Chapter 2
A Survey of Select Works of Hélène Cixous

Cixous's contribution to literature is in various genres: fiction, essays, plays and criticism. Her critical readings of several works and writers have secured for her an exclusive place in literary circles. In her preface to *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, edited by Susan Sellers, Cixous herself says that she has multiple identities in various countries:

yet it is the whole that makes sense. That which cannot be met on one path. and which I cannot say in one of my languages. I seek to say through another form of expression. (xvi)

Read in chronological order. Cixous's works reveal the development of one of the most creative and brilliant minds of the twentieth century. To the serious student, the name of Cixous is particularly associated with her theory and practice of *écriture féminine*. Cixous's conception of what constitutes *écriture féminine* is to be sought in the unique and highly poetic language of her literary creations. Her metaphoric vein, her playing with puns, which is
possible to a uniquely high degree in the French language, her intertextual citations, and her transformation of bodily experience into text through language are exclusively Cixousian and render comprehension and analysis difficult and, sometimes, impossible to a reader who is not acquainted with her theory and practice of language and writing. The multiple layers of meaning that her text can produce point to excess or abundance, which, according to Cixous's theory of writing, can propel a text or an author or a reader beyond death or limitation.

*Inside*, published as *Dedans* in French in 1969, is Cixous's first full length work of fiction. In it, Cixous refers to her father's death of tuberculosis when she was eleven years old and says that the loss acted as a formative force on her evolution as a writer. Verena Andermatt Conley, in *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*, comments on *Inside* thus:

> In a phantasmatic representation of her North African childhood, Cixous had written about her position in the family triangle next to her brother, absent (dead) father, and German mother, a practicing midwife who introduced Cixous at an early age to alterity and the guttural sounds of another tongue [. . .]. (26)

*Inside*, like much of Cixous's early fiction, centers round the relationship to loss and death. Within the narrative, the notion of *inside* has several manifestations and meanings. It represents "the tomb of human mortality
figured by the father's death,” and also “the paradise of childhood before expulsion and knowledge of the world [. . .]” (Sellers 19).

The first part of Inside can be read as an account of the period before the separation of the self and the other, that is, before the entry into the symbolic order. The mouth, an important metaphor described as a disembodied organ, represents the point of entry into the transformation. In the original French text, Cixous exploits the feminine gender of the French words for mouth and lips, the effect of which is lost in the English translation (Sellers 19). Cixous draws a parallel between the mouth and the mother by assigning the former a role similar to that of the latter in the “individuation process” (Sellers 19). Sellers explains that, as the words animate the self, the mouth disappears and the ‘I’ is propelled through this absence inside a recognition of difference, inside a body demarcated by physical limitations (19).

In the second part of Inside, the ‘I’ that has been refusing loss or death now willingly faces loss, that is death, in order to gain access to the symbolic order. The ‘I’ confronts the reality of the human condition figured here in an encounter with the spectre of her own death. The ambiguous last lines of the text highlight the paradoxical nature of the human condition. Separation brings loss, but the language that this produces offers the possibility of inscribing and overcoming loss. Echoing Shakespeare’s King Lear, Cixous suggests that to be inside the human condition is to be both imprisoned and free (Sellers 21-22).
The final paragraph of Inside is typical of Cixous's *écriture féminine* in content and expression:

Come, says he, let's away to prison, we two alone, without her without them, alone I will make you alone, alone you will make the night with your lips on my eyes and I shall see you beyond walls and time. If you will have me I will hold you in my arms and we shall create new tales. If you won't I shall ask your forgiveness. You will be up above and down below and I shall be inside. Outside, the mystery of things will dry up, under the sun the generations will wash up worlds over words, but inside we shall have stopped dying. (qtd. in Sellers 23)


from the position of non serviam, a refusal of all orthodoxies and a commitment to doubt as the only attitude consonant with reason; through an engagement with the Thomist concept of *felix culpa*, the belief that sin can be seen as positive, since it is necessarily linked to the possibility of redemption, or, in Joyce's
Hélène Cixous interweaves a loose narrative line with anecdotal presentations, autobiography, lyricism, myth, dream, fantasy, philosophical insights, and intertextual citations of and conversations with other authors and thinkers. Cixous evokes the relationship of the female narrator and her lover, a relationship of alternating presences and absences, separations and rejoinsings — a passionate and ever-buoyant relationship in which the partners partake of life and death, memory and oblivion, desire and discovery, the transgressive and the visionary, and the chimerical and the "real." This relationship assumes protean forms within a complex web of writing, creating a "third body" out of the entwined bodies of the narrator and her lover. This is a sensuous body endowed with flesh and blood reality, and it is also the body of the text: for Cixous, writing is grounded in the physical body, and the physical body becomes writing.

While the narrative shows the lovers coming together to create an entity that is both sum and separate, the text is expanded by intertextual and intercultural references. Cixous alludes to three exemplary texts, namely Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*, Freud's interpretation of *Gradiva* in "Delusion and Dream," and Kleist's "Earthquake in Chile." The allusions are integrated with reminiscences of the narrator's dead father and juxtaposed with thoughts about
her lover, evocations of her mother and ruminations on figures taken from a variety of sources like scripture, classical mythology and fairy tales.

*The Third Body*, like several other works of Cixous, uses the technique of intertextual collage, which disturbs the normal expectations of novelistic structure. As a result, the reader perceives a challenge to rational thought and conscious identity (Shiach 78). Shiach explains: “Each of these texts involves a journey of exploration by a subject, a *je*, whose contradictory and painful confrontation with theoretical discourse and with literary and artistic representations constitutes the drama of the text [. . .]” (78-79). The “subjective complexity, temporal transgression, and dialogic structure” make it next to impossible to summarise these texts. In fact, reading these texts coherently poses a problem, because they have several stories and the characters transform themselves in the course of the narrative. The characters retain no real identity but remain symbols. The stories do not seem to lead to any conclusion at all (Shiach 79). However, it must be borne in mind that this complexity is not accidental, but deliberately cultivated, because Cixous’s prescription for writing *écriture féminine* is the same.

In *Neutral*, which was published in French in 1979 as *Neutre*, Cixous experiments with a new mode of narration. She defies the traditional practice of omnipotent masculine subject directing the narrative and, instead, appoints the signifying function to do this work. Moreover, Cixous deliberately employs the suggestions produced by language itself. In the process, she
invents several neologisms. Conley comments: "Neutre introduces a coin into the archives of academic literary criticism and its ideology. Neither fiction nor criticism, it is an impersonal, secret narration cutting between institutionalised barriers. It consists of métaphores mal jointes in semantic random, in a dice roll [...]" (38).

Cixous’s First Names of No One, published in French in 1974 as Prénoms de personne, is a collection of readings of works by Freud, Hoffman, Kleist, Poe and Joyce. In the “Prediction,” Cixous expresses her views on literature and critical practice. Cixous equates writing with the desire that can propel personne beyond the rule of “opposition, aggression (and) enslavement” currently in force, beyond lack, fear of castration, the law and death. Texts should be valued according to their ability to bring the subject into play and give “life without limits.” In literature, the logic of “repression” and “negativity” can be circumvented so that the subject is left free to “evolve.” Writing offers an “elsewhere,” an alternative, with the potential to subvert the “homogenising, reductive, unifying reason” that has led to the current socio-political and intellectual impasse. The reader’s role is intrinsic to this invention process (Sellers 27).

