

EVOLUTION OF ÉCRITURE FÉMININE IN CONTEMPORARY  
FRANCOPHONE LITERATURE

by

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In 2022 Annie Ernaux was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for her story *La Place* (A Man's Place), the story of her father, his life, and their relationship. This grand honor came as a shock to those who for years had deemed her work as depressing and populist, dismissing her previous pieces as shameless in their brutally frank depictions of life. Ernaux straddles memoir, auto-writing, and fiction, against the insults of sexist critics referring to her as “Madame Ovary.” Undeterred, Ernaux writes the effaced, representing the disenfranchised in meticulous vignettes highlighting gender and class in postwar France. Hélène Cixous, a French feminist author, argues in her essay “Le Rire de la Méduse,” (The Laugh of the Medusa) that women must not only write, as empowerment comes through expression, but must write through their bodies. This notion of embodied writing offers empowerment and reclamation, a different horizon for the phallogocentric landscape of literature and, fundamentally, language itself. With lucid awareness and consideration of its controversiality, this thesis works to uncover a mode in which Cixous’ essay— impassioned, dynamic, singularly influential—may nonetheless dialogue with broader contemporary Francophone cultural and linguistic discourses, as instantiated by many other prominent female authors. These writers include Assia Djebar, Marie NDiaye, and Nina Bouraoui. Through their works, this research explores how the concepts of Cixous have manifested in literature today. These novelists all articulate their experiences and identities through subversions of the memoir form to tell their stories, with particular emphasis on the corporeality of women and demonstrative efforts to reclaim the body through their writing even within the confines of the gender-marked French language.

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## Introductions

### Research Questions

How is *écriture féminine* characterized and embodied in current Francophone literature? How is it marked in narrative writing, and how are these authors shaping and transforming the genre of memoir? Why is this evolution of Cixous' theory necessary; what gap in contemporary literature does auto-fiction fill?

### Methodology

This thesis will examine literature from two countries, France and Algeria, using select works of several authors of both theory, narrative fiction, and memoir to explore the writing of the body in a Francophone context. The two countries will be linked through the framework of French-Algerian author Hélène Cixous and her essay "Le Rire de la Meduse" (The Laugh of the Medusa), where the very notion of *écriture féminine* was created. Following the tradition of literature-based theses, this comparative account of the works will be conducted through close readings, contextualization, and cross-disciplinary theoretical foundations.

My original system for selecting authors related only to the genre, gender, and location of each writer; I wanted every author under consideration to be alive today, thus marking their relevance in contemporary literature. However, I soon realized that my initial French author, Annie Ernaux, and even Cixous herself, are from an older generation, and their works reflect it. The state of women's writing has continued to evolve from their influence, and it is therefore imperative to bring in younger voices as well. This allows me to compare not only two countries, but multiple generations, and examine the notion of writing through one's body in its continuous growth. I will therefore consider the works of Assia Djebar, who, though recently deceased, lived

through the same eras as Ernaux and Cixous. For considering the works of younger writers, I have selected Marie NDiaye and Nina Bouraoui. Each author will be examined through 1-3 source materials from their bodies of work, with an approach of close reading to analyze the text, pulling passages that trace to the ideas of why we write ourselves, what writing means to these authors, and why, for so many, it is an inherently gendered art. The works chosen from each of them prioritize memoir writings or autobiographical components, ranging from the more editorialized “auto-fiction” of Bouraoui in *Garçon Manqué* to the actual diary entries published by Ernaux in *Se Perdre*.

The work of Cixous, which serves as the establishing theory for this investigation, is presented first in dialogue with their accompanying criticism as we determine how to use *écriture féminine* today. Several other academic essays are employed from some of the many scholars who have already examined the selected works, used to supplement the research which is mainly founded in personal interpretations and arguments constructed from close reading and analysis of the texts.

Finally, as this thesis examines the French language the act of translation is occasionally necessary. I am most interested in the integrity of the texts and centering the voices of the authors rather than the translators, therefore all English translations will appear in footnotes. In the event where a professional translation is not available for the text, I will be interpreting the works myself. This translation will be conducted careful consideration and research using my background in French as well as any external aids, such as dictionaries, needed to fully modify the material for my audience, and will be marked accordingly as: (My Translation).

## Presenting *écriture féminine*

« Je parlerai de l'écriture féminine : de ce qu'elle fera. Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, dont elles ont été éloignées aussi violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps; pour les mêmes raisons, par la même loi, dans le même but mortel. Il faut que la femme se mene au texte- comme au monde, et à l'histoire-, de son propre mouvement. » (*Le Rire de la Méduse*, 37)<sup>1</sup>

And so begins Hélène Cixous' 1975 manifesto, her call to arms, for women must write and return to the body and the history from which they have been excluded. *Écriture féminine* is the vehicle for women to write women, a revolutionary discourse which exceeds, by necessity, systemic phallogentrism, created by those who break through automatism and reject subjugation. For the following investigation into the evolution of this slippery theory, *écriture féminine* is considered to consist of:

1. A feminine syntax, which must be seized!
2. Embodiment: expression for the dual reclamation of writing and body
3. A female (c'est-à-dire, féministe?) collection of works.
4. A laugh

Denying the precedent stricture of hegemonic literature, Cixous doesn't explicitly define *écriture féminine*; rather it is more important the writing-the-body occurs, that it appears against patriarchal structures, than that it's articulated in one way. Breaking free of these constraints will allow women to disrupt the reification of the past essential identity; it poses a radical break to enrich literature globally.

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<sup>1</sup> "I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. 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-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement." (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 875)

A product of its time, Cixous' essay prompted a slew of anti-essentialist criticisms, and theorists like Ann Rosalind Jones examine *écriture féminine* under the conceptual framework of *féminité*. She discerns which she criticizes as overly vague and unhelpfully idealist, fatally passive concerning any constructive political movement they supposedly hope to inspire. Jones praises the investigation of the intricacies of language and representation which had thus far limited women's self-knowledge and self-expression; however, she rejects the notion of the body as an appropriate launchpad for the systems that attempt to distance women from their sexuality. (Jones 252, 255) If femininity is understood as a universal, biological affair, it functions as another force that flattens individuality and reduces women to a monolith. Furthermore, she consolidates the interpretation of Cixous's *féminité* as celebrating differences from men, rather than celebrating the diversity of womanhood apart from a male reference point (Jones 256). Establishing a "feminine" identity in relation to or as a counterpoint of "masculine" relegates it to the unknown, which is often a space of marginalization and insignificance. Cixous attempts to preemptively address her use of "woman" as a flattening signifier, knowing reality recognizes the inherent multiplicity of the feminine, and hopes to avoid the prescription of a singular archetype.

« Quand je dis "la femme"... je parle de la femme en sa lutte inévitable avec l'homme classique ; et d'une femme-sujet universelle, qui doit faire advenir les femmes à leur(s) sens et leur histoire. Mais il faut dire, avant tout, qu'il n'y a pas, aujourd'hui même, et malgré l'énormité du refoulement qui les a maintenues dans ce "noir" qu'on essaie de leur faire reconnaître comme leur attribut, une femme générale, une femme type. » (RDLM, 38-39)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "When I say "woman," I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history. But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression that has kept them in the "dark" -that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute-there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman." (LOTM, 875-876)



Rather, Cixous hopes to unify “les femmes” in their fight against the patriarchal structures which she views as universal—but this ambition risks obliterating nuance and diversity of experience. Jones’ conclusion cautions that genuine empowerment of women can only come from *fémininité*’s—and subsequently, *écriture féminine*’s— extension beyond the Île-de-France, and the acknowledgment of its many other possible forms (Jones 261).

Scholar Katherine Binhammer rereads Jones’ mismanaged collapse of feminine into femaleness. She argues “feminine” ought to be read metonymically; feminine does not mean female directly but is instead “the metaphor that is not a metaphor is a metonymy” (Binhammer, 76). As a contiguous function, metonymic interpretation circumvents the binary nature of essentialist debates, allowing more practical, material considerations to take effect. She specifically extends this argument to address the use of “bisexual” in Cixous’ writing. Cixous’ concept of bisexuality, for Binhammer, does not neuter, neutralize, or denature differences. It celebrates distinct yet omnipresent libidinal economies.

“She does not deny that these economies are overdetermined by social and cultural signifying systems which produce different relations of historical, sexed subjects to libidinal economies but, by positing bisexuality, Cixous is able to open up the possibility of an elsewhere in which sexual difference will no longer exist in its present form (“It is impossible to predict what will become of sexual difference in another time (in two or three hundred years” ?”) (1986, 83). In such a future, when males and females explore the infinite possibilities of their bisexuality, in this world of elsewhere, 'woman' will no longer hold us captive, and the either/or of essentialism will be worn out.” (Binhammer, 77)

The bisexuality which Cixous posits usurps the stable sex oppositions by spotlighting the internal individual differences, instead of the differences between genders, even claiming that each of us are born bisexual (Binhammer, 77). This attention to queerness further explored by Cixous herself years later, and further demonstrates that a non-oppositional reading, as Binhammer explores with metaphor and metonymy, is crucial to understanding Cixous’ work.

