Trying to Write It

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Trying to Feel It

The voice is in the dirt.

It wasn't for what she did

It was for what she suffered.

Which is not my hurt.

So I write this. So I

Try to give birth. Me,

A man.

-Stan Rice

Silent All These Years

But what if I'm a mermaid

In these jeans of his

With her name still on it

Hey but I don't care

Cause sometimes

I said sometimes

I hear my voice

And it's been here

Silent All These Years

- Tori Amos

I. Being the Angel

I'm going to write a feminist story. It will be a young adult story, and it will have a strong female character. It's going to be about El Trauco[1]—a metaphor for patriarchal repression—but this girl will outwit him. She will not be a helpless victim.

Trauco was poised up on the tree across from the Girl's house, watching, and waiting. He had come at sunset, and now it was deep night. A hammer was banging away at his brain—the result of all the concentration he was putting into sending her the dream. His gnarled, footless legs were hurting, so he tried to shift his weight around. It didn't help, but he didn't mind. If there was one thing he had, it was patience. This new Girl, she intrigued him. She had something that—

—What would you like for lunch? —What? —What would you like me to make for lunch? —Umm... I don't know, honey, whatever you want. —Well, we have some fish fingers, or I can make pasta. —Pasta —Okie dokie. 'Cause the fish fingers, there's like 40 of them, so that will be enough for like... 5 lunches. —Do you want to eat fish fingers now? —No, no, I was just saying. —Fish fingers, then. —O.K

She had something that... he had never seen before?

No, what a cliché.

She had something that he couldn't quite recognize.

[1] El Trauco is a character in the mythology of Chiloé, a Chilean archipelago. He is a disfigured creature who rapes teenage girls. Any unexplained pregnancies are attributed to El Trauco and young are taught to fear him.

O.K, that's a bit better. He can remember all the usual girls he seduces, the typical scared, lost females. When she ends up surprising him, it will be like a disruption of men's stereotypical images of women. Note to self: make sure the girl is a believable character. I'm going to—

—What do you want with the fish? —Huh? Umm...Whatever is easiest for you. —Rice? —Sure. —But my rice is never very good. —Do you need me to help you? —No, no, don't worry about me. —I'll come help you.

Virginia Woolf, in several of her works, claimed that to write fiction, a woman needs money and a room of her own. I have neither. What I have is a one-bedroom apartment, an insufficient scholarship, and an unemployed husband.

Of course, I cannot claim to be the first would-be writer under strenuous physical and economic constraints. Isn't it a mark of the writer—both male and female—that until (s)he gets published, and usually even after that, (s)he is, as they say, *starving*? In fact, I am probably much better off than many male writers whom popular biography tell us died unrecognised, sick, and hungry on some sad park bench in London.

Then what is the problem? Why should women be different than men in needing this space? Recently, one of my male teachers told me that he had five children. How can he manage to write in a household with a wife and five kids, when I can barely sit down and tune out my one very supportive husband?

The problem, I think, is that women are expected to interact with those five children. We have been taught, generation after generation, that our main goal in life is to serve. Serve the children, the husband, the community. Our gender has been assigned the difficult task of loving unconditionally. There is no love like a mother's love/ there is no

love like a woman's love. We've learnt this from our mothers, our fathers, our sisters, our friends. We've even been told in the books we read.[2]

This is why one of feminist criticism's main concerns has been the portrayal of women in books by male writers. This practice of feminist criticism, which Toril Moi dubs "images of women criticism," places emphasis on the re-reading of texts by male authors to discover the stereotypes of women which they depict and analyse how these stereotypes help to perpetuate patriarchal values and female subjugation. According to Moi, this has "proved to be an extremely fertile branch of feminist criticism." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 42)

One well-known example of these texts is Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's "The Madwoman in the Attic." These authors find that there are two models of women represented in patriarchal writing: the "angel" and the "monster" that lurks behind her. Each of these incarnates, respectively, men's idealization and men's fear of the female.

The idea is that if—historically—only men can write, then only men can write/create women. We become their "greatest invention." (Gilbert and Gubar 13) Women writers, having only these two figures as models after which to shape both their physical and textual identities, have until very recently been unable to "definitively kill either figure." (Gilbert and Gubart 17) Rather, the female writer has had to "define herself as a mysterious creature who resides behind the angel or monster or angel/monster image." (Gilbert and Gubart 17)

The angel is an ideal stereotype, a passive mother/muse who is meant to be selfless and dull. She is also meant to be dead. "To be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. A life that has no story, like the life of Goethe's Makarie, is really a life of death, a

[2] For more on the tasks assigned to women, see Cecilia L. Ridgeway.

death-in-life. The ideal of 'contemplative purity' evokes, finally, both heaven and the grave," warn Gilbert and Gubar (25).

