

Translating Womanism: Can there be Gender-sensitive Translations?

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Abstract

This paper, "*Translating Womanism : Can there be a Gender Sensitive Translation ?*" is a study which establishes the need for translations of texts that are gender sensitive and those which deal with race and class based oppression of the women .The main objective of the study will be to analyse *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood in the light of *womanism* and how language as a *phallogentric* tool has made a woman incapable of expressing her emotions and feelings. The paper will explore the very topic in the light of *Ecriture feminine* . Moreover the use of term 'Translating' is metaphorical to establish that women and their experience have not well been resonated with the language which is more or less phallogentric in origin. The methods employed in this study are qualitative in nature and will deal with the post-modernist analysis of the chosen text written by a woman.

Keywords: *Ecriture feminine*; Lacanian real; Language; Other; Phallogentric; Womanism.

In almost all the societies across the world, women akin to subjugated subjects have been marginalized to the position of '*other*' by the patriarchal domination. This term *other* equivocally resonated with women sharing an intimate bond with the colonized cultures and races who had been at the receiving end of the politics of oppression and repression. From the early 19th century many women writers vehemently asserted the idea of female identity in a way that a social movement grew out of it and people started acknowledging this articulation of feminist struggle to end patriarchal dominations. In 1975, in her essay *The Laugh of Medusa*, a French feminist, Helen Cixous, claimed that a woman must write herself, write about women and put other women to write from which they have been forced apart as violently as from their bodies," "because their sexual

pleasures have been marginalised and denied expression. Utilizing Lacan's work in structure of language that is focused around the Phallus, and that language inside the specific emblematic order is authentic and where a solitary signifier is associated with a solitary signified, Cixous contends that the subject situation of "woman" or the "feminine" is on the edges of the Symbolic, and consequently less firmly secured and constrained by the Phallus.

Using the principle of play from Derrida, Helen Cixous comments that "women" are decentred, and therefore free to travel, render and reinvent in this way. Kristeva's "Ecriture Feminine" possibility develops from Freud's notion, which describes that women are large, less balanced than men, less good, and calls them "the dim landmass" along these lines, while Cixous uses that as a representation to celebrate this powerlessness of having possible influence over the condition of a woman in the emblematic phallogocentric Order.

Feminine works are similar to the Lacanian Real, the maternal body, exiled from the emblematic request; it links the symbolic composition with the illustrative composition and the feminine and maternal bodies with the non-authentic composition. However, feminine writings do not inherently have a place exclusively for women; Cixous argues that within the Symbolic order, everyone can take up the oppressed status of a "woman" and write from that position in *Ecriture feminine*. In the light of the reality that it will be to describe and detain it within the rationale of Western phallogocentric realism, refusing to characterise or encrypt or identify *Ecriture Feminine*, Cixous conflictingly declares that *Ecriture Feminine* comes from the female body, and that men may also write from that place. She depicts *Ecriture feminine* through an assortment of similitude's, which include milk, orgasm, nectar, and the sea. She notes that as a problematic and deconstructive force, *Ecriture female* fills in, shaking the protection and reliability of the phallogocentric Symbolic Order, and ultimately making further play for all subjects using language in gender, texts, and sexuality.

In brief, this paper emphasises the importance of language experience and non-linear writing rights that oppose the debate dominated by the *phallogocentric* paradigm, as language is no longer a neutral means, but acts as a patriarchal speech tool. By the novel surfacing, this paper supports the exhibition.

