

WOMAN: THE NON-EXISTENT "IMPERFECT MAN" IN SORTIES

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"If I loved him it is because when he hung over my waters,
I saw the reflection of my waters in his eyes."

This was the lot of the handsome / beautiful young Narcissus, son of the river god and the nymph, doomed to grow beside a lake or a fountain, mistaking it to be a pride for the lake, which he simply wasn't. The unfortunate youth would never know / reading that the take cared only for the reflection of his presence in its waters.

This is not a paper on feminism, not is it on feministic theory or its philosophy. Instead, it attempts it explain in single terms some of the complex views and ideas examined by the eminent 20th century French feminist philosopher, Helene Cixous on feminist literary theory, a complex and dynamic area of study. It is on 'writing the body.'

Who am I? No-body – a daughter of chance, a phantom doll –the cause of sufferings?
Wars – the pretext.....

What is my name? I want change life.

What are my battles? I want to fight which is my language?

..... Me, no-body.....

These passionate and vehement outbursts of a bewildered Algerian French girl are not for the Algerians, nor for the French, not for the Germans, nor for the Europeans but for common consumption. This 'daughter of chance' than portrayed her feeble struggles throughout the ages in a world fashioned by man, ruled by man and still dominated by man. This world is a masculine world a logo centric and phallogocentric world - her age-old enemy. Woman, in such a male-oriented and vindictive world has suffered neglect and has had none of the glory. Defined as an object and less than a man and at man's disposal, she is perhaps the most discussed animal in the universe.

Sorties, by Helene Cixous, depict a battle of ideas for supremacy, between the two combatants; the plane is ideological and literary. The male reason grounded by logocentrism and phallogocentrism is stated to be the acknowledged master. Victory for one is obviously defeat for the the 'other' is woman. It is from the stand point that the whole gamut of ideas is viewed and described.

The essay can be divided into three parts logocentrism, l'écriture feminine and phallogocentrism. Significantly, the essayist raises questions but suggests no answers. She studies

the male-constructed literary history in which women have remained sadly neglected and have been deliberately relegated in the margin.

The 3-4 year old girl observes the first thing in the street that the world is divided in half, organized hierarchically, and this distribution is maintained through VIOLENCE. There are those who beg, who die from hunger, misery and despair, and that those are offenders who die of wealth and pride, who stuff themselves, who crush and humiliate, who kill. They walk unashamed in a stolen country, as if they had had the eyes of their souls put out; blind and insensate. History's commonplace gesture is the basic thrust. It is that there have to be the races of men - the masters and the slaves.

A simple definition of the word SORTIE should take us a little further.

SORTIES: French word for the verb 'Sorties' meaning to leave, to exit or to escape.

It is an invasion with a special mission: a combat mission. It is an attack made by besieged soldiers on their besiegers:

A Sortie is (thus) an offensive made by troops coming out from a position of defence. The besieged rise up to attack the besiegers (captors). The captives are women; the captors are men.

Who am I? Where are my battles?

Which is my language?

Who is this 'I', who spoke for me throughout the generations? The questions are about one's breathing, about one's existence, vehement cries in the animated desert of men that have echoedBut to what avail? She tells herself that there has to be 'somewhere' for such persons_ history's condemned, exiled, neglected, exploited, muted and then silenced, at the mad injustice of sane (?) men. A place, she feels does exist which is not economically or politically indebted in the vileness of the male world and has no room for compromises. Such a place is WRITING where the 'other' writes herself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds. For, there are other worlds to sing in. Writing is thus the passageway, the outlet, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the OTHER – 'in me- her- that other (she says) that I am and I am not.

It is important to mention here that Helene Cixous confines her cogent views/arguments only to writing. It is (as she says) writing the body.

'The fact is we are both body and mind'. "l'écriture feminine" is a term used by French critics to designate women's writing. It is a particular way of writing by WOMEN that is characterized by the anti-thesis of phallogocentric writing. Cixous' emphasis is psychological and theoretical rather than social and pragmatic. She does not treat or discuss things in a matter-of-fact way, for pragmatism is concerned with practical results of values or truths.

Logocentrism is Helene Cixous' first subject. The essay describes the process by which male reason is ordered as a series of binary couples or oppositions, in which the other half is always INFERIOR. Our entire culture is based on binary oppositions and we always (tend to) think in terms of pairs.

Victory-defeat, day-night, Light-dark, man -woman, nature –culture, reason-emotion and superior-inferior,

The essay describes a process. This process determined the male reason as a series of binary oppositions. Combining in her person a literary critic and an author of novels and plays, Cixous tries to deconstruct the hierarchical (binary) opposition. Her views are radical, fundamental-advanced in opinion & policies. Her argument centers on feminine writing, which is

the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text. She expands her notion of the connection between women's DESIRE and women's LANGUAGE.