On the flip side of the dead angel coin is the monster. The one who will not submit. If you are not the angel, you are the devil, there is no other way. She is the Medusa, evil, insane, alive, *free*. For writers like Brontë and Austen, say Gilbert and Gubar, this monster, this *madwoman in the attic* is simultaneously mirror/heroine/victim. She has attempted to fight the system, but at the expense of her health, her sanity. In fairy tales, it is a matter of deciding between being Snow White or her Evil Step-Mother.

What if I want to be the prince?

If we are to write, says Virginia Woolf, we must get rid of the angel in the house ("Professions for Women" 202), whispering over our shoulder, asking us to be quiet and stop fretting, like good little girls. After that, we must also lose our fear of becoming the monster.

O.k. I can do that. I don't want any patriarchal stereotypes informing my work. In fact, why give the voice to the male Trauco at all? Why don't I hand the microphone over to the girl, and see what she thinks of herself for a change?

> Angela stooped down to inspect the dark substance by the front door of the cabin. There was no moon, and she hadn't brought out a flashlight. Digging into the pocket of the jacket she wore over her PJ's, she pulled out her mobile phone. By its light, she realized that it was a pile of mucky pellets. They were Coke-can red and formed a path from the door into the nearby trees. She wondered if some sort of animal had been marking its territory. Or was it sick? She guessed there wasn't much she could do for a wild

animal with a stomach-ache, but she was curious. Besides, her hippy parents had dragged her around enough remote landscapes that she no longer feared the woods or the night.

When she was eight years old, her parents made her stay for a month in a tent in the middle of the Bolivian Yungas, while they tried to connect with the *Pacha Mama* by taking unprecedented quantities of acid. She guessed that once you had survived that combination of jungle and hallucinating parents, there wasn't much that could scare you. Certainly not the woods of Chiloé.

She had woken from a dream both pleasant and uncanny. It was mostly hazy by now—a feeling more than a memory—but it had filled her with an urgent need to go out and look at the stars. That was when she discovered the clumps of poo.

She hurried back into the house for her flashlight and gloves, and wondered if she should leave a note for her parents. Realising that even if they woke up they probably wouldn't bother to look in on her, she set out to follow the shit-line.

—I think I better go to Uni tomorrow. —Aren't you on a break? —Yea, but I want to take out some books. I feel lost with my essay. —Oh, O.K —Do you want to come with me? —Nah, don't worry about it. I don't want to interrupt your work. —Come with me. We can take out some movies.

But killing the angel is easier said than done. It is not simply a matter of what the female author writes, but of writing itself. If she is going to wage war against the angel and the monster on her page, she must first find the time to sit in front of her desk.

No matter how much theory fuels our texts, we women must still deal with the practical circumstances of writing and these, it appears, haven't changed much since Virginia Woolf's dream of the private room. Robyn Rowland laments, "Women writers with children often seem so distracted, heads full of percussive lists; over–busy, worried, trying with varying success and sustained irritation to carve out a cave of silence (39)."

It's not only the interruptions. It's the fact that you are there. If you would only find a job—so I can go back to eating cereal out of the box instead of helping you choose lunch, so I don't have to worry about you getting bored and depressed, so I don't have to worry about you being worried about money. So I don't have to feel guilty about your kindness, and your effort to not bother me.

Of course, even if women today are lucky enough to have someone else take care of their domestic tasks, that isn't always enough to create the necessary silence. "How weary we are of hearing how Sylvia Plath rose at 4.00 a.m. to write. As if we do not show enough devotion to the art if four hours of sleep will not do. But even if we cleared time and space, we cannot clear out our hearts of caring, our psyche too, so turned towards our children as we are," says Rowland (41). Our minds are ever tuned, she says, not only to the cares of our children, but also of our parents, partners, siblings.

I think you are generalizing, says Whitney, I don't feel like this at all, I haven't been taught to serve.

Is this idea essentialist? Yes. Even Gilbert and Gubar have come to admit that the madwoman/angel analysis does not consider the different experiences of women (XV –

XLV). Some may have been raised in fully egalitarian homes. We are all different, and ignoring that difference is just one more way of objectifying women.