In an understudied foreword to the 2010s republication of her work, “Un effet d’épine rose,” Cixous attends to queerness, demonstrating a further necessity for research into the application of *écriture féminine* in contemporary times. In this new paper, Cixous recalls the early 70s as she taught the concepts of Derrida, Lacan, and Freud. She claims she defended these theorists and recontextualized their works to North American feminists, who she says were too quick to define their movement through exclusions and oppositions. Yet Cixous preferred to consider herself on the side of Tiresias, for understanding the self to be of multiple sexualities, and was haunted by the idea of advancement only possible through cooperation (29, “Un effet d’épine rose”). Cixous does not wish to be reductive when she writes of a feminine writing style, just as her formulation of the universal woman need not be essentially identifiable; instead she attempts to play with the concepts of the philosophers who could not be ignored in discussing gender, writing, and gendered writing. Her essay attempts to be inclusive to a point of total unification of women, who she believed were systematically plagued by the same oppressions and could therefore be consolidated.

In the years following the initial publication of her essay, Cixous recognized that English translations unwittingly or carelessly pillaged the text through translation, effacing the semantic multiplicity so striking in the original language:

« Mais tout de même parfois cela m’ennuie de voir que le *Vol*, qui m’est si cher, et surtout grâce à l’homonymie dont il jouit en français, n’est qu’un demi-vol en anglais, ou l’indécision s’éteint en traduction. C’est comme si ma Méduse ne

volait que d'une aile, elle qui en a tant. Voilà qu'en traduction on nous aura volé un vol.<sup>3</sup>" ("Un effet d'épine rose," 30)<sup>4</sup>

This lamentation of translation's lost integrity has further guided this research, and all texts will be cited in the original language<sup>5</sup>.

Cixous concludes with a discussion of how she named the essay, revealing a new dimension she hopes will be illuminated moving forward. When asked about the title, she claims: « C'est Méduse qui me l'a donné. La Muse de la littérature. Une *queer*. D'autres disent la *queen des queers*. La littérature comme telle est queer. Dis-je.» ("Un effet d'épine rose," 32)<sup>6</sup> Medusa is once again re-imagined here, as in her original essay, but now she is elevated to position to the Muse of Literature (though surely this is not the replacement of Clio and Calliope?), crowned as queen of the queers. Literature itself is queer. If Medusa and Literature are queer bodies, then a wealth of possibilities and new interpretations of "female" and "woman" open, further distancing her use of the terms from the essential, binary reading she hopes to avoid.

Cixous ends in both awe and appreciation of Medusa's global ubiquity, unrestricted by borders, and asks that she returns to France, where she is desperately needed:

« Elle pose sa couronne, s'assied, rose, et puis : où en sont les femmes aujourd'hui ? dis-je. -En 2003, je suis née et j'ai vécu en Corée, on arrivait en 1970, dit la couronnée. Tout de suite après, ce sont les latinas qui m'ont appelée, et ces jours-ci je vis en Californie. C'est l'Heure de la Méduse entre les Amériques. Je n'arrête pas de galoper les airs d'Asie. Et en France, c'est comment ? – Je crains qu'il faille que tu reviennes voler devant ma fenêtre, dis-je.

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<sup>3</sup> The translators of the most popular English edition of this essay do attempt to address this *faux-pas*, adding in their own footnotes to explain double-meanings and wordplays which were lost. But footnotes are largely ignored, they break the flow of the reader's interpretation, they cannot comparably hold the integrity of the prose as the original text does.

<sup>4</sup> "But all the same sometimes it bores me to see that le *Vol*, who is so dear to me, above all because of the homonym that it plays in French, is nothing but a half-flight in English, where the indecision dims the word in translation. It's as if my Medusa couldn't fly but with one wing, her who has so many. Look how in translation, we will have stolen a flight from ourselves." (My translation)

<sup>5</sup> There is another motivation for examining these works through the original language: French, like many romance languages, is incredibly gendered, even using its articles. My favorite example: *le vagin* (nm)!

<sup>6</sup> "It's Medusa who gave [the title] to me. The Muse of literature. A *queer*. Others say the *queen of the queers*. Literature like her is queer. -I say." (My translation)

Ces temps-ci l'air est plein d'algues, on étouffe et on ne rit pas beaucoup. » ( “Un effet d'épine rose,” 31)<sup>7</sup>

Despite her battle cry, neither literature nor the feminist movement have progressed as much as Cixous hoped; the futures once aspired to still have yet to crystallize. Modern examinations of the practice and actual applications of *écriture féminine* are necessary to move beyond reliance on the theory alone. How have authors across the Francophonie world realized this concept in their self-writing? As we approach the fifty-year anniversary of Cixous' work, evaluating the actualization of her call to action helps us to understand not only the continued influence of gender in life and in art, but how writing itself is evolving.

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<sup>7</sup> “She puts on her crown, sits, pink, and then: where are the women today? I say. -In 2003, I was born and I lived in Korea, we arrived in 1970. Immediately afterwards, it's the Latinas who called me, and these days I live in California. It's the Hour of the Medusa between the Americas. I do not stop traversing the airs of Asia. And in France, how is it? - I fear that you must return to fly before my window, I say. These days the air is full of algae, we suffocate and we do not laugh often.” (My translation)

## Seize a feminist syntax!

« *Telle est la puissance féminine, qu'emportant la syntaxe, rompant ce fameux fil (juste un tout petit fil, disent-ils) qui sert aux hommes de substitut de cordon pour s'assurer, sans quoi ils ne jouissent pas, que la vieille mère est bien toujours derrière eux, à les regarder faire phallus, elles iront à l'impossible.* » (RDLM, 56)<sup>8</sup>

The writing of *écriture féminine* may be first analyzed structurally, as writing of the body will require a rupture of all partitions and codes and directives and borders which restrict, including (and above all) in rhetoric. These current orders which describe relationships are of course hierarchal, but abandoning the presupposed logic and finding creative ways to communicate connections can liberate the feminine voice. construction of a self-writing practice in form—not just content—is creation of “l’arme antilogos” Cixous seeks to employ, against writing which privileges a phallogocentric logic (RDLM, 46).

### Marie NDiaye’s Parataxis: Equalizing Clauses

Writing reflects importance; therefore, the minutiae of every word, every sequence, is critical. The structure of sentences can confirm a gendered connotation of order and rigidity in hypotaxis, understood as a dominating, complex way to demonstrate mastery of a language. Thus, Marie NDiaye’s use of paratactic writing in *Autoportrait en vert* can be evaluated as a feminist practice reflective of a Cixousian *prise de parole* as it favors equivocating syntax, subverting the typically masculine hierarchy of importance. This strategy may risk adopting the essentialist stereotypes of women as teasing, coquette, mysterious (etc.), yet its ultimate use

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<sup>8</sup> “Such is the strength of women that, sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, they say) which acts for men as a surrogate umbilical cord, assuring them—otherwise they couldn’t come—that the old lady is always right behind them, watching them make phallus, women will go right up to the impossible.” (LOTM, 886)

supersedes this danger as it becomes a unique way to develop self-writing without submitting to the blatant reporting often expected in autobiographical works.

Whereas hypotactic writing is marked by an inherent subordination, paratactic practice is defined by putting the clauses next to each other in equal value. An early example comes with the first appearance of a woman in green (at least, one that appears to NDiaye in the corporeal form):

« La femme en vert, tombée lourdement dans l’herbe verte, haute, jamais tondue, s’est relevée avec une souplesse insolite, a épousseté son pantalon vert, brossé de la main son tee-shirt vert, ses cheveux noirs longs jusqu’aux épaules. »  
(*Autoportrait en vert*, 30)<sup>9</sup>

This asyndetic phrase builds on itself, creating a more and more developed green woman who fell heavily in the tall green grass, which was never cut. But she didn’t fall *because* it wasn’t cut; she simply fell, and the lawn was not trimmed. There is no cause-and-effect relationship to structure these events, nor one clause that dominates in its importance. Instead, it is the repetition of the green which becomes distinct, and the reader is enveloped in this infectious haze with NDiaye. This emphasis on green can be considered liberating as it develops the surrealist tendencies of the novel and subverts the generic expectations of a memoir, driven by the halting creation of unsettling atmosphere rather than marching forward with an action driven plot.

The introduction of *la Garonne* instantiates this saliently. NDiaye writes first what the river is not to distinguish what it intrinsically is, at once bulging, heavy, brown, and feminine:

« Nous attendons, nous surveillons. Ce n’est pas sur un quelconque Vieux Père que s’exerce notre vigilance, ce n’est pas sur le Mississippi, ce n’est pas sur le

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<sup>9</sup> “The woman in green fell heavily into the tall, green, unmowed grass. Oddly spry, she stood up, patted the dust from her green pants, brushed off her green tee shirt and black shoulder-length hair with one hand.” (*Self-Portrait in Green*, 23)

Rhône ni sur le Danube : il ne fait de doute pour personne ici que la Garonne est d'essence féminine. Ce soir elle est brune, lourde, comme bombée. » (*AEV*, 10)<sup>10</sup>

The community equally waits and survey. On one side of the semicolon is the refusal of *la Garonne* as a paternal force like so many other bodies of water; on the other side is the assertion of a belief in its essential femininity. As soon as the “lack” coming from *la Garonne*'s non-masculine identity is established, it is refuted, imagery of feminine surplus rushes forward. NDiaye writes the feminine identity of the river with rapt attention, and this recognition works to valorize both through the form and the descriptors used.

