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**THE VORACIOUS TEXT – HÉLÈNE CIXOUS' VIVRE L'ORANGE /  
LE TEXTE VORACE. VIVRE L'ORANGE D'HELENE CIXOUS / A  
TRĂI PORTOCALA DE HELENE CIXOUS<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *In her autobiographical texts, Hélène Cixous creates a strong connection between self, writing and place through the medium of consumption. Hers is a voracious writing which both consumes and creates the self. In her texts there is an intricate relationship – on the level of the signifier – between the narrating “I”, the letters of the text and referentiality. Perhaps one of the most conspicuous examples is her play upon words in *Living the Orange*, where orange is a pun made up of Oran, her birth place, and je which claims a central part in the text. In this way, Cixous ensures a non-objectified version of the self but one which is entrenched in a highly subjective space and language.*

**Keywords:** *autobiography, food, alterity, language, politics.*

*Il y a des femmes qui parlent pour veiller et pour sauver, non pas pour attraper*  
Hélène Cixous is known worldwide as the proponent and inventor of a special kind of *écriture féminine*, for her special brand of feminism, for a resistance to norms and stereotypes, for her astute theoretical writings, for blending poetics with theory, for her wonderful friendship with Jacques Derrida and not in the least for her invention of new words and a new language. I will start my paper by reviewing some of these Cixousian words as a way of becoming familiar with part of her philosophy and her outlook on writing, language, alterity.

Orange Oran je – This is one of the most conspicuous of Cixous' *jeux de mots* and it shows the affinity between the fruit, her place of birth and the “I”. The orange is then, in a first reading, the confluence between the creation of the self and the geographical and national emplacement of the self.

Algeriance – here Cixous shows that being born in Algeria carries within strong political connotations, which condition one to take sides to have a political stance and belonging to a certain ideology.

Remembering - *Re memberment* – memory is for Cixous entrenched in the body but also in the archetypal memory of all women in history be they Isis who re-membered the body of Osisris or Clarice Lispector whose work of memory deeply influenced Cixous

*De l'une a l'autre – de lune a l'autre* – here Cixous shows her allegiance to the feminine and the need to escape the male-centered framework of mind and also her identification with the moon which she explicitly makes in one of her writings. There is an interplay moon/earth in her texts by which she defines her relationships with other wo/men

*Ecrivance* – *ecrivance* rhymes with *errance* suggesting the voyage one embarks upon when writing, the vagabond ways of writing but also diverging from the norm. *Ecrivance* – *ressemblance*, tolerance,

*Texts mouvementés*. *Texts mouvementés* refers perhaps to her inner force of unpetrifying the meanings of words of fighting clichés and stereotypes.

*Séparéunion*. *Séparéunion* is an instance of ambivalence, of refusing to choose, of language's refusing to choose. Is there a separation in every reunion? Cixous, in line with Derrida, thinks there is. It is this deconstruction of presence that she undertakes in many of her texts.

*Lisance* – *Lisance* is the complement of *ecrivance* but it insists on the reader and gives him a sort of status of artist by turning the act of reading into a poetics and engaged act.

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Poétique – as the word shows, it is a question of never divorcing art from ethics. In Cixous work, ethics involves talking about and for women, against discrimination, for political and regional equality.

Lispectorange – As we will see, Clarice Lispector is one of the most decisive figures for Cixous' formation as a writer and here she collates her name with that of the orange, a recurrent motif in Cixous's writing, from *Portrait du soleil* to *Vivre l'orange*, which we are about to discuss.

*Vivre l'orange* is a text about re-coming to writing through the assimilation of another woman/writer – Clarice Lispector – whom Cixous considered on a par with Jacques Derrida as far as her spiritual development went. It is written in a subtly confessional mode traversing various moments in what appears to be Cixous' reawakening: from incapacity to talk and write to anchoring into historical and political reality and finally to her own voice through the experience of finding, and letting speak, the other's voice. This paper will argue that in this text Cixous evokes an apophatic experience, the dark night of the soul, which she is recovered from by her soulmate, Clarice Lispector, *lispectorange*. We will discuss the book in triptych fashion: first, we will look at Cixous' hunger for words in *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Secondly, we will discuss the symbolism of the orange in Cixous' and Lispector's writing. Last, we will look into the consummation of the other through Cixous' incorporation of the discourse of Clarice Lispector.

