

## French post-structuralist feminism

**French post-structuralist feminism** takes post-structuralism and combines it with feminist views and looks to see if a literary work has successfully used the process of mimesis on the image of the female. If successful, then a new image of a woman has been created by a woman for a woman, therefore it is not a biased opinion created by men. Along with Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous is considered one of the mothers of post-structuralist feminist theory.<sup>[1]</sup> Since the 1990s, these three together with Bracha Ettinger have considerably influenced French feminism and feminist psychoanalysis.

### *L'Écriture féminine*

*Écriture féminine* literally means *women's writing*. It is a philosophy that promotes women's experiences and feelings to the point that it strengthens the work. It is a strain of feminist literary theory that originated in France in the 1970s.

Hélène Cixous first uses this term in her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in which she asserts:

*"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. Écriture féminine places experience before language, and privileges the anti-linear, cyclical writing so often frowned upon by patriarchal society."*

## Important French post-structuralist feminists

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### **Hélène Cixous**

In the 1970s, Cixous began writing about the relationship between sexuality and language. Like many other feminist theorists, Cixous believes that human sexuality is directly tied to how people communicate in society.

#### **The Laugh of the Medusa**

In Hélène Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa", she discusses how women have been repressed through their bodies all through history. She suggests that if women are forced to remain in their bodies as a result of male repression then they can do one of two things. The first option is to remain trapped inside their bodies, thereby perpetuating the passivity women have been a party to throughout history. The second option is to use the female body as a medium of communication, a tool through which women can speak. This is ironic given the body, the very thing women have been defined by and trapped within, can now become a vehicle in transcending the boundaries once created by the body.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the original myth Medusa was a beautiful woman who confronted endless hardships that were brought about by the actions of men. She was raped, killed, and beheaded by various gods. However even in the face of tragedy and disgrace, Medusa was still portrayed as a meaningful figure. Following the moment her head was cut off, a Pegasus flew out of her body, representing the birth of beauty.

In the more popular version known by most today, Medusa is a monster with hair of a thousand snakes whose glance will turn anything she looks at into stone. Cixous claims that this monstrous image of Medusa exists only because it has been directly determined by the male gaze. Even though this version of the myth is misrepresentative of the original version, people continue to believe the modern version without question.<sup>[2]</sup>

Cixous suggests that it is important for women to expose the flaws in language that currently exist. Through the awareness of such flaws, as well as the invention of new ways of expression, women can overcome the obstacles that are constructed by what she labels a phallogocentric discourse. She argues that even through attempts to expose current inadequacies, it will always be impossible to define a feminine practice of writing because this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded. "It will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take

place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by those who are breakers of automatisms." [2]

## Luce Irigaray

Born in Belgium in 1932 Irigaray is a French feminist, psychoanalytic, and cultural theorist. Best known works: *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977). She was inspired by the psychoanalytic theories of Jaques Lacan and the deconstruction of Jaques Derrida. Her work aims to reveal a perceived masculine philosophy underlying language and gestures toward a "new" feminine language that would allow women to express themselves if it could be spoken.

## Julia Kristeva

Born on June 24, 1941 in Bulgaria Kristeva is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, psychoanalyst, feminist, and (most recently) novelist, who has lived in France since the mid-1960s. Julia Kristeva has become influential in today's international critical analysis, cultural theory, and feminism after publishing her first book *Semiotikè* in 1969. Although Kristeva does not refer to her own writing as feminist, many feminists turn to her work in order to expand and develop various discussions and debates in feminist theory and criticism.

Three elements of Kristeva's thought have been particularly important for feminist theory in Anglo-American contexts:

- Her attempt to bring the body back into discourses in the human sciences;
- Her focus on the significance of the maternal body and pre-oedipal in the constitution of subjectivity; and
- Her notion of abjection as an explanation for oppression and discrimination.

## Critique of classical psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud established the initial theories which would serve as a basis for some of Cixous' arguments in her writings. Freud's analysis of gender roles and sexual identity concluded with separate male (Oedipus) and female (Electra) theories of which Cixous was critical. For Bracha Ettinger both Oedipus and Electra are complexes that belong to the phallic paradigm. She proposes a different paradigm: the feminine-matrixial borderspace.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French\\_post-structuralist\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_post-structuralist_feminism)