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From silence to speech: women's breathing space in "The Laugh of the Medusa"

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Abstract. The study focuses on the empowering aspects of women's writing referring Helen Cixous influential work "The Laugh of the Medusa". Cixous passionately advocates for women to embrace writing, as a tool for self-expression and liberation believing that it has the potential to not transform individual lives but also shape culture, history, and society. The authors suggest that by expressing themselves, contemporary women can establish their place in the world just as the Medusas gaze turned enemies into stone. The paper also explores the connection between language, subjectivity and diversity which are related in feminist discourse. It emphasises the importance of reclaiming language that has historically marginalised women and highlights the need to develop a vocabulary that truly reflects their experiences and aspirations. Important is to create an environment where women are given the space and support to communicate their thoughts and feelings. It is crucial for women to cultivate their own voices, honour their bodies and utilise language to challenge patriarchal norms. The continuous fight for gender equality and empowerment is fueled by Cixous's appeal for women to reclaim their voices and experiences. The research stresses about providing women the room and encouragement they need to express themselves. Women's writing may act as a catalyst for the destruction of repressive power systems, to pave the way for a just, equal, humane, and free world for women.

Keywords: women's writing, language, feminism, gender equality, H el ene Cixous

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От молчания к речи: женское дыхание в «Смехе Медузы»

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Аннотация. Основное внимание уделяется аспектам женского писательства, расширяющим возможности женщин, во влиятельной работе Элен Сиксу «Смех Медузы». Сиксу страстно выступает за то, чтобы женщины восприняли письмо как инструмент самовыражения и освобождения, полагая, что оно может не только изменить частную жизнь, но и сформировать культуру, историю и общество. В исследовании доказывалось, что через самовыражение современные женщины могут утвердить свое место в мире подобно тому, как взгляд Медузы превращал врагов в камень. Изучается связь между языком, субъективностью и разнообразием, которые взаимосвязаны в феминистском дискурсе. Указывается на важность восстановления языка, который исторически маргинализировал женщин; подчеркивается необходимость развития их словарного запаса, который действительно отражает их опыт и стремления. Требуется создать среду, в которой женщинам будет предоставлено пространство и поддержка для выражения своих мыслей и чувств. Женщинам крайне важно развивать свой собственный голос, уважать свое тело и использовать язык, чтобы бросить вызов патриархальным нормам. Непрерывная борьба за гендерное равенство и расширение прав и возможностей подогревается призывом Элен Сиксу к женщинам вернуть себе свои голоса и опыт. Подчеркивается важность предоставления женщинам возможности поощрения, необходимой для самовыражения. Делается вывод, что женские произведения могут послужить катализатором разрушения репрессивных систем власти с целью создания справедливого, равного, гуманного и свободного мира для женщин.

Ключевые слова: женское письмо, язык, феминизм, гендерное равенство, Элен Сиксу

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Introduction

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies.

Hélène Cixous, 1976

When women write they enjoy their breathing space. Helen Cixous, the famous French philosopher and literary critic calls it the *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Medusa's laughter stands for the laughter of women who would be triumphant

when they will express freely and loudly. Cixous views on women's writing and expresses her belief in its power to bring change in the lives of all women, the culture and history and the society at large. In the paper we explore the dimensions of women's writing and emancipation of women by exploring themselves and appreciating the space of empowerment.

Medusa, is a Greek mythological figure. It is believed that Medusa was the only mortal out of the most famous of monsters-Gorgons. Any one who looked directly at Medusa turned to stone. Medusa in greek world petrified everyone opposing her; similarly, today's Medusa can also laugh triumphantly as women must engage in writing for themselves and for other women. Women have been barred, diverted from expressing freely because of their bodies. But the same body, under the same laws, history, and culture can determine the future.

Professor Helen Cixous, a French poet, dramatist, philosopher, literary critic, rhetorician, and feminist author, wrote an essay titled "The Laugh of the Medusa". It was originally written in 1975, in French and was translated and released in English in 1975. Helena Cixous is considered as one of the three mother of the post structuralist feminist theory. The other two are Julia Kristeva and Lucy Irigaray. Since 1990 these three together have considerably influenced french feminism and feminist psychoanalysis. Cixous' writing was influenced by Freud, Lacan, Derrida and Arthur Rimbaud.