Cixous insists that her reading should relate her to the real way she wants to transform it. To Cixous, fiction is action and has an efficacy. It privileges life and opens up new possibilities through meaning and textual
play. It also subverts repressive political constraints that limit and control the imagination (Conley 16). Conley says:

In *Prénoms de personne*, Cixous throws out a call to struggle on two fronts: subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The affirmation of the divisibility of the subject is not distinguishable from a critique of intersubjectivity, of the rapport between masculine and feminine, man and woman, vitiated by the threat of castration, petty anti-life speculation [. . .]. Sexual economy based on castration and death limits the possibilities of life [. . .]. A change in sexual economy calls for another logic, one that will bring about eroticism without lesion. (18)

In *First Names of No One*, Hélène Cixous sums up the subversive activity of literature in a mini-manifesto of her authorial credo:

Celebrating expenditure in their song, the poets of protest shake up conservative narcissism, and break the yokes and the ties. They tear the subject from its enslavement, cleave the proper, take the puppet to pieces, cut its strings, disturb and blur the mirrors. Already Hoffmann had set free the difficult and intoxicating knowledge that "I" is multiple. Before Kierkgaard, his characters are stirred by an intense, pseudonymic activity, a dance of individualities which traces the open group that is No one. Already, Kleist’s ironic blows had been unleashed on the
Law. That the Proper goes hand in glove with death is said better by Poe than anybody else: death administers the conjugal home, and Poe describes its perverse and troubling work, while Joyce mocks its trifling economy. (qtd. in Sellers 33)

In "The Character of 'Character'," published in 1974, Cixous observes that the unified subject of fiction has been one with the notions of character. Conley states that Cixous, like the other new novelists in France, feels that the concept of character is tied to an outmoded literary convention. She adds that, in revolt against this, Cixous situates herself in the mainstream of French avant-garde writing of the 1970s, which favours breaking up character and unity and introducing a surplus of reality in fiction (Conley 24-25).

Rejecting all literary production that sustains the status quo, Cixous argues for a new kind of writing from the imaginary, with its infinite multiplicity of identifications precluding a stable subject. She favours figuration, not characterisation, with possibilities of reading in different directions. The new "subject," being a true subject of the unconscious, will always be on the run, exploding codes and social orders, undoing censorships and repression. It will free, give birth to writer and reader, break the contract, displace debt and recognition. The author's signature will always be multiple in the new dispensation (Conley 26).

Cixous's *Breaths*, published in French in 1975 as *Souffles*, is a work of fiction, which deals with "loss in relation to the mother and the attendant
(re)birth of a self that is both female and feminine” (Sellers 49). In Cixous’s *Breaths*, a feminine voice, which is linked to the body and the pre-symbolic union between mother and child prior to the law’s intervention, incites the ‘I’ to a new relation with her own self, with others and with the symbolic order. Represented as an eagle, the voice belongs to “the time when the soul still speaks flesh” and has not “been subjected to the injury of censorship” (Sellers 49).

Cixous has always maintained that man’s fear and desire to appropriate the origin for himself has led to woman’s annihilation. Now, in *Breaths*, she shows that the mother is tortured for her “secret.” Cixous insists that the feminine writer should convey not only those incidents that will present the author in a flattering light, but also incorporate the darker, more destructive side of the human psyche. This is borne out in the horrific exposition of the desire for the mother’s abasement and possession in “Breaths” (Conley 51-52).

Cixous’s novel *The (Feminine)* was published in French in 1976 as *La*. According to Sellers, *The (Feminine)* offers a portrait of the feminine writer, whose writing is beyond censorship and has the capacity to circumvent "reason," which is an "enemy of life." It is rooted in a liberating love. Its keynote is humour. Its time is the present, including the acceptance of inevitable death. It is transmission leading to growth. It also aims at celebrating life in the face of death (Sellers 59). In *The (Feminine)*, Cixous
humorously depicts woman's role in instituting man as God. It is Cixous's stand that woman's fear of separation, solitude, and death is culturally produced through such histories as the biblical account of Genesis, conspiring to prevent woman from giving birth to herself (Sellers 61).

Commenting on the message of *The (Feminine)*, Sellers says: "Challenging the biblical account of the Fall as an excuse for inaction and inertia, the text imagines an alternative scenario in which there is encouragement to "raise ourselves" and "invent." Writing is the key to this (re)birth, for which the self must take on the role of mother [...]" (64).

In *Angst*, published in 1977, Cixous continues to talk of the subject she dealt with in *The (Feminine)*. In *Angst*, the newly born woman is shown as having to negotiate a place for herself within a symbolic order designed to protect the masculine. Language is the representative of this order and, as such, it is depicted as a "web of metaphors" spun by the masculine "he" to entrap woman. "He" talks without hesitation in "his" own language, spinning "fictions" that are designed to annihilate "her" reality. However, the masculine desire to subjugate the "other" also ensnares "him." for, he too is "a fly struggling in the web of his making" (Sellers 71).

Conley comments on *Angst* thus:

*Angst* writes both a detachment and an arrival. Written out of anguish, in anguish, it moves away from a masculine writing scene toward a feminine one: "There is a woman, the Living, the
spirit of life knowing itself and wanting itself, while I was losing
my body in anguish, a woman set on asserting life, decisive, a
Thought without model [. . .]. She the most solitary for having
made possible the locus, beyond the restricted economy of death,
where stretches and spends itself without limits the love that
knows how to give outside of the trajectory of castration.”
There, another writing, conjoining body and thought, will be.

(94)

*To Live the Orange* is “a fictional treatment of Cixous’s engagement
with Lispector’s texts” (Shiach 64). Published in French in 1979 as *Vivre l’orange*, it affords the reader an insight into Cixous’s vision of *écriture féminine*. Sellers recalls what Cixous described as the purpose of feminine
writing in terms of an image of the m/other’s face in her essay “Coming to
Writing,” published in 1977:

The moment I came into life (...) I trembled: from the fear of
separation, the dread of death. I saw death at work (...) I
watched it wound, disfigure, paralyze, and massacre from the
moment my eyes opened to seeing. I discovered that the face
was mortal, and that I would have to snatch it back at every
moment from Nothingness (...) Because of my fear I reinforced
love, I alerted all the forces of life, I armed love, with soul and

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words, to keep death from winning. Loving: keeping alive: naming. (qtd. in Sellers 83)

Now, in *To Live the Orange*, Cixous outlines this function of feminine writing in detail. She compares those voices that obliterate what they express with those that watch over and save, reflect and protect the things that are "ever as delicate as the newly born." This feminine writing involves a going beyond the borders of the self, in spite of the innumerable difficulties like blindness, falsity, injustice, error, murder, hypocrisy, distraction, death and "holding words out" in the other's direction. This inscription derives from a level of being which precedes the automatic confines of thinking, "where each being evolves according to its own necessity, following the order of its intimate elements" (Sellers 83).