The development of the male (EGO) is from Pre-Oedipal (non-linguistic) - Imaginary to the SYMBOLIC. The non-linguistic is fashioned as SPACE. It is connected to the body of the mother. The symbolic is associated with the Law of the father. Logocentrism in man's world remains indisputable. It is taken to be the word of God or principle of divine reason and creative order identified with Gospel of John with the second person of the TRINITY incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is the divine wisdom manifest in the creation, redemption of the world and often identified with the second of the Trinity. TRINITY: the Lord, the Son and the Holy Ghost. LOGOS: The transcendental belief of logocentrism is: the world is a play of phenomena and there is somewhere a 'centre' that regulates the play of language. Logos in metaphysical world is differently termed. In theistic philosophy, LOGOS means GOD. God is the center or presence of the universe. In Platonic philosophy, LOGOS means ideal world. In Western metaphysics, there is something outside the world of phenomena. God has the priority or privileged status. Logocentrism refers to systems of thought or habits of mind which are reliant upon what Jacques Derrida terms 'the' metaphysics of presence or center. It underwrites and fixes linguistic meaning, but is itself beyond scrutiny or challenge.

LOGOS: Greek "Word" meaning truth; "kentron" – a sharp point. The logocentric world gives man superiorly over woman. The male's dominant drives (fantasies) are erotic and egoist. These get revealed in their writings. A meticulous analysis would reveal how various literary and linguistic features are informed and constructed by these drives or fantasies.

Men are creatures of self Love and conceits. Man, claims Helene Cixous, has much to lose. In relation to what he "gives" to woman, he expects to "gain" more; masculinity has value of virility, authority, power, money or pleasure. All these reinforce man's phallogocentric Narcissism at the same time. Cixous claims that masculine profit is almost always based on social success.

Women (claims Helene Cixous) are a direct contrast to the behaviors of men. Masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis (phallus). Women are not bound by this. Women (she states) pleasure in their gift of changeability, while masculine energy is limited. Feminine energy has vast resources yet..... She (still) remains 'vulnerable' to the logocentric, phallogocentric world. This world is fabricated by men.

"A woman doesn't speak. She throws her trembling body out into the air....."

L'écriture féminine, the anti-thesis of phallogocentric writing is Cixous' second subject in the essay. In political as well as social relationships man has always been the Giver or Provider. Woman has always been the Receiver.

Sigmund Freud and Jones supported the thesis that there is a natural anatomical determination of sexual difference. Phallogocentrism on this ground has position of power. The essay deals, in detail, with the opposing positions taken by Freud and Jones. Freud held the thesis that 'woman is imperfect man,' the fatality of the feminine situation, according to him, is the RESULT of an anatomical defectiveness, lacking in completeness; showing imperfection, shortcoming and fault.

Napoleon said: Anatomy is Destiny:

Freud held that the mother being the first love object for both the sexes, it is only for the Boy that love of the opposite sex is natural. For Jones, femininity is a self-governing essence. It is the inner nature or most important equality of a thing; something which is its own justification. The little GIRL experiences a primary DESIRE with regard to the father. She has a primary love for the opposite sex.

The sole motto of 'what is mine, hence what is good (The selfsame) dominates the scene. That which limits it, threatens my-own-good is the OTHER. Good is good-for-me, the selfsame. In a hierarchically organized relationship, the SAME is what rules, names, defines and assigns the OTHER. In unmistakable terms, it is the reduction of a person to a 'no-body', to a position of OTHER. This does imply that there has to be a slave for or master. And there can be no economic-political power without down-trodden; 'cattle under the yoke'. 'Otherness' is thus a paradox and literary history has not been friendly to it. The 'other' is only to be recaptured and destroyed.

It is relevant to refer to the Swiss historian, J. J. Bachofen (1815-76)-historian of a non-history, who aimed to show that the various peoples (Greek, Roman, Hebrew) have passed through an age of GYNOCRACY, "The reign of the mother" before arriving at patriarchy, which (the age) remains without history. The humiliated man, according to Beachofen, has repressed the situation and historical oblivion has buried it. History has hasthen remained dark the woman and she have seen her character die is history's pages which has been man's ding. Woman seems to have forcibly abandoned the glory and distinction of being mankind's MOTHER. Women the other that stands reduced to a voice, enfeebled and unheard whose subdued intensity and tremulous richness seems to envision the mystery of a world of feeling that must remain untold.

The universally held assumption is that man's purpose in line is to serve God, the State, Society, his self-advancement, while woman's purpose is to server man.

Milton: 'He for God only, she for God in him.'

