Helene Cixous and Ecriture feminine.

Feminist extensions of the work of Lacan, Derrida, and Deleuze produced certain research works that combined the disciplines of literary theory and psychology to explore language as an instrument for radical change. Introduced by Helene Cixous in her essay, The Laugh of the Medusa, ecriture feminine refers to a uniquely feminine style of writing characterized by disruptions in the text, such as gaps, silences, puns, new images and so on. It is eccentric, incomprehensible and inconsistent, and the difficulty to understand it is attributed to centuries of suppression of the female voice, which now speaks in a borrowed language. Believed to originate from the mother in the stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centred verbal language, this pre-linguistic and unconscious potentiality manifests itself in those literary texts which, abolishing all repressions, undermine and subvert all significations, the logic and the closure of the phallocentric language, and opens into a joyous free play of meanings.

Helene Cixous a feminist writer born in 1937, along with Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray are a group of feminist writers considered as the French Feminists. They share the ideas of feminism propagated by the feminists of France in the sixties, who were highly influenced by the works of Derrida,Lacan, Foucault.They were highly influenced by the theories of post structuralism and psychoanalysis’ .Helene Cixous and others both used these ideas and critiqued them to question and challenge male hegemony. The idea of Derrida was used to critique the notion of binaries and the very nature of language and the way language plays a heavy role in the subordination of women as majority of the concepts are and ideas are prejudiced against women and are socially and culturally constructed by male hegemony to keep women under perpetual subordination. In her work Laugh of the Medusa, Cixous has written in a language like that of poetry and her intention is to break the structural norms of logic and argumentation set by patriarchy and instead prefer a poetic medium that is more imaginative and is not bound by the limits of prosaic logic and hence in this we see the rebel of Cixous against the boundaries set for women by patriarchy. Through this work Cixous is urging women to write extensively as this is the platform that can change the history and oppose the male hegemony. When Cixous talks of ecriture feminine she does not necessarily mean writing by women, and she certainly does not mean writing that is girlish or gushing. For Cixous feminine writing is a practice that can never be theorized and can never be enclosed or coded and hence cannot be tied to any gender definition .

By writing, Cixous believes, women can reclaim themselves. “The Laugh of the Medusa” is also a call to arms, urging women to reclaim their bodies and, by extension, their desires and identities through writing. For a variety of socio-cultural reasons ,masculine writing has reigned supreme over feminine writing. Cixous has objected to masculine writing and thinking because they are cast in binary oppositions .Man has unnecessarily segmented reality by coupling concepts and terms in pairs of polar opposites, one of which is always privileged over the other. Some of these dichotomous pairs are ,

Activity /passivity

Sun/moon

Culture/nature

Speaking/writing

High /low

In Cixous’s view ,all these dichotomies find their inspiration in the fundamental dichotomous couple Man/Woman in which man is associated with all that is active , cultural, light, high and generally positive and women with all that is passive, natural, dark, low or generally negative. Moreover in these dichotomous pairs ,the first term is that from which the second term departs or deviates. Man is the ‘self’ and woman is his ‘other’. Thus women exists in man’s world on his terms as the other or the ‘unthought’. Cixous challenged women to write themselves out of the world men have constructed out of them by putting into words the ‘unthought’. By developing a way of writing that is not limited by the rules that currently govern languages, women will be able to change the way the western world thinks and writes and with it women’s place in the world .

Concerned with traditional representations of women by men in literature and other scholarly texts, Cixous begins her analysis by invoking the classical figure of Medusa, but she does so by refiguring how Medusa has been represented through the ages. In this way, Cixous reclaims her. Instead of being painted as weak and lacking, or as frightful monsters like Medusa, they can share the full wealth of their experience and redefine what it means to be feminine. Cixous has critiqued this notion where women are portrayed either as a monster or as “an unexplored abyss”, an idea proposed by Freud where he insinuates women as a being which is the negative of what man stands for: they are shown as lacking beings ( lacking the penis). The mystery of their nature can’t be explored or understood. Cixous uses the metaphor of the Laugh of the Medusa as a tool to reject the very idea of binaries that are deeply ingrained in western patriarchal thoughts as she says that you have only to look at the medusa straight on to see who she really is and she is not deadly and terrifying but she is beautiful and she is laughing.

Through writing, women can rewrite the "history of life somewhere else." According to Cixous, writing and creating a feminine empire of writing would allow women to redefine their relationships with men, with the world, and with themselves.

Luce Irigaray posits a “woman’s writing” which evades male monopoly and the risk of appropriation into the existing system. “Women’s writing” draws not upon the monolithic phallus, but upon the diversity, fluidity and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and the functions of female sexual experiences. Julia Kristeva introduces the concept of chora, or pre-Iinguistic, pre-Oedipal, and unsystematised signifying process, centred on the mother, which she calls the “semiotic”, which is repressed on the acquisition of the father-controlled syntactically ordered, logical language, the “symbolic”. The semiotic language can break out in a revolutionary  way, as a “heterogeneous destructive causality” that disrupts and disperses the authoritarian subject and strikes free of the oppressive order and rationality of our standard discourse which, as a product of the law of the father, consigns women to a negative and marginal status. While masculine language represents the symbolic (it is linear, authoritative and realistic), ecriture feminine behaves like the semiotic, disrupts the symbolic and threatens to unleash chaos where there is order.

 Emily Dickinson‘s poetry is filled with strange images, breaks and pauses that display the use of ecriture feminine. Similarly, Kristeva locates ecriture feminine in the experimentative forms of avant-garde and Modernist writers, Julia Kristeva wrote the highly influential  *Revolution in Poetic Language(*1974 ). Its account of two new areas of discourse, the semiotic and the symbolic, proposed new ideas on the formation of identity, especially the mother-child relationship, which have transformed ideas of women’s function and significance. Simone de Beauvoir’s work provided inspiration for large sectors of the movement. Autobiography or autobiographical fiction were popular modes, combining lively linguistic experiment with innovative analyses of individual experience, focusing especially on hitherto taboo areas, such as female sexuality and the family and its discontents.