



# Hélène Cixous's Concept of Love as a Strategy of Feminine Writing in Margaret Atwood's *Life before Man*

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## Abstract

*This paper focuses on Margaret Atwood's Life before Man to find elements of similarity between her writing and Hélène Cixous's thoughts. In order to achieve this goal, her approach, feminine writing will be discussed in detail and love as the key word of this approach will be also applied to main characters in before-mentioned novel. Here love represented as a means of transforming the relation between self and other to a none-violent one. The lack of love results to characters' failure in their relations and subverts their lives to vicious circle.*

**Keywords:** Hélène Cixous, margaret atwood, feminine writing, love, self, other.

## Introduction

Feminine writing is one of the key terms, introduced by Cixous in "The Laugh of Medusa." She is interested in psychoanalysis which plays an important role in shaping her thoughts and philosophy. Cixous introduces feminine writing in reaction to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. This term is a deconstructive practice that moves beyond phallogocentric rules and principles and destroys their frame. In her feminine writing Cixous unveils what is repressed in phallogocentric society which is caused by fear of castration. Cixous argues that phallogocentric writing is completely against difference and other and is locked restrictedly in traditional hierarchies that are repeated all the time. The result is the static position of this kind of writing in the edge of abyss, locked with fear, and consequently unable to enter into free and dynamic thinking. For this reason, phallogocentrism transforms to oppression, racism, and every form of thoughts which try to define other and difference as lack because of fear. She says: "most often human beings choose to kill the other"<sup>1</sup>.

In "The Laugh of Medusa", she writes: "I do desire the other for the other, whole and entire, male or female; because living means writing everything that is everything that lives, and wanting it alive"<sup>2</sup>. For Cixous, feminine writing is about other and for the other that gives the possibility and space of existence to the other, without interferes of the self or writer. In this way, the other becomes an autonomous existence. The texts that are written by feminine economy are open. Cixous urges us to write our bodies; she argues:

I write texts that are very much in movement. Eventful. That is what I imagine, at least. There ought then to be a metaphorical grouping, or collection that stems at once from the registers of transport, but also that always goes through the first of the means of transport which is our own body. What we are able to

do as an exercise in translation with our body or as a translation of our affects in terms of the body is unlimited<sup>1</sup>.

Cixous words demonstrate the nature of her writing, words such as "movement and eventful" show that her texts are written in feminine writing; and by means of jouissance energy. Body in her writing is a metaphor that acts as the first means of transport or translator, which gives her free access to unlimited tell, show and express.

Feminine writing must not be considered not only as a method of writing, but also as a new way of thinking, Cixous understands feminine writing as a source of nourishing the thoughts. In all of her critical texts, Cixous does not talk about just women as repressed sex in society; she talks about humankind. She states that men have the same problem like women; they caught in traditional way of thinking, writing and living. Cixous is on the side of free and creative thoughts and writings. She states:

Language is all powerful. You can say everything, do everything, that has not been said, not yet been done. What is beautiful is that it is to economic. It suffices to displace a letter, a full stop, a comma, and everything changes. Out to infinity<sup>1</sup>.

She encourages us to use the power of language in free, new and creative mode to come out of repeating all that have been repeated from ancient time up to know. This is the characteristic, which makes Cixous's own writing unique, fresh and new in every aspect. She writes:

It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in

areas other than those subordinated to philosophic-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breaks of automatism, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugates<sup>2</sup>.

**In addition, she discusses:** A text is neither representation nor expression. A text is beyond both representation-the exact reproduction of reality- and expression: it always says something other than it intend to say. The text is always more than the author wants to express or believes s/he expresses. As a result of fashionable theoretical practices, all this has been repressed<sup>3</sup>.

In both of above-mentioned quotations, She talks about feminine writing that gives birth to new text, free from chains of traditional theories and it's not possible to theorize them. In this way, it is possible to find out the text's other message that is beyond what defined by traditional theories and principles.

