

## Hélène Cixous's *Écriture féminine*, from Illusion to Reality: A Critical Examination of the Reception of Her Theory in Selected Persian Theoretical Studies

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### Abstract

As feminist movements gained momentum in the second half of the twentieth century, many literary theorists set out to address the possibility and quality of feminine writing. One of them was Hélène Cixous, the French critic who introduced the theory of *écriture féminine* in her classic paper "The Laugh of the Medusa," causing a lot of controversy in Western academic circles. In Iran, too, many researchers have dealt with *écriture féminine* to analyze it from literary and socio-moral perspectives. Nonetheless, for certain reasons, including the absence of a complete Persian translation of "The Laugh of the Medusa," many studies conducted by Iranian researchers suffer from ideologically-laden or inaccurate readings of Cixous's theory. The present study launches a critical examination of one of the most frequently read Persian articles on *écriture féminine* to identify certain established stereotypes in related theoretical Persian studies. The paper, then, attempts to resolve the ambiguities about *écriture féminine* within the context of Poststructuralist Feminism and by citing Cixous's own words. Thus, the questions tackled by the present study are how *écriture féminine* has been received in theoretical Persian studies and whether these receptions have been accurate. In so doing, the study first provides a brief explanation of the main themes of Cixous's paper and, then, the selected theoretical Persian studies are critiqued. The findings demonstrate that, contrary to conventional suppositions, not only is *écriture féminine* not limited to the writings of female authors, but it does not necessarily reject any such socio-moral institutions as marriage, pregnancy, and motherhood, either.

**Keywords:** *Écriture féminine*, Poststructuralist Feminism, Sex, Gender, Motherhood

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

One of Cixous's most important theories is her theory of *écriture féminine* which has been discussed and elaborated on for years. The present study seeks

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to find out how the theory of *écriture féminine* has been received in theoretical research studies in Iran and how accurate and comprehensive these receptions have been. To answer these questions, first, the main components of her theory are explained based on her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" and, then, theoretical studies on this concept are examined.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The present study draws upon Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine*. Cixous finds women's body a great source of plurality and polyphony and believes that capacities exclusive to women, such as pregnancy and motherhood can make possible establishing a special form of relationship with the other, which is represented in writing in the form of fluidity and endlessness. The *écriture féminine* Cixous has in mind neither suppresses nor sets limitations. As a poststructuralist feminist, she focuses on historical binaries such as 'man/woman' and 'self/other' and tries to subvert the patriarchal social and discursive system.

## 3. Methodology

The present study aims to examine the reception of *écriture féminine* in Persian theoretical studies on literature. The study mainly focuses on examining Qodratollah Taheri's criticism of the theory of *écriture féminine* based on the essay "The Laugh of the Medusa."

## 4. Discussion and Analysis

In *écriture féminine*, the adjective 'féminine', unlike the interpretations made in most Persian theoretical studies, does not merely cover the female gender. In other words, Cixous believes that men can get involved in *écriture féminine* as long as they consciously and actively resist the naturalizing norms of society so that they liberate themselves from the network of masculine social contracts. In the article "The Laugh of the Medusa," the metaphorical aspect of *écriture féminine* has been emphasized. According to Cixous, femininity and masculinity are fluid concepts and gender alone cannot determine femininity or masculinity. Gender differences, to Cixous, are fictional and rather than such distinctions, the representation of gender in society, esp. in writing, is of importance to her. In other words, gender and how it is constructed should be examined rather than whether the writer is a woman or a man.

## 5. Conclusion

In the present paper, we argued that since the essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" and other major works by Cixous have not been fully translated into Persian, many Iranian researchers have had an inaccurate, fallacious or

ideological reception of Cixous's feminist theory. An example of such a reception is Taheri's article which we have examined in the present paper. We studied the common clichés and problems with Persian theoretical studies on the theory of *écriture féminine*, and also showed that this theory is neither exclusive to female writers nor opposes common social values and institutions such as marriage, pregnancy and motherhood.

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