

MOTHER TONGUE AND WOMEN'S LANGUAGE*

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Women and men speak the same language — of the code, rules and law — which organizes all communication strategies in order that all messages be stated clearly and in order that political and ontological models function in the city-state. Of course this language spoken by all members of a community varies from one individual to another according to the degree of resistance and insubordination to the norm. Outlaws are everywhere and of every description. The various types of aphonia and aphasia are indicative of that.

This language spoken by everyone is referred to as “mother tongue.” And yet lately it is also said to be the language of the law-of-the-father. To designate this law of which “the transcendental Signifier and the general primacy is PHALLUS,” Jacques Lacan suggested the metaphor Name-of-the-Father.

Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Name of a divine triangle in which the Mother experienced no sexual pleasure and from which the Sister has been excluded. The mother tongue is virgin and the sister has no tongue. The sister IS NOT. She is not yet. With the woman-mother's enjoyment of sexual pleasure*, she is what happens in language. She is potential.

In the unitary language of the God of Moses, the Word was inscribed in stone for everyone.

*The word “pleasure” is used throughout to designate *jouissance*, Barthes' term for pleasure, ecstasy, sexual pleasure. E.G.

In the triangular language of the Father-Son-Spirit, the Word was kept all-One and the Myth of the body and the blood imprinted an excess of meaning and an undecipherable law named Love. Excess in its affront to the law. Excess in the violence done to the men and women who did not conform to it.

The tears of the mother and of the sister were ineffectual against this violence. But they were not shed in vain. Whoever knows how to listen to a foreign mother tongue can even hear them. And not just the tears. The cries too. Cries of joy and of anger. And in passing, one can tune into the tears of pleasure.

To hear this foreign mother tongue, but also to comprehend, in its potentiality (in its promise), the tongue of the sister, the “eternally innocent young girl,” to use Maurice Blanchot’s words in his reading of *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*,¹ one must be able to think the Other in its radical difference (its “differance”). To think the Other in its relation to the One (to the Same). To think the Other in the interference. To think *between* Self and Other, *between* Same and Other, *between* the One and the Other. To accept that this thought might cause conflict. The Other’s thought can only be transferential and in every transfer the couple love-hate appears.

To choose never more to think/copy the Other onto the walls of the Same, onto the flesh of the ONE. That is how the “great theories” ON female sexuality were formulated. Theories of Hegel, Freud and Nietzsche who shaped so much of “modern” and “progressive” thought. Theories which insisted in black on white that “Truth is Virility” and that “women have testicles hidden in their tubes,” that is why Truth escapes them — It is “hidden” from them (Hegel). Theories which insisted, supported by the Oedipus Myth, the “the female Libido” and the problem of (phallic) castration (Freud and his followers). Theories that insisted on “Female hysteria”: illusion, trickery, affectation, disguise, “the seductive Feminine,” because if the “Feminine is Truth,” the “Female” alone knows that the Truth does not exist, that it is an abyss — abyss of the ONE, abyss of the Same, abyss of the Word (Nietzsche). When the Other cannot be thought in its radical difference, the Truth of the ONE crumbles in the castrating lack or in seductive trickery.

This choice of the Other tongue’s thinking in its radical difference is madness, but as Annie Leclerc wrote in *Parole de femme* (Women’s speech), this “madness is the only reason I have left.”²

The thinking of the Other is heard in the huge, white expanse of the in-between, the poetic space where the pause and silence and listening

of the “third ear” (René Major) welcome the song of rapture, song of love (and hate) of women and men, with neither Faith nor Law, in search of polyphonic truths.

There is no more Truth in theory than in fiction. There are truths to decipher *between* theory and fiction, particularly with respect to truths about male and female sexualities and I have no difficulty speaking of these phenomena, writing about them, without falling into the “philosophical essentializing nonsense” or the “artist’s frustration” that Jacques Derrida referred to in *Spurs*, Nietzsche’s styles,³ enclosing the terms “femininity” and “female sexuality,” and consequently “women’s Writing,” in proscriptive quotation marks, but preserving in the nobly conceptual “the Woman” and “the Feminine.” I have no problem speaking about female sexuality and women’s writing without quotation marks, and I do not see why it would be more *philosophical*, hence more True, to substantify characteristics.

It is not more philosophical, nor more poetic, to substitute lunar for moon, solar for sun, nocturnal for night and diurnal for day. It is not more true to speak of “lived” rather than life. It is not more correct, but it has become fashionable. Decreed.