A final but important example appears in the depiction of her mother: « Ma mère est une femme en vert, intouchable, décevante, métamorphosable à l'infini, très froide et sachant, par la volonté, devenir très belle, sachant aussi ne pas le désirer. » (*AEV*, 82)<sup>11</sup> The audience is trusted to draw the implicit connections between each element and view them in equal importance. And if it were to be written hypotactically? If she was to order these qualities, for example, as “My mother is a woman in green because she is unreachable, deceiving, can change herself infinitively, and is very cold; what's more, she knows how to become very beautiful, but she also knows how not to desire it.” These now explicit connections are not only boring but reductive. The reader is not required to do any work of engagement or imagination; the meaning is tethered to one interpretation disallowing the very multiplicity green suggests. Certainly, there is no one defining characteristic of a woman in green, so why prioritize or set her qualities in contention with one another? Green itself is growth, decay, spring, jealousy, rebirth, disgust (etc.) and evolves to accommodate multicultural, plural significations. Therefore, NDiaye does not

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<sup>10</sup> “We wait, we watch. The object of our vigilance is not some Old Man, it's not *le Mississippi*, it's not *le Danube* or *le Rhône* ; no one here doubts for a moment that *la Garonne*'s essence is feminine. She's brown tonight, heavy, almost bulging.” (*SPIG*, 4)

<sup>11</sup> “My mother is a woman in green, untouchable, disappointing, infinitely mutable, very cold, able, by force of will, to become very beautiful, and able, too, not to want to.” (*SPIG*, 74)

presume to define (which would be to restrict) its symbolism in a single formulation. In an exploration of the self, the women in green reflect fears on who NDiaye may become and who she is already; thus, this flexible, considerate structure of writing notably diverts from the familiar scaffolding of hypotaxis and puts the responsibility on the reader to determine relationships between each clause.

### **Écrire les temps : Ernaux's Reconstructions**

Nestled between journal entries describing her disappointment in the horoscope of the day and reflections on the loss she felt with her mother's passing, Ernaux's unconscious reveals an egalitarian motivation to write in *passé composé*; One night, she dreams she is questioned by some of her students, in a setting reminiscent of her childhood in Normandy— an uncanny situation:

« ...dans une sorte d'école, chapelle, comme à Saint-Michel d'Yvetot, des élèves qui étudient mes livres me disent que le passé composé est dépassé, qu'on doit écrire au présent ou au passé simple. Je leur répons : Comment racontez-vous ce que vous avez fait hier ? J'écris au passé composé parce qu'on parle au passé composé. » (*Se Perdre*, 244)

This choice to valorize the life of everyday citizens, rather than ascend to the respected ranks of the more literary *passé simple*, demonstrates a desire to move away from restrictive, exclusive traditions shrouding literature and to write for her community. Ernaux claims « La plupart des adultes ne considèrent pas comme nécessaire de « parler français », seulement bon pour les jeunes. » (*La Honte*, 54)<sup>12</sup> To speak well is a luxury, to find the proper words takes time, to speak succinctly is more important in daily life than speaking grammatically correct.

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<sup>12</sup> “Most adults don't think it's necessary to “speak good French”; it's something they associate with the younger generation.” (*Shame*, 46)



Verbs conjugated in the literary *passé simple* provide the narrator a certain distance; this more self-consciously academic form allows dramatization and objectivization in the same breath<sup>13</sup> (Bors, 349). Ernaux's writing in *passé composé* avoids this filtering; her writing doesn't distance, it doesn't hide, it doesn't force an objectivity which will inevitably fail. It's not that she prohibits the use of *passé simple*, or remains only in *passé composé*; indeed, she has a thorough understanding of the consequence each form of writing takes, and each tense is a conscious decision rather than an unintended coincidence, as demonstrated explicitly by her explanation in *Passion Simple*:

« Pourtant, quand je suis mise à écrire, c'était pour rester dans ce temps-là, où tout allait dans le même sens, du choix d'un film à celui d'un rouge à lèvres, vers quelqu'un. L'imparfait que j'ai employé spontanément dès les premières lignes est celui d'une durée que je ne voulais pas finie, celui de "en ce temps-là la vie était plus belle", d'une répétition éternelle. » (*Passion Simple*, 61)<sup>14</sup>

This utilitarian approach to art manifests in her style *écriture plate*, evidently more creative than many (including Ernaux) realize. For while she believes she « ne connaîtr[a] jamais l'enchantement des métaphores, la jubilation du style » (*LH*, 70)<sup>15</sup> and often rejects narrative « qui produirait une réalité au lieu de la chercher » (*LH*, 38)<sup>16</sup>, the privileging of spoken parlance and attempting to use vernacular of a wider demographic is itself a lyrical and rhetorical choice. Her writing still functionally communicates the events of her life but maintains its creative integrity, truthful and artful at once.

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<sup>13</sup> « Le verbe au passé simple isolé permet au narrateur de se distancier de l'évènement relaté ; en effet, nous avons distingué trois valeurs attribuées aux diverses occurrences du passé simple isolé, notamment la dramatisation, le refoulement et l'objectivisation. » (Bors, 349) "The isolated verb in *passé simple* allows the narrator to distance themselves from the event related ; in effect, we have distinguished three values attributed to the diverse occurrences of isolated *passé simple*, notably the dramatization, the repression and the objectivization." (My translation)

<sup>14</sup> "Yet, when I began to write, I wanted to stay in that age of passion, when all my actions—from the choice of a film to the selection of a lipstick—were channeled towards one person. The past tense used in the first part of the book suggests endless repetition and conveys the belief that "life was better in those days." ( *Simple Passion*, 47)

<sup>15</sup> "I shall never experience the pleasure of juggling with metaphors or indulging in stylistic play." (*Shame*, 58)

<sup>16</sup> "...which would mean inventing reality instead of searching for it." (*Shame*, 32)

This distinctive writing is noticeable in her work *La Honte* which describes a scene in her childhood where her father tried to kill her mother and then contextualizes the event. In relating her memories of life at the age of twelve, she can only use the language of this era to accurately convey the consequences of these words:

« Mettre au jour les langages qui me constituaient, les mots de la religion, ceux qui mes parents liés aux gestes et aux choses, des romans que je lisais dans *Le Petit Écho de la mode* ou dans *Les Veillées des chaumières*. Me servir de ces mots, dont certains exercent encore sur moi leur pesanteur, pour décomposer et remonter, autour de la scène du dimanche de juin, le texte du monde ou j'ai eu douze ans et cru devenir folle. »<sup>17</sup> (*LH*, 38)

Inscribing these histories through her own experience, Ernaux repurposes and recontextualizes the language that has and does oppress her— the private words of home life, the institutionalized words of religion, and the serialized words of the media. Combined with Ernaux's use of tense and concerted efforts to make her work accessible to an audience who often served as subject, the rural middle class, her deceptively simple writing is an action of seizure— here, rather than adopting a feminine syntax, fuses her own style together based on her life, her experiences.

Ernaux's reclamation of diction designed to be accessible, marking her writing as open and revealing, along with NDiaye's repositioning clauses to designate equality, marking her writing as concealing and protected, demonstrate the multiplicity of feminine syntax in the realm of *écriture féminine*. These seemingly contradictory approaches are not mutually exclusive, but instead demonstrate a key aspect of Cixous' theory: there is no one right way to liberate yourself. Women may choose to employ language as a veil, they may choose to reject it entirely; the important consideration is that this is a choice coming from autonomy rather than imposition.

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<sup>17</sup> "...to expose the different languages that made up my personality: the words of religion, the words my parents used to describe their behavior and daily environment, the serialized novels I read in *Le Petit Écho de la mode* or *Les Veillées des chaumières*; to use these words, some of which I still find oppressive, in order to dissect and reassemble the text of the world surrounding that Sunday in June, when I turned twelve and thought I was going mad." (*Shame*, 32)

## Write the body

« Une femme sans corps, une muette, une aveugle, ne peut pas être une bonne combattante. Elle est réduite à être la servante du militant, son ombre. Il faut tuer la fausse femme qui empêche la vivante de respirer. Incrire le souffle de la femme entière... » (RDLM, 46)<sup>18</sup>

The writing the body Cixous describes, throughout the essay, carries many different meanings. It is ultimately, however, a militant act, and crucial for crystallizing *écriture féminine* in its entirety. Writing the body includes rejecting, raising, and recreating the feminine form; alliance to the body is not guaranteed, but earned.

### Destruction and Remaking the Body, Chez Bouraoui

Nina Bouraoui opens her writing in *Garçon Manqué* by immediately presenting us with the conflict of writing an honest coming-of-age story. How do you write the self when you don't know who you are? Born of a French mother and Algerian father, Bouraoui embodies an incredible task in Algiers, of reconciling the identities of her parents in the years following Algerian independence. « Ici nous ne sommes rien. De mère française. De père algérien. Seuls nos corps rassemblent les terres opposées. » (*Garçon Manqué*, 10)<sup>19</sup> With such an intimidating task, it's no wonder she looks for a freedom outside of the corporeal form. She looks beyond the body which she finds in the ocean, the mountains, the rural expanses outside of the city confines: « Là, je m'efface enfin. Je deviens un corps sans type, sans langue, sans nationalité. Cette vie est

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<sup>18</sup> “A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman.” (LOTM, 880)

<sup>19</sup> “Here, we are nothing. Born of French mothers. Born of Algerian fathers. Our bodies alone reunite the conflicting lands.” (*Tomboy*, 4)

sauvage. Elle est sans voix et sans visage. » (*GM* 11)<sup>20</sup> Without a voice, without a face, life cannot be materialized— For little Bouraoui, life has no body.

