



Écriture Féminine* and Female Corporeality: A Reading of Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow **Dina M. Abd Elsalam**

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Abstract

According to the French writer and critic Hélène Cixous, language has been colonized by male logic so much so that it has become a masculine tool, hence failing to capture the essence of womanhood. In her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976), Cixous coins the term *écriture féminine* (women’s writing), which is a kind of writing that is not stabilized, or bogged down with male tradition and logic. It is an eruptive and torrential form of language that is in keeping with the powerful essence of woman’s nature. The aim of this essay is to read Marina Carr’s play *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) in the light of *écriture féminine*. At the beginning, the nameless but so called Woman, the heroine of the play, is reluctant to reveal her true feelings. However, being on her deathbed and urged by Scarecrow, her alter ego, to vent, she is finally willing to speak her own mind and give vent to her innermost feelings. Her confessions challenge male logic and reveal her true feelings towards her unfaithful husband in particular, and her repressive Irish society at large. Through a Cixousian lens, the research traces how the heroine of the play is ultimately able to express herself by defying male-oriented discourse, and write her own being as well as her corporeality à l’*écriture féminine*.

Keywords: *Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, White Ink, Catholicism*

Introduction

Women have often curbed their desire to write, wrote under pseudonyms, or avoided publishing their works. Aware of the complexities of authorship and self-representation under sexist strains, Hélène Cixous seeks to empower women through writing, particularly through a mode of writing known as *écriture féminine*, which, according to her, truly captures the essence of womanhood. In her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976), Cixous coins the term *écriture féminine* (women’s writing), and introduces this new form of writing which challenges the hegemony of male tradition and logic. Drawing on mythology, she uses the figure of the Medusa to mock patriarchy and laugh at its legacy. The aim of this essay is to provide a reading of Marina Carr’s *Woman and Scarecrow* through the lens of *écriture féminine*. Like Cixous, Carr often draws on mythology in her works to expose the universal suffering and repression of womanhood. Women characters, in Carr’s plays, assume a universal rather than a local status. In *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), the heroine is not given a name, but is simply called “Woman”. As such, she comes to represent all women who are repressed by phallogentric logic and discourse. Alluding to mythology, both Cixous and Carr show how the Medusa and Scarecrow are the embodiment of women who have been tarnished by patriarchy. To counter that repression, women characters, in the works of both Cixous and Carr, finally find their voices and are allowed to express themselves out loud in a language which suits their nature.

Écriture Féminine

Écriture féminine, translated into women’s writing, was first coined by the French writer and critic Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay “Le Rire de la Méduse”, which was translated into English in 1976 under the title “The Laugh of the Medusa”. In her essay, Cixous introduces a mode of feminine writing, which defies the confining language of patriarchy. According to her, language has been colonized by male logic so much so that it has become a masculine tool, hence failing to capture the essence of womanhood: “[n]early the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason [...]. It has been one with the phallogentric tradition” (p.350). To counter this male-oriented language, Cixous proposes *écriture féminine*, which is not ordered or stabilized, or bogged down with tradition and logic. It is “volcanic” (p.357) overflowing and abundant. According to her, women are full of “torrents”,

“waves”, “floods” and “outbursts” (p.348) that seek release. Cixous clearly compares the female body with nature, invoking natural forces at their fullest to stress the intensity of women’s experiences. Women, however, have been “led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism” (p.348), which made them ashamed to express themselves out loud: “We’ve been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty” (p.355).

In opposition, Cixous encourages women to reclaim their bodies and express themselves through their regained territories. According to her, their writing has to flow from their bodies: “Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes” (p.355). It is through their torrential and volcanic bodies that women can subvert male dominance, since it is this “new insurgent writing” (p.350) that has the ability to liberate women. S. Sellers (1991) finds that according to Cixous,

the ongoing body functions of breathing, pulse, the momentum of the body drives, stress and hormonal changes, influence our use of language. She believes a writer's attempt to repress these activities is both a falsification of the nature of the writing process, and an attempt to control meaning in compliance with the dictates of masculine law. (p.139)

In the same vein, Cixous argues that syntax and grammar are inhabited by masculine ideas of order, stability, reason, logic and progress. By creating their own syntax, writing loose ungrammatical sentences, and developing new images, women are to deconstruct that male-structured language. In so doing, *écriture féminine* ruptures that seemingly stable male system, and dethrones it.

When women write from their female physical nature, they are to unleash the unconscious, “the dark continent” (p.354). Women are to destabilize the conscious and the rational, since psychoanalysis “reproduces the masculine line view” (p.354). According to Cixous, psychoanalysis provides “a useful description for the way sexual difference is organised within patriarchy” (Sellers, 1991, p.57), while *écriture féminine* counters it and thus becomes “an opportunity to challenge and defy its law” (Sellers, 1991, p.57).