*To Live the Orange* also pays a handsome tribute to the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, whose work was discovered by Cixous in 1978, and who had a lasting and profound influence on Cixous as a writer and as a literary critic. Cixous says with admiration:

She [Clarice Lispector] had the two courages: that of going to the sources,—to the foreign parts of the self. That of returning, to herself, almost without self, without denying the going. She slipped out of the self, she had that severity, that violent patience, she went out by décollage, by radiance, by laying bare the senses, it requires unclothing sight all the way down to naked
sight, it requires removing from sight the looks that surround, shedding the looks that demand, like tears, dis-regarding to arrive at sight without a project, contemplation. (qtd. in Sellers 91)

Cixous, who is still haunted by the law which, for her, is nothing but a word, urges women to turn away from “maps of culpability,” and “from a language after the Fall.” According to her, the poet must “self-strange” herself to the point of “absolute innocence,” one not reversible into guilt. She urges that the poet must rethink her writing activities in such a way as to “désoublier (to unforget), détaire (to unsilence), déterrer (to unbury), se désaveugler (to unblind), se dessourdire (to undeafen), in an endeavour to displace all that has been repressed, incorporated, appropriated” (Conley 106-07).

Cixous’s “Castration or Decapitation?” appeared as Le sexe ou la tête? in French in 1976 and was translated in 1981 by Annette Kuhn. It is an attack on the phallocentric culture for relegating woman to the position of the other. Challenging this dispensation, Cixous points to the threat that the female body poses the phallocentrists, namely, the fear of castration. In her introduction to her translation of “Castration or Decapitation?.” Annette Kuhn says that in the article, Cixous throws light on certain feminist practices which challenge phallocentrism and concentrates on a writing which inscribes femininity (Kuhn 37-38).
Among things that will constitute a "feminine imaginary," Cixous foresees the invention of a novel identity for woman, which will not be defined by the masculine. In her own method, she prefers "to fantasize, 'in flight,' so that instead of lying down, women will go forward by leaps in search of themselves" (52). Cixous says that she would define a feminine textual body "as a female libidinal economy, a regime, energies, a system of spending not necessarily carved out by culture [...]" (53). These features are highlighted in her novels too.

What Cixous tells of feminists is true of her texts. She says that "a feminine text can't be predicted, isn't predictable, isn't knowable and is therefore very disturbing [...]" and dissuading prediction on account of their unsequential narrative (53). The power of laughter in women is highlighted when she says, "Laughter that breaks out, overflows, a humor no one would expect to find in women [...]" is their strength, because, "it's a humor that sees man much further away than he has ever been seen" (55).

Cixous's novel (With) Or the Art of Innocence was published in French in 1981 as (With) Ou l'art de l'innocence. In "(With) Or the Art of Innocence," Cixous distinguishes between those who "chase after" words in order to "crucify" their meaning and those whose language "creates." According to her, in this creating sense, writing is vital to living. Her project is "writing you," an endeavour beset with difficulties. Although the writer cannot
fulfil her aim of writing "the book of You," she asserts the positive benefits of the attempt. It will be "the most beautiful of all failures." (Sellers 95).

Conley says:

For Cixous, there are masculine and feminine modes of arriving. They are determined by the mode of arrival of the child. To men, children happen from the outside; hence their astonishment. To women, they arrive from the inside, after a period of gestation, of waiting. The relationship to the other is modified by this experience by the effects of jouissance inscribed on the body [. . .]. (119)

Objecting to the practice of many feminists who extol the position of daughter and insist on killing the mother. Cixous argues that such a practice nourishes the masculine phantasm of a father-daughter rapport, with its inevitable implications of rape. She maintains that it is a masculine structure, which "devalorizes the mother, vitiates the mother-daughter relation in a political economy privileging the phallus" (Conley 119-20).

Cixous's *Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite* was published in French in 1982 as *Limonade tout était si intim*, the title being taken from a phrase written by the dying Kafka. The text is based on a letter that the feminine subject strives to write, a love letter that will communicate her "joy of feeling herself exist thanks to her" (Sellers 107). Cixous poses the question of the writer's responsibility in the context of history, in terms of a war waged
by the “men-men” to protect their domain from difference and “all women of the feminine gender.” The letter is also “an antiwar letter.” Love, in these “dire political circumstances,” is not sufficient to resist the “Great Logic of Destrucions.” Paradise is a state that human beings should continually strive for. We must work every day with tenderness and fierceness in order to reattach living importance to the delicate things from which we are constantly torn away by the forces of war. Writing, with its capacity to inscribe the forbidden and the forgotten, is a powerful ally in this struggle (Sellers 107).

Sellers comments:

writing's potential to inscribe the living moment is explored in an endeavor to write the “last” book [...]. Echoing Cixous' delineations of a feminine writing, it will be a book in which the self is involved without predomination, free from “habits, obligations, proprieties. Terror [...].” Unlike those works of art which are the products of ambition, it will be a “work of being” in which each phrase testifies to the long and passionate “apprenticeship to be human” (114).

Cixous's The Book of Promethea, published in French in 1983 as Le Livre de Promethea, is a work of fiction. In it Cixous endeavours to communicate different forms of perception, relation and representation, whereby she illustrates many of her prescriptions for écriture féminine (Sellers 112). The Book of Promethea is to be “a book of love,” in which Promethea
herself is the source of writing. The author is not, however, a passive recipient. She must work at her relationship with Promethea, just as she must struggle with the process of writing. Inscribing the love relationship with Promethea is essential, because there is a possibility that, in the process, love might be shared and "others can see which way to venture" (Sellers 121).

Sellers sums up the message of *The Book of Promethea* thus:

Writing is both the ally of the author's endeavor and her adversary. Writing can carry the author away from the truth; it can invent, lie, wound and kill. The author must remain open to the shifts and contradictions her position entails, figured here in a splitting of the writing position between "I" and "H." The creation of this dual position circumvents any temptation to mastery, reflecting the slippages and difficulties implicit in the task of relating to another and the inscription of this relation through the other of writing. (121)

In *The Book of Promethea*, Cixous expatiates on the predicament of a writer of *écriture féminine*:

It is how serious translation is that torments me. Translating oneself is already serious—I mean putting life into words—sometimes it is almost putting it to death; sometimes dragging it out, sometimes embalming it, sometimes making it vomit or lie, sometimes bringing it to a climax, but one never knows before
beginning whether one's luck will be good or bad, whether this is birth or suicide. But translating someone else—that requires extraordinary arrogance or extraordinary humility. Extraordinary arrogance is something I don't have. And extraordinary humility—I don't know who has that. Except perhaps Promethea. In this book (expanding and growing richer as I sit here stewing), which is Promethea's book, a young, vigorous book is growing, one I don't know how to write. (21)³

In The Book of Promethea, Cixous creates a novel that illustrates many of her convictions about the transformative potential of a feminine economy. Her allusive use of myth facilitates this process, because it enables her to exploit the resources of the dominant culture without being trapped within it. Milton, Dante, Shelley, Ariosto and the Bible offer her images and narratives. She combines them with "a collage of voices that subvert their authority while acknowledging their intellectual and emotional power." The book discusses the problem inherent in inducting such a range of allusions into a fictional text (Shiach 100).

