak and has confined her to the dark continent. Women have been turned away from their bodies. Right from childhood they have been taught to ignore their bodies and their bodies' needs and urges. They have been taught to conceal them through modesty. They have become victims of patriarchy.

Cixous urges women to write and she considers writing to be the first step towards liberation. They must write through every restriction, barrier, silence and invent an impregnable language of their own. Women have lived throughout history in muffled silence and only in dreams, with stifled urges. When women fight back through their writings, as the Medusa looks back, they will dissolve their restrictions and impossibilities and become the fore bearers of the New Woman. Women's voice will no longer be

suppressed but it will be written out over and against the other. Their language will no longer be the language of men.

It is through the body that women have responded to persecution and to the familial – conjugal enterprise of domestication and to repeated attempts at castrating them. It is also through language that men have suppressed women because women have always functioned within the discourse of men. This in turn had stifled their own voices, needs and desires. The desire of women is a loving desire for a complete living body as well as the soul.

According to Cixous, the New Woman, should create a world for themselves outside their patriarchal confinements. It is dangerous for a woman to be classified, diagnosed and confined within the rules and regulations set by men for them. Women need space—to move freely to fulfill their needs, desires and aspirations. Women are beginning to defy, and refuse to be duped and domesticated. However, they do not act on an egoistic impulse or try to strengthen their narcissism or to verify the weakness of men. She seeks to live in harmony with mutual respect and understanding. Her mission is not to achieve but to maintain self respect, equality and liberty.

Women can best carry out her mission through writing. Their writing should be a search for love, self respect and liberation, which they have been deprived of through the ages. Cixous says that when women combine their energies and voices and views they will never be weak or 'lacking'.