Discussion

The study focuses on women's writing and about impact of it on women and on the overall society. Cixous expresses her belief in its power to bring change in the lives of all women, the culture and history and the society at large. "The Laugh of the Medusa" stands for the laughter of women who would be triumphant when they will express freely and loudly – the desires of their body and mind.

Cixous writes as a woman toward women. She reminds them to be honest with themselves. She says, listen to what your bodies have to communicate, know your body, respect it, hear carefully its vibrations, its notes, its rhythm-synchronise all in a symphony. Women have to find their own voices, speak and write honestly what they want to. Women cannot ignore the vibrating chord within their body, rather they have to acknowledge it. Cixous (1976) promotes a radical feminist literary style that celebrates the body and the unconscious while rejecting patriarchal norms. She exhorts women to oppose and disrupt patriarchal power systems using words.

Cixous talks of "the infinite richness of women's constitutions", "their imaginary is inexhaustible", "their stream of phantasms is incredible". Every woman has her own universe that she has been covertly living since early childhood. Within their bodies are worlds of searching, that elaborate their knowledge. Their bodies are experimental fields where they are able to accurately interrogate their desires and passions. J. Kristeva (1980) makes the case that literature and the arts may provide a forum for delving into the complexity of human subjectivity and identity to investigate the connection between language and desire. She emphasizes how crucial it is to challenge conventional language and social standards.

Women must feel the urge to celebrate the functioning of their bodies. Women also have their natural flows, they must claim their desires, and freely express the unheard songs to the world. They are not demonic figures, there is no need to feel guilty about what they are. They must examine why they are so. There is need to create true text of women without being scared of the entire capitalist machinery that is patriarchal and anti women.

Men have divided women, have made them stand against each other and have constructed the infamous logic of anti love. Women see each other through men's perspective and interpret through their minds. Women are used by men to satisfy their imperialistic desires. This has lowered women's self image. It is imperative to understand that the new woman should be liberated from the old one. According to S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar (1979), cultural conventions and expectations that consigned women authors to the home sphere often held them captive throughout the 19th century. They suggest the metaphor of the "madwoman in the attic" to represent the suppressed creativity and yearning of women. While attempting to understand the relationships between race, gender, and sexual orientation, A. Lorde (1984) makes the case for the value of valuing diversity.

I write to you from the depths of a solitude in which I have just recognized myself. I should not be the prey of this lie which is my fate. And yet I was shipwrecked in this abyss, I cannot touch the bottom, and I am drowning slowly (Cixous, 1976).

Cixous talk of breathing space for women. The body censored is like the breath censored. When women will speak freely, their substance will reach to every woman; thus strengthening the entire community of women. Men usually see women in terms of sex. Cixous sees women writing as a way to realise their individuality that will transform women, the history and culture. Now is the time to break away from the past, to forget it, to reshape it. Two things are to be done, one to destroy and the other to project. According to V. Woolf (1929), to produce work that represents their experiences and viewpoints, female authors need to be financially independent and have their own place. She emphasizes how crucial a nurturing atmosphere is for women's artistic expression.

Cixous strongly writes as a woman toward women. She reminds them to be honest with themselves. She says, find your own voices, speak and write honestly what you want to. This journey from 'silence to speech' has to be taken by every woman. According to E. Showalter (1985), a feminist method to literary criticism that may find and promote women's voices and opinions, women's work has often been neglected and excluded from the literature.

Cixous talks about the relationship of one woman to another, of all women to each other. The first music of the first voice of love passes on from mother to daughter and from one woman to another. This nectar within her; when expressed would be in white ink. Cixous implores women to write out of love of self, of culture and of life. So that today's persues may not behead Medusa and another Athena not fix the head on the shield.

Speech is the most natural phenomenon of any living entity. Birds, animals, insects, trees, plants, flowers or elements of Nature like Water, Air, Sky, Earth all have their speech-their expression. Speech is Life. To be speechless is like being

lifeless. Speech thus is as essential as breath. When the speech of a living entity is obstructed, controlled or suppressed it is like depriving that entity of life itself. So when women's voices are not heard it is a striking sign of suppression of their breath, their life. When women do not speak it is also a striking sign of lifelessness.