Cixous's The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia is a play. Cixous has been interested in the theatre throughout her writing career. In the early 1980s, during her association with the experimental Théâtre du Soleil (Sun Theatre), this interest burgeoned into two major historical plays. The engagement with the others of history may be regarded as
a major shift in Cixous's work from her engagement with the personal other of Promethea (Sellers 141).

Norodom Sihanouk, dated 1985, is a documentation of the history of Cambodia from the end of the Second World War to the present day. Cixous presents conflicting pictures of Cambodia so that the truth is clouded over. Cixous herself is alive to this problem, but she asserts that the attentive spectator/reader may discern the truth because truth, just like lies, lives because of those who listen. According to Sellers, the play suggests that only an attention to the truth can prevent the self-centered, partial and destructive patterns from repeating themselves (141).

Juliet Flower MacCannell, in her introduction entitled "Cixous and Modern Consciousness," to Cixous's play, The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia, says:

Hélène Cixous's terrible but not yet finished his-story (for the play is histoire—both history and story) of Norodom Sihanouk is a step in the formulation—the formation, really—of a collective modern consciousness. The world has turned on its axis, so that its orienting polarities are no longer East and West—spatially and politically. Instead Traditional and Modern are the poles of our fundamental opposition. A reorientation of our minds is called forth. And yet none comes. Except, perhaps, from writing [...]. (vii-viii)
Judith Pike, in her introduction, entitled “Sihanouk and Contemporary ‘Epic’ Theater,” to Cixous’s play, The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia, says that Cixous, along with Robert Wilson and Peter Brook, is responsible for creating “a new epic theater.” and comments, “The force of Cixous’s vision lies with the destiny of an entire people. She calls this destiny into question; the result can only be tragedy” (xviii-xix).

Lollie Groth, in her introduction entitled “Cixous, Mnouchkine, and the Théâtre du Soleil,” to Cixous’s play, The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia says: “Cixous’s writing is riveting. a weave of the historical and the primordial, sustained by what Cixous refers to as her “unknown autobiography.” Her ability to enhance the political with the wealth of the unconscious is repeatedly demonstrated in Sihanouk [. . .]” (xx).

Indiada or the India of Their Dreams, first performed and published in French as L’Indiade ou l’Inde de leurs rêves, in 1987, is Cixous’s other major historical play. In Indiada, Cixous ponders why the Indian struggle for independence, a cause that united 400 million Indians from every religion and caste in pursuit of the same goal, should have resulted in the partition of the country. She suggests that the answer lies in the conjunction of historical and other circumstances like the English readiness to weaken the Freedom Fighters of the Indian Congress by manipulating the Muslim League and the aspirations and weaknesses of individual Indians (Sellers 159).
Sellers comments that Gandhi’s vision of a healing love that would respect differences is undercut by the insistence of Jinnah in favour of partition that, given the historical and political reality, such a love would be a one-way affair. The play persistently explores the need to discover “a mode of living that will love others as other” which links it to the concerns of Cixous’s fiction (159).

Shiach observes:

she [Cixous] is now committed to understanding women’s struggle as part of a broader political and ethical movement: to realize the subjective and collective dimensions of a feminine economy, to preserve cultural diversity in the face of homogenisation, and to resist the deadly cynicism of subjective and social domination. (135-36)

Cixous’s *Manna for the Mandelstams for the Mandelas*, published in French in 1988 as *Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas*, is a work of fiction. Cixous graphically presents the dangers of oblivion in the fate of Alfios Sibisi, who was murdered and disposed of mysteriously by the South African authorities. The novelist confesses that she has difficulty in imagining the consequences of apartheid. She apologises that the book is only an attempt at compassion, because she can never really physically feel the tortures suffered by the black leaders of South Africa. All the same, she asserts that
the tale must be told because that is the only way to counter repression and negation (Sellers 165).

The Russian Jewish poet Osip Mandelstam and the South African anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela are brought together through the common first syllables of their names and the dates of their exiles. Yet, their exiles, their resolve to fight and the fervour with which their struggles are carried on during their absence by their wives Nadezhda and Winnie/Zami have been so eloquently delineated that, as Catherine A.F. MacGillivray states in her introduction to the novel, the text is "neither pure poetry nor pure political history, but a hybrid weave of poems, anecdotes, scenes, images, historical "truths" (themselves always figurative representations of what one names "reality") embroidered on and expanded by poetic fiction [. . .]" (xv). The novel becomes "a modern myth of separation, loss of paradise, descent into the lower world, and of the human struggle to maintain in prison what is left of the earth and sky [. . .]" (MacGillivray, introduction xv).

"Extreme Fidelity" is an essay published in English in 1988, but based on a lecture given by Cixous in French at the Paris International College of Philosophy in 1984. It is a clear exposition of Cixous's view of sex and gender difference and it outlines her concerns as a reader and teacher of literature (Sellers 131). Cixous points to Clarice Lispector, whose works are close to a feminine economy because the self and the other co-exist in them. Cixous
concludes the essay by saying that writing is the one place where the feminine can be expressed (qtd. in Sellers 131-36).

In Cixous's *First Days of the Year*, published in French in 1990 as *Jours de l'an*, writing itself becomes the subject of the fiction. In it, the paradoxical predicament of language is dramatised, as Cixous endeavours to find an alternative means of expressing her love. Cixous exemplifies the negative constructions that language carries. Cixous also presents an earlier pre-Oedipal relation to the world and says that the recreation of this paradise is the writer's task. She urges that words need to be purged so that a new space may be created for writing. Such an exercise will transform one's relations to the world, others and themselves (Sellers 183).

In Cixous's essay “Deluge,” published in 1992 in French as *Déluge*, the experience of personal loss at the heart of the end of a love relationship joins the loss at the heart of the human condition, namely the loss of the mother. Death, in a rewriting of the biblical deluge. Depicting death graphically. “Deluge” describes the “compulsory murder” of the self's own needs and desires, which losing entails and highlights the “poison” of illusion. The character of Ascension dramatises the work which mourning involves in the course of her struggle to discover and invent solutions to the problems that confront her. The endless struggle is presented as vital, because it is in the work that we live (Sellers 191).
Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing, published in 1993, is a revised presentation of three lectures delivered by Cixous in English at the University of California, Irvine, in 1990, as part of their Wellek Library Lectures on critical theory. In the first lecture, entitled “The School of the Dead,” Cixous argues for the complexity of gender and says that only writing can present the truth about identity. In the second lecture, entitled “The School of Dreams,” Cixous urges the importance of dreams as a source for writing, because dreams have the capacity to shatter the “eggshell” constructions we create about our lives. In the third lecture, entitled “The School of Roots,” Cixous cites Clarice Lispector’s work The Passion According to G.H. to argue that what is spurned by the Bible as unclean is the root of writing and so writing has the potential to return us to “paradise” (Sellers 199: 201: 203).