My mother herself is a working professional. She was the only female engineering student at her University. With the support of my father, she has carved a way for herself in a male work environment, and they have always encouraged my sisters and me to do the same. However, we were not raised by her. We saw her late at night, or on Sunday afternoons. Ultimately, she had to make a choice: mother or engineer? It is a decision that even now, at seventy years old, fills her with guilt.

Still, the fact remains that many women are expected to play the angel. In a preliminary 1988 study on guilt and gender, Grace K. Baruch states that women have traditionally been socialized to "take responsibility for the well–being of others." (13) She says that several studies show women are expected to involve themselves in "other people's troubles," (13) and suffer from their involvement. Describing a research study by Ford and Lowery she says that "women, more often than men, when asked to generate a real-life moral dilemma, mentioned one involving issues of caring for others vs. caring for one's own needs." (14) In addition, failing others is a source of guilt for women more often than for men.

The choice, says Adrienne Rich of her own career, "still seemed to be between 'love'— womanly, maternal love, altruistic love—a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture; and egotism—a force directed by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of others, but justifiably so." (Rich 25)

The angel not only tells us what to write, but that we shouldn't be writing at all! What business do we have—she says—writing books—which are the dominion of men—

when we should be taking care of the children? Of course, this is a *passé* notion of the female obligation and the amount of successful contemporary authors—and other professionals—who are also mothers proves that the two are not incompatible. But the combination of writing and mothering remains a privilege reserved for those who have the time and money to do so. What about the single mother of three, who must work two jobs to support her family, whose little spare time must be spent either sleeping or hanging out with the kids? When will *she* write?

Even if we are lucky enough to have the time and money (*or to have a husband willing to give up his job of 15 years to move across the world so you can "give writing a try"),* we have to unlearn centuries of social instruction and its associated guilt.
Oh my God, I made you give up your job, and move across the world so I could write? What the hell was I thinking?
One point for the angel, zero points for me.

II. Writing like a girl

I haven't written in three weeks. I wanted to finish my essay/story, but I haven't. I must finish this week, before my parents' visit and because I've renewed the feminist books too many times at the library, and if I don't finish now, I'll have to start paying fines. Out-of-our-planned-budget fines.
Where was Angela? She was leaving the cabin, following the shit-line. Shit-line. I like that. It's strong and witty. Very Scott Westerfeld. He's my favourite young adult auth—

"That is a man's sentence; behind it one can see Johnson, Gibbon and the rest. It was a sentence that was unsuited for a woman's use." (Woolf, "A Room" 77)

Ah, crap, Virginia, here we go again.

I've defeated the angel (*well, for now—my husband is at the grocery store*), I've given the voice to my main character, and here I am, being all anti-patriarchal.

Except, the feminists now tell me that *even my sentences are not my own*. Language itself is a reflection of patriarchal domination because it reflects the logos (Moi, "Sexual/ Texual Politics" 102). Patriarchal binary thought creates oppositions such as Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Father/Mother, Logos/Pathos. In these oppositions, the feminine is always associated with the second, negative, weak, term. To acquire meaning, the first term must destroy the second one. "The male is always the victor." (Moi, "Sexual/ Texual Politics" 103).

An aim of French feminist theory has been to uncover the ways in which language helps to consolidate repression, and to develop a new, feminine, way of writing that fights back. Enter Hélène Cixous and her *écriture feminine*:

> Her whole theoretical project can in one sense be summed up as the effort to undo this logo centric ideology: to proclaim woman as the source of life, power and energy and to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logo centrism colludes with phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women. (Moi, "Sexual/ Texual Politics" 102).

Fabulous. Now I have to write like a girl. How do I do that?

Virginia Woolf thought that Jane Austen, unlike her predecessors who awkwardly tried to write with the male sentence, managed to create "a perfectly natural, shapely

sentence, proper for her own use." Unfortunately, she does not go into much detail about what this sentence should look like. She *does* describe a *male* sentence in "A Room of One's Own. (77)"

> [However, it] does not entirely help, since it is also (and admittedly) quite Victorian—that is, tied to a specific age as well as to a gender—and a bit of a set-up. It is filled with abstract nouns—"grandeur", "satisfaction", "art", "truth", "beauty"—periodic in its structure and somewhat pompous.(Bayuk-Rosenman 79)

So, I want sentences which are un-pompous, un-Victorian and abstract-noun-less.

> The ground was muddy and Angela's sneakers made a loud suctioning noise as she crept through the forest. She was well within the line of trees, but the excrement *(is excrement too pompous?)* had not stopped. She guessed that she'd have to surrender curiosity to caution soon.