Cixous's feminine writing did not receive positive outlook of all critics, some of them argued that Cixous's feminine writing is a kind of essentialism. Abigail Brays writes:

As Felsky points out, an assumption that a subversive experimental writing is capable of transforming society is itself the hallmark of an earlier utopian strain within modernism which heralded the revolutionary potential of art. In this sense, Cixous's celebration *écriture féminine* carries with it a Utopian avant-garde idealization of the relationship between art and society, the poetic and the political. In this context, the avant-garde over-estimates the liberatory affects of its own productions through a rather naive faith in the transformative power of art. Artistic innovations are often only accessible to educated elite and thus hardly capable of effecting larger social changes; if indeed the avant-garde effects any real change at all<sup>4</sup>.

Bray summarizes all criticism against Cixous's work as follows: She relies upon a concept of phallogentrism, which is *ahistorical* and thus unable to account for complex social changes. *Écriture féminine* is utopian and so potentially reactionary and unable to offer pragmatic, situated interventions. Sexual difference becomes a *meta-narrative*, which erases all other (racial, class, etc) differences and so risks a simplistic, even reactive, account of social and political reality. Cixous *idealizes* the revolutionary potential of language and confuses linguistic change with social change. The feminine is *romanticized* oppositional. Her position is based on a form of *biological essentialism*<sup>4</sup>.

All these criticism against Cixous makes clear that there are misunderstandings about her theories. Reading these criticisms alerts us about misreading and misunderstanding her works and thought. Cixous talks about morphological body not the anatomical one which leads to essentialism. The anatomical body refers to physical body that is used in Freud's theories as the reason for considering women inferior to men, because he

believed that anatomy is destiny. Cixous writes completely in opposition to him and she uses body in morphological meaning to reject Freud's idea. She mentions:

I am careful here to use the *qualifiers* of sexual difference. In order to avoid the confusion man/masculine, woman/ feminine: for there are men who do not repress their femininity, women who more or less forcefully inscribe their masculinity. The difference is not of course distributed according to socially determined 'sexes'...we must guard against falling completely or blindly into essentialist ideological interpretation, as, for example, Freud and Jones, in different ways, ventured to do, in their quarrel over the subject of feminine sexuality, both of them, starting from opposite points of view, came to support the awesome thesis of a 'natural,' anatomical determination of sexual difference-opposition<sup>5</sup>.

She believes that we are different anatomically but it must not lead to cultural misrepresentation of difference which results to binary oppositions or in other word the superiority of one upon the other. Cixous challenges these binary oppositions by showing them, as cultural and historical misrepresentation of our natural differences. Morphology would not be limited to binary oppositions it moves beyond them and in this way gives more possibility to write body in a new dynamic way. That is what Cixous thinks and write about in the name of feminine writing.

In her article, Cixous explains the relation between self and the other very beautifully: What is the "*point of wheat?*" it is the relation one can have with the other and with the world when one has "de-heroized" oneself by not forgetting the other; even if it is a cockroach, or even if it is the rain, then one has the type of love that the rain and the earth have one for the other. And that could be defined as a kind economy of attention<sup>6</sup>.

She invites us to experience none-violent approach to the other that is preoccupied with not forgetting the other. Cixous gives us the relation between rain and earth as an example; rain falls with love on the earth, which she calls it the economy of attention. By use of the economy of attention, she means, instead of seeing the relation or connection between self and the other as one that leads in negating the other by the self or vice versa, this connection must be seen creatively. In her view, openness does not mean passivity, which makes self or other vulnerable to annihilation but rather a productive generosity as what happens between the rain and the earth.

## Literary Background

**Hélène Cixous:** Hélène Cixous's works introduce her as a poet, novelist, play writer, and above all a critic and philosopher. There are some characteristics which make her works difficult to read, she writes multidimensional. She writes in various genres about various issues and her language is poetic and at the same time philosophical. In this way, she gives more

opportunity to the text to be heard and to us to discover the unseen in the text. She writes about extra ordinaries in ordinary life such as loving the other without knowing, living out of fear of death in a way that makes her language unique, and shows her talent in picturing the unseen in a very different; clever way.