Throughout her life thus far, Bouraoui's own body has been a haunting force, and she recalls waking up and attempting to reidentify every morning with her four « *problèmes* » : French, Algerian, girl, and boy. (*GM*, 167) This constant questioning of identity, divided by the perceived mutual exclusion of Algeria and France/femininity and masculinity, demonstrates her internal rift mirroring the surrounding international conflicts. Ultimately, no matter how she tries to disguise herself, she knows « *Mon corps me trahira un jour* » as it will become formed, feminine, against her desires (*GM*, 62)<sup>21</sup>. The body is established as an enemy, a site of conflict rather than love or desire. The impending puberty shaping Bouraoui's form is not empowering, but frightening, and limiting, something she cannot escape. And in her life, it condemns her, for she represents French-Algerian peace made through the body, with her French mother and Algerian father. Embodiment here is not a source of pleasure but rather a constant conflict.

How to write the body when turmoil doesn't simply inform, but occludes pleasure? The body does not simply contain, but imprisons the voice, at least for Bouraoui. For others it is an active offense, an affront to both French and Algerian identities: « *Nos seuls corps, nos seuls visages sont des invasions.* » (*GM*, 75)<sup>22</sup> Accused of being Pied-Noir, accused of being settlers, accused of still being French, her body, her very skin outs her as enemy to the only known home. The racism Bouraoui witnesses and experiences traces back to bodies, the bodies of her parents- Bouraoui writes that racism is a disease, capable of tangible symptoms despite its intangible

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<sup>20</sup> "...my body is erased and becomes unrecognizable. I become a non-descript body, a body without language, without nationality. This life is brutal. It is voiceless and faceless." (*Tomboy*, 4)

<sup>21</sup> "My body will betray me one day." (*Tomboy*, 34)

<sup>22</sup> "Our mere bodies, our faces alone, are invasions." (*Tomboy*, 42)

form. It is caused by bodies, the imagination of bodies, bodies making love, bodies like her Algerian father and French mother:

« Le racisme est un fantasme. C'est imaginer l'odeur de sa peau, la tension de son corps, la force de son sexe. Le racisme est une maladie. Une lèpre. Une nécrose. C'est le corps de ma mère avec le corps de mon père qui dérangera. Ces deux chairs-là. Ce rapport-là. Cette union-là. Ce frottement-là. Ce rouge-là. Cette mécanique-là. » (*GM*, 153-154)<sup>23</sup>

If racism is a permeating fantasy, unity — and therefore, peace— is a palpable body. Her body. Bouraoui is the public personification of this union, and she will suffer for it, her writing reflecting the exile and isolation she experiences through frequent ostracization from both parties.

The body is weaponized consistently, in one notable instance which marks the instant that Algeria becomes the main source of concern for young Brio (for the narrator is constantly reinventing identity- now, she is Brio). The mother drives them through Algiers, and they are accosted by young children who throw rocks and yell at them, and certain lower their pants:

« Le corps est plus fort que la voix. Le corps est plus agressif que les mots. Leur petit sexe. Leur petite arme. Ils frappent ma mère. Ce n'est rien, des coups d'enfant. C'est doux et rugueux. C'est maladroit. C'est en désordre. Mais c'est déjà tout. Cette main levée. Cet attentat. Cette agression de l'enfant sur la mère. De l'Algérien sur la Française. » (*GM*, 81)<sup>24</sup>

Penises weaponized against the Mother. The perpetrators, little boys, turn their sex into weapons. The sign of the phallus, and these bodies, will be more powerful than any words. This is male dominance asserting itself as sovereign. Bouraoui functions as the inaudible witness in this instance, later wondering how to make this life under oppression known; silence is embodied,

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<sup>23</sup> “Racism is a fantasy. It means imagining the smell of another person's skin, his body's tension, the strength of his sex. Racism is a disease like leprosy or necrosis. What bothers them is my mother's body against my father's. These two bodies, their flesh together, their relationship, their union, the rubbing, the heat, this love machine.” (*Tomboy*, 90)

<sup>24</sup> “Some lower their pants; the body is more powerful than the voice. The body is more aggressive than words. Their tiny genitals. Their small weapons...It's an aggression of the child against the mother, of the Algerian man against the French woman.” (*Tomboy*, 46)

and once tangible she can vanquish it. « Mon silence est un corps. » (GM, 57) She will kill this silence, this omission, this lack through writing.

Embodiment in *Garçon Manqué* has been a burden, a weapon, something to be feared, respected, hidden, ousted. In the final section in Tivoli, as Bouraoui leaves both France and Algeria behind for a summer in Rome, she is reborn. Nothing will be the same, she discovers herself, her body. With it, she chooses to become free.

« Mon corps portait autre chose. Une évidence. Une nouvelle personnalité. Un don, peut-être. Je venais de moi et de moi seule. Je me retrouvais. Je venais de mes yeux, de ma voix, de mes envies. Je sortais de moi. Et je me possédais. Mon corps se détachait de tout. » (GM, 191)<sup>25</sup>

Enveloped in unintelligible Italian words, Bouraoui is recreated, fashioned by her own eyes and voice alone, no longer her mother's daughter. (GM, 190) The erasure and reconfiguration Bouraoui experiences as she explores the fluidity of nationality, race, and gender situated in the Other, beyond the realm of what's known (and thus overly defined), allows her to now celebrate the body which was once stifled; through this process of rebirth, outside of France and Algeria, she is empowered as an individual, as a writer, and as a fighter.

### **Subjects versus Setting: Djébar's Revalorization of the Body**

« Il faut que la femme écrive par son corps, qu'elle invente la langue imprenable qui crève les cloisonnements, classes et rhétoriques, ordonnances et codes, qu'elle submerge, transperce, franchise le discours-à-reserve ultime... » (RDLM, 55)<sup>26</sup>

Assia Djébar referred to autobiographical writing as a “*mise à nu*,” a vulnerable, erotic, and physical act— it is also what has prevented the colonizer from ever ultimately “possessing”

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<sup>25</sup> “My body revealed something new, an evidence, a different personality, a gift, perhaps. I came from myself and myself alone. I was finding myself, born solely from my eyes, my voice, and my desires. I shed my old self and reclaimed my identity. My body was breaking free.” (*Tomboy*, 112)

<sup>26</sup> “Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse...” (*LOTM*, 886)

their bodies (Rice, 118). This vulnerability is indescribable to the cruel, the bodies taken by force are not understood and true “ownership” is impossible, as mutual constitution comes from actual communication and communion rather than violence. This is *écriture féminine* recognizing multitudes; identities past and present sharing the same battlefield. They appear simultaneously and weave through histories, best presented in *L’amour, La Fantasia*. As Djébar’s first semi-autobiographical work, she recognizes the beauty and burden of writing the body, demonstrated in her meticulous attention crafting the narratives of Algerian lives, documented and imagined over one-hundred and fifty years. Her work reclaims the bodies that are first expressed obscenely, exploitatively, into history—or, through effacement, utterly excluded from it— by the French colonizers whose writings had dominated the literary canon surrounding Algeria’s occupation.

Djébar writes their bodies, the body of Algeria, to valorize the lived knowledge and experiences which would otherwise fade as whispers into the French voice, the French body. A body which dominates the coast of Algiers in 1830. More than tactical reports, they arrive in the form of memoirs, as every soldier captain translator botanist merchant anthropologist (etc.) clings to the experiences of conquest they turn to narrative. Djébar reminds us of this repeated offense in the colonizer’s plight:

« Le mot lui-même, ornement pour les officiers qui le brandissent comme ils porteraient un œillet à la boutonnière, le mot deviendra l'arme par excellence... Toute une pyramide d'écrits amoncelés en apophyse superfétatoire occultera la violence initiale. » (*L’amour, La Fantasia*, 37)<sup>27</sup>

The writing of French colonists arrives in a frenzy, used to construct and obscure the atrocities committed against the Algerian people. Djébar’s work aims to de-shroud the mystery of the

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<sup>27</sup> “And words themselves become a decoration, flaunted by officers like the carnations they wear in their buttonholes; words will now become their most effective weapons... The supererogatory protuberances of their publications will form a pyramid to hide the initial violence from view.” (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, 45)

occupation and recognize the violence explicitly, with attention to the victims otherwise dismissed.

After the first invasion, an account written in an « d'un ton glacé » describes the bodies of two women to emphasize the tendency of women in Arab tribes who had « avaient montré le plus d'ardeur à ces mutilations » (*LALF*, 15). In viewing their corpses, the account only serves to mark the savagery of Algerian women, part of the propaganda that would be common in attempting to justify French invasion. However, Djébar takes this moment to describe the courage of the two « héroïnes » writing the murder of an infant by a mother who, herself shot and dying, refused to let her child be taken by French soldiers— an action which Djébar imagines as « comme une grenade printanière » (*LALF*, 15)<sup>28</sup>. A pomegranate splitting open in spring. The bounty and beauty of life, the vibrant red, opened, shared, becomes the image replacing the obscene reality of infanticide; thus, Djébar translates a report of violence into a demonstration of desperate mercy, humanity, and maternal love. The woman, along with her neighbor observed with the heart of a French soldier in her grip, now represent courage and the strength of Algerian women, rather than condemnable savagery the report hoped to convey. Djébar's writing attributes extra-human, figurative significance to the human deaths, and examines their actions alive, rather than marginalizing their corpses as mere casualties.

A few years later, another officer in 1840 writes in letters to a friend about another attack; between the giddy admiration of his commanding officer and the orchestration of such a well-executed offense, several passages stand out to Djébar. A woman's foot, for instance, is described- it was hacked off to obtain the precious metal anklet it wore. Her attention is again called to the corpses of seven women, slain because of their hurled insults at the French officers.