Mud, sneakers, poo... I can go on like this. Easy.

Woolf expanded her description of the ideal feminine sentence in her commentary on Dorothy Richardson's *Revolving Lights*. It is "of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes." (Woolf, "Romance and the Heart" 124)

Uhh... what? An elastic, stretched, sentence that suspends particles?

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S u d d e n l y , a b l u r r e d f i g u r e m o v e d a c r o s s t h e e d g e o f h e r v i s i o n .

—What are you doing? —I'm writing my essay. —Your essay? And what are all those little dots supposed to be? —The frailest particles. —The what? —The— never mind.

The most developed theories relating to "feminine writing" come from French feminism. To understand them, we must first take a look into psychoanalysis, from which many of these theories are derived. In particular, the ideas of Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva take root in Jacques Lacan.

Lacan explains that in the pre-Oedipal period we are in the Imaginary. A lovely space in which children believe that they are one with the mother and with the world. We are not separate entities, and with no separation, there is no lack. However, once we enter into language, once we learn how to say "I", we cross the boundary into the Symbolic Order. Here, "the father splits up the dyadic unity between mother and child." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 97) We enter into crisis. We start to lack. We have lost the body of the mother, we desire it, and—

—....think? —What? —What do you think? —About what? —About what I've been talking about for the past five minutes. —I'm sorry. I didn't hear you. I'm writing. —Can't you do two things at once? —No. Can you? —No, but women are supposed to be good at multi-tasking, aren't they? —Yea. I think I'm flawed. It's probably from when Mono ate my brain. —Maybe... You should ask the neurologist.

we must repress our desire. "The phallus, representing the Law of the Father, thus comes to signify separation and loss to the child." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 97)

From then on, language becomes associated with repressed desire, and repressed desire becomes the unconscious.

The unconscious, then, is the key. Kristeva redefines Lacan's Imaginary as the semiotic. The semiotic *chora* is pure pulsation, heterogeny and disruption. To reach a revolution in symbolic language (and all it entails) we must reconnect with the chora. Of course, if we don't want to be psychotic, this has to be done from within the symbolic, for how can we speak with no language? What we must do is "allow the *jouissance* of semiotic motility to disrupt the strict symbolic order." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 169)

For Hélène Cixous, the path to *écriture feminine* also lies in a connection with the Imaginary, the unconscious. And we tap into it through the body. This body has been repressed—our body, and the body of our mother—now we must allow it to speak, to break into the symbolic. Cixous' work is filled with images of women's "trembling body", the pleasures of the "swollen belly", writing as giving "milk", texts that "caress". Let your body speak, she says, and you will have unleashed the repressed woman:

> Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence", the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word "impossible" and writes "the end." ("The Laugh" 2049)

Powerful stuff. Yes, Hélène, yes. I will write with my body. I will get in touch with my uterus, my clitoris, my breasts, and everything else that might have been repressed in my female body. Alright, clitoris, here we go... Write!

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Clitoris?

.....

Clitoris?

The truth is that women do not write with their bodies, they write with their brain. At least, I do. It is my brain that tells my hand to type, it is my brain that holds all the words. What do I know about my brain? It's meant to be giving.

Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen declares that "the female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. (1)" That is why we "make the most wonderful counsellors, primary–schoolteachers, carers, therapists, social workers, mediators, group facilitators or personnel staff." (185) That women are also hard-wired for mothering, doesn't seem like much of a leap.

Cixous might agree. She describes a masculine libidinal economy that belongs to the Realm of the Proper where "the insistence on the proper, on a proper return, leads to the masculine obsession with classification, systematization and hierarchization." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 109) The feminine libidinal economy, on the contrary, belongs to the Realm of the Gift in which "the woman gives without a thought of return." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 111)

Ah, dear angel, we meet again.

The problem with this is that *it is not true*. As Cordelia Fine shows in her book "Delusions of Gender", while both popular and "hard" science have tried to convince us that there are essential differences between a male and a female brain[3], none of these studies can actually prove that there is a difference in our capabilities. Male and female brains are physically different, and there are differences in who does what, or who achieves what. However, while these two things may be connected, there are gaps and inconsistencies in current research that question the causal relationship between biology and behaviour. It may very well be that women desire and achieve different things because they are expected to do so (Fine, "Delusions of Gender").