Her works are occupied with the process of insight as a creative, dynamic and positive activity which passes the limits by subverting dominant subjectivity. In addition, it means reading differently and taking up a new subjectivity that leads to production of new representation, among her works *To Live the Orange* (1979) is a brilliant instance of new perception and subjectivity. Although Cixous is famous for her critical essays but she started her career as a writer by publishing the collection of short stories, *Le Prenom de Dieu*, in 1967.

In 1969, she published her first autobiographical novel, *Dedans* which won the Prix Médicis prize. In this novel Cixous mourns for the loss of father and in a poetic language describes how she keeps him alive in herself as the other by means of her writings. In 1975, she wrote her major drama, *Portrait do Dora* which was a great success and run for a year in the theater. In this play we can find the traces of Freud and Lacan psychoanalyst theories that enlighten Cixous thought. We cannot find a fixed character according to identification and classification which makes Dora an interesting character.

In 1976, she wrote her influential article, "The Laugh of Medusa," which put her in the center of attentions especially in United States as a critic and philosopher. In this article, she introduces one of her key concepts, "L'écriture féminine." She uses this term as a strategy for deconstruction of phallogocentrism self-defining frame: it is an attempt to provide space for the other to exist free of self-definition. In above-mentioned she writes:

The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural. Anticipation is imperative. What I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project<sup>2</sup>.

In these lines, she talks about the necessity of fundamental change in what is called destiny all that was imposed on us from the past. She does not accept that our biology makes our destiny, and wants to project the new possibility of being more than what is defined in the past for us as our only way of being a man or woman. Moreover, her aim is to introduce new ways of communication and counteraction with other, which is beyond phallogocentric frame.

In 1979, she wrote *To Live the Orange*, which its subject is contemplation and the extremity of thoughts that is the result of deep thinking on an orange. In this book the orange is metaphor

of the other, she moves toward it by crossing the layers of language that surrounded it. She asserts:

The orange is a moment. Not forgetting the orange is one thing. Recalling the orange is another thing. Rejoining it is another. At least three times are needed in order to begin to understand the infinite immensity of the moment...I am beginning to measure its importance the orange is a beginning. Starting out from the voyage all voyages are possible. All voices that go her way are good<sup>9</sup>.

Here the orange is used for the sake of perception and is divided into different layers; Cixous describes these layers as "not forgetting," "recalling" and "rejoining"<sup>9</sup>. All these concepts happen in the moment that is infinite and could be called a voyage. Here Cixous challenges the common understanding of things such as orange, to inform us that it is possible to give response to the call of other things materiality without violence or in her words: *To Live the Orange*.

Cixous pays attention to the deep and slow thinking that must be through the body in a way to engage with the materiality or the body of the other, which here she calls it orange. She tries to show us that the genuine reality is located under the fake layers of language and one must peel those layers through deep contemplation to reveal the real nature of the other. She reminds us that to live the orange is an attempt toward our freedom from the bonds of artificiality of language toward the great awareness and attention to the other.

In 1990s, her works in a certain way were part of the recognizable history of literature, she writes as if in every one of her works she is through a door, which gives her the possibility to get to the other side. As the reader attempts to read her and to get her, she is through a new door and in this way; she transforms the modern reader to the other reader. In 1991, she published *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* that makes a group of Cixous's writing from 1976 to 1989. This collection is a coherent book which is the result of her artistic and critical reading of other writers like Claris Lispector. In addition, her interests in opera and painting had inspired her writing in this book; she used them in a new artistic way to express her thoughts and theories.