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<sup>28</sup> "...like a pomegranate in spring." (*FAAC*, 18)



Djebar recognizes the officer reports them as casual specificities, blots on the rest of the page, and yet their inclusion punctures the account. The smell of decaying bodies arises, the shrill screams pierce the air: « Soudain les mots de la lettre entière ne peuvent sécher, du fait de cette incise: indécence de ces lambeaux de chair que la description n'a pu taire. » (*LALF*, 70)<sup>29</sup> Djebar insists on recognizing this corporeal element which ruptures formerly practical French communication through its admission of brutality by the authors.

Finally, the brutal murder of the Ouled Riah tribe chronicled by Pélissier describes the asphyxiation of approximately fifteen hundred men, women, and children. The officer insists on bringing forward the corpses, six hundreds of whom are exhumed. His description of the events and its brutal results travel, the corpses transformed to words, which are repeated in a parliamentary session. The words of Pélissier brought on such shame, guilt, and embarrassment, that future reports were made to be much less controversial or poetic. Subsequent atrocities were conveyed in much more palatable ways to French audiences, silencing and hiding the true victims. But Djebar brings us back to the cave and the corporeal ashes left behind, almost — almost—thanking the French soldier who, unlike his predecessors, and as intentionally avoided by all his successors, faced the consequence of his destruction.

« J'oserais presque le remercier d'avoir fait face aux cadavres, d'avoir cédé au désir de les immortaliser, dans les figures de leurs corps raidis, de leurs étreintes paralysées, de leur ultime contorsion. D'avoir regardé l'ennemi autrement qu'en multitude fanatisée, en armée d'ombres omniprésentes. » (*LALF*, 101)<sup>30</sup>

To write the bodies of the victims is a demonstration of respect, perhaps unexpected from such a devastating event. But because of Pélissier's writing, Djebar can return to the Ouled Riah tribe,

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<sup>29</sup> “Suddenly as he inserts these words, they prevent the ink of the whole letter from drying: because of the obscenity of the torn flesh that he could not suppress in his description.” (*FAAC*, 56)

<sup>30</sup> “I venture to thank him for having faced the corpses, for having indulged a whim to immortalize them in a description of their rigid carcasses, their paralysed embraces, their final paroxysms. For having looked on the enemy otherwise than as a horde of zealots or a host of ubiquitous shadows.” (*FAAC*, 78)

and take us with her, her authorial voice radically empathetic to the victims of French violence whose oppression she attempts to understand more than a century later. He accounted for the bodies she can now memorialize.

By transforming stolid observations to a sedulous research Djébar rehumanizes the Algerian men, women, and children who were consistently reduced to aesthetic depictions or mandatory details in the writing of the French colonizers; she makes them the subject, rather than the background, of her narrative, directly opposing the dehumanizing prose which had thus far described them through tactical reports and memoirs of the conquerors. This valorization sans fetishization gives a voice to, reclaims, the Algerian body.

### **NDiaye's Subject: Mud, Morality, and the Grotesque**

Embodiment in *écriture féminine* is not confined by constructions of desire and pleasure, but also the pains and fears of corporeal existence. In her narrative, NDiaye's women in green demonstrate an understanding and exploration of quotidian bodily horrors and fears. This can especially be seen through the story of her friend Jenny, whose life changes in NDiaye's entry for April 11, 2001.

Jenny enters the home of a former lover, Ivan, whose wife she had begun seeing rather frequently. However, this day, she decides this is the last time she will visit Ivan's wife and resigns herself to removal from this setting which renews painful reimaginings of a life she could've lived. When she doesn't find anyone inside, she sits, crosses her legs, and begins to smoke. Suddenly she gets up, descends to the basement, her feet slap the cement, and she grabs the legs of Ivan's wife who has hung herself. Thighs in velvet green, chest in satin green, only the woman's feet are left bare, and Jenny remarks on the dust that grays the soles swinging

before her. The feet are already cold. Jenny pushes her face into the stomach of the woman before her, and sobs.

The belly of the woman is bulging, « bombé ,» like the first description of la Garonne (*Autoportrait en vert*, 61). This body is removed from any sensual power it once held. Jenny attempts (almost immediately) to replace this body and marries Ivan shortly thereafter.

When the narrator visits Jenny some years later, she finds out that Ivan's wife returned as a ghost, *la pendue* whom Jenny first sees with Ivan in a store shortly after her discovered suicide. The woman is dressed in an elegant coat, tinted green, but despite being a completely different body she's identifiable for her beauty, the distinct beauty of the women in green, and « surtout le plaisir sexuel qui était très visible dans ses yeux, dans son sourire, dans sa manière de frotter son col de fourrure sur son menton. » (*AEV*, 67)<sup>31</sup>. This incarnation of sexual pleasure begins to haunt Jenny, and she sees the woman everywhere, which causes a divorce from Ivan who accuses her of plotting with the ghost to torment him. Even after her body was gone, the green woman continued to threaten Jenny. Soon after this visit, Jenny dies from an overconsumption of medication— likely a suicide, though not pronounced definitively (*AEV*, 70).

This prepares NDiaye for the later revelation that the woman in green does not always appear in green (she can be gray, she can be pink), she does not stay in the same form (her body may balloon, her body may die), she does not even need to remain human— for *la Garonne*, the river, is a green woman too. When she does appear in green, she is supernatural, spectral, strange, scary. Her beauty is uncanny, and her desires intimidating. The desire of Jenny, who laces her arms around the legs she'll prove a sorry substitute for, is not admirable but perverse. The body of the woman in green is a supernatural, metamorphosing figure that rejects

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<sup>31</sup> "...sexual pleasure most of all, it was perfectly clear in her eyes, in her smile, in her way of rubbing the fur collar against her chin." (*Self-Portrait in Green*, 59)

objectification regardless of its allure, and becomes instead a site of the abject. This abject, the horror and misery, reacts to perceived threats of subject/object breakdown, or self/Other breakdown; this collapse of the self into the Other, the women in green, is particularly prevalent in the searching autofiction of NDiaye (Felluga). It is also an important yet underutilized focal point of empowerment.

As an example of *écriture féminine*, this practice of writing is crucial— the goal of Cixous is not to develop a practice of writing that romanticizes and idealizes the woman but rather to recognize her and empower her. In describing the elusive definition of *écriture féminine*, Cixous' ideal is explained as writing which:

“In style and in substance, therefore, [...] carries with it the possibility of breaking free from established forms of literary production. It opens up the option of writing differently about different things in suggestive-rather than descriptive or prescriptive- prose.” (Rice, 99)

When Cixous demands we write the body, she knows this means writing all of it. For too long the blazons and marriage market portraits have over glorified the beauty of the woman, dropping her on a pedestal so high it can never be reached. But the mother's milk will sour, and the hands that take the pen to paper soon scrawl, shaking with age. The body must be recognized in all its forms, it must be seen at every stage.

This writing breaks the constraints upon women as subjects only for agreeable, aesthetic purposes. NDiaye, in her *autoportrait*, enforces the importance of the body and desire even when it isn't palatable, insisting on new ways of writing on new subjects— or rather, making old subjects new again.

Life is as gross, and as cruel, as it is beautiful. Like women themselves. *Il faut écrire les maux, pour écrire la vie.*

## A female/feminist collection: Assia Djébar's Love Letters as Resistance

“Viendra l'heure pour elle où l'amour qui s'écrit est plus dangereux que l'amour séquestré.”<sup>32</sup>

(*L'amour, La Fantasia*, 3)

Cixous' work calls for the creation of a corpus of work which is definitively female, and perhaps feminist, though some of the authors never identified with the feminist movement. However, the nature of *écriture féminine* is inherently political, as it requires liberation and rejection of current entrenched systems. The work of Djébar demonstrates the political capacities of writing beyond its philosophy, through an especially unique medium of love letters.

### L'amour s'écrit: The Beginning

Assia Djébar continues this tradition of writing desire and examining the sensuality of words, in a new and undervalued medium: love letters. How does writing the body change when it is not for us or an audience, but instead explicitly tailored to seduce or enrapture another, *one other*?

In the first chapter of her novel, Assia Djébar recounts the perils of writing which she first encounters in the form of a love letter, written in French, at the age of seventeen. She is the intended recipient of this marked adoration from a high-school boy, a stranger whom Djébar remembers making defiant eye contact with a few days earlier, prompting this request for a friendly correspondence. But her father intercepts it first.

For him, it is « comme si les préparatifs d'un rapt inévitable s'amorçaient dans cette invite. »<sup>33</sup> (*L'amour, la Fantasia*, 4) He is bewildered, and he is enraged, and he rips it up before Assia can read it; thus, he unknowingly creates a new desire within Djébar to reconstruct and

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<sup>32</sup> “For her the time will come when there will be more danger in love that is committed to paper than love that languishes behind enclosing walls.” (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, 3)

<sup>33</sup> “...but this invitation is tantamount to setting the stage for rape.” (*FAAC*, 4)

reevaluate this language, the French tongue, whose originally banal words « se sont gonflés d'un désir imprévu, hyperbolique, simplement parce que le père a voulu les détruire. » (*LALF*, 4)<sup>34</sup>

She puts together the remaining pieces of the letter:

« ...invite si banale—dont je retirerai les morceaux de la corbeille. J'en reconstituai le texte avec un entêtement de bravade. Comme s'il me fallait désormais m'appliquer à réparer tout ce que laceraient les doigts du père... » (*LALF*, 77)<sup>35</sup>

Resolving to be more careful in the future, she becomes absorbed in the defiance of love letters, continuing a secret correspondence. And the letters become a signifier of transgression.