Surfacing is a novel by Margaret Atwood; the novel is set in the time when Canada was looking for autonomy from America. The

story line spins around the female anonymous protagonist who is out on a mission of finding her father alongside her companions and her boyfriend. From the beginning, the problematising nature of language is revealed as the character does not own a name and is barely referenced by a name in the book. Her inability to have a name is correlated with her impotence to be included in the Symbolic, and as is referred to by Lacan, Kristeva and many others as an appeal where the subject is constructed or built by the father's name and is divided from her/his true self. As the story unfolds, we see this same character approaching a point where her emotions, her memories, can not be voiced. She is betrayed by language as a human patriarchal construct. As the novel opens and the group moves through the border of northern Quebec, the nameless narrator states that

"My throat constricts, as it learned to do when I discovered people could say words that go into my ears meaning nothing. To be deaf and dumb would be easier" (*Surfacing*, 10)

The thought of demolishing word structures, syntax and the semantics of a language becomes more prominent not only because the narrator is being made to speak English in a French part of the county which gives her "A strangling feeling and paralysis of throat" but also because the language as a whole fails her. The more time she spends in wilderness thinking, rethinking and reconsidering her thoughts and feelings, the more isolated and helpless she feels in expressing herself. This helplessness is well illustrated when Joe, her lover asks her, if she loved him and in answer to the question she states,

"It was the language again; I couldn't use it because it wasn't mine. He must have known what he meant but it was an imprecise word; the Eskimos had fifty two names for snow because it was important for them. There ought to be as many for love." (*Surfacing* 119)

This inability of the speaker to fit her expression in a logo centric framework where there has to be an answer in binary, makes the expression even harder for her. Yet another incident when she gets back to her senses immediately from a vision where she sees her father drowning, her boyfriend Joe comes to look out for her and she states

"I touched him on the arm with my hand. My hand touched his arm. Hand touched arm. Language divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole" (*Surfacing* 159).

This desire of being a whole, to migrate and relocate the pre-oedipal stage in her fictional universe where she may turn into an whole, turns out to

be strong to such an extent that subsequent to having culminated her adoration in wild, she envisioned that she may have gotten pregnant with this semi god/semi animal like creature .While imaging this she reflects that

“will never teach it the words” (*Surfacing* 177).

While simultaneously escaping from both, her friends, so they won't be able to find her and language, by not responding when they call her name, the disposition from the language is marked when she says

“It's too late; I no longer have a name. I tried for all those years to be civilized but I'm not and I'm through pretending” (*Surfacing* 185).

The existing order of assigning a name to a person along with the father's name is an act of civilizing a person according to the societal Marxist norms which is again enormously phallogocentric in nature .Her attempt to “clear a space” extending from banishing language and mirrors to burning the pages of book is illustrated by

“To burn all through the words would take too long” (*Surfacing* 197).

She gets closer to an event rather than a state as the protagonist becomes a part of nature. She now has a totally new vocabulary, as the novel reveals

“In one of the languages there are no nouns, only verbs held for a larger moment. The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word. I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning...I'm not an animal or a tree, I'm the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I'm a place.” (*Surfacing* 209)

In conclusion it will be fair to remark that language is Phallogocentric in nature where women find it hard to express their authentic selves to the world and to the people around them .There seems to be an asymptotic relationship between language and expression. The women are made to construct their discourse in form of a language they seem not being able to relate to and instead of addressing and accepting this inadequacy of language depicted through various excerpts from the novel, this text is read in the light of a condition where its probed that the narrator / protagonist is psyched into a fit of madness . In fact this text has been read so many times under the genre of hysteria novel/ literature. It is probed that because of undergoing an abortion the woman who is the protagonist has gone entirely bonkers .

Accepting this inadequacy of language as a mode of translating women, who think differently, write differently, feel differently will be a baby step in recognising women and their struggles with language. Margaret Atwood's novel provides storyline open to such comprehension, while the nature and substance of their prose both praise the *second sex* or female body and its expression of the non-linguistic references. However I would like to establish and as Julia Kristeva asserts, abandoning language as a whole and creating an alternate articulation acceptable and comprehensible, this abandonment of language is; but impossible henceforth to be heard and understood as point where articulation has to be created and where women feel free to express whatever and however they write. This paper concludes on reasserting the question, "Can there be Gender sensitive translations without categorizing them in the frame work of mere hysteria."

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