In his book, *Hélène Cixous, Live Theory*, Ian Blyth argues: "Lispector's writing arrives 'with an angel's footsteps' at a time when Cixous' 'writing-being was grieving for being so lonely' [...]. The gratitude and the love Cixous feels for Clarice Lispector infuses every page of *Vivre l'orange* with an almost religious fervor". (BLYTH, 2004:46). The word religious, although used to denote passion here, is not coincidental. Religion played an important part in Cixous' work – although she claimed to reach somewhere beyond God, creation, and creaturely status – she must have been aware of Derrida's work on apophaticism as well as of other theologians who had approached the apophatic way in their writings. She was also aware of Derrida's and Levinas' work on alterity and the way she puts into play her relationship with Clarice Lispector is along the lines of the *poétique* of otherness.

However, Cixous departed from Derrida in her passion for experience and presentness which she attempted to rekindle through the invention of new words and through her poetic writing, flowing and unencumbered for which she found inspiration in Clarice Lispector as Susan Sellers argues: "Central to *Vivre l'orange* is the notion that while our relation to others is also linguistic, this symbolic relation does not mean severing words from experience. This is figured in *Vivre l'orange* through the comparison of Cixous' own hitherto abstract writing to Lispector's gift of the orange" (Susan Sellers, 2003: n.p)

In her "The Mystic Aspect of l'écriture Féminine. Hélène Cixous' *Vivre l'orange*", Anu Aneja insists on the strong relation between the author and Clarice Lispector:

"Finding inspiration in the work of the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, Helene Cixous' *Vivre l'orange* establishes a mystic dialectic with Clarice's spirit. The female body, represented here as the dark continent of adventure and exploration, finds expression in the Symbolic, through the narrator's linguistic dialogue with Clarice. Rejecting the masculine economy of investment and return, *Vivre l'orange* privileges expenditure and gift, a pleasurable giving. (Aneja, 1989: 189)

### **Hunger – The Dark Night of the Soul**

The dark night of the soul refers mainly to what Medieval mystics called their apophatic experience, that of experiencing the absence of God, of language or of sense. According to Dionysius the Areopagite, it is only in this situation that we can truly become reborn. This absence of God and of words is also sensed as a hunger, one in which one is deprived of the basic necessities of being, unable to communicate or to create. According to Jacques

Derrida, apophatic discourse: “says something of the end of discourse itself and is an address to the friend, the extremity of the envoi, the hail, the farewell” (Derrida, 2005: 41). However, it is only in this radical displacement of the self that the new, awakened I can affirm itself in all its plenitude. As Derrida and Franke see it, the apophatic moment of discourse is constitutive of the real language of presence, the one entails the other.

In *Vivre l'orange*, Cixous unwittingly avows going through a similar experience in 1978, one year after Clarice Lispector's death. She is at a loss for words, sense, capacity of valuing her previous work, possibility of relating with other fellow beings, not to mention the capacity to write and create which has vanished in the thin air. She is on the brink of madness: - “j'avais peur qu'elle devienne folle, je n'osais plus m'écouter” (Cixous, 1989: 11); Je ne parlais plus, je craignais ma voix, je craignais la voix des oiseaux, et tous les appels qui regardent au-dehors, et il n'y a pas de dehors sauf le neant, et sont éteints – une écriture ma trouvée quand j'étais introuvable à moi-même” (Cixous, *ibid.*: 13).

Mystic experiences throughout the world talk about this temporary loss of soul which precedes a transformational experience in which one embraces a new spirituality.

Cixous vaguely speaks of a guilt – “moi qui n'ai pas payé le prix” (*ibid.*: 27) and, read in the context of the interplay orange/apple, we can interpret it as women's shared guilt of Eve, of the burden of the fall or the guilt associated with leaving her Oran je (*ibid.*: 41). However, through her experience of absence and loss, Cixous atones and, as she herself remarks, it is only in this senselessness that one can regain (although not in the manly fashion of investment and gain) one's soul again. Cixous' way is again that of the mystics and of Derrida: the gift – she gives voice to Lispector's words, she assimilates and chews them with the hunger proper for one who recovers after a long illness, lets them breathe their own air, without intervening, without interpreting or analyzing: “A partir d'une si grande faim, peut naître la force d'aimer la vie” (*ibid.*: 41).

Cixous suggests that it was a question of her *écriture féminine* itself that the writings of Clarice Lispector came to inspire her, comparing her previous writing as under the sign of the masculine – the sun/le soleil as she suggests in *Portrait du soleil* with her newly found discourse in the encounter of Clarice Lispector's words:

J'ai erré dix années glaciales dans la solitude surpubliée, sans voir un seul visage de femme humaine, le soleil s'était retiré, il faisait un froid mortel, la vérité s'était couchée, j'ai pris le dernier livre avant la mort, et voici que c'était Clarice, l'écriture. Je ne dormais pas, mais j'avais les yeux glacés, ma vue n'arrivait pas aux choses. L'écriture est venue jusqu'à moi, elle s'est adressée à moi, l'une après l'autre, elle s'est lue à moi, jusqu'à moi, à travers mon absence jusqu'à la présence” (*ibid.*: 49)

From here on, Cixous will read Lispector's texts with voracity, finding in them a feminine voice who was not afraid to go to the source and in whom she found many common points.