So where does that leave Cixous' giving body? Toril Moi accuses her of biologism. ("Sexual/Textual Politics" 112) At least in her description of the male and female libidinal economies, Cixous seems to be entering the realm of the Symbolic, crossing the line into the binary. Moi says:

> Cixous seems in danger of playing directly into the hands of the very patriarchal ideology she denounces. It is, after all, patriarchy, not feminism, that insists on labelling women as emotional, intuitive and imaginative, while jealously converting reason and rationality into an exclusively male preserve. ("Sexual/Textual Politics" 121)

So much for writing with my clitoris.

III. Forgetting the Woman

[3] According to Fine, women are said to be more empathetic, intuitive, better at art; men have been shown to be better at math, science, solving spatial problems.

I'm free to write again. If Cixous is being all essentialist, why should I listen to her? Give me back my masculine, non-elastic sentences. I like them just the way they are.

> The figure jumped quickly behind the tree, but not before Angela saw it. She gasped and took a step back. She thought she had seen—but what would such a crippled old man be doing in the middle of the forest, at *night*? In an instant, Angela became very aware of the distance between herself and the cabin, of the fact that her parents had drunk themselves to sleep, of the fact that she was wearing only pyjamas. *Come on, Angela, get a hold of yourself*, she thought. *If it really is an old man, he probably is sick, needs help. Don't be such a wimp. Think. Be logical. Don't be such a girl.*

Near the end of "A Room of One's Own", Virginia Woolf describes the ideal characteristic of a writer's mind: androgyny. This mind, which contains both the male and the female, is more complete, resourceful, and ready for creation than a single-sex mind. The text of a single-sex mind is "a horrid little abortion" (101) and sex-consciousness is "fatal" (102). Of course, this is a contradiction after Woolf took such pains to point out the necessity of women writing only in women sentences, and Woolf does not aid us in reaching a resolution (Bayuk-Rosenman 110-112).

Similarly, Hélène Cixous declares that feminine writing is bisexual ("The Laugh" 2047). Forget about the female body, we must be both male and female.

Yes, it's the opposite of what I just said she said. It's not my fault. The lady is a master of contradiction[4].

Within bisexuality, we finally escape the logic of opposing binarism. However, this is not a bisexuality that neutralizes the male and female and does away with difference:

> Bisexuality; that is, each one's location in self *(répérage en soi*) of the presence—variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female—of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex, from this "self-permission," multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body. (Cixous, "The Laugh" 2047)

Cixous draws from Jacques Derrida's ideas of *différance*: meaning, he says, is created in active difference, where "a" is "a" because it is not "b" or "c" or "d", and so on. Therefore, he rejects the binding logic of binary opposition (where words get their meaning from an opposite). In *différance*, signification is thrown open, it is free (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 104).

What Cixous aims to do is break the male/female binary opposition and write within the *différance*. To go back to the Imaginary, we must break away from the idea that male opposes female, and that they neutralize each other. Rather, we can be both male and female *at once*.

Take a breath, think about this: What do you mean? What does it mean to you?

[4] These contradictions arise from the fact that Cixous works within the imaginary. She does not aim to be logical. For an analysis of the contractions in Hélène Cixous see Moi, *Sextual/Textual Politics*, 117 – 125.

We must stop defining ourselves as "women" just like Cixous cringes at being called a "feminist."(Leitch 2038) "I don't believe in rigid positions or categories, or oppositions. I don't think that women are sheerly women and men, men," she says ("Difficult Joys" 23). Ultimately, we are all bisexual, even if we don't yet know it. Go back to the Imaginary, you'll discover you're both a woman and a man. Julia Kristeva finds that there is the same option for both little girls and little boys in the pre-Oedipal stage: "mother-identification, which will intensify the pre-Oedipal components of the woman's psyche and render her marginal to the symbolic order" or "father-identification." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 164) This is how femininity is decided, this is a choice for all of us; "*woman as such* does not exist." (Kristeva 16)

—Do you want some tea?

And here we have it: man himself can be the angel:

> In any kind of couple—married couple or lovers, two women or two men—one element will be at the place of the mother, whatever the sex of the person is, at the place of the person who wants to give life, of the good mother, who doesn't want to prevent the other from progressing, who doesn't want to hurt the other...(Cixous, "Difficult Joys" 24)

My God, is this what you have become?

—Honey, I asked if you want some tea?

Have I been too logical? Have I become the patriarch? Have I thought myself the Victim when really I am the King?

Tap into your unconscious, says Cixous, “we should write as we dream.” (Cixous, “Difficult Joys” 22) Our dreams do not lie. Find the truth in you, forget about you, get lost in *differánce*, be simply, violently, everything.