Women have innate qualities of creation. They are sensitive and compassionate to everything and everyone around them. Women tend to explain and express their concern, their feelings. They have been granted varied capabilities of expression. Women use these to speak, to express the true emotions of the heart, and experiences of the body and mind. They dance, they sing, they draw, they embroider, they make floor-paintings and wall-paintings, they decorate objects, they make clothes and accessories. They also write, they speak, they shout, they quarrel; but whatever women do to express themselves is one form or the other of their speech. This speech is honest and trustworthy.

What matters most in the social setup are their desires and wishes. They want to dismantle the structures of power and privilege – access to which is denied to them. Cixous inspires women to speak, and to breathe, and to live as strong figures. She also inspires them to be compassionate, the natural flow of which must reach from one woman to another and from one generation to another. Only then can women exist as living entities.

Cixous addresses the value of language and the need for a new vocabulary that incorporates the experiences of women. She argues that women need to take back the terminology that has been used against them and develop their own vocabulary that represents their goals and experiences. Cixous is a supporter of a language that frees women from patriarchal society's restrictions so they may speak honestly and freely.

L. Irigaray (1977) contends that women's bodies and experiences are often left out of philosophical discourse while criticising standard Western ideas of subjectivity. She stresses the need for a new vocabulary that can communicate women's subjectivity and the need of embracing diversity. She emphasizes the need of acknowledging and rejecting the patriarchal ideals that underlie these depictions in addition to recognising the possibilities of horror as a medium for feminist critique. G. Anzaldúa (1987), while advocating for a new *mestiza* consciousness that may welcome and enjoy hybridity, speaks to the challenges of balancing many identities and cultural practices and emphasising the need of dismantling current power systems and developing fresh means of expression.

L. Irigaray (1985) looks at how language and women's bodies are related, arguing that traditional philosophical and linguistic discourse has overlooked the reality of women. She highlights the need of recognising diversity and offers a fresh language that could better capture the subjectivity and experiences of women. In exploring the connections between feminism and psychoanalysis, S. Kofman (1985) makes the case that both might provide a forum for delving into the experiences and subjectivity of women. She criticises conventional psychoanalytic theories that fail to account for the experiences of women, and she suggests a feminism-based strategy that might upend patriarchal expectations and hierarchies.

As far as western and non-western women voices are concerned, on one hand, the propensity of western feminist studies to generalise women's experiences and disregard the particulars of non-western settings is criticised by C.T. Mohanty (1988). She advocates for a more intersectional strategy that acknowledges the variety of experiences that women have as well as the influence of colonialism and imperialism on feminism. While on the other hand, the western feminist rhetoric to talk for and about “subaltern” women without allowing them a voice is criticised by G.C. Spivak (1988) by asking for a more inclusive and intersectional feminist politics and says that the power systems that marginalise these women also make it difficult for them to be heard and respected.

These sources provide a variety of theoretical and artistic viewpoints on women's writing, emphasising the need of questioning society conventions and establishing safe places for women to express themselves. The writers promote a women centric approach to literature and criticism that may unearth and celebrate women's viewpoints and experiences. It is imperative that the society listens to and values women's voices.

From Cixous's renowned work, the idea of “The Laugh of the Medusa” as a representation of women's rebellious strength and creative potential develops. The additional references build on and contextualise this notion, highlighting how crucial it is to give women's writing a voice and to challenge patriarchal expectations and systems. These sources provide a wide variety of thoughts and viewpoints on women's writing, its difficulties, and the potential it brings. They provide an invaluable resource for anybody looking to learn more about the achievements made by women to literature and culture as well as to promote the freedom of speech for all women. According to L. Bell (1989), women's literature may question and disrupt present cultural standards while also creating a platform for women's voices to be heard. Important is to concentrate on the need of fostering an atmosphere that is supportive to women.

Conclusion

The need for women to reject the patriarchal systems that have silenced and oppressed them by writing about and reclaiming their own voices and experiences, is advocated by Cixous. The writing by women can be a source of strength and emancipation, and by writing about other women and themselves, women may carve out a place for their own originality and self-expression. Women must reclaim their voices, their roles and must advocate for a rewriting of power relations.

The inspiring essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” by Cixous urges women to embrace their identities, aspirations, and voices. She argues that women need to express themselves with writing and coin new vocabulary to explain their goals and experiences. It can be powerful for women to use their expressions and narratives to break free from the exploitative patriarchal social arrangements and imposed restrictions to create a new future for both themselves, and the society at large.

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