### **The I - L'orange**

In her article, Anu Aneja says the following of the orange in Cixous' text:

“Orange is woman's fruit. A bright, glistening ball of flame, a magic circle of desire. Orange desire is not the desire to have, to take; it is rather, the pleasure of giving, the pleasure of having pleasure in giving” (*ibid.*: 189). While Aneja is attentive at extracting the intensely feminine flavor of Cixous' writing as well as its qualities of gift-giving, Cixous might not be so innocent when it comes Derrida's economy of the gift as she herself avows her guilt in her exchange of orange/apples with Clarice Lispector. To use one of Cixous' play upon words, with the apple/orange, Cixous appelle, interpelle, arête mais s'arrête de dévorer because the orange is the ultimate image of her *poétique*, she refuses to be one of those women who capture, devour or castrate. And for this, Clarice Lispector is an excellent example.

I argue that the orange is not only an image of Cixous' femininity or feminism but, as other authors have argued, her Ariadne thread to her place of origin, her Algeriance, therefore of her journey towards encountering the self; her political presence among other women of her time and not only; her own historicity, her firm emplacement in a time and space defined by her strong personality; her ethical choice especially as concerns not eating the other but saving and adoring him/her.

For Cixous, the orange is a model of gift-giving – a fruit which gives itself peacefully and whose benediction she had lost in the previous period. “Toute orange est originaire” (Cixous, *ibid*: 19) says Cixous referring to this fruit's symbolism of beginnings and genesis but such beginnings as they were engendered by a feminine god. Moreover, the fruit is atemporal: “Trois regards autour d'une orange, d'ici au Brésil aller aux sources en Algérie. Le fruit brille dans le temps sans heures. Le jus du temps coule selon les besoins. Je vis en plongée sous l'heure, sans souci, sans pressentiment, sans peur. [...]A ce moment-là je séjournais en Orient intérieur” (21). It is worth remarking that via the restorative properties of the orange, the author has converted the dark night of the soul into the Orient which is the place of rest and revelation of Sufi mystics like Sohrawardī and Ibn Arabī.

In Cixous' poetics, the orange is co-substantial with pre-existence, with writing in the present, it ensures an anchorage in the history of the time with the inclusion of archetypal ethics. It turns writing into a more palatable enterprise - “la saveur acidulée et apaisante de l'écriture-présent” (65). Finally, the orange is a symbol of Cixous' feminine writing – liquid, pungent and solar.

### **The Other – Clarice Lispector**

Clarice Lispector, the Brazilian writer in whose discourse Cixous saved her own writing is best described in Cixous' own words.

This woman, our contemporary, Brazilian (born in the Ukraine, of Jewish origin), gives us not books but living saved from books, from narratives, repressive constructions. And through her writing-window we enter the awesome beauty of learning to read: going, by way of the body, to the other side of the self. Loving the true of the living, what seems *ungrateful* to narcissist eyes, the nonprestigious, the nonimmediate, loving the origin, interesting oneself personally with the impersonal, with the animal, with the thing. (Cixous and Suleiman, 1991: 59)

Clarice Lispector is presented, in Cixous text, as the Ur-woman-writer, who comprises all other women, all origins and ends: she is the incarnation of the existence of women before representation, before being put into labels and stereotypes, in the land where the spirit ran free. Her words, which Cixous quotes abundantly, denote her perfection: “Elle m'est arrivée dans sa perfection; qui est la peau de son être” (61). As soon as she has recognized it, Cixous hungers for this perfection which she sees as the most accomplished expression of writing. It has affinities with her *poétique* because she has “les yeux qui ne prennent pas entre leurs regards” (Cixous, *ibid*: 61).

Among other things, Cixous discusses Lispector's work of memory, her minutiae, her attention to the detail of everyday life, her “force-orchidée” (*ibid*: 69), her capacity of uniting signifier with signified: “Travail: Clarice. Le travail de désoublier, de de-taire, de déterrer, de se désaveugler et de se désassouvir” (*ibid*: 79). This is in truth the process Cixous undergoes in reading Lispector's texts, she covers the immense space between écriture masculine and écriture féminine via the gift of the *lispectorange*. At the end of her book, Cixous unravels her own work of love, re-naming things, showing what Clarice Lispector means for her.

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