Cixous maintains that women should write “in white ink” (p.354), referring to mother’s milk, that nurturing constituent that characterizes women’s physiognomy and flows naturally from their bodies. Through writing in “white ink”, women can resist the gendered politics of language, and can rid it of the masculine values and attitudes inscribed in it. Cixous clarifies that she uses the word mother “outside her role functions” (p.354) with all the chores and responsibilities heaped on the word “mother” by patriarchy. What she means when she uses “mother’s milk” is the rushing of life through women’s physiognomy. The flowing creativity that bursts with life and nourishment; this purely feminine characteristic that is capable of replenishing the world and sustaining it.

Cixous’s theory can be described as essentialist in nature, since she calls for a form of language that is based on women’s biology and sexuality, “[p]ositing the female body as the source and origin of the voice to be heard in all female texts” (Allen-Randolph, 1991, p.49). Cixous is aware of that problematic. In answer to that, she writes: “It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded” (1975, p.353). Her aim is to “surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system [...] in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination” (p.353). Cixous is opening new gates for women to explore parts of themselves that have been interred for so long out of shame. Women have been struggling with a language that does not adequately voice their concerns because it was regulated by masculine philosophy. Rather than enclosing women in an essentialist theory, she is pointing to one of the many possibilities that women could embrace.

Though *écriture féminine* developed as a reaction to social and political currents in France, “it was perhaps most notably adopted and appropriated by Anglo-American theorists and practitioners” (Taylor, 2018, p.41). American activists of the second wave of feminism, which occurred between the early 1960s through the 1970s, used the title “second wave” “to distance themselves from a “first wave,” often perceived of as a narrow struggle for suffrage” (Molony & Nelson, p.2). After the achievement of civic equality, second-wave feminists came to recognize “that the system itself seemed to have an inbuilt propensity for institutionalizing gender (as well as other) inequality” (Whelehan, 1995, p.4). They vehemently and widely fought against gender inequality and discrimination, and *écriture féminine* offered

new potential. It came to be widely used by “second-wave feminist artists invested in challenging hegemonic structure in language, culture, and also Western art” (Taylor, 2018, p.41). Its main aim was “to deconstruct the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text” (Mackinlay, 2018, p.9). With its focus on language, and the culturally inscribed discrimination it bears, *écriture féminine* enriched the endeavours of second-wave feminists.

The endeavours of second-wave feminists were followed by a “third wave” which was to include age, class, race, etc. as factors which play an important role in discrimination. Despite these waves, and the fact that Cixous’s essay was written almost half a century ago, the suppression of women’s voices which it points to and the pursuit for female forms of expression remains pertinent today. Marina Carr’s play *Woman and Scarecrow* is an example of why and how Cixous’s ideas continue to be relevant.

Marina Carr’s *Woman and Scarecrow*

Marina Carr is one of the prominent contemporary Irish playwrights. Born in Dublin in 1964, Carr was introduced to theatre at a young age as her father was a playwright. She received a degree in English and philosophy, and her M.A. dissertation was on Samuel Beckett. Generally speaking, her plays present domestic life and women’s struggles within the confines of patriarchal societies. Her writings “have changed the ways women have been and will be represented in Irish drama at the expense of patriarchy and nationalist fervor” (Sternlicht, 2010, p.150), since they “explore the dereliction of women within Irish culture, their relegation to positions of anger, frustration, and ultimately, death” (Noonan, 2017, p.1). *Woman and Scarecrow*, which was published in 2006 and premiered at the Royal Court in the same year, is a case in point as the heroine, who is on her deathbed, finally expresses her inhibitions, regrets and frustrations. Carr, however, does not only expose the pains of Irish women. In many of her plays, Carr adapts Classical mythology and Greek tragedies to “give voices to the women characters who have been silenced and submitted to the men’s words and actions by the classical tragedian” (Paul, 2024, p.113). She allows vilified women in Classical mythology to reclaim their voices and defend themselves. Whether her heroines are placed in an Irish context or a Classical one, her aim is to expose the universal suffering and repression of women.

In fact, women characters, in Carr's plays, assume a universal rather than a local status.

One important feature of *Woman and Scarecrow* is Carr's attempt to stress its universality and timelessness. In the stage directions, time is indicated as "Now" (p.151) so that every time the play is performed, the time becomes contemporaneous and immediate. Moreover, the characters of the play are not given names but are called "Woman", "Scarecrow", "Him", "Auntie Ah", and "The Thing in the Wardrobe" (p.151). Scarecrow is Woman's alter ego, Him is her husband, Auntie Ah is her aunt and The Thing in the Wardrobe is a dark terrifying bird that has come to take her to the world of the dead. Carr clearly avoids giving names to her characters to stress their universality and give them a symbolic edge, rather than pin them down to specific characters living at a given point in time. Even the minimalism of the set, which is reduced to a bed, chair, wardrobe and a CD player (p.151), creates a general atmosphere that is not culture-bound or related to any specific community. Thus, Woman becomes a symbol of all women who are repressed by phallogentric logic and discourse.