Djebar knows now, even from a young age, that every correspondence she has will be monitored, and this initial confiscation marks a clear invasion of privacy, expected in her position as the daughter, as Moneera Al-Gradeer writes in “Conquest’s Spectacle: Djebar’s *L’amour, La Fantasia* and Lacoue-Labarthe’s *Musica Ficta*.” According to Al-Gradeer, the opening scenes demonstrate Djebar’s memory of writing as at once a matter of language, love, and interdiction, but by her reconfiguring of the torn letter she “not only initiates a conflictual relationship with the paternal figure, but also begins to expose a difficult, disrupted process of” as demonstrated from her split narratives interweaving throughout the rest of the novel (Al-Ghadeer, 246). Her writing continues to demonstrate the accordance of acts of writing to notions of love, which vastly differed from her fellow Algerian women who weren’t privileged to a French education as she was and thus remained cloistered in their family homes.

Under colonial rule, the French language became one of mobility and freedom, whereas Arabic was designated a foreign language in 1938, and thus a clear demarcation of physical

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<sup>34</sup> “Simply because my father wanted to destroy the letter, I interpreted the conventional French wording used...as the cryptic expression of some sudden, desperate passion.” (*FAAC*, 4)

<sup>35</sup> “...such a banal invitation—in front of me, and my rescuing the fragments from the waste-paper basket and obstinately piecing the message together in defiance. As if from then on I would always have to set myself to make good everything that my father’s hands might destroy...” (*FAAC*, 61)

spaces began. The home, where the women rested, remained a space of indigenous languages and oral traditions, whereas the public, a male-dominated space, was memorialized in French.

As Djébar continues her exploration of the delineated spaces, Arabic and French, Maternal and Paternal, Private and Public, she records the defiant actions of her cousins who, confined to the house, had secret pen pals across the world as they wrote to strangers. Only one of the sisters abstained from communicating with these abstractions, these phantom men, for “Si cela arrivait, cela voudrait dire qu’elle allait aimer.” (*LALF*, 15)<sup>36</sup> Writing love letters continued to represent an exposition, an intimacy considered just as vulnerable as sex. Or at least just as condemnable for a young woman.

Do these transgressions root themselves solely in love letters specifically? The content of the messages implicitly exposes the author and the recipient as engaging in a vulnerable, often taboo exchange which was especially prohibited for young women, but Djébar believes that the simple act of writing is enough to condemn these women in the eyes of the anxious, terrified, constructed order of patriarchy. And so many of the young girls are cloistered, hidden from society, rigidly kept in the domestic prison.

« Voilez le corps de la fille nubile. Rendez-la invisible. Transformez-la en être plus aveugle que l'aveugle, tuez en elle tout souvenir du dehors. Si elle sait écrire ? Le geôlier d'un corps sans mots — et les mots écrits sont mobiles — peut finir, lui, par dormir tranquille : il lui suffira de supprimer les fenêtres, de cadenasser l'unique portail, d'élever jusqu'au ciel un mur orbe. » (*LALF*, 3)<sup>37</sup>

The silenced voice risks flying away in written words. And so « Le gardien devra veiller jour et nuit » to keep these precautions effective (*LALF*, 3)<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> “If she did so, it would indicate that she was prepared to fall in love with him.” (*FAAC*, 12)

<sup>37</sup> “So wrap the nubile girl in veils. Make her invisible. Make her more unseeing than the sightless, destroy in her every memory of the world without. And what if she has learned to write? The jailer who guards a body that has no words— and written words can travel— may sleep in peace: it will suffice to brick up the windows, padlock the sole entrance door, and erect a blank wall rising up to heaven.” (*FAAC*, 3)

<sup>38</sup> “The jailer must keep watch day and night.” (*FAAC*, 3)

## **L'amour, ses cris: A Continued Violation**

Djebar continues her narrative with another episode of betrayal and loss of control, demonstrating again the risks of writing the self, of committing one's realities and desires to paper. During a vacation with friends in Normandy, a man, with whom she wants nothing but friendship, persists in pestering her with performed words of affection, and attempts of seduction. When she transitions from passively responding, hoping that indulging him will allow the feelings to pass, to outright silencing him, he punitively steals a love letter from her.

The content of this letter is much more explicit than the awkward flirtation of a teenager-now, in a period of separation with a lover who acts on his unsatisfied lust in her absence by detailing every aspect of her body as he remembers it. But Djebar feels immediately disconnected from the explicit desire, unable to see herself as the subject of these erotic words which seem so impersonal, and instead begins to view it as a talisman which addresses the desire to all the generations of women before her who never received such address. The jilted man, upon his invasion of privacy, continues his offense by mocking her apparent sexuality. He taunts her with the contents; now the letter becomes a source of guilt and perversion, seen through inescapable voyeurism: « Cet homme, fasciné par les mots nus de l'autre, qui parlent de mon corps, cet homme me devient un voleur ; pire, un ennemi. » (*LALF*, 74)<sup>39</sup> She had suffered the surveillance and domination of the father disrupting her writing, and now is punished by the same violating act as she rejects a man who presumed access to her.

Djebar is therefore relieved when the letter is stolen once more when she's later robbed of her wallet, containing the letter, by another stranger. She doesn't believe she had a right to

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<sup>39</sup> "This man's fascination with the other man's unguarded words, which speak so frankly of my body, makes him a thief in my eyes; worse, an enemy." (*FAAC*, 60)



such words, which revealed a secret she had not kept, and was grateful that next to the far more valuable items the letter would likely be lost forever.

### **Ceci n'est pas d'amour: Intentionality of the Act**

Crucially, and perhaps surprisingly, Djebbar recognizes that these exchanges were not manifestations of desire or lust she often rehearsed for her recipients.

As she reflects on one childhood summer, where she too was relegated to the house in the absence of classes, she reveals that the letters, contrary to their pretense of being written for love, are more accurately veiling desire instead of expressing it: « car l'ombre du père se tient là. » (Djebbar, 71) The initial disruption of writing has not been resolved. The letters written in French could never pierce her emotionally, as it is a language that could offer technical treasures but would never be able to communicate true care, passion, love (Djebbar 38). She recognizes the passion in words, and she accepts it, but never returns the affection fully, for messages « ...de l'autre se gonfle parfois d'un désir qui me parvient, mais expurge de toute contagion. La passion, une fois écrite, s'éloignait de moi définitivement. » (Djebbar, 72)<sup>40</sup> So the correspondence is not, in fact, about love or physical desires. These writings' inherent distance and detachment become exaggerated and are expelled even further through the French language.

Instead, her letters, like her cousins who wrote to faceless foreign men, were expressions of desire more as acts of resistance, of defiance. Rather than love for another, Djebbar admits the words she sent flying overseas, which allowed her to transcend the physical limitations of her reality, were founded on a distinct and new objective: « Écrire devant l'amour. Éclairer le corps, pour aider à lever l'interdit, pour dévoiler...Dévoiler et simultanément tenir secret ce qui doit le

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<sup>40</sup> "...from "The Other" is sometimes pregnant with desire, but has lost any power of contamination by the time it reaches me. Once passion has been expressed in writing, it cannot touch me." (FAAC, 59)

rester, tant que n'intervient pas la fulgurance de la révélation. » (*LALF*, 75)<sup>41</sup> This ambition, recalling the initial conflict of the destroyed letter that opens the novel, foreshadows more ominous threats and expectations writing brings, even after the era of French colonization which Djébar reports. Writing becomes a way to confront love, not just name it, and reveal what has been hidden: the woman's body, the woman's voice. Words can function as a torch to illuminate or as another veil to protect and protect what is private. This revolutionary medium of love letters, no matter their authenticity regarding a single subject, continues to tempt and fascinate audiences.

In his article "The Blood of Writing: Assia Djébar's Unveiling of Women and History," Gaïfaiți compares Djébar's writing to the myth of Prometheus: "...to write, for the woman, is to steal words, to tear them from a social rule, from the masculine grasp" (Gaïfaiți, 813). To bring desire into a tangible form that risked being stolen, read, exploited, destroyed, and used against her, demonstrates the power writing held for Djébar and her contemporaries in their efforts to resist the efforts made to keep them hidden. This writing to confront love, to consider the word as a revealing, freeing tool, elevates Djébar's letters from dismissible teenage fantasies to inherently political actions that assert and demand her freedom. The concept of love letters is transformed, from romantic poems to acts of bravery and agency, at once weapons and shields. Thus, the empowerment of taking control of intimacy (which others always seek to surveil at best, and outright oppress at worst), the thrill of transgression, and the seizing of freedom, define this medium of letter-writing, and to a greater extent, the very idea of what it is to write oneself.

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<sup>41</sup> "To write *confronting* love. Shedding light on one's body to help lift the taboo, to lift the veil... To lift the veil and at the same time keep secret that which must remain secret, until the lightning flash of revelation." (*FAAC*, 62)

## A Laugh

« *Tant pis pour eux s'ils s'effondrent à découvrir que les femmes ne sont pas des hommes, ou que la mère n'en a pas. Mais est-ce que cette peur ne les arrange pas ? Est-ce que le pire, ce ne serait pas, ce n'est pas, en vérité, que la femme n'est pas castrée, qu'il lui suffit de ne plus écouter les sirènes (car les sirènes, c'étaient des hommes) pour que l'histoire change de sens ? Il suffit qu'on regarde la Méduse en face pour la voir : et elle n'est pas mortelle. Elle est belle et elle rit.* » (RDLM, 54)<sup>42</sup>

The final quality of *écriture féminine* is the laugh, which brings Medusa's voice ahead of her gaze and constitutes the joy which women feel. For Medusa isn't deadly, she is beautiful, and she is laughing. But why? Is the laugh pure joy, is it cackling, is it forced, is it innocent, is it empty...to understand the multiple dimensions of this laugh, we return to Annie Ernaux for an exploration of *jouissance*.