Man is seen as the NORM, woman as the OTHER, not merely different, but inferior and lacking. They are considered to be bold, strong, assertive, logical, independent, aspiring and rational women, on the contrary, are considered to be timid, yielding, gentle, dependent self-sacrificing, intuitive and emotional. Studies in feminism make woman the subject of the story and NOT the object of male desire and male satisfaction. This view is opposite to the male conspiracy that places woman under the yoke.

The contrariness between man and woman places the lattes to a position of disadvantage.

Philosophy always associates women with passivity. The mother is considered irrelevant and even overlooked completely in kinship setting. Father is central. Helene Cixous claims that this situation is mirrored in literary history, for philosophy is self is built on the premise of the inferiority of women, and this giver the father appearance that the inferiority of women is necessary for the survival of the system.

'What would happen is the rock upon which the church was founded would crumble?'

The essayist foresees on feminine writing French feminists say, 'Even' is language, 'Woman' as a speaker I does not exist.

To quote Freud:

Man: always the subject – the author

Woman: always the object – the reader

Male & female being contradictory terms (not complementary), the female becomes the negation of the male. She is not a being, she is an apology.

The female style of writing, as the French feminist critics argued, has a particular characteristic. It is different from that of man's, which has chronology and orderliness. The female writing has open ends and has connection of ideas (in style). There are gaps, and breaks and broken syntaxes. Consequently, the female practice of writing develops definite female consciousness.

This is the argument advanced in favour of writing by women.

Language gives women 'expressive freedom' & power. The dominant male culture sets the norms and controls them. Women, the muted groups, have to express themselves through the accepted categories. Their expression has to adjust itself to the framework decided by men: They have to mediate their feelings and beliefs through the already established structures.

Cixous says that the language of the woman has to be the established language (male language) to express them. The writing of women should not really be outside the male tradition, but inside their own. This linguistic model of difference poses a question.

Can women treat men's language as 'foreign' or alien? Can it be the other way round? Can woman not use men's language? It is admitted that there is no separate female language.

French feminists believe that it captures that consciousness, woman must capture the speech, for they have been found to use a language which is foreign___ built by men for projecting their mental-serial- cultural categories.

The logocentric plan Cixous claims, was designed to create a foundation for phallogentrism: It would ensure guaranteed Masculine superiority and supremacy in the social order. The undermining of this foundation would "transform the functioning of all society". She describes HOW the phallogentric system has classified and isolated woman.

"We have been turned away from our bodies shamefully, we have been taught to be unaware of them."

A look at the distinction between female and femininity shows that female is a biological concept related to female body and female experience. Femininity is essentially a product of culture and surroundings; it is culturally produced. The patriarchal ideology, in its cultural dimension, creates femininity.

Simone de Beauvoir says:

'One is never born a woman, one becomes so.'

It is wrong to argue that women have stood illuminating ages; but it is true that these ages have been unworthy of the womankind. Jacques L'acan, French psychologist speaks of a child's pre-Idéal stage. It is the world of the mother and infant. It is a world of imagination having no language. The Ideal stage is the world of the father, a world of language. The child develops a patriarchal viewpoint, along with language.

Phallogentrism: Phallus- Greek phallus – penis:

The term signifies a system in which the phallus (the male genital organ) is held to be a symbol and source of POWER. The symbol of power that gives meaning to other object is the privileged signifier. Desired by the mother IT becomes an object of identification for the child.

Phallogentrism is the enemy. This ideology has produced more than one victim. Woman exists only as a fragment. History itself is a story of phallogentrism.

"Where are my battles? My fellow soldiers, what am I saying..... the comrades, women, my companions – in – arms ?"

The young Algerian French girl, having often seen her character die in the pages of history, is sacking answers to her questions.

Various peoples (Greek, Roman, Hebrew) and J. J. Bachofen, Swiss historian of a non-history tells us, have passed through an age of "The reign of the Mother", before arriving at Patriarchy. This age remains without history and can only be deduced. The situation having been humiliating for man has been repressed (according to Bachofen's Theory) and covered by historical oblivion Gynocracy, he says, is organized materialism.

Anatomy cannot be Destiny. And inversely, if Destiny were Anatomy (as held by Napoleon) the world would have been peopled only by Napoleons; which it is not. What has to be kept in mind is that the fulfillment of human potential must be judged not in terms of happiness, but in terms of LIBERTY. This is woman's due. The feminist thinkers do know that woman's journey and quest for liberation from the yokes of logocentrism and phallogocentrism -from the Egypt of male servitude to the Promised Land (Jerusalem) is going to be a difficult one.

Shall we leave it to TIME to weigh and judge and decide the question for us? But then time is the slowest judge of us all.

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