On her deathbed and faced with the reality of death, Woman is willing to open up about her life and reflect on her journey. The liminality of her state becomes "a site of transformation, a location of possibility" (Donohue, 2024, p.119). More importantly, however, Woman is instigated by Scarecrow, a female scarecrow, to express herself openly and frankly once and for all before finally dying. Completely disappointed in Woman because of the kind of life she had succumbed to, Scarecrow is harsh to her throughout the play and keeps confronting her with the opposite point of view. As such, Scarecrow becomes Woman's foil, perhaps also her alter ego, for she represents a strong powerful voice that disapproves of Woman's attitude and choices. Scarecrow bluntly tells her "There is no describing what you have given away. Wilfully given away" (p.162). She adds, "You who I had such hopes for. I truly believed when I latched on to you before the weaver's throne, I truly believed that you and I would amount to something. I was wrong" (p.162). As such, the play becomes more of a confession, for not only is Woman on her deathbed, but she is also being pressurized by Scarecrow to tell the truth. It is this confessional streak that makes the play fall under *écriture féminine*, for Woman here, expresses herself

frankly, voices her true unbridled feelings, exposes her hidden self, and is no longer inhibited by decorum, societal pressures and sexual repression.

Woman's Inhibitions in *Woman and Scarecrow*

Right from the very beginning, Woman is introduced as the mother of eight children, so much so that this becomes her identity. Having dedicated all her life to her children, Scarecrow tells her “you hid behind the nappies and the bottles” (p.222). She admits to having hidden behind her children all her life: “the mountainous bellies and the cut knees, the broken arms, the temperatures, the uniforms, the football, the music, the washing machine, the three square meals, yes I hid behind it all” (p.222). Married to an unfaithful husband and living an unfulfilled life, she distracted herself by burying herself in those daily chores. Instead of deciding to flee the marriage, she gave in to that life. In fact, at the beginning of the play when Scarecrow tells her that her time is due, all she still thinks about is her familial duties:

Woman What about the twins' lunches? Did someone buy bread? Cartons of juice? Who is making the lunches?

Scarecrow We're beyond making lunches.

Woman I wonder did Toby bother brining home his lunchbox. I'm blue in the face telling him, and who is (p. 155) washing the uniforms, I have to stay on top of the uniforms.

Scarecrow The time for washing uniforms is past.

Woman And Hal won't do his homework. Hal can't even read yet. I have to do his reading with him. I have no business lying here. Who is going to make the sandwiches?” (p.156).

According to Scarecrow, Woman's ego is bridled with “the convent psyche” (p.167), which constantly pricks her conscience, and would not allow her to enjoy anything to the full. The mention of the word “convent” is particularly interesting for “the situation of women in Ireland has been controlled, to a large extent, by the presence and influence of the Catholic Church, and the views on female sexuality within that church” (Noonan, 2017, p.7). Most Irish women have spent “approximately thirty childbearing years of their lives that were framed by a strict regime of enforced

selflessness” (Tighe-Mooney, 2017, p.193) which condemned contraception and this clearly “reflects the conflict between the Church and women for control of the female body” (Tighe-Mooney, 2017, p.193). This is obviously Woman’s case as she spent most of her life giving birth to children and rearing them.

In another exchange between Woman and Auntie Ah, the Catholic grip on Irish women’s psyche is foregrounded once more:

Woman That the whole point of living is preparing to die. Why did no one ever teach me that?

Auntie Ah I did.

Woman You did not. You were all simper and gush about Heaven. Had to figure it out for myself. Too late of course. And now to be cut off in the blossom of my sins.

Auntie Ah Now you’re talking. Father Gant is in the kitchen waiting on your confession.

Woman He’ll be waiting.

Auntie Ah It’s the height of bad manners. Confess for my sake. (p.194)

Her aunt, who clearly represents conservative morality and Catholic faith, has only taught her about the afterlife, and now urges her to confess. Her aunt’s presence at Woman’s deathbed only reinforces the presence of Catholic repression in Woman’s life. This added dimension of religious repression, and in this case Catholic repression in particular, exposes an additional pressure that Irish women have been subject to. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women “navigated life within an atmosphere of heightened Catholic patriarchy” (Delay, 2019, p.18) and the Irish educational system implemented “idealised Catholic womanhood, with the goal of preparing girls for future motherhood” (Delay, 2019, p.15). It is worthwhile noting that Catholic parenting and schooling had a political dimension since “Catholicism was interpreted as natively Irish and opposed to English Protestantism, it became a central component of Irish nationalism. And because women’s roles were key to Catholicism, the religious ideal of womanhood informed the ideology of the nationalist movement” (Delay, 2019, p.21). Thus, the Irish state’s

enforcement of Catholicism was its own way of asserting its own being versus England and this is how women got implicated in the process.