Cixous’s Stigmata: Escaping Texts, published in 1998, is a collection of essays on several subjects. As the publisher’s blurb states, it is a collection of “texts that get away—escaping the reader, the writer, the book [. . .].” The blurb also describes the work as “a reading pursuit, chasing across borders and through languages on the heels of works by authors such as Stendhal, Joyce, Derrida, Lispector, Tsvetaeva, and Rembrandt, da Vinci, Picasso—works that share an elusive movement in spite of striking differences.”

The essays explore a broad range of poetico-philosophical questions in which Cixous has been consistently interested. The publisher’s blurb lists these subjects as “love’s labours lost and found, feminine hours.
autobiographies of writing, animal-human family ties, the prehistory of the work of art...” The blurb says that all these are woven into “a performance of writing at the intersection of contemporary Western history and a singularity named Hélène Cixous...” By way of conclusion, the publisher’s blurb states: “Evoking her [Cixous’s] ‘origins’, the economy of a departure from Algeria (so as) never to arrive, and the psychomythical events that are engraved as fertile wounds into the body’s many bodies, this book is an extraordinary writer’s testimony to our lives and times.”

The survey of select works of Cixous attempted above points to the fact that she is essentially a theorist and practitioner of écriture féminine. No readymade definition of écriture féminine is available. However, the works of Cixous considered above, between them, point to and illustrate most of the criteria she has prescribed for écriture féminine. Besides, Cixous has specifically delineated the features of écriture féminine in “Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays,” a ground-breaking essay contributed by her to The Newly Born Woman, co-authored by her and Catherine Clement and published in French as La Jeune Née in 1975. She has done so again in her influential essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” originally published in French in 1975 as Le rire de la méduse. The two essays contain several identical points, with several phrases and words being repeated. These two seminal works of Cixous are summarised hereunder.
Cixous, in her essay “Sorties,” begins with a critique of the hierarchical opposition, which has dominated Western thought. Pointing to the suppression of the other of the two opposing components in the process of making sense of binary entities, Cixous says that it ends in the death of the other. Stressing the fact that the one makes sense only because of its difference from the other, by which they are dependent on each other, Cixous points to the necessity of the existence of both. Extending this argument to sexual repression, Cixous avers that the masculine and the feminine make sense, not by repressing the other, but by their difference from each other. Instead of trying to subordinate the other, they should exist in the mutual difference that each provides to the other to make sense. This, in effect, becomes a call for bisexuality, which Cixous carries into the realm of writing. Using literary, mythical and philosophical texts, Cixous points to the repression of the other and also draws instances from texts, which thrive in their difference from and dependence on the other.

Cixous provides instances of the hierarchical opposition, which dominates Western thought in its study of nature, relationships and eventually of language. The pairs Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature are derived from activity/passivity. Similarly, the pairs Father/Mother, Head/Heart, Logos/Pathos can be traced to Man/Woman. Extending this idea into language, one finds pairs like Speaking/Writing, High/Low etc. They are always engaged in a duel, wherein the positive one, the subject, represses the negative component, the object. Cixous says that, whenever one element of the pair
intends to make sense, one witnesses “a universal battlefield” which ends in the
death of the negative component. The male is privileged while the female
is the passive recipient of the death sentence (“Sorties” 63-64).

Cixous points to the myth of the Sleeping Beauty, wherein, absolutely powerless, the woman is desirable in her sleep. The tale ends with the rescuer, a man, leaning over her. The unknown author of this text inscribes a repressed woman who is desired in her subordinate state, by which she elevates the man to the position of the rescuer. Cixous highlights the difference between the man’s dream and the woman’s—he loves her who is “absent, hence desirable, a dependent nonentity, hence adorable,” whereas she wants to sleep, “to be loved in a dream” (“Sorties” 67).

Woman has been assigned the dark region by man and has been tutored on the dangers of it. Cixous points to the fact that women have gradually internalised their horror of this region. This dark continent which exists within the female body is not unexplorable, assures Cixous. Exploding several myths, Cixous clarifies that of the Medusa. Contrary to the mythical belief, Cixous asserts that the Medusa is not deadly but, “she is beautiful and she laughs.” Cixous calls to the “frigidified” women to exit in order to refuse death (“Sorties” 68-69).

Cixous’s first encounter with hierarchical opposition began with colonialism in Algeria. As a Jew in Algeria, ruled by the French, Cixous sees a general category, inevitable and in constant struggle: “two races—the masters
and the slaves" ("Sorties" 70). Accusing the powerful of its attempt to put to death its subordinate, she protests, "There has to be some ‘other’," since there can be "no master without a slave." But the exclusion of the ‘other’ is a historical phenomenon ("Sorties" 71).

Cixous positions herself as the other who has been excluded on account of her birth in Algeria with ancestors spanning Spain, Morocco, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Germany: "exiled, colonized, and burned." Cixous says that she searches for people who are like her in their rebellion and in their hope ("Sorties" 72).

Cixous’s love for struggle leads her to "rebellious texts" which embody such struggle. She watches the really powerful characters who could have changed society. Yet, her interest is in "the persons endowed with an individual strength but without authority, those who are isolated, eccentric, the intruders: great, undaunted, sturdy beings, who were at odds with the Law" ("Sorties" 72-73).

Cixous says that her random reading of the Bible attracted her to the stories of Saul and David: "The rise and fall of men spoiled by power" ("Sorties" 73). She travels to mythical and historical times. She fights the Trojan war in her own way and becomes Achilles himself while she is afraid of being Ulysses.

The end of Cixous’s childhood and her entry into womanhood severs her association with some of the mythical and Biblical characters. She sees
herself in the midst of the struggle as a woman. She recognises the profusely giving woman, on whose debasement man tries to identify himself, while she lives in her freedom. Cixous compares this condition to that of Ariadne and Theseus in Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* ("Sorties" 75). Not wanting to see herself in Dido's place on account of the passivity of Dido, Cixous appreciates Joan of Arc for her energy and ultimately "for her trial and her stake."

Looking ahead to overcome death, Cixous says that she looks for a scene where death would be completely overcome by love produced by desire ("Sorties" 77).

Cixous refers to "the Empire of the Selfsame," which rejects the idea of a desire without conflict and destruction ("Sorties" 78). The history of phallocentrism in this Empire discusses desire, but ultimately brings it under Man's Law, whereby the masculine thrives in the death of the feminine. Theorists privilege the masculine. Freud suggests an "essentialist ideological interpretation," which eventually perpetuates male supremacy, relegating woman to her body as a limitation ("Sorties" 81). Cixous refuses to accept Freud's theory that "anatomy is destiny," through which sexual difference is studied in an imagined relation to the body. Cixous's verdict is that transformation in sexuality cannot be achieved without political transformation, which is radical ("Sorties" 82).

Ruminating on a masculine future, Cixous names a few aspects, which may be a challenge to the phallocentric order. Cixous points to a group of
writers who are exceptional on account of their complexity, mobility and openness and who demolish concepts and forms. Cixous proposes bisexuality as another remedy. The location of both the masculine and the feminine in oneself may demolish the deadly conflict. She also proposes the other bisexuality, which does not annual differences but stirs them up to produce multiple meanings. Stating that woman is bisexual, Cixous assures that writing is woman’s, wherein the other exists (“Sorties” 86).