To me it seems impossible to speak of language without thinking parlance,* and subsequently women’s parlance and also writing — I shall simply say women’s writing.

Difficult to visualize because THAT which I want to think, and write, cannot be approached only through the categories of the Word nor solely through reliance on Myth.

It is not a matter of explanation nor of dispute. It is a matter of thinking meeting. Meeting, not of the “feminine” and the “Masculine” with a view to conceptualizing the “Truth” or to finding the “Truth” through revelation, through believing in it. Faith and Knowledge are on the same axis as “Truth.” They are not in opposition. The quest for the transcendental, supreme Truth leads to dogma and despair.

Truth does not exist; I know that. Even so, I have not given way to despair.

There is no more Truth in the Word than there is in Myth. No more in Knowledge than in Fable. Truths are exiled from Knowledge alone

*“Parlance” is used here in a broad sense of “speech, way of speaking, way of using language” to translate *langage*. *E.G.*

or Fable alone. They spring forth in their meeting. Claire Lejeune would say, "They become clear through their mutual co-nascent/cognition (*co-naissance*)."

More often than not they are nomads, constantly changing time and place. Their meeting is entirely aleatory and necessity lies in the offering, the gift that this meeting constitutes.

Gift of understanding the things of love. Understanding the things of pleasure and suffering. Understanding the things of Life, but also of Death, right to the threshold of the incomprehensible. This is not explained nor illustrated any better "in the feminine than in the masculine." No analytical grid, no dogma can *be right* about these truths. They know no boundaries but rather approach on tiptoes with the understanding of the body: truths of the heart, eye, ear. Truths of touch, gaze and voice. Of tone, of timbre. And of silence.

To think the Other in language is to risk thinking a "foreign mother tongue" (Winnicott). This climb back in time and space (the mother's body) is certainly hazardous; it cannot take place without the choice of *writing*, whatever the forms or modes of writing selected, and this choice always involves a certain vertigo because literally each time it is a matter of *poetic creation*. Poetic creation is always risky: uncertain, aleatory and perfectly solitary. It can be shared, but meeting the other can only take place after this descent and return of *each body* within its foreign mother tongue.

I write in order to find out what I DON'T KNOW of some philosophy. Some theosophy. Some mythology. Relative to the language of the Other, they are all in the Knowledge or the Fable of the Same. The Word and Myth of the language of the ONE-for-all. This is what Jacques Derrida calls "Phallogocentrism."

In the poetic act I reach (through the inaudible) the unheard of the foreign tongue. The foreign nature of the tongue is "mother". Luce Irigaray, in *Amante Marine de Friedrich Nietzsche* (Friedrich Nietzsche's Marine Lover), writes magnificently about the unheard of in language. I love to read and reread the entire first part, her letter to Nietzsche entitled "Dire d'eaux immémoriales" (Immemorial Waters Speak). I also enjoy reading *Passions élémentaires* (Basic Passions) as well as Carole Massé's *L'Existence* (Existence) and *L'Autre* (The Other).

The ear that is tuned to the Other's language lets a different voice be heard. Its listening through an infinity of silence, as in the great beyond, lets it hear a women's speech: "Shadow" speech (Michèle Montrelay); a voice that lets you see differently (Marguerite Duras).

If women and men speak the same language, language of the Same (of the ONE-for-all), it is through difference that they enter into language. Women and men do not enter into the co-nascence/cognition (*co-naissance* and the recognition (*reconnaissance*) of their foreign mother tongue in the same manner.

To think this difference the way you think thunderbolt or as you would think earthquake, the jarring of a thought. Thunderbolt writing — it comes from the explosion of the *heart of the letter*. You reach it through infinite cunning: ultimate opening up in the operation of the ear and the eye. It is making the until-here-and-now inaudible and invisible of the foreign mother tongue tremble.

“ . . . luxating the philosophical ear, putting the *loxos* (the obliquity of the tympanic membrane) to work in the *logos*”⁴

“First to exercise, to the point of exhaustion, the virginal vision for which seeing does not yet raise the question of the relationship between the image and the sense of seeing. This naive gaze can only generate the literally photographic reproduction of the multitude of points imprinted on the retina when it is exposed, overexposed, underexposed; generate the reproduction of what is revealed or fixed — is memorized — through the eyes of the head, since the eye of the heart (that eye which sees the indivisible) is still buried in its potentiality.”⁵

Task of unearthing. Cryptomnesia. Decoding of the underground formula. Deciphering of signs left there hanging on the body-monument; body-monument of archives filled with hieroglyphics (Jacques Lacan); impulses: positive or negative letters right there on the flesh, engraved (Serge Leclair).