Extreme Catholic targeting of women's bodies was evident in Ireland's infamous Magdalene Laundries as they were "a religious punitive system which targeted the female body in a very specific way" (Gott, 2022, p.66). The Magdalene Laundries or asylums claimed they rescued

the prostitute or 'wayward' female who was regarded as 'fallen' even from the status of 'woman', that idealized paragon who was without sexual drive or sexual experience apart from a dutiful response to facilitating her husband's desire. The religious sisters were universally admired for embodying sexual chastity, a 'purity' essential to idealized womanhood, and the religious sisters of the Magdalene institutions were further admired for sacrificing their pure lives to the rescue of the 'impure' and trying to elevate the 'fallen woman'. (McGettrick, O'Donnell, O'Rourke, Smith & Steed, 2021, p.8)

Since the late eighteenth century, the laundries became places of detention and slave labour where women were forced to work unpaid for long hours every day. The early conception of the laundries as asylums for sexually deviant women became rather questionable as "analysis of the oral history interviews, considered alongside anecdotal evidence from speaking to survivors, suggests that in the twentieth century this was rarely the case" (Gott, 2022, p.10). The laundries came to include orphans, girls who were perceived to be troublesome by their parents, victims of abuse and much more. The carceral measures which took place behind convent walls were sanctified by "a national patriarchal discourse of moral probity and purity" (McGettrick et al., 2021, p.9). Though the laundries were shut down in 1996 (Gott, 2022, p.2), their traumatic scars still haunt the Irish imagination. Sadly, despite "important cultural advances for women in terms of their role in society, the one institution that has not altered its perception of women to any great degree is the Roman Catholic Church" (Tighe-Mooney, 2017, p.193).

According to Sihra, "in a society where historical processes of female oppression have only begun to be seriously acknowledged in the social, political and academic fora of the last decade or so, painful narratives need to be addressed before

transformations can occur” (2007, p.214). This is clearly Carr’s vocation for, in her plays, she addresses female oppression and exposes the narratives of women to pave the way for transformation and raise awareness about women’s issues after centuries of repression. Though these social and religious pressures are seemingly peculiar to Ireland in this play, they are easily relatable, hence maintaining the play’s universal dimension.

Overcome by domestic and religious inhibitions, Woman is shown to have been deprived of happiness throughout her life. Scarecrow confronts her with that fact:

Scarecrow I only asked for a little happiness.

Woman A little happiness?

Scarecrow You make it sound like some obscure metal.

Woman And is it not?

Scarecrow No, it’s easy to be happy. Happiness like most things is a decision, like going to the dentist or painting a wall. There’s no great mystery. (p.165)

Later, Woman asks Scarecrow: “When did it all turn to tragedy, Scarecrow? (p.178). Woman is shown to have lived a tragic life; “Carr’s theatre explores the tragic death of self which occurs in the life half-lived” (Sihra, 2018, p.195). Living within the confines of male logic and language, Woman has not been herself and has led a death-in-life existence.

This is akin to Cixous’s exploration of how male language and discourse are forced on women to oblige them to conform to the dictates of patriarchy. According to Cixous, language has been dominated by male logic and as such has become a tool of oppression, which fails to embody the true nature of womanhood. In Carr’s theatre, women reclaim their voices; “[w]hat gives her female characters their power is their use of language, and through language, their connection to the natural world and to a world of myth. Carr’s heroines have the power to use words to express their anger, their grief, their unresolved mourning” (Noonan, 2017, p.10). Woman gradually starts to reclaim her voice and shake off the shackles of misogyny. She is pushed by Scarecrow to overcome her inhibitions and speak her mind. The grip of

her duties and daily chores eventually loosens up and Woman starts to express herself freely. Confiding in Auntie Ah, Woman speaks of a trip that set her free: “Imagine last summer I was strolling Paris. I drank glass after glass of Sancerre. I flirted. I smoked. I ate raw steak till the blood dribbled down my chin... and I looked beautiful. Paris is the correct backdrop for me. I was set free. A woman with eight children roaming Paris alone... Why did I bother coming back?” (p.192). Later she tells Scarecrow about her dreams: “And my dreams were all of infidelity. Strange that, and I thought I loved him but my dreams, all of escape, flying, bedding strangers” (p.197). All of these confessions of hers emanate from dream-like states where the superego is held in abeyance. This is when her wild thoughts start to flow without any restrictions, hence defying male logic and sensibility. Her words are no longer conservative or censored, and clearly defy traditions and decorum. As such, “Carr’s feminist voice(s) [...] complicate and disrupt traditional perceptions of womanhood and motherhood” (Haughton, 2013, p.2).

The Medusa in Classical Mythology and its Appropriation in Cixous’s Essay

To achieve their goals, both Carr and Cixous before her seem to resort to Classical mythology. The title of Cixous’s 1975 essay, in which she proposes this kind of feminine writing, bears the name of the mythical Medusa, albeit with a different tone; instead of the hideous Medusa with snakes for hair, Cixous allows her to laugh at the patriarchy and to mock its stifling conditions, hence the title “The Laugh of the Medusa”. In Classical mythology, the myth of Medusa is mentioned by Homer, Hesiod and it also appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. Medusa was an outstandingly beautiful Gorgon, unlike her monstrous sisters and “a survey of earlier Greek myths would tentatively suggest that Medusa was a priestess of Athena” (Henry, 2023, p.13). Enchanted by her feminine charm and glorious hair locks, Poseidon, god of the sea, raped her in Athena’s temple. Out of jealousy and in retaliation for defiling her temple, Athena turned Medusa into a monstrous serpent-haired witch whose mere sight instantly turned onlookers to stone. Noone was able to kill her, until Perseus finally came upon her as she was sleeping, and looking at her reflection in Athena’s shield (for he could not look at her directly), he managed to decapitate her with his sickle.