The idea of gift is embedded in writing. Masculine writing gives only to prove something, while woman, in writing, gives herself. She gives “pleasure, happiness, increased value, enhanced self-image” (“Sorties” 87). The reason for these two different modes of giving can be traced to their sexuality. Man’s sexuality is focused on his penis, while woman’s libido is cosmic and hence the profusion in giving. She comes repeatedly, “Unleashed and raging” (“Sorties” 90).

Cixous states that a feminine writing practice, which evolves from the aforesaid aspects “will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded” (“Sorties” 92). However, she points to the salient features of this writing practice. This practice privileges voice. The woman, who speaks, speaks with her body and defies linearity in her narration. Another significant feature of feminine speech, as in writing, is the “song, the first music of the voice of love, which every woman keeps alive” (“Sorties” 93). Woman cries out against her repression in her voice. Cixous concentrates so thoroughly on the
body, which is more in woman than in man as the source of writing that she states: “More body hence more writing” (“Sorties” 95). The writing woman effects “depropriation,” as she destroys boundaries and the law. Through her gestures of flight and stealing, she demolishes propriety (“Sorties” 96).

Cixous recognises this type of writing in some men too—“men able to love love” (“Sorties” 98). Kleist and Shakespeare are, according to Cixous, able to transform themselves into women. Cixous identifies herself with Kleist’s Penthesileia, Shakespeare’s Juliet and Plutarch’s Cleopatra. These women have trespassed the law and have become ‘unmanageable’ by patriarchal norms.

Cixous’s interest in the origins of patriarchy is motivated by a desire to mine the very institution. Cixous, in her study of Oresteia, focuses on Apollo’s words, which claim that the strength of the word—the marriage pact—is stronger than the blood-tie. Thus he reduces the significance of the maternal bond and paves the way for the development of patriarchal social relations. Cixous also explores the significance of deceit and the role of the dead in the play. A significant aspect is the way Cixous looks at Electra as the head of the “new phallocrats,” who is bent on putting her mother Clytemnestra to death (105). She is compared to “the one last Great Woman,” namely Helen (“Sorties” 105). Electra remains, till the end, a disruptive force. She embodies electricity and excess. She attracts with her magnetic power the Choir, Clytemnestra and Chrysothemis. She “releases her own negative particles
constantly, stimulating, going over and over the sensitive periphery of her being” (“Sorties” 106). Though the text is masculine in its ordered narrative and in its attempt at closure, Cixous concentrates on the excess in which Electra exists.

Cixous’s study of Kleist’s Penthesileia, the drama of the Amazon Queen and her love for Achilles, draws Cixous’s attention to the excess which characterises the play. Capable of transformations, Kleist “insists on passing through the bodies and souls of those who are stretched to the limit” (“Sorties” 112). The play stages an ordeal, which shows the strength of love, and, ultimately, turns to elation. Cixous says that every lover created by Kleist is endowed with “the tireless energy of the strong, the raging” and “wants more, higher” (“Sorties” 113). His texts are characterised by “Assumptions, flights, self outdoing self, again and again/in body after body” (“Sorties” 113). In the war between the Greeks and the Amazons, the war of love gradually turns to violence. Having lost her trust in Achilles, Penthesileia understands that she has been too much a woman and literally devours Achilles: “Penthesileia herself a devouring dog” (“Sorties” 121). Cixous says that “Achilles dies without hate and within Penthesileia [...]” (“Sorties” 121).

Cixous lauds Shakespeare’s expertise in featuring extremes when she studies the love life of Antony and Cleopatra. She says that Shakespeare, while he depicts it, is “neither man nor woman but a thousand persons,” and that he “perpetuates the explosive brilliance of this ‘inimitable life’,“ as did
Plutarch in his *Life of Antony* ("Sorties" 122). Composed of the opposing elements, Cleopatra is, according to Cixous, "Wise and innocent," and she is also "extravagance and abundance" ("Sorties" 123). Cixous traces Cleopatra's loftiness to the Orient, for, she believes that that is where "the Impossible is born; she who is incomprehensible, who exceeds the imagination [. . .]" ("Sorties" 125-26). Cixous, pointing to Cleopatra suckling the asp, says, "Even in death, she is the one who nourishes" (130). Cixous concludes that Antony and Cleopatra still live because of Cleopatra's endless desire for Antony which, springing from her cosmic libidinal energy, produces love ("Sorties" 130). Thus, Cixous urges women to exit in order to continue to live. She provides examples of women who have survived death on account of feminine writers like Kleist, Shakespeare and Plutarch.

In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous writes about women's writing and also foresees the effect of such writing. She insists that woman should write her self. Her writing should focus on women and return them to writing as well as their bodies, from which they have been driven away by patriarchy. Woman should motivate herself into her text ("Medusa" 245).

Though she admits that a long history of repression has left its mark on women, she also warns women not to continue it by following the norms that patriarchy has laid down for them. Cixous says that it can be made possible, not by an entirely new discourse, but by breaking the new from the old—the
'new' referring to the 'feminine'. What she aims at is, "to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" ("Medusa" 245).

Cixous says that, in spite of the "dark" in which they have been kept and which they have been forced to accept as their attribute, there is no generalisation among women, because they have one feature in common— "the infinite richness of their individual constitutions" ("Medusa" 245-46). Cixous stresses the multiplicity of female sexuality when she says, "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible" ("Medusa" 246).

Cixous, through a woman's account of a world of her own, says that it consists of searching, a thorough examination of her bodily functions. She emphasises that it is a rich and productive act and an aesthetic one too. She wishes that all women proclaimed their experience with the body, which opens up a unique world of desire. Ashamed of this desire, which actually resists death, women have held back their joyous outbursts for long. Cixous admits that she is one among them. In order to overcome this, Cixous invites women to write, an act meant exclusively for them, to be executed by their bodies. Believing that only great men wrote, women had not written or had written in secrecy. Cixous points out that, when the woman overcomes obstacles created by her self, her "female-sexed tests" overcome other hindrances like the publishing houses and their personnel and, the readers too ("Medusa" 246).
Women return from afar. Repressed from their childhood, which is their most powerful stage, they are alive beneath their “frigidified” exterior (“Medusa” 247). They may respond out of the “old Apartheid routine” in which they have been trained, but only to shortly return to the “dark continent” which they inhabit under man’s supervision (Medusa” 247-48). Their return is due to their having “internalized” the fear of the dark. Cixous points out that, as soon as they begin to speak, they are occupied by the dark as it has been inculcated in them (“Medusa” 248).

Accusing men of domination in various ways, Cixous describes women’s condition, in the aftermath, including her’s, as “our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trodden spaces, the bevies [. . .]” (“Medusa” 248). She says that the point of liberation for women has arrived to break away from what patriarchy has dictated. The “New Woman” is the arrow, which moves further, rapidly, from the Old Woman. To know her is the immediate need. This feminine creature is the writer who inscribes femininity as a check against male supremacy. But Cixous points to the precariousness of her suggestion, for, there is rarely a feminine writer in the whole of the writing community (“Medusa” 248).