> Her mind wandered over the trees, over the sky, over the man pinning her to the ground—so strong—such a tiny tiny man—too strong, for such a tiny man—the dark forest was beautiful—the cabin had opened up its roof—are you frightened? said the man—does my body scare you?—she saw her mother, Ramones t-shirt scrunched onto her back—one hand thrown carelessly over the bare chest of her father—he—nothing but boxers—drunken drool dripping down his throat—help—they looked lovely, the two of them—home—she crept into the bed—the tiny hands pulling her hair—she crawled between her parents—shh—she said—sleep—there were scratches all over her arms—they stung—she had scratched the tiny man—her mother was warm—pain—intimate pain—her father would protect her—no pain—are you enjoying this, little girl?—yes, she thought—I’m home.

IV. Where is My Voice?

I’ve come full circle. I’ve fought the angel, I’ve tried to write like a woman, only to discover that I am the man.

Wonderful, Virginia, hand me a gold star.

Except—

This is not the story I wanted to write. It is not how I wanted things to go.

This is not my voice.

I'm just a student. I'm learning. I'm still trying to figure out what it means to have a "voice": that Holy Grail that my classmates throw around in every workshop. If I write like the feminists want me to write, where does that leave my own voice?

When a woman poet writes, says Eavan Boland, she is caught in a field force:

> Powerful, persuasive voices are in her ear as she writes. Distorting and simplifying ideas of womanhood and poetry fall as shadows between her and the courage of her own experience. If she listens to these voices, yields to these ideas, her work will be obstructed. (Boland 240)

What are these voices? In one ear, we have patriarchal tradition, what history tells us is "good" writing. In the other ear, the feminist screams away. Boland laments: "In recent years feminism has begun to lay powerful prescriptions on writing by women (...) Separatist prescriptions demand that women be true to the historical angers which underwrite the women's movement, that they cast aside pre-existing literary traditions." (Boland 243)

What does my voice matter, you'll say, when identity does not exist? If there is one thing that post-structuralism has embedded in us it is that we are fragmented beings, that there is no *one* identity. With all this talk of The Death of the Author, Roland Barthes claiming that texts get written not when the author puts pen to paper, but every time someone reads them, it shouldn't matter what I am really trying to say.

But it does.

Toril Moi says her project "is to encourage young women, in particular, to find a voice of their own, so as to be able to say what they mean, in whatever context they find

themselves. That is part of what women need to do to get access to the universal."(Moi, "Feminist Theory" 162)

It is not sufficient to hear the Voice of the Mother that Cixous tells us is echoed in the voice of every speaking woman, a pre-language pulsation that will help us reach the Mother's "milk and honey." (Moi, "Sexual/Textual Politics" 113)

That all sounds marvellous, but I need my own words. This pulsational *écriture fémenine* does not speak for me, fragmented as I am.[5]

In an analysis of Katherine Mansfield's writings and their link to illness, Mary Burgan asserts that Mansfield wrote *against death*. She couldn't accept a deconstructed identity because her ego was fighting for life. The death of the author, in her case, was a physical threat. She could not fade into the Imaginary, so prized by *écriture femenine,* because she was reaching towards a clear understanding with her readers. She couldn't waste time in saying things she did not mean. (Burgan xvi)

Yes, but Dani, you're not ill.

No, but I will die, won't I?

And if I died today, this is how my story would end:

> The girl leaned over to kiss him. Trauco raised his head, excited and expectant. No girl had ever shown interest in him. No girl had ever fallen for him without the use of magic. Yet here she was, standing close to him, the light of the fireplace chiselling her pretty features. She wanted him, had asked him into her cabin before he even attempted the rape.

[5] Cixous would agree: "First of all, writers are free, they are what they are, who they are and no one can reproach anyone for anything, either for being a woman or for not being a woman. There are different types of writing or approaches to writing. *Personally*, when I write fiction, I write with my body." Cixous, "Difficult joys", 27.

“Kiss me”, she said, and he did. He let himself fade into the sweet-bitter taste of her breath, the softness of her dry lips. Her hands caressed his shoulders.

Trauco felt himself thrust backwards. He was burning, his flesh disappearing in a tsunami of pain. His mind hadn’t caught up with his body. He stared at her in confusion. There she was, standing before the fireplace, her hands in tight fists, her eyes wide. He screamed, but he couldn’t hear his own voice. As his body began to fall to pieces, her mouth hardened in a gesture of defiance:

“Fuck you, little man.”

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