In the myth, Poseidon rapes Medusa. Surprisingly, Athena punishes the victimised Medusa, and does not punish Poseidon, the aggressor, for desecrating her temple by his act of rape. Athena's reaction is "an all-too familiar story for women, who are still being subjected to sexual rape and personal outrage around the world; they are often punished, while the men guilty of such brutal acts may walk away free" (Alban, 2017, p.1). Greek gods and goddesses were anthropomorphic, that is they were made in the image of humans, hence professing human-like rather than god-like attributes. In the myth, they are jealous, abusive and unjust.

Not only is Medusa severely punished, but killing her to rid the world of her so-called ugliness becomes the target of numerous heroes, until Perseus manages to sever her head by looking at her reflection in his shield. Perseus then uses Medusa's head to petrify his foes, for her head still retained its powers even after death.

In the Classical myth, Medusa is depicted as a beautiful female who is deservedly punished for her femininity. Not only is she turned into a monster, but she is eventually beheaded by Perseus who is hailed as a savior. The myth is told from a patriarchal perspective and Medusa's side of the story is silenced and sidelined. Despite being wronged and mistreated, Medusa is vilified.

In *The Newly Born Woman*, written by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement in 1975 as *La Jeune Née* and translated into English in 1986, they argue that

She is innocent, mad, full of badly remembered memories, guilty of unknown wrongs; she is the seductress, the heiress of all generic Eves. Both sorceress and hysteric, in their way, mark the end of a type-how far a split can go. It is the demoniac figure that comes to its end with the sorceress-the end sanctioned by the group in death by fire. The "matrix" alienation, that which fixes the guilt of reproduction on the ill female organs, comes to term with the hysteric. What comes undone in both cases is woman's causality; she/it shifts, changes names at the same time the history of mentalities makes cultural norms evolve. But even if the split shifts, it does not disappear. Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today. (p.6)

Despite being innocent, male-oriented societies exclude and ostracize women by categorizing them as demonic, hysterical and sorcerous. By ascribing those characteristics unto women, it becomes easy to push them aside and take away their

agency, leaving them helpless and feared. In the Middle Ages, women were burnt at the stake by simply accusing them of sorcery and witchcraft. The accusations were mostly unfounded and driven by frenzy. What happened to Medusa is not much different, for she too was turned into a monster and severely punished for her womanhood. Thus, the roots of demonizing women for their female physiognomy are to be found in the myth of the Medusa. Due to their female biology, women learn to develop a sense of guilt and also learn to feel ashamed of their physiognomy which is considered to be associated with evil.

In “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Cixous says: “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” (Cixous, 1975, p.355). Unlike Classical mythology and traditional views of the Medusa which present her as an ugly monster, petrifying whoever dares look at her straight in the face, Cixous presents a different Medusa: “[r]ising above obstacles placed in her path, she may seize her opportunities from a resistant patriarchal world and break free of the warped views opposing her in bursting into defiant laughter” (Alban, 2017, p.24). By reclaiming her laughter, she is able to present her side of the story and sneer at patriarchy which has hushed up her narrative for so long. What applies to the Medusa applies to the New Woman for she too is “to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the “truth” with laughter” (Cixous, 1975, p.357). Her laughter now resonates with freedom and liberation. She makes herself heard and asserts her being.

Medusa/ Scarecrow/ The Thing in the Wardrobe

The characters of Scarecrow and The Thing in the Wardrobe are in line with most of Carr’s plays where “the creatures evoked tend to have monstrous associations, often signifying death and loss, rather than ethereal beauty. Scarecrow in *Woman and Scarecrow* is one of the more intriguing characters in Carr’s female bestiary” (Noonan, 2017, p.2). In fact, Scarecrow in Carr’s play could be said to resemble the Medusa in Cixous’s essay. Scarecrows are meant to scare birds, the same way the Medusa has come down in history as an ugly terrifying monster who scares whoever sets eyes on her, turning them to stone. However, through the rewriting of these characters, it turns out that these frightening figures, have been disfigured and demonized by patriarchal societies simply because they represent wild and uninhibited women. Scarecrow stands for Woman’s uninhibited needs and

desires, and gives “scenic representation to Woman’s psyche or emotions” (Noonan, 2017, p.3) and “ultimately represents Woman’s repressed creative instinct” (Noonan, 2017, p.5). Similarly, in Greek mythology, the Medusa was a free maiden, who was punished for her beauty and sexuality. Thus, both Scarecrow and the Medusa are the embodiment of women who have been vilified by patriarchy.

