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reading with  
*Clarice  
Inspector*

HELENE CIXOUS

Edited, translated and introduced by  
Vorena Andermatt Conley





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# Reading with

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# Clarice Lispector

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Hélène Cixous

Edited, translated, and introduced  
by Verena Andermatt Conley

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Theory and History of Literature, Volume 73

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# Introduction

Verena Andermatt Conley

The pages that follow have been excerpted from Hélène Cixous's ongoing meditations between 1980 and 1985 on problems of reading, writing, difference, and related themes, including exchange and the gift, love and passion, poverty and riches. The texts gathered are all readings of Clarice Lispector or, rather, readings by Cixous with Lispector in the context of seminars given at the Université de Paris VIII—Vincennes at Saint Denis and at the Collège International de Philosophie. This in part dictates the format of the texts and an ordering reflective of Cixous's preoccupations rather than one that would follow Lispector's chronology as a writer. Cixous discovers Lispector at a time when she studies questions of sexual difference in connection with what have been called libidinal economies, that is, with ways the body is engaged in exchanging with and finding its limits in, a social world.

Paradoxically, Cixous begins her reading of Lispector with one of the Brazilian writer's later texts, *Agua viva* (*The Stream of Life*). Cixous claims to have been overwhelmed by her encounter with *Agua viva*. In it she finds the finest practice of *écriture féminine*. Outside of the seminars, it appears as a somewhat controversial term and has often been misunderstood among literary and social critics. In the relation that Cixous holds with Lispector, *écriture féminine* is a working term referring less to a writing practiced mainly by women than, in a broader logical category, to textual ways of spending. It suggests a writing, based on an encounter with another—be it a body, a piece of writing, a social dilemma, a moment of passion—that leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most conscious life. By virtue of its

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**Hélène Cixous**, born in Algeria in 1937, is head of the Center of Research in Feminine Studies at the University of Paris VIII. Since the publication of *La jeune née* in France in 1975, Cixous has become one of the major writers and theoreticians to come out of the French feminist intellectual movement. She received the Prix Medicis in 1969 for her first novel, *Dedans*. Her latest novel, *Manne* (about the Mandelas and Mandelstams), appeared in 1988 (Ed. des Femmes). Many of her books have been translated into Dutch, Danish, Japanese, Brazilian, German, and English, including *The Newly Born Woman* (Minnesota, 1986). She has written several plays; her two latest, one about Cambodia, the other — *The Indiad* (on the partition of India) — were performed by the Théâtre du Soleil.

**Verena Andermatt Conley** is professor of French and women's studies at Miami University in Ohio. She attended the University of Geneva and received her Ph.D. in 1973 from the University of Wisconsin. Conley is author of *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* and contributes to *Diacritics*, *New Literary History*, *Enclitic*, and *Esprit créateur*.