### Ernaux's *Jouissance* In, Through, and From Writing

« *Cette pratique, d'une richesse inventive extraordinaire, en particulier de la masturbation, se prolonge ou s'accompagne d'une production de formes, d'une véritable activité esthétique, chaque temps de jouissance inscrivant une vision sonore, une composition, une chose belle.* » (RDLM, 38)<sup>43</sup>

Attempts to translate *jouissance* reduce what it can mean and what it can do. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," it becomes rapture, and many other Anglophone authors translate it into "pleasure" or "orgasm," attempting to express the infinitive *jouir*, meaning both "to please" and "to come." However, its role in Cixous' essay posits a new dimension of the concept; *écriture*

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<sup>42</sup> "Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing." (LOTM, 885)

<sup>43</sup> "This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision a composition, something beautiful." (LOTM, 876)

*féminine* embodies a practice of experimenting and exploring the body which then produces beautiful compositions, inscriptions both by and of *jouissance*.

There are three salient historical examples of *jouissance* before Cixous. In 1957, *jouissance* first began to indicate orgasm, representing a positive limit of pleasure. Soon after, Lacan distinguished *jouissance* from pleasure and delineated two forms of *jouissance*, feminine and phallic (Goder 114). Lacan links *jouissance* with the plain-pleasure surpassed to excess, and thus harmful, like the child eating candy until their stomach hurts. *Jouissance* is especially relevant in discussing work that questions the essential nature of gender identity. For Lacan, who is often credited with inventing the term (at least asserting its untranslatability), it is the relation of the speaker to *jouissance* that determines male/female identity, not anatomical distinctions. The two kinds of *jouissance* allow for a male form (phallic and surplus) and a female form (phallic and supplementary). He also asserts, like Cixous, that there is no universal “woman,” no categorical definition to reduce one to. Every being must pass through signification; however, women are not wholly subject to it the way men are, they have certain exemptions. Therefore, they can experience a *jouissance* not entirely phallic, and this “Other” *jouissance* is another distinct pleasure. In true Lacanian fashion, these different *jouissances* are each designated their own algebraic sign:  $[J\phi]$  phallic *jouissance*  $[JA]$  *jouissance* of the Other, visibly affirming their difference. Barthes moves even further in his literary theory and places pleasure and *jouissance* in opposition, in conflict; *Plaisir* (to pleasure) is safe, accepted culturally, and ego-assuring, whereas *jouissance* shocks, rejects cultural acknowledgment, and disrupts the ego. He also introduces a new dimension to *jouissance*: fear (Gallop 114).

Cixous brought *jouissance* into feminist discourse to demonstrate a creative power for women that is consistently oppressed for its ability to unify the mental, physical, and spiritual

female experiences: *jouissance* is something women have, and men fear (Gallop 114). Women have it, men fear it. How does this fulfillment of desire beyond eroticism, incorporating the political, even mystical, faculties of women manifest in writing?

“As *jouissance* becomes a banner and a badge for French feminine writing, the accompanying fear or unworthiness is projected outward and we-militant and bold-lose the ambiguous link to fear and emotion, which are catapulted beyond the *jouissance* principle...” (Gallop 114)

This reversal of roles is particularly fascinating when we consider that, phallogcentrically speaking, it is women who are thought to fear sexual pleasure. The dichotomy of knowing and fearing *jouissance* can be seen in the binary roles attributed to women in the first place, virgin and whore; this subversion of these aesthetic attributes is reminiscent of the reclamation of castrating Medusa. (Gallop 115) Thus, *écriture féminine* has liberated *jouissance* from its Lacanian genesis.

The opening to *Passion Simple* by Annie Ernaux succinctly identifies this attempt of writing *jouissance* in contemporary literature: « Il m’a semblé que l’écriture devrait tendre à cela, cette impression que provoque la scène de l’acte sexuel, cette angoisse et cette stupeur, une suspension du jugement moral »<sup>i</sup> (*Passion Simple*, 12)<sup>44</sup> Anxiety, stupefaction, and a suspension of moral judgements. What writing should aspire to; what sex should grant us. Inscription of *jouissance* in Ernaux’s works is an acknowledgment, even celebration, of its realities in intellectual and physical embodiments. Ernaux provides a unique lens to understand this feature through her expression and exploration of sexuality in works like *Passion Simple*, *Se Perdre*, and *La Honte*, where she literalizes connections between bodily pleasure, *jouissance*, and auto-writing.

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<sup>44</sup> “It occurred to me that writing should also aim for that - the impression conveyed by sexual intercourse, a feeling of anxiety and stupefaction, a suspension of moral judgement.” (*Simple Passion*, 2)

Ernaux traces the origins of her explicit connection between sex and writing to her childhood in *La Honte*. She felt she was unable to hide her sexuality, which in her culture could only be indicative of perversion, manifesting in the very form of her letters at school: « Je savais ce qu'elle voulait me signifier, et elle savait que je le savais: « Vous dessinez le m comme un sexe d'homme. » » (LH, 76)<sup>45</sup> Language threatens Ernaux<sup>ii</sup> as she constantly code-switches to traverse church, private schools, dumb cool kids, smart cool kids, the café and shop at home (etc.); therefore, her curiosity and exploration of her body (which she is taught to be ashamed of) naturally appear as well in writing. This continues throughout her oeuvre but is most explicit in the collaborative *Se Perdre* and *Passion Simple*, which takes place years later and explores her affair with a married man. Ernaux's emphasis on orgasm and sex, whether in an illicit affair or masturbation, demonstrates the social necessity of subterfuge, which becomes intrinsic to the practice of writing of the body tempered by notions of conformity and concealment.

Ernaux does not draw such a tangible connection between pleasure and auto-writing solely in self-gratification for making the private public, nor is it the thrill of displayed vulnerability. The autobiographer is often likened to the exhibitionist, yet Ernaux explicitly rejects this association: « (C'est donc par erreur qu'on assimile celui qui écrit sur sa vie à un exhibitionniste, puisque ce dernier n'a qu'un désir, se montrer et être vu dans le même instant.) » (PS, 42)<sup>46</sup> This justifies her *écriture plate* style, naturally terse and tinged with apathy for experiences that are more often depicted romantically, in meandering prose: « Naturellement, je ne me lavais pas avant le lendemain pour garder son sperme. » (PS, 20)<sup>47</sup> It isn't as salacious as it is unsettling. This denied voyeurism in favor of a factual anemic account of such graphic

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<sup>45</sup> "I knew what she meant and she knew that I knew: 'You do you 'ms' like a man's penis.'" (*Shame*, 76)

<sup>46</sup> "(It is a mistake therefore to compare someone writing about his own life to an exhibitionist, since the latter has only one desire: to show himself and to be seen at the same time.)" (*Simple Passion*, 31)

<sup>47</sup> "Naturally I would never wash until the next day, to keep his sperm inside me." (*Simple Passion*, 10)

encounters distinguishes her work from the erotica genre that explicit sexual expressions are often labeled as: if Ernaux wanted to write pornography, the audience would extract pleasure from the narrative.

The lack of gratification Ernaux seeks from the audience is expected, perhaps, because the connection of orgasm to auto-writing is not forged out of a love for her readers. She may seek our love, but she knows she has no real use for it.

« J'écris pour être aimée, mais je ne veux pas de leur amour, à eux, les lecteurs. Ainsi, je pourrais écrire dans un livre, directement, « Aimez-moi ». Comme J. Hallyday dans je ne sais plus quelle chanson. Et « on » m'aimerait certainement, la femme fragile d'*Apostrophes*, des conférences de Prague ou d'ailleurs, mais je ne désire que l'amour choisi, désiré par moi, et de préférence pour celui qui ne voit pas en moi l'écrivain. » (*Se perdre*, 155-156)<sup>48</sup>

Nor should her works of self-writing be regarded simply as therapeutic reflections of journal entries seeking self-actualization or rooted in psychoanalytic unraveling. In *Passion Simple* she openly refutes an explanation of her passion:

« Quant à l'origine de ma passion, je n'ai pas l'intention de la chercher dans mon histoire lointaine, celle que me ferait reconstituer un psychanalyste, ou récente, ni dans les modèles culturels du sentiment qui m'ont influencée depuis l'enfance (Autant en emporte le vent, *Phèdre* ou les chansons de Piaf sont aussi décisifs que le complexe d'Œdipe). Je ne veux pas expliquer ma passion – cela reviendrait à la considérer comme une erreur ou un désordre dont il faut se justifier – mais simplement l'exposer. » (*PS*, 31)<sup>49</sup>

She just wants to expose her passion, to instantiate it. However, outside of sex, the relationship with her lover is emblematic of interpersonal jouissance in representing a frantically obsessive

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<sup>48</sup> “I write to be loved, but I don't want the love of *readers*. I could write a book, straight up: ‘Love me,’ like J. Hallyday in I-can't-remember-what song. And “people” would love me, certainly, the fragile woman from *Apostrophes*, or the lectures in Prague and other places. But I only want love that is chosen, desired by me, preferably for a man who doesn't see me as a writer.” (Getting Lost, 126)

<sup>49</sup> “As for the origins of my passion, I have no intention of searching for them in my early history—which one reconstitutes with the help of a psychoanalyst—or in my recent history, or for that matter in the cultural standards governing emotion which have influenced me since childhood (*Gone with the Wind*, *Phèdre* or the songs of Edith Piaf are just as decisive as the Oedipus complex). I do not wish to explain my passion—that would imply that it was a mistake or some disorder I need to justify—I just want to describe it.” (*Simple Passion*, 21)

relationship, so painful yet so passionate Ernaux cannot detach herself. She is ultimately unwilling to give up the pleasure it does afford her. And we, the audience, are stuck with her in this delayed animation, frozen and locked into a frustratingly passive and desperately vulnerable narrative. Ernaux spends her days marinating in his presence and his absence, aimlessly daydreaming, or wandering with no inspiration to write nor teach nor live. She abdicates her agency and submits to her lover complete sovereignty over their relationship (and thus her life), despite his rejection of a romance and singular interest in a physical connection. We are stuck, lost, with Ernaux. We stay with her (unempathetically) as she laments the « cerceau de papier, »<sup>50</sup> the circle of life that realizes desire only through two ever-distressing, all-consuming forces: men and writing (*Se Perdre*, 68).