Cixous had been writing around 44 fictions, 16 drama, 14 articles, essays, and some collections of poems up to now. There are many books and articles among these works which are discussable and full of interesting and new ideas. I wished that it was possible to write about each one of them in details, but due to limitations, it is not possible. I just mention the name of some of these works as suggestions for further reading: *Three Steps on The Ladder of Writing* (1993)<sup>12</sup>, *The Newly Born Woman* (1986)<sup>12</sup>, *Angst* (1985), *Inside* (1986), *Neutre* (1988), *Sorties* (1980), *Writing Blind* (1996), *Stigmata* (1998), *Veils* (2001), that she wrote it with Jacques Derrida.

**Margaret Atwood:** Margaret Atwood started her career in a decade that coincides with the rise of Second Wave of Feminism. This event repeatedly put her under pressure of supporting Feminism but she announced many times that she tries to show her society's situation in her works. She writes and reflects the real atmosphere of 1950s in her society. The most important context that we can put Atwood's work in is her position as a Canadian writer; especially that she began writing at a time when traditional customs of Canadian literature were invisible; and her own criticism, which out of this absence of a critical heritage emerged. This part focuses on the cultural historical and literary forces that Atwood has tried to write against them.

In discussion about the way of perceiving and valuing art through the ages, and the more important discussion of censorship that happened in the 20th century Atwood as a young woman shows us the real atmosphere of 1950s. The censorship did not happen just to books, it was pervasive in all aspects of Canadian people. The censorship was so strict that when Atwood read Hemingway's *Hills like White Elephants* (1927) for the first time, she could not understand what the characters were talking about. In her country, abortion was a subject that no one talked about it.

The historical situation of Canada as a political entity came into being in 1867, and only achieved absolute independence from the UK in 1982 by way of the Canada Act. At that time, it was twenty years that Atwood had already been publishing her works. But it was still difficult to distinguish Canada from the USA. Because of awareness of identity of otherness, Canada seeks a distinguishable Canadian identity. When Atwood was young, Canadian did not know anything about Canadian canon even they did not include Canadian literature in universities syllabus and Atwood recorded this fact in her interviews and in her *Survival* (1972). From that time Canadian started developing a distinguishable canon called CanLit and Atwood was one of the central figure in developing it as a critic and writer. This attempt highlighted the fact that Canadian writers attempt to create a national literature and Atwood is one of the female writers who took part in this attempt.

It happens that Atwood sets just her dystopian novels out of Canada because her country has a powerful image in Atwood's mind, which is evident in her novels such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009)<sup>14</sup> and her political novel *Bodily Harm* (1981). In the last mentioned novel, the characters, which the narrator is talking about, are Americans and are recognized because of their appearance and behaviors.

As a critic, because Atwood wants to assert a national identity, she writes about nationalism and difference between Canadians and US citizens. But she mentions that her characters speak their own views not hers. As an export that speaks by and for Canada Atwood shows us her version of Canada, The version

that is different from the one government likes to reproduce. Atwood is a powerful enemy because she is an intellectual writer with global sales which makes her popular among wide range of readers. Moreover, the fact that she is able to sell her criticism and the review of her books by means of her name as their author shows that how much power and influence she has in literature and business world. She playfully suggests, "As a theorist, I'm a good amateur plumber"<sup>10</sup>. Despite the flippancy in her language when she talks about herself, Atwood's role in acceptance of Canadian literature and criticism around the world is undeniable. She is the author of nonfiction works such as short history of Canada as well as six collections of cultural and literary criticism<sup>10</sup>.

### Love as Strategy of Feminine Writing

Open relation between self and other leads to love. Love is the recurrent theme in all of Cixous's writing, and in fact, it must be said that love is an inseparable part of her life that surrounded her very early from her childhood. She writes:

I discovered that Face was mortal, and that I would have to snatch it back at every moment from Nothingness. I didn't adore that-which- is-going-go-disappear; love isn't bound up for me in the condition of mortality. No. I loved. I was afraid. All the forces of life, I armed love with soul and words, to keep death from winning<sup>7</sup>.