The identity of The Thing in the Wardrobe is hidden, though its avian character is revealed when by the end of Act I, the wardrobe opens and a “wing droops from the wardrobe, then a clawed foot hovers then lights down” (p.190). At the beginning of Act II, it is understood that that creature had attacked Woman as there is blood trickling down her chin and there are black feathers in her hand, while Scarecrow is battling with it in the wardrobe to prevent it from attacking Woman once more. Scarecrow is literally trying to scare the crow or the avian creature in the wardrobe. In Irish mythology, the war goddess Badb takes the shape of a crow:

Badb is essentially a prophetess of death and finds her direct equivalent in Atropos, the Fate who cuts the thread of life. Badb also finds her contemporary expression in the banshee, the Irish fairy whose crying is a portent of death. She also appears in the role of washer at the ford, washing the arms and clothes of a warrior who is to die shortly. (O’Connor, 2002, p.68)

Thus, in the Irish imagination crows signal the approach of death and the sound of the movement of the black avian creature in the Wardrobe throughout the play constantly reminds Woman that her demise is approaching, hence instigating her to frankly reveal her innermost feelings. Towards the end of the play, The Thing in the Wardrobe finally steps from the wardrobe revealing an odd assortment of avian and human attributes: “one black wing, cobalt beak, clawed feet, taloned fingers” (p.220), hence confirming its mythical nature.

Like the Medusa in Cixous’s essay, the use of bestial creatures in Marina Carr’s *Woman and Scarecrow* is primarily related to female self-expression. While the laughter of the Medusa declares her ability to sneer at the malfunctioning practices of patriarchy, the “muffled laugh” and the “deep-throated guffaw” (p.154) of the creature in the wardrobe, along with Scarecrow’s pressurizing techniques trigger Woman’s desire to vent and expose her secrets. Thus, both writers resort to

mythology and interweave its creatures within the fabric of their works to explore women's psyches and their entrapment within patriarchal discourses.

Cixous's *Écriture Féminine* in *Woman and Scarecrow*

In Act Two, Scarecrow promises Woman to see her to the last breath, only if she writes a letter to her husband (p.204). Under the pressure and menace of Scarecrow, Woman starts writing a letter to her husband. At first, she wastes a lot of time writing about her funeral arrangements to avoid getting to the confrontational part. Running out of patience, Scarecrow forces her to get to the confrontational part and this is when she says: "This is not me but the other one, the filthy scarecrow who has hounded me down the years" (p.207). At this point, Woman declares that Scarecrow represents her other self, that is different and uncurbed. She explicitly declares that the confrontational part that is to be written forcefully and frankly is not written by her tamed, docile self but rather by her alter ego, that other side of her which she has never been.

It is at this juncture that her writing converges with *écriture féminine*, for it becomes forceful and uninhibited. In fact, Scarecrow takes over at this point and starts to dictate her strong words of accusation directed at her husband so much so that for the first time in her life, she is able to tell her husband in writing: "You have reeled through my life wreaking havoc at every turn. Well, I am crying out at last, Enough! You will go no further with me" (p.208). These strong words of indictment are actually uttered by Scarecrow, her strong and untamed self. This is why her language is no longer checked by decorum, or restrictive patriarchal morality. It becomes torrential and angry, for she no longer needs to hide her true feelings or pretend.

When Scarecrow starts dictating woman, literally putting words in her mouth, Woman gathers her strength and begins to voice her true feelings. She blames her husband for his infidelity, telling him that his "insatiable ego" drives her "hatred" (p.209). Woman and Scarecrow seem to almost team up, where they alternately start throwing accusations at Woman's husband, until they finally reach a crescendo and this is when they say together "Be aware I go to my grave bewildered by your cruelty. I go angry, I go unforgiving (p.209). These strong feelings of anger are finally allowed to surface only after Woman threw away her shackles and unleashed

her true feelings towards her husband. Though Carr presents “weak female characters in the patriarchal dramatic tradition, she does not construct Woman as a victim. The relationships in this play operate as a circulation of power or a fluid matrix of power relations” (Haughton, 2013, p.5). Thus, her docility and domesticity give way to a revolutionary voice. Earlier in Act II, she says to Auntie Ah: “I wasn’t good to myself...I refused to be happy” (p.195), declaring that that was the greatest sin she committed.

White/Red Ink in *Woman and Scarecrow*

Towards the end of the play, *écriture féminine* takes another turn when Scarecrow plucks a feather from her own wing, takes out a parchment and declares that She has a few forms to fill in. For lack of ink, Scarecrow pierces the vein of Woman’s wrist causing a fountain of blood to shoot out. She dips the quill in and out of her wrist. When it dries, she pierces Woman’s neck. Instead of Cixous’s “white ink”, which represents the natural gushing of life from women, and the eruptive creativity which flows from their bodies to nurture and replenish the world, what Carr represents here is red ink, the ink that Scarecrow uses to write down Woman’s answers to her interrogation which is meant to extract more confessions from Woman. This is when Woman confesses to Scarecrow that women should seize the passionate moments of their lives, only to discover that passion has a different meaning for women:

Woman We must mark those moments, those passionate moments, however small. I looked up ‘passionate’ in the dictionary once because I thought I had never known it. And do you know what passion means?