Returning to her childhood, *La Honte* incorporates new dimensions of jouissance demonstrating the desire fulfillment through intellectual and social pursuit. First, the cerebral pleasure associated with imagining her life furnished with the products she saw in her town newspapers. Secondly, with the joy she felt in acting like a bad student while knowing she was a good one, thus according to her social privileges of misbehavior and maintaining the opportunities that would come from her stellar grades. To end her work, Ernaux returns to the scene that opened her novella, a traumatic testimony of a Sunday afternoon in June when her father tried to kill her mother. Before writing *La Honte* she claims she would only express this memory to lovers in testing their response to her vulnerability, and specifically only men whom she felt she « avai[t] dans la peau. » (*LH*, 16)<sup>51</sup> Now, in the final pages, she looks at a photograph of herself as a young child, reflecting only the memory of that summer Sunday would bring her back to that girl, « puisque l'orgasme où je ressens le plus mon identité et la permanence de mon

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<sup>50</sup> "...paper hoop" (*GL*, 55)

<sup>51</sup> "...was crazy about them." (*Shame*, 15)



être, je ne l'ai connu que deux ans après. » (*LH*, 133)<sup>52</sup> Orgasm is the only experience which comparably forms and clarifies identity the way memory can, both of which pose issues of inaccessibility. Writing is a way to reach and relive them both, a process which cyclically gratifies through recollection and through the expression itself. These final lines are therefore a return and expression of the self.

The use of *jouissance* across these three texts demonstrates the fulfillment of desire beyond eroticism or the physical, incorporating political— through a literal representation of authority in the role of the diplomat/lover, and the activist movement of departing from phallogentric integral structures like language— and emotional creativities. But writing the self also allows authors to return to moments of vitality and make them coherent, a return to and expression of the self which is often repressed or restrained to the interior. A way to return to the body. A body that only knows how to make this same defining, expressive pleasure known through orgasm. Through sex.

Writing and sex. Sex and writing. The Sisyphean tasks Ernaux confines herself to. Absurdism has her smiling, *écriture féminine* hears her laughs.

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<sup>52</sup> “...since orgasm, the moment when my sense of identity and coherence is at its highest, was something that I was not to experience until two years later.” (*Shame*, 110)

## Polyphonous Identities: Feminist Revisions for the Future

The true beauty of literary works that are punctured by the personal comes when their inclusion of the self is not a conceited move, but a strategic one, sneakily concentrated in expressing the experiences of the many through the one. The polyphonous nature of *écriture féminine* is another way in which authors may escape the essentialist critique. This is especially evident in the work of Assia Djébar, a unique contemporary of Cixous. Djébar and Cixous had similar upbringings. Born only one year apart, the authors share an era and a culture, their childhood spent only a few hundred miles separate in the cities of Oran (Cixous) and Cherchell (Djébar). In studies of francophone writing, they are often cited tangentially. However, though Cixous witnesses the Arabic identity, she does not share it, which can cause issues of authority in her text. Sohelia Ghaussy demonstrates this outsider perspective becomes evident in the apparent audience for her theory of *écriture féminine*:

“In *Fantasia* the Arab woman is therefore doubly subjugated: in her own culture as a woman, and by the French both as woman and as object of colonization. In this context, Cixous’s “Write your body, your voice must be heard” becomes problematic (“Medusa,” 250). Cixous implicitly addresses only white, literate, middle-class women.” (Ghaussy 459)

There is a clear delineation of two spheres within *L’Amour, La Fantasia* that Ghaussy tracks: the public French masculine writing *écriture*, and the private Arabic feminine orality *kalam* (speech or utterance). In Arab countries, where many women were unable to receive a formal education and were considered “illiterate,” the specificity of the feminine desire experienced in the body could only be expressed through oral tradition (Ghaussy 459). What does it mean, then, for Cixous to ask these women to write their body universally? The writing of the body, therefore, that does take place, has much higher stakes for the Algerian women—and celebrating it, as

Djebar does despite intimate knowledge of her expected role, is even more courageous (Rice 124).

Djebar's use of *écriture féminine* opens new ways to understand the technique, as she moves between these spheres. In one instance, Djebar describes a scene of a typical family gathering, where a web of women would meet and be able to talk freely. This practice, which survived generations, allowed everyone to tell their story, whether through whispers or wails, and it was through speaking and listening that each person could find a brief respite from inner turmoil. Crucially: « Jamais le « je » de la première personne ne sera utilisé » (*L'amour, La Fantasia*, 203)<sup>53</sup> Their catharsis is shared and multiplied, consistently but not identically. Like these women, Djebar's writing of the self throughout her work moves away from the entrapments of personal confession, instead echoing the collective voices that contextualize her lived experiences.

Attention to hybridity is also shown in the works of Nina Bouraoui, whose work *Garçon Manqué* takes place post-colonization and demonstrates that Algerian liberation did not dispel completely lingering racial tensions. The memory of a war she never lived was etched in Bouraoui's upbringing, French violence was ubiquitous— she cannot hold her grandmother's pet without remembering how the French army used such dogs against Muslims, a horror she claims you never forget (*Garçon Manqué*, 111). She embodies a memory she never personally formed because the collective consciousness of oppression is so strong, it seeps into her own identity. It becomes a source of power for Bouraoui, and she inscribes Algeria, thinking of her parents, into her writing.

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<sup>53</sup> “The ‘I’ of the first person is never used;” (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, 154)

« Ce sera une force vive mais rentrée. Un démon. Qui sortira avec l'écriture. Ce n'est pas soi qui compte. On arrive toujours à se soigner. À guérir. À se guérir de la haine des autres. C'est la mémoire de nos parents qui est importante. » (*Garçon Manqué*, 134)<sup>54</sup>

The needs of the self are not above the needs of the many which Bouraoui and Djébar speak for.

This style of *écriture féminine*, particularly as it relates to writing the body, requires bravery and risk from its authors, it's taxing, with the language we use affecting us physically, manifesting in our aching aging ailing bodies. The transgression of femininity in a patriarchal society is an exhausting offense, naming it explicitly even more so; *écriture féminine* is a political tool, not just a personal one.

## Conclusion

In Assia Djébar's *L'amour, La Fantasia*, she reimagines notes how reading and writing in the French language, or any foreign language, produces an intense bodily effect; the image and flight (*voler*) which Cixous employs to express her excitement at the freedom language will provide is contrasted with the idea that this movement detaches what could be an anchored process of embodied writing. Compared to her studies in her native language, which seem to recreate the architecture of the cities and *medinas* through her body, interacting with foreign languages has a completely different effect: « Quand j'écris et lis la langue étrangère : il voyage, il va et vient dans l'espace subversif, malgré les voisins et les matrones soupçonneuses ; pour peu, il s'envolerait ! » (*L'amour, La Fantasia*, 242)<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “My sheer strength is restrained, a demon that will surface in writing. The self is not what counts. One can always heal, take care of oneself, dress the wounds caused by other people's hatred. Our parents' memory is what counts.” (*Tomboy*, 78)

<sup>55</sup> “When I write and read the foreign language, my body travels far in subversive space, in spite of the neighbours and suspicious matrons; it would not need much for it to take wing and fly away!” (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, 184)

This passage reaffirms the importance of examining *écriture féminine* beyond the scope of its conception to reveal new possibilities and opportunities for its importance. Bouraoui, Ernaux, NDiaye, and Djébar, each explore beyond the individual feminine experiences they've lived to make larger efforts towards equality and liberation. They attack phallogocentrism in unique ways, and when they take opposite, seemingly contradictory approaches, they demonstrate the multiplicity of *écriture féminine*. Cixous' theory has already manifested and evolved in a manifold of diverse voices; expanding understanding of her work will allow future writings to fly freely.

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ENDNOTES :

<sup>i</sup> Interestingly, in the film adaptation Ernaux's *je* is transferred to a character named Hélène !

<sup>ii</sup> Žizek's analysis of Lacan may be useful here: "For Lacan, language is a gift as dangerous to humanity as the horse was to the Trojans: it offers itself to our use free of charge, but once we accept it, it colonizes us. The symbolic order emerges from a gift, an offering, that marks its content as neutral in order to pose as a gift: when a gift is offered, what matters is not its content but the link between giver and receiver established when the receiver accepts the gift." (*How to Read Lacan*, 11-12) Ernaux's use of jouissance seems to be both a demonstration of submission to these forces, as well as an attempt to than liberate from them. This idea of language as harmful is present in each of these authors' works, but it is the nature of *écriture féminine* to dismantle this abuse and instead appropriate it for feminism's own empowerment.