She finds the mortal situation of human being and starts her quest for a way to pass the mortality. She finds love as her weapon and fills it with soul and words to fight against death, for Cixous, love means keeping alive. Love should be considered as an important political, philosophical and literary subject that is so powerful, as what had come to us from past tells us that by means of love power, monarchies had been destroyed. Cixous talks about love in every aspect of her life even those part that may seem to us frustrating and unbearable like her father's and her son's death. She says: "I go about carrying a tomb on my back, my father's, like my snail shell, and then I found strange that in cemetery nothing falls less than a tomb, and in action one falls in love, but upwards."<sup>8</sup> This is a unique and strange experience; she finds love in her father's death and his tomb that inspires her with love of writing.

She asserts: "I start writing from: Love. I write out of love. Writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love. *The Gesture*."<sup>7</sup> Here by the gesture of love, she means openness to the other; this other may live inside of us or in the outside world. For Cixous love is the central issue of exploring the relation between two sexes. She writes:

What is beautiful in the relation to the other, what moves us, what overwhelms us the most—that is love—is when we see a certain heart beating. And this secret that we take by surprise, we do not speak of it; we do not touch it. We know, for example where the other's vulnerable heart is situated; and we do not

touch it; we leave it intact. This is love<sup>1</sup>.

Love enables us to see its secret in the other that he or she does not know it him/ herself, but we do not touch it we just keep it:

It is to find one has arrived at the point where the immense foreign territory of the other will begin. We sense the immensity, the reach, the richness of it, this attracts us. This does not mean that we ever discover it. I can imagine that this infinite foreignness could be menacing; disturbing. It also can be quite the opposite: exalting, wonderful, and in the end, of the same species as God: we do not know what it is. It is the biggest; it is far off. At the end of the path of attention, of reception, which is not interrupted but which continues into what little by little becomes the opposite of comprehension. Loving not knowing. Loving: not knowing<sup>1</sup>.

She talks about love as accepting the other's difference and strangeness without fear of it as a threat. In her view, it is just possible by passion for wonder and openness to unknown, which results in loving not knowing. When Cixous talks about love she asserts that in love we are in a great risk, she mentions:

In the face of love we disarm ourselves, and indeed we keep the vulnerability. It does not disappear, but it is offered to the other. With the person we love, we have a relationship of absolute vulnerability. why? First of all because we think they will do no harm to us at the same time that we think and we have the experience that they are the only person who can do all the harm in the world to us...and this is the childlike and magical side of love, we think that the person who can kill us is the person who, because he or she loves us, will not kill us. And at the same time, we (do not) believe in it. In love we know we are at the greatest risk and at the least great risk, *at the same time*. What the person we love gives us is first of all mortality<sup>1</sup>.

In these lines, she refers to the negative side of love, we disarm ourselves<sup>13</sup> when we love and consequently we enter into an unknown zone which changes love into a great risk. We cannot be sure that the person we love will not abandon us or he or she may die. Love becomes the first declaration of our mortality, but Cixous does not want to alarm us against dangers of love she continues:

Ah but we are immortal too! The person who gives us mortality gives us immortality. ...So in reality, virtually, when we love we are already half dead. We have already deposited our life in the hands that hold our death: and this is what is worth the trouble of love. This is when we feel our life; otherwise, we do not feel it<sup>1</sup>.

That is the risk of love which takes the most from you and at the same time gives you the most. You will live half dead and at the same time it can be considered as a gift, because in this way you are able to get rid of the fear of death. On the other hand, other becomes the source of your life and gives your life to you

unconsciously. Cixous talks about what she calls the secret of love:

We love the other to the extent to which we love to love. We love to love because it is an activity which, as a rule, let us say half the time, is a generous activity. The other half is just the opposite: it is an activity that is avaricious, capturing, destructive, etc. but the generous part is gratifying: we are happy with ourselves. We love ourselves. We love to love because, in loving, we love our loving selves. It is perhaps the secret of love: the narcissistic satisfaction that can develop in so far as it is engendered, it is maintained by the best there is in us<sup>1</sup>.