Scarecrow It comes from the Latin, *patior*, to suffer.

Woman Well, I said to myself, if that’s the definition of passion then I have known passion. More. I have lived a passionate life. Yes, I have lived passionately unbeknownst to myself. (p.224)

She declares that passion only meant suffering for her, which is quite in keeping with her religious upbringing and Catholic background. Just as the passion of Jesus Christ denotes his suffering at the cross to redeem his followers, she too had to lead a life of suffering for the sake of her family and children. With this declaration, Scarecrow finishes writing and rolls up the parchment, hence putting an end to her life.

Woman's confession on her deathbed and her last words which were scribbled on a parchment clearly fall under *écriture féminine* for they are mostly written away from the constraints of patriarchy and phallogentrism. Unlike Cixous's white ink, they are written with red ink, for Woman has to pay her life for this kind of writing.

Nature in *Woman and Scarecrow*

Woman's thoughts and wishes on her deathbed are primarily connected to mother nature, which she has been uprooted from. Old and drained, she now dies in a suffocating room away from the boundless fields of her childhood. In fact, the play starts with Woman's desire to run westward to the place where she was born; the very first sentence of the play is: "I ran west to die" (p.153). The west is her birthplace, and her desire to reconnect with it "reveals the transcendent power of place as an element of identity" (Sihra, 2018, p.191). Cixous argues that women are essentially connected to nature and their bodies overflow with its natural powers. In the play, Woman's desire to cross the river Shannon and finally settle in her place of birth reveals her desire to reunite with nature once more, and to finally make up for what she has been deprived of. Scarecrow keeps confronting her with her withdrawal from nature and life at large:

Scarecrow The clouds are so beautiful. Why doesn't everyone just look at the clouds? It should be a law like paying taxes...You did not eat the world.

Woman I barely tasted it" (p.155).

She confesses that she has lived a life of deprivation, for she has barely tasted nature. Withdrawing from her true self has caused her to feel lost. In Act I, when she drifts off, she dreams of nature once more. It is only when she is half-conscious that she is able to reconnect with her true essence:

And the mountains...what can I say about the mountains except they were there...purple on brown on blue on molten grey...and the memory of ice in the light on the water and the water, glass...was that out west or did I just dream it, and the dwarf oaks shaped by storm, bent and rounded as old women's backs...hopeless...hopeless...or is there such a thing as light at all...and the whole landscape, the mountain, the tree, the water, poised, waiting, for something...what? (p.171)

The mountains, ice, water, oaks and storm represent the powerful elements of nature where Woman feels home. Away from the confines of domestic life and urbanity, she reunites with mother nature and its forceful elements to reclaim her true self. It is in nature that she is able to express herself through her regained territories. Her writing starts to flow naturally and forcefully without any linguistic or social constraints. Away from male syntax and grammar, her words are infused with her true essence and become truly hers. They are no longer regulated by masculine language and break free from its grammatical moulds. Her run-on sentences, with the overuse of ellipsis, emulate the flow of water which is not to be barracked by grammar and syntax. It is a new form of writing that defies linguistic rules and structures.

The above words were uttered when Woman drifted off, hence allowing her unconscious to surface. These words represent a kind of discourse which clearly defies phallogentrism and dismantles its fixed order. It is written *à l'écriture féminine*, which ruptures the seemingly stable male system, and dethrones it. Written from female physiognomy, it unleashes the dark unconscious and its undiscovered territories.

The Female Gaze in “The Laugh of the Medusa” and *Woman and Scarecrow*

Typically, the male gaze objectifies women. It turns them into commodities meant to please and entertain. Under the male gaze, women strive to meet the beauty standards set by patriarchal societies.

The dominant social gaze in our societies is male, exposing women beneath an ubiquitous, even panoptic eye. The power of the gaze is seen in all the media, whether film, broadcasting, advertising or social media; any public view of women places them under an evaluative scrutiny which objectifies them as sexual beings, whether admired, or dismissed as unworthy of observation and lacking the dignity of complete human beings. Objectified through such looks, women are evaluated as merely female, rather than being appreciated as human. (Alban, 2017, p.24)

Rather than being scrutinized by the male gaze, what Cixous does in her essay is that she turns the situation upside down so that it is now the Medusa who sneeringly gazes at the male. It is now the power of the Medusa's gaze that is able to observe and evaluate the male and to dismiss the ills of male-oriented societies. Similarly,

urged by Scarecrow to reassess her relationship with her husband and to confess her true feelings about their sick relationship, Woman is allowed for the first time in her life to scrutinize her husband. Traditionally, the male gaze commodifies women, turning them into sexual objects meant to please and entertain men. While the power of the male gaze reinforces male standards of beauty and femininity, the female gaze turns the situation upside down, so that women are given the right to gaze at the male. The female gaze, however, is not a purely sexual gaze as is the case with the male gaze. Instead it is a gaze that is free to assess and evaluate; it is a gaze that is allowed to observe male behavior and scrutinize it. Confronting her husband with her true feelings, Woman is finally allowed to vent:

Woman I've listened to you too long and all that listening has taught me nothing.

