

# Resistance to Phallogocentrism in *The Storm* by Women's Writing

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**Abstract:** *The Storm* is one of the most representative works by Kate Chopin, who is best known for her stories about the inner lives of sensitive daring women, for which she is considered as a forerunner to focus on feminist literary in the 20th century. *The Storm* unfolds a story about a moment of a woman's passionate sex, reminding that Hélène Cixous compares Medusa's laugh as the outpour of women's writing and declares women are "stormy". Thus, it is a typical work bearing the properties of women's writing claimed by Cixous, and reveals resistance to the oppression of women's body by phallogocentrism by writing through women's body with mother's quality. *The Storm* can be accepted as women's writing for its stressing on the liberation of women's body and women's sexual desire as resistance to phallogocentric tradition.

**Keywords:** Hélène Cixous, Phallogocentrism, *The Storm*, women's writing.

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## 1. Introduction

Women's writing is proposed by Hélène Cixous, the Jewish-Algerian-French writer, whose reputation lies in the considerable contributions as a feminist literary theorist. Cixous' feminist essay "Le Rire de la Méduse" originally written in French in 1975 was translated into English as "The Laugh of the Medusa" in 1976 by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. "The Laugh of the Medusa" has a place of importance in the world of feminist literary theory as a ground-breaking essay that declared what Cixous called *Écriture féminine*, not a specifically defined term but a distinctive style of writing for women and by women, which devotes to liberating women from patriarchy and phallogocentrism through writing.

Kate Chopin, an American novel writer, is best known for her stories about the inner lives of sensitive daring women, and considered as a forerunner of American 20th-century feminist authors of Southern background. *The Storm*, considering no editor at the time would publish a work as sexually explicit as this one, not published until the 1960s, many years after writing, is one of the most representative ones among her feminist works, which unfolds a story about a moment of heroine Calixta's passionate sex, as well as reminds readers by the title that Cixous compares Medusa's laugh as the outpour of women's writing and declares women are "stormy" to express ecstasy by liberating women's body and breaking phallogocentrism. *The Storm* is a typical work bearing the properties of women's writing claimed by Cixous. It reveals resistance to the oppression of women's body by phallogocentrism by writing through women's body with mother's quality.

## 2. Resisting Phallogocentric Tradition

The oppression of women's body by phallogocentric tradition is resisted in *The Storm*.

Cixous argues that "Men have committed the greatest crime against women" by fantasizing women's body as a "dark continent" since "the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason...It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition." *The Storm*, however, face readers

directly with women's body by describing women's sexual femininity as full of ardor and vitality, through which it fights against the long-term ignorance of women's body and even takes on the challenge of self-congratulatory phallogocentric tradition.

Per Seyersted, a Chopin biographer, holds that "sex in this story is a force as strong, inevitable, and natural as the Louisiana storm which ignites it." She argues that "the emphasis is on the momentary joy of the amoral cosmic force." In *The Storm*, although the moment of adultery sex takes place, it is the pleasant sexual magnetism and experience that are centered to resist phallogocentric reason created by patriarchy.

*The Storm* serves as shocking exposure of women's body and their "unique unconscious desire" hidden and obscured by traditional male writing dominated by phallogocentrism, through which women's writing achieved its resistance.

## 3. Writing Women's Body

The writing through women's body in *The Storm* is aimed at feminine sexuality to subvert phallogocentric oppression.

Women should write experience and thinking through their body. Considering the multiple richness of women's body, they are deliberately neglected by males. Cixous supposes that "women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language." Body writing by women is "about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization."

In *The Storm*, Calixta and Alcée had an unexpected sex during the storm. Calixta possessed "lips as red and moist as pomegranate seed", "white neck" and "full, firm bosom" that moves Alcée. During the fiery sex Calixta was surprised to know for the first time that she was "as white as the couch she lay upon" and her firm, elastic flesh "was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world". Calixta's ardor and passion was aroused by getting aware of her body and sexual vigor. Her extreme ecstasy and pure passion were woken up. "Her mouth was a fountain of delight" and she was "at the very borderland of life's mystery". Her ecstasy is the "jouissance" which is asserted to "to subvert phallogocentric oppression at its deepest levels."

What's more, the writing of Clixta's body creates abundant and rich language, which is poetic aimed at "reading pleasure, artistic enjoyment and imagination space," reproduce infinite mobility and sexual complexity which are defamed by phallogocentric tradition as well as enormous power that can "wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and code."

#### 4. Highlighting Feminine Quality

Writing with "mother" metaphor is another way to suggest feminine quality in *The Storm*.

Cixous takes women's writing as writing "in white ink," by which she points out that women's writing may trace its inspiration to the "mother" "as nonname and as source of goods." In *The Storm*, Clixta, as a mother, reveals mother's quality as maintaining and caring for family. Before the storm, Clixta gathered Bobinôt's Sunday clothes in case of the rain and felt upset about Bobinôt and Bibi's situation. After the storm, when Bobinôt and Bibi was bothered by Clixta's blame for coming back late and staining their clothes, Clixta was preparing dinner and hurried to check if her families were all right as soon as they came into the house. Clixta's caring offered a sense of relief to both Bobinôt and Bibi. They even enjoyed a happy supper without any coldness or distance after the storm.

The maternal quality of Clixta shows women's ability to "nourishes and stands up against separation." Women are inborn with the gift for love and good, which is of considerable significance not only for family but also for women's liberation and unity by "maintaining feminine bond and combining individuals with the whole history of women." Through the feminine writing of Clixta, women's quality inherited from the "mother" is testified and considered as the power of women to get bonded and liberated by getting rid of patriarchy's oppression.

#### 5. Conclusion

*The Storm*, a response to Cixous' appeal as "write your self; your body must be heard," can be accepted as women's writing for its stressing on the liberation of women's body and women's sexual desire as resistance to phallogocentric tradition.

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