According to what Cixous says, love has two opposite sides, one side is generous and the other destructive. However, the generous side of love gives us a kind of narcissistic satisfaction we become happy, or in Cixous's world when we are in love, we love our loving selves. When we merit our love we gain the best part of ourselves naturally by love and in love, this makes love easier. Once we enter into the world of love everything becomes much easier for us, we just need to pass the borderline and enter into this amazing world. Here every action makes us happy, even loss of ego's resistance which makes it easier for us to give our loving selves.

In another part, Cixous talks about the drama of love: It is the great drama of love: we want at once to devour the other and not to devour the other. To not want to devour the other is not a mark of love, but a mark of disinterest. So it's the two at the same time: we want at any price to devour the other, and so it is an homage (the desire for the other, in this form, is a sign of love), and at the same time, we know that if we devour them there will be no more we must perform this double movement all the time we must realize that to love is not of this world, but of another planet. What can be confusing and misleading is that the other planet, which is ruled by absolute and by faith, is nonetheless located in this world. So that when we love, we are subject to a double regime: that of the ordinary world with its economy and its common laws, and simultaneously that of the singular planet where everything is different. And what is impossible in this world is at the same moment possible in the sphere of love in the sphere of love, all is grace, free, without price. All is 'easy': nothing is easy: all is given; all is to be given. Because this sphere must be created, at every instant. In any case, to love well, to beloved, is relentless work.<sup>1</sup>

Devouring and not devouring becomes the double movement of love, which makes it more strange and at the same time more interesting. We are going to give up the desire of devouring and destroying the other which becomes a kind of passage and is easy and just possible in love. Nevertheless love is ruled by absolute and accompanied by unquestionable faith that are not possible in this world, so they make love strange as if it comes from another planet. Consequently, love is not ruled by this world's rules, which make it free of price, something given by

grace and everything becomes possible in love's sphere. The only misfortune is that we do not care of limitations we go on devouring the other until we find it that there is none left. Love must be continuous and strong in a way to survive, which makes it fragile. Whenever we stop or make it less strong, we stop love and destroy it.

Cixous encourages us to get rid of all the world's bounds and rules that prevent us from searching and loving. She believes that there are lots of things that have been left unknown under the layers of everyday life, so in her view it is necessary to lose everything in the everyday life and start a new quest in *Coming to Writing* she says: Go, fly, swim, bound, descend, cross, love the unknown, love the uncertain, love what has not yet been seen, love no one, whom you are, whom you will be, leave yourself, shrug off the old lies, *dare what you don't dare*, it is there that you will take pleasure, never make you're here anywhere but *there*, and rejoice, rejoice in the terror, follow it where you're afraid to go, go ahead, take the plunge, you're on the right trail<sup>7</sup>.

The meaning of life in Cixous's words is "the search for love" and it is possible to be found by abandoning the fear of unknown and uncertain, when we stop our egos resistance from going toward the other.

**Discussion:** Love absence in all aspects of character's lives is evident from the first part of the novel. They try to deny love as a necessary part of their relations survival, and it results in cold and unhappy atmosphere that surrounds them and their lives. Love is just a kind of mask that covers the appearance of their relationship but in the deep parts of their relationship, there is no love. They do not understand love as a risk as Cixous mentions and they do not dare to risk their lives for it.

**Elizabeth:** The first picture of Elizabeth that is represented to the reader is a lonely and empty person. She is unable to accept love as a risk therefore; she cannot be open to love in any part of her life that leads to her loneliness, her marriage defeat and her various relations with other men. This inability is the reason that in her relationship with Chris, she rejects him firmly and pushes him to his death. Atwood reflects her feeling after Chris's death in this way:

I live like a peeled snail. And that's no way to make money. I want that shell back, it took me long enough to make I want a shell like a sequined dress, made of silver nickels and dimes and dollars overlapping like the scales of an armadillo. Armored dildo. Impermeable; like a French raincoat. I wish I didn't have to think about you<sup>11</sup>.