Him Nothing?

Woman Nothing save you were not worthy of my love.

Him So that's the way of it. Curse me on the lip of the grave.

Woman You drank the wine. Now drink the vinegar. (p.189)

In the play, the female gaze is not just limited to Woman's husband, but extends to include her entire life. Everything in her life is now to be observed and scrutinized. Even her relationship with her children and her aunt are to be scrutinized.

The gaze she exercises from her deathbed is free, uninhibited and empowering. It is no longer encumbered by male discourse and ideology. For the first and sadly last time in her life, she is able to reassess people and relationships in her life. Unlike the male gaze, which is exclusively sexual, her gaze is inclusive and unlimited.

Conclusion

Reading Marina Carr's play *Woman and Scarecrow* through Cixous's ideas of *écriture féminine* brings to light the liberation of women through language and writing. In the play, Woman's liberation is chiefly linguistic for it is achieved through her verbal utterances and scribbling, hence converging with Cixous's *écriture féminine*.

The play starts in a liminal zone between life and death, and the action of the play takes place on and around Woman's deathbed. Strangely, her passing seems less tragic than her life itself, which was steeped in deprivation and alienation. Although on the surface, Carr's Woman in the play may seem like the traditionally weak type with a suppressed voice, her discourse develops into a specifically strong feminine voice. At the beginning, her words are muffled and subdued by male-oriented discourse. She, however, eventually manages to come into her own and express herself. Her demure oral confessions give way to epistolary writing, until finally her words are written in her own blood, thus offering a new take on Cixous's white ink, turning it into red ink.

Écriture féminine surfaces in the play when Woman casts off male discourse to assume her true native voice. Away from the confines of patriarchy, that voice is essentially wild, eruptive and connected to nature and its forceful powers. It is no longer regulated by grammar and syntax. In fact, at certain moments, it breaks free from those moulds and structures to emulate the flow of natural forces. *Écriture féminine* also allows her secret and intimate thoughts to surface from the dark recesses of the unconscious.

Once she reclaims her empowering voice, Woman is given the right to observe, comment and scrutinize. She is no longer relegated to the backstage, where her corporeality is invaded. The limiting male gaze is toppled by an empowering female gaze which truly befits her and allows her to view the world from her own perspective.

On her way to the grave, Woman is finally liberated and regains her corporeality. Sadly, her confessions are delivered in red ink (her own blood) as they are aligned with her pain and suffering. They are equally aligned with Irish Catholicism which has turned her life to eternal "passion".

Like Cixous, Carr interweaves mythology in her work to shed light on the narratives of silenced women. While the Medusa's laughter signals strength and empowerment, the muffled laughter and guffaws of the creature in the wardrobe in Carr's play instigate Woman to pour her feelings torrentially *à l'écriture féminine*.

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الكتابة النسائية والجسد الأنثوي: قراءة لمسرحية «المرأة والفزاعة» لمارينا كار

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المستخلص

تري الكاتبة والناقدة الفرنسية إيلين سيكسوس أن المنطق الذكوري قد هيمن على اللغة بحيث أصبحت اللغة أداة ذكورية ومن ثم صارت عاجزة عن التعبير عن جوهر المرأة ومكوناتها. وفي مقالها "ضحكة ميدوسا" (1976) تطرح سيكسوس فكرة الكتابة النسائية وهي كتابة غير مكبلة أو مقيدة بالتقاليد أو المنطق الذكوري. فهي كتابة متفجرة ومنهمرة تتوافق مع طبيعة المرأة الجسدية. ويهدف البحث إلى تقديم قراءة لمسرحية «المرأة والفزاعة» (2006) لمارينا كار من منظور الكتابة النسائية. في بداية المسرحية نجد أن البطلة التي ليس لها اسم وتدعى (امرأة) غير راغبة في البوح عن حقيقة مشاعرها. ولكن عندما ترقد طريحة فراش الموت، وعندما تحثها شخصيتها البديلة، (فزاعة)، على البوح، تشرع في اعترافاتها التي تتحدى المنطق الذكوري وتعبّر عن مشاعرها الحقيقية تجاه زوجها الخائن بشكل خاص وقمع مجتمعا الأيرلندي لها بشكل عام. ومن خلال طرح سيكسوس عن الكتابة النسائية، يتتبع البحث كيف تتمكن بطلة المسرحية من مجابهة الخطاب الذكوري، والتعبير عن ذاتها وجسدها من خلال الكتابة النسائية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إيلين سيكسوس، "ضحكة ميدوسا"، الحبر الأبيض، الكاثوليكية