Cixous says that the masculine writing mode has been followed by most women writers. This particular kind of writing, the “marked writing,” Cixous says, is driven by a libidinal economy which is the locus of the
perpetuation of male domination. Surprisingly, from this very disappointing fact, Cixous catches a hopeful glimpse of "the very possibility of change,"—a subversive possibility ("Medusa" 249). In spite of the world of reason, which is the center of masculine writing, there have been poets whose writing has been feminine and whom Cixous describes as "men capable of loving love and hence capable of loving others and of wanting them [...]" ("Medusa" 249). In this type of writing, the writer treats the woman as an able and equal companion. But this can be achieved only by dismantling the cultural and social codes, which have been in vogue for long, by a series of "harrowing explosions" ("Medusa" 249). Cixous associates poetry with feminine writing, because "poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive" ("Medusa" 250).

Cixous advises woman to write the self. In doing so, woman returns to the body, the origin of feminine writing, which is robbed from her as soon as the law intrudes. The inseparability of the body from writing and from the very feminine existence is stressed by her. She also warns the woman: "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" ("Medusa" 250).

Another advantage in restoring the body lies in its ability to lead the feminine writer into writing, as well as speech, which has been an exclusively masculine arena. Breaking off from silence, woman, in collaboration with the
body, does not merely speak but, rather, "throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies [. . .]" ("Medusa" 251).

Another notable element which Cixous detects in women's speech is the 'song', which is "the first music from the first voice of love." The voice is the maternal in woman, with the help of which, "She writes in white ink" ("Medusa" 251). The maternal is so powerful that Cixous foresees that "Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think" ("Medusa" 252).

Cixous states that feminine writing cannot be "theorized, enclosed, coded." This is true of her writing too. It evades any fixed meaning, and is open to multiple interpretations. It aims at undoing the work of death, not by extinguishing the difference between masculine and feminine writing, but through an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. The differences stirred out of it evolve various meanings unendingly. Bisexuality in writing, that is, the presence of the masculine as well as the feminine aspect, is accepted by Cixous, though she points to its effacing of differences as debilitating. Against this, she posits the other bisexuality. She explains that it "doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number." Consequently, the process of death slackens and gradually wears away. This brings the idea of the primacy of the phallus to an end, thereby restoring two kinds of victims—the woman who idolises the phallus, yet cannot control it, and the man who has been handed the power, while at the
same time being “a single idol with clay balls,” and constantly consumed by what Freud calls the fear of being a woman (“Medusa” 253-54).

Cixous invites women to explore the dark continent—their femininity, which is not actually so. Cixous says that Medusa is “not deadly.” She is “beautiful and she’s laughing” (“Medusa” 255). In order to realise this, Cixous calls the woman to write, to dare the man: “Let the priests tremble, we’re going to show them our sexts!” (“Medusa” 255).5

Pointing to the enormous task of discovering the whole of femininity through writing, Cixous advises woman to begin from her body, which has the ability to “make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.” Having been turned away from their bodies by the patriarchal power, Cixous insists that women have to invent a language of their own with subversive potential to wreck the law and the partitions erected by it (“Medusa” 256).

The resultant effect of the revolt of this culturally and historically repressed group is highly destructive to the Phallic period. The force that exudes from these women—“Muffled throughout their history, they have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts”—is intense, in spite of their vulnerability. Though they have existed within male discourse, which prospers by one signifier curbing the other signifier, Cixous exhorts women to explode this closed relationship between the two signifiers and thrive on the unending differences (“Medusa” 256-57).
By this, Cixous does not suggest taking possession of men’s concepts and tools, but “to dash through and to ‘fly’” (“Medusa” 258). Cixous states, “Flying is woman’s gesture—flying in language and making it fly” (“Medusa” 258). She stresses the capacity of this exclusively feminine act to traverse complex and narrow areas, to cross boundaries and laws and to disrupt propriety. The feminine text, which is a product of the liberating gesture of flight, is “volcanic” and the subversive writer injects this quality “in her pronouns, her nouns, and her clique of referents” (“Medusa” 258).

Alienated historically and culturally, woman does not suffer as man would do in anonymity, for she is “capable of losing a part of herself without losing her integrity” (“Medusa” 259). Her capacity for this can be attributed to the fact that she is a giver, who can gift endlessly and without loss. Cixous associates this idea with woman’s libido and subsequently with feminine writing too. She says that, while masculine sexuality finds its locus in the penis, woman’s sexuality is cosmic. Her writing, which finds its source in her libido, is fired by this unbounded force and hence becomes endless. The same libidinal energy, during her status as an outcaste, kept her relationship to the “fore-language,” the maternal language, alive. The woman takes pleasure in her plurality, made possible by her feminine sexuality. Cixous describes the experience thus: “I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation” (“Medusa” 260).
In the light of one’s relation to the maternal, Cixous describes how pregnancy is viewed by women and reviewed by the dominant order. According to her, “Women know how to live detachment; giving birth is neither losing nor increasing” (“Medusa” 262). She concentrates on the life that is begotten at the end and which proves to be a continuation. She admits that her view may sound idealistic. Yet, she also points to its challenge against death, which is her ultimate goal (“Medusa” 262).

Cixous transposes her idea of accepting the two sides of anything to her writing also. Referring to the feminine and the masculine aspects, she says, “I want all. I want all of me with all of him” (“Medusa” 262). Her desire for this entirety comes from her understanding that “living means wanting everything [...]” (“Medusa” 262).

The New Woman who desires everything is omnipresent: “she’s everywhere, she exchanges, she is the desire-that-gives” (“Medusa” 263). She gives profusely in the belief that it will cause “life, thought, transformation” (“Medusa” 264).

The foregoing survey of select works of Cixous and the summaries of her essays “Sorties” and “The Laugh of the Medusa,” between them, offer a fairly comprehensive picture of Cixous’s literary theory and practice. Sellers, in her introduction to *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, succinctly sums up the characteristics of *écriture féminine* thus:
Cixous' name is most often associated with that of écriture féminine — "feminine writing." For Cixous such a writing is feminine in two senses. First, while Cixous suggests that feminine writing is potentially the province of both sexes, she believes that women are currently closer to a feminine economy than men. As a result she sees in women’s writing the potential to circumvent and reformulate existing structures through the inclusion of other experience. In particular, Cixous stresses that the inscription of the rhythms and articulations of the mother’s body which continue to influence the adult self provides a link to the pre-symbolic union between self and m/other, and so affects the subject’s relationship to language, the other, himself and the world. Second, since a feminine subject position refuses to appropriate or annihilate the other’s difference in order to construct the self in a (masculine) position of mastery, Cixous suggests that a feminine writing will bring into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression. It is in this sense that Cixous believes writing is revolutionary. Not only can writing exceed the binary logic that informs our present system and thus create the framework for a new "language" and culture, but, she stresses, through its transformations, feminine writing will initiate changes in the social and political sphere to
challenge the very foundation of the patriarchal and capitalist state. [...] (xxix)

Cixous’s emphasis on the specificity of language use by the practitioners of *écriture féminine* takes her works beyond the realm of feminism and gives it a much wider scope overlapping stylistics and philosophy. Starting from the gender base, Cixous moves beyond gender in positing the theory that the woman’s question relates to the nature of writing. In other words, *écriture féminine* feminises/philosophises the gender component of language. This means that at a certain point, Cixous stops being a mere feminist and, as a poststructuralist philosopher, enters a ‘metafeminist’ zone of interest. Hence her universal relevance.