Task of luxation as well. *Loxos* (luxere): dislocation, displacement, de-centering. Injury too. This opening to the Other and this upheaval do not occur without injury to the philosophical ear (and eye).

In order to enter into the language of the Other it is necessary to imagine the Eye of the supreme and omnipresent God in a state of injury. The Other's language is never spoken in omnipotence. If the writing of it is hazardous, it is also because the language is fragile and vulnerable. Prone to injury, its strength lies in this primordial admission.

Cryptomnesia and luxation mark the entry of a labour of love into language. Love is in labour in language. The words of love in labour are “not to be found in discourse or on the page.”⁶

It is in the poetic art that this language of love is tapped. In the writing of this act that its thrumming (*bruissement*) (Roland Barthes)⁷ is heard. In this thrumming, this jarring of pleasure (and suffering), that the *inédit* (unpublished), the inter-diction of love is understood. It comes down to a birthing of the Other. An extravagance in the abandon of Self and a wonder at the gift of the Other.

The writing of this act of birth (of this act of mourning too) endangers all discourse and fiction which flaunt the Truth. If the Truth is expressed as Phallus or Woman it is divine (transcendental) in God, whatever its Name, and the subjective truths of the language of the Other's body will have just died.

To leave the mother's body through injury (*loxos*) and the cry of pleasure. And of suffering. PATHOS is the price of loving knowledge. Knowledge: the fruit of passion. Truth of theory and truth of fiction. Writing happens between the two. It is entering into the Word through this injury and through this cry.

This writing of the body touches on the initial (and immemorial) words in the shadow of the language of the ONE-for-all. That is why such writing can be called "women's words"; writing-parabola of the body: ear, eye, heart, voice, touch, "mucosa" (Irigaray) and as many polysemous metaphors, *creative sparks* through which discourse becomes aroused when the body makes its thrumming heard on the page.

The foreign woman's writing in suprising proximity to the letter — and it is not from being too distant that the language of the Other disturbs; it is because the language is so near. The feeling of "unsettling strangeness" comes to him or to her for whom the beautiful stranger is too close.

In transference (of love, writing, reading) the threat of what is too close remains latent. When the truths are discovered *between* Self and Other, symbiosis does not take (has no) place.

If there is rejection (mourning at the separation of the loving body and the writing-reading body), this rejection, this abandonment (violence inflicted on the body by the Other of language) is always/already also latency, pure potentiality.

Femininity (female sexuality or writing in the feminine) is heard, seen, touched by gaining access to the language of the Other. Because of a history which precedes us, includes us, surpasses us, this language courses through women's parlance. As women and men we speak the same language, but our entry into the universe of language is different.

This language runs, moves at the speed of light: faster than the apparent sounds of madness or the ambient cacaphony, more agile and more distant than any aponia. Behind the mask of the mute (hysterical?) woman rises the voice of the Other.

It is in poetry, of all times and in all languages, that the voice of the Other has always been heard. And it was not by accident that the most poetic philosopher of all, Nietzsche, was throughout his work — and not just in a text or two *on* “Woman” or “Femininity” — literally haunted by the “Feminine,” a metaphor that he constantly linked to the concept of “Truth.”

Nor was it by chance that the advent of women’s language (women’s parlance) was announced in literary circles by the visionary poet Arthur Rimbaud.

Is it simply by chance — or might it be due to an awareness (or unconscious knowledge) colliding with a terrifying historical rebuff, i.e. the great silence of women — that many of these poets themselves entered into the great silence of madness or suicidal death? Suicide is a murder of speech for whoever no longer knows how to speak, but keeps alive the desire to speak the things of life and of death.

Women’s writing must not be reduced to its delinquent results (lexical, grammatical, syntactical) in the coded system of the ONE-for-all language (language of the Same, language of the Name-of-the-Father). All terms of common language could be feminized, rules of agreement could be changed so that in this language one gender would be equal (or would become superior) to the other. It is perhaps even desirable to attack these symptoms. But it is also possible to work elsewhere and to write otherwise.

To write inscriptions of the foreign mother tongue in the greatest depth, with the most reality, at the greatest distance, and in closest proximity right onto the body of words — engraved.

The tattoo artist’s stylet* may be masculine, but in this language, language of the Other, *writing* is feminine.

**le stylet* i.e. masculine E.G.