These lines indicates her view about love, she is unaware that love is a risk and wants it with guaranty. Thus as it happened to her from her childhood she experiences loss repeatedly. She wishes that she was able to forget him because she tries to deny her feeling of Chris's absence and loss of love that she tried to

deny in her life.

Elizabeth looks at love as a kind of controlling power that she hates it and tries to stay away from it. She knows that from the past time, Nate did not have such a power on her and they did not have such a feeling for each other, she married Nate very easily without any good reason: "She hates it when anyone has power over her. Nate doesn't have that kind of power, he never had. She married him easily, like trying on a shoe"<sup>11</sup>. Marriage for her is an unimportant issue, which is as easy as trying on shoes without any necessary factor such as love.

All the events in her life took the shape of repetition, even being surprised is something ordinary for her. Every year she waits to be surprised:

Elizabeth sits in her kitchen, waiting to be surprised. She's always surprised at this time of the year; she's also surprised on her birthday, at Christmas and on Mother's Day, which the children insist on celebrating even though she tells them it's commercial and they don't have to. She's good at being surprised. She's glad she's put in a lot of practice: shell be able to walk through it tonight with no slips, the exclamation, the pleased smile, the laugh<sup>11</sup>.

All the occasions that are emblems of love and friendliness such as Mother's day, Christmas and even her birthday lost their aura for her. She memorized all parts, smile and laughs as a professional actor. There is no sense, no love in her life just a cover that is called love.

Even none of the charities that she does is for the sake of love or sympathy with other people:

She hands each a bundle and drops coins into their slotted tins. They twitter happily among themselves, thank her, and patter across the porch, not knowing, really, what night this is or what, with their small decorated bodies, they truly represent. All Souls. Not just friendly souls but all souls. They are souls, come back, crying at the door, hungry, mourning their lost lives. You give them food, money, anything to substitute for your love and blood, hoping it will be enough, waiting for them to go away<sup>11</sup>.

**Lesje:** Lesji is one of the interesting characters in the novel, she is somehow strange and in compare to Elizabeth, she has a very different personality. She has an ordinary and boring life with her boyfriend William; there is no interesting point in their relationship. Atwood shows us that there is not such a feeling like love between these two people: "Except that she can no longer daydream about William, even when she tries; nor can she remember what the daydreams were like when she did have them. A daydream about William is somehow a contradiction in terms. She doesn't attach much importance to this fact"<sup>11</sup>.

Their relationship transformed to everyday life without any specific point or characteristics such as daydreams. In fact their

relationship could be called neutral and therefore without any sense of love.

Lesje's view about marriage is the same as Elizabeth, she does not believe in marriage as the result of love between two people:

She's noticed recently that she's no longer waiting for William to propose to her. Once she thought it would follow as a matter of course. You lived with someone first, to try it out. Then you got married. That's what her friends from university were doing. But William, she now sees, finds her impossibly exotic<sup>11</sup>.

She thinks about marriage as if it is a defined contract that will happen for all people as it planned and is imitated all the time. When William does not propose her for marriage, she does not consider it as the matter of lack of love. She thinks that William thinks about her as a strange person that comes from another country.

In another part, Atwood brings evidences to prove that their relationship is a kind of contract and nothing more:

Not William in any case. He's never phoned her without having something to say, some pragmatic message. I'm coming over. Meet me at. I can't make it at. Let's go to. And later, when they'd moved in together, I'll be back at. And lately, I won't be back until. Lesje considers it a sign of the maturity of the relationship that his absences do not disturb her. She knows he's working on an important project. Sewage disposal. She respects his work. They've always promised to give each other a lot of room<sup>11</sup>.

She understands that there is something wrong between them about the way they behave with each other but she tries to justify all these repeated routines as the signs of their relationship maturity. Even when they are walking in the street there is no sign of interest between them, they just walk without any word: "Lesje is walking beside William, hand in cool hand."<sup>11</sup> Atwood uses cool hand expression deliberately to tell us that there is no warmth in this relationship too.