All the three novels analysed in the present study are complex compositions as required by *écriture féminine*, requiring several readings to identify the features of *écriture féminine* embedded in them. The allusions and the intertextual citations and the other features of the style of Cixous enrich the novels but, at the same time, render comprehension difficult. The reader will be able to comprehend the novels more easily if acquainted with a few key terms used in a special sense in the Cixousian canon. Some of these terms are explicated hereunder.

The three novels of Cixous taken up for study namely—*The Third Body*, *The Book of Promethea* and *Manna for the Mandelstams for the Mandelas*—have certain common features, namely, subversion, poetic
language, love/desire as a motivating force, flight as metaphor, writing the body as technique, giving as a motif, elusiveness, plurality, multiplicity, bisexuality, jouissance and rejection of closure.

Cixous's texts abound in allusions from the Bible, mythology and literature. Her recourse to the ancient and, more particularly, patriarchal texts, does not mean a disruption of her political aim. On the contrary, Cixous employs a subversive strategy peculiar to her. She subverts the patriarchal meanings of those texts to suit her feminine endeavour.

Cixous uniformly employs a language that is lyrical in all her texts. An important feature is the song. Cixous traces its origin to the mother and the love between the child and the mother. Cixous's political project, which involves the emancipation, not only of women, but also of the imagination, finds in the song a fit medium of expression for women's repression.

All the three texts taken up for study, present a love relationship. Desire is the cause of the unending nature of love. All the characters desire endlessly. These limitless activities and emotions challenge death. Having triumphed over death, they celebrate the vastness of life. The desire that one encounters in Cixous’s text does not end in conflict or destruction. Desire is equated with the gift in her texts. Cixous identifies them both as feminine gestures. Desire is frequently associated with endless wanting. When she encounters the celebration of these features in a few male writers, she hails those works as feminine writing.
Flight is a significant metaphor in all the three texts. This is a liberating gesture with which many of Cixous’s characters are associated. One witnesses the flight in Cixous’s writing and in her language too.

Écriture féminine can roughly be described as the act of writing one’s body or self. The inscription of the feminine body in all the three texts is evident. The woman’s body becomes the source of Cixous’s writing.

The concept of the gift as a mark of abundance, which entails no loss at the end, is adopted by Cixous. Like the woman’s desire, her gifts are also endless. Instead of suffering loss, she enjoys the pleasure of giving away more. All the acts of giving are associated with the maternal. This exclusively feminine act, generally associated with abundance, exuberance and limitlessness, is extended to language by Cixous, whose language exudes meaning endlessly. This disrupts the patriarchal formula of assigning a single signified to a signifier. In this way, Cixous aims at greater liberation.

Cixous believes in bisexuality. The presence of the masculine and the feminine sensibility in most of her characters proves it. Yet, Cixous suggests the ‘other bisexuality’ where the differences between the two aspects are not annulled, but stirred up to produce endless meanings. On account of this, the characters assume multiple identities. They also become elusive. Promethea is an example of this.

Jouissance or pleasure as an unique feminine experience finds instances in all the three texts. The narrator in The Third Body, Promethea in
The Book of Promethea and Zami in Manna for the Mandelstams for the Mandelas exhibit this feeling of celebration of a feminine triumph. Their status as women allows them the experience of *jouissance*.

The ‘imaginary’ is the stage of pre-verbal and pre-Oedipal form of understanding in the infant’s maturation. At the central part of this development, called the mirror-stage, the infant identifies its own image and takes its mother as the ideal image, since it has no identity of its own. The body of the mother provides identity as well as the knowledge of the binary concept. Cixous revalues the imaginary and makes it a characteristic attribute of the feminine writer and *écriture féminine*. The ‘symbolic’ is the stage into which the infant enters when it is introduced to language. Learning to speak the language, it is limited and alienated as it is governed by the norms of the prevailing order, which is patriarchal. The name of this order of abstraction that overpowers is the ‘law.’

Cixous’s texts do not admit closure. They revel in their open-endedness. By refusing to come to a conclusion, which is basically a patriarchal construct, Cixous allows the reader to exercise the limitless potential of *écriture féminine* and savour the endless capacity of language. In The Third Body, one sees the continuance of the love relationship at the end of the text; in The Book of Promethea, the love relationship of all the three women still continues after the text ends; and, in Manna for the Mandelstams for the Mandelas, the love of Osip Mandelstam and Nadezhda and Nelson
Mandela and Zami continue to thrive, in spite of the struggle, separation and death. Love and life continue to exist amidst odds as a result of various transformations. The transformations substitute one for the other and prevent an end. Neither do the texts allow a closure, nor does Cixous’s écriture féminine allow coding or theorising.

The aforesaid features of écriture féminine have been used by Cixous in the novels that have been taken up for study. All the novels provide illustrations of all these features. So, it can be said that the novels illustrate écriture féminine. This also proves the hypothesis that Cixous practises her theory in her writing.
Notes

1The term *intertextuality*, in its original use, as Sara Mills says in *Discourse*, "could be defined broadly as the propensity of texts to refer to others and to be constructed by that reference to other texts [. . .]" (154). She adds, "intertextuality is one aspect of textual construction which brings about ambivalence within a text; if a statement from one text is integrated into another, it creates some sort of disjunction [. . .]" (155).

2Nancy K. Miller, in "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions, "says that, to Cixous and Kristeva, femininity is "a modality or process accessible to both men and women" (65). In "French Feminism in an International Frame," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says that Cixous privileges poetry and suggests that a Kleist or a Rimbaud can speak as women do (93).

3In *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*, K.K. Ruthven states that attempts to define feminist writing are looked upon with suspicion because they are bound to be premature and perhaps " oppressively prescriptive," and cites Hélène Cixous's warning in this regard, but adds, "But we all have a rough idea of what feminist writing is like, even if we cannot define it exactly [. . .]" (20).

4Deborah Cameron, in her introduction, entitled "Why Is Language a Feminist Issue?" to her compilation *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*, says that Hélène Cixous has charged some women with doing men's writing for them (7).
5In her introduction to Hélène Cixous’s “Castration or Decapitation?” Annette Kuhn explicates that Cixous’s neologism “sexts” implies that she wants to write, and to write about a “writing that inscribes feminity” (38).

6The concept of gift can be traced to the anthropological research of Marcel Mauss, where it is a means of communication and exchange, in the early societies, particularly the Northwest Indian tribes. The chiefs try to outdo each other in a ritualistic playful destruction of fortunes—goods or men. This gift, which involves spending, is actually a possibility of gain in social status and does not mean material loss.