Ecriture Feminine

The very purpose of this paper is paradoxical; I am attempting to convey notions of what feminine writing, or *écriture féminine*, is. This is especially difficult because the feminine writing position is, *by definition*, impossible to define. Ironically, it is best understood by comparing it to its masculine counterpart (this is somewhat humorous, as “essentialist” females bemoan their recurrent comparison to males.) If this relationship is examined as a binary opposite, the masculine occupies the favored half of the slash, embodying certainty, rationality, and the definite. On the other hand, feminine writing embraces the vague and the slippery, shrouding itself in mystique; exact wording is never the focus of feminine writing, but rather the myriad of possible interpretations, meanings, and lessons that it doesn’t *directly* express. A dictionary could therefore be seen as *the* compendium of masculine writing, an honest guide to the surefire meaning that waits behind each word. In contrast, feminine writing could be compared to (ha ha) a metaphor, where meaning it transmitted by understanding something *as something else*. This notion presents the idea that masculine writing is inherently incapable of *suggesting* something in an artistic or abstract sense, leaving feminine writing to occupy these roles.

The Poststructuralist feminists can be divided into two different camps - the “essentialists” and the “constructionists.” While essentialist women confined themselves to the right side of the male/female binary division, believing that “womanness” was formed by, and therefore bound to, its more powerful and influential male counterpart. This position had to be escaped, superseded, outgrown. Constructionists took one further step back, and attempted to discern how gender is constructed as a whole for both men and women. This examination would conclude with the idea that gender is a social construct that exists beyond physical, biological, and even mental states, not slottable into the binary division of man versus woman. Ecriture feminine identifies with Post-Structuralism through its deconstructive stance toward this binary opposition of men and women. It rejects the singular “masculine” form of thinking, focusing instead on where literary realms meld, twist, overlap, and co-mingle. The essentialist camp also identifies with Marxism in its quest for the de-conditioning of subordination that has been imposed by the dominant group - in this case, patriarchal society reducing women’s existence to domestic roles. In some societies, even language had come to reflect these biases against women. Gloria Anzaldua was shocked the first time she heard a group of Chicano-Spanish women refer to themselves as “Nosotras”, which means “we”. In Gloria’s society, only the masculine form “Nosotros” existed - groups of women were, linguistically, not supposed to exist independent from man.

Feminine writing was initially confined to diaries, poems, letters, or sentimental fiction, allowing it to be easily dismissed from the “canon” of great works that patriarchal society embraced and credited. With the new paradigm that gender was not cemented in whether or not someone had a penis, the realm of *écriture féminine* would grow to encompass works written by men, from the feminine “position.” Instead of seeing if a piece of writing had come from a person with a penis, the exact “femininity” or “masculinity” of a piece of writing came to be ascertained by it’s “position” or relationship to the Phallus. The Phallus was another name Lacan gave to the “center”, which was the supposed to serve as an anchoring point for signifiers, providing structure and order to the world. Its very name speaks for how intensely manly and masculine and penis-like this “center” is, and therefore should be indicative of the rational, singular thoughts permeated it’s atmosphere. As one begins to move away from this metaphysical obelisk of manliness, his or her communication would become less grounded in certainty and more open to interpretation. Lewis Carroll, for example, wrote “Jabberwocky”, a piece that embodies the vagueness associated with feminine writing. This was accomplished by his use of words like *slithy* or *brillig* to evoke feelings (perhaps of slithering, and brilliance) rather than incorporate commonplace words that described them.