Even their principle for their relationship survival is not love; it is based on somehow ridiculous rule: "His one stipulation is that she must not cut her hair. This is all right, since she does not want to cut it. She's not betraying anything"<sup>11</sup>.

**Nate:** Nate has the same feeling as Elizabeth, he knows that they do not have any feelings for each other and love is just an everyday expression without any sense:

He doesn't know what love means between them anymore, though they always say it. For the sake of children. He can't remember when he started knocking on her door, or when he stopped considering it his door. When they moved the children into one room together and he took the vacant bed. The vacant bed, she called it then. Now she calls it the extra bed<sup>11</sup>.

Although Nate and Elizabeth declare it that, they are living with each other just because of children; there are signs of their inability to teach love to their children. In fact, they have problem in their relationship with their children too. They cannot show their love to their children easily:

Janet comes into the kitchen as he's sliding the casserole dish into the oven. What's for dinner? She asks, adding "Dad," as if to remind him who he is. Nate finds this question suddenly so mournful that for a moment he can't answer. It's a question from former times, the olden days. His eyes blur. He wants to drop the casserole on the floor and pick her up, hug her, but instead he closes the oven door gently.<sup>11</sup>

Even he is gradually forgetting all the love that he had for his children as a Dad, even when he remembers those days and feelings instead of showing it, he tries to control it. He is taking distance of his children gradually and they are taking down their children along with themselves unconsciously.

The only difference between Nate and other character is that he is searching love most of the time, though his approach to this issue is wrong and results in his failure. Like others he is not aware that if wants to succeed, he should accept love as a total risk. He is not brave enough to accept this risk and risk his life for the sake of it, which is evident in his relationship with Lesje that ends unsuccessfully:

Holding her two hands he says, "You know how important you are to me." When she wants him to say he would kill for her, die for her. If he would only say that, she would do anything for him. But how important invites measurement, the question: How important? For her Nate is absolute, but for him she exists on a scale of relatively important things. She can't tell exactly where on the scale she is; it fluctuates<sup>11</sup>.

He is not able to devote himself unconditionally to his relation with Lesje, as what she has done from the beginning of their relation. Cixous considers unconditional devotion as important factor in love which is again absent in their relation.

## Conclusion

As it has been discussed, Cixous uses her key words such as feminine writing to subvert social conventions about self and other that are based mostly on Freud and Lucan's psychoanalysis. She uses her feminine writing against phallogocentric writing that in her idea ignored difference and consequently other. She introduces phallogocentrism fear of castration the cause of that it sees difference as lack, therefore phallogocentric writing becomes static and follows the repeated rules, which came from that ancient time. She introduces feminine writing as new and dynamic method of writing that not only connects with other and difference but also tries to give space to other for its existence. Cixous tries to find a means or tool to establish a none-violent relation between self and other,

and love becomes her means.

Cixous gives a new meaning to the concept of love in opposition to its traditional meaning that was under influence of binary oppositions produced by phallogocentric society. In this new aspect, love is not selfish it is a strategy of self-movement toward the other. Although this movement is not a possessive one, it is as what Cixous mentions accepting the other with all of its differences but not as a threat. She tries to warn us that if we do not understand love in this way the result will be failure and unhappiness as what happens for the characters in *Life before Man*.

Atwood has similar ideas with Cixous, she uses her writing including her novel and critical books to reflect the atmosphere of her phallogocentric society in order to criticize it. Her *Life before Man* is a good instance of what she observes in her society as one that stocked to meaningless and useless traditions and rules which results in dazzle and ruin of its people. Atwood tries to show that lack of love results in all characters failure; there is no matter if they are male or female. They have no clear and understanding definition of love. It is possible to see their despair and loneliness at the end; they are in neuter state and dazzling around without knowing what to do.

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