Cri du Cœur Cri de Guerre Cris de Femme


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**Cri du Cœur Cri de Guerre Cris de Femme**

While the world is struggling through economic depression following the 1973 oil crisis\(^1\), Hélène Cixous is struggling to improve the lot of women. In her 1975 essay, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ she encourages them to write to free themselves from phallogocentrism\(^2\), from male-literary mastery. She worries about young women who, ablaze with sexual desire, must break away from yesterday’s women, victims of the “golden phallus” which looms in the “old manner over their bodies” (Medusa CH2p892-3.)

The following year, she publishes ‘Fiction and its Phantoms,’ a critique of Freud’s ‘The Uncanny’ (1919.) Jacques Derrida’s comments on Freud’s essay, in a footnote to “The Double Session” (DJ1p268:67,) strongly suggest a blueprint for Cixous’s work\(^3\); however, she attacks his ideas defining women under her own stamp: indeed, ‘Fiction and its Phantoms’ appears possibly as much of a militant sequel to ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ as an assessment of uncanniness.

Her quarrel with Freud stems from his view that the lack of a penis is central to womanhood: Freud claims that the girl envies the boy’s penis and that the boy is terrified by the girl’s genitals, believing her to be castrated\(^4\) (FS2 p334.) Cixous protests that a woman's body is complete; that she is not definable by lack (Medusa CH2p884.) Freud's belief that the Oedipal myth traces a boy’s sexual development by object cathexis of his mother and the threat of castration by his father does not only not apply to girls, but also suggests that his mother’s mate subjects her boy to violence, which is repugnant to motherhood (Medusa CH2p890.)

In Freud’s ‘The Uncanny,’ which Cixous calls “a strange theoretical novel” (Phantoms CH1p13,) he alleges that the loss of an eye is a “mitigated substitution” for castration, and professes that castration is the uncanny aspect of the literary work he
discusses. Cixous deconstructs this claim of mitigated substitution to attack Freud’s
castration-complex-defining-women-by-lack notion: her critical discourse hinges on
Derridean and Freudian themes in both of her essays: in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ once
she has curried support against phallocentric repression of women, she launches her ideas
of women’s writing, styled later as Écriture Féminine; she then follows the ‘Medusa’ essay
with ‘Fiction and its Phantoms,’ where she assesses Freud’s castration complex.

She writes of homosexuality and of bisexuality, identifying Freud’s literary doubles
and engaging some of her own. She adopts a militant style throughout: in fact, by
following ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ so closely with ‘Fiction and its Phantoms,’ she
essentially foregrounds the activist continuity of both.

This paper attempts to trace how these two essays work together to accomplish her
womanly objective.

Cixous urges women to struggle against “conventional” man, who penetrates to
pacify and gets lost in their “dark continent” while satisfying his “virile needs.” Men locate
women between two horrifying myths, the Medusa and the abyss. They are guilty of
“Hatred: a heritage, again; a remainder; a duping subservience to the phallus” (Medusa
CH2p893:) they need to control and to repress far more than women do: she protests in
particularly biological language:

“If they believe, in order to muster up some self-importance, if they really need to
believe that we’re dying of desire, that we are this hole fringed with desire for their
penis - that’s their immemorial business. Undeniably (we verify it at our own
expense-but also to our amusement), it’s their business to let us know they’re getting
a hard-on, so that we’ll assure them (we the maternal mistresses of their little pocket
signifier) that they still can, that it’s still there - that men structure themselves only
by being fitted with a feather.” (Medusa CH2p890.)
Her tone is at best condescending and at worst domineering; it is a display of repressive power; its robust discourse might be called phallocentric, or should we not call such literary militancy under a banner of resistance to misogyny, lack-o-centric? Keen to get rid of masculine/feminine oppositions, she is convinced of the bisexual nature of humans; but, she insists, bisexual writing is overwhelmingly women's writing (MT1p107-8.) Of this “non-neuter” bisexuality, she professes “self-presence,” “non-exclusion,” “self-permission” of desire “over all parts of my body and of the other body” (Medusa CH2p883-4.)

Toril Moi asks the question: does écriture féminine mean female or feminine writing? Does it concern the biological aspects or the social constructs? (MT1p95) Cixous shows in her paragraph that she engages her fight biologically through her body and psychoanalytically, if this means socially too, through women’s writing; and she would never use the word female because the French connotation, femelle, is used only for animals or to insult women.

Freud’s opponents try to develop theories that explain that men and women are psycho-sexually equal; they see the castration complex as derogatory to women: however, for Freud, if psychoanalysis is phallocentric, it is because the human social order, which it perceives through the human subject, is patrocentric (MJ1p7;20;23.) Freud writes: “In conformity with its peculiar nature, psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is - that would be a task it could scarcely perform - but sets about enquiring how she comes into being” (1933) (MJ1p4.) In spite of this, he asserts, perhaps ambivalently, that the presence or absence of the penis and nothing else marks the distinction between the sexes (MJ1p6.) He justifies himself writing: “I would only like to emphasise that we must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology” (1935) (MJ1p21.)
Hélène Cixous, indebted to Derrida’s work, appears with a list of patrocentric binaries: activity/passivity; Sun/Moon; culture/nature; day/night; father/mother; head/emotions; intelligible/sensitive; logos/pathos. Her male-female oppositions struggle for signifying supremacy, as, under patriarchy, the male usually wins. Her texts search to undermine this logic by deconstructing such binary oppositions (MT1p102-106.) She reproves phallic mastery flaunted in the ‘name-of-the-father’ power of naming, which renders a mother a nurturing “nonname.” She echoes Derrida’s statement that a name carries death and that men, starting with Freud, associate femininity with it.

Women must write to display sexual opposition, not just sexual difference; write so as not to allow great, phallocentric, self-admiring, self-congratulatory men to keep writing for themselves: the male ear is deaf to non-masculine language (Medusa CH2p881.) Writing analyses, illuminates, emancipates; it’s like secret masturbation: “the woman who writes, cuts herself out a paper penis.” To write is to enfranchise her sexuality; to give her access to her body; to destroy her guilt of desire. “There is, there will be more and more rapidly pervasive now, a fiction that produces irreducible effects of femininity” (Medusa CH2p883.) It is impossible to define écriture féminine, she writes: it can’t be theorised, enclosed or coded: it will overtake phallocentric discourse because it occurs in areas other than domination, where, not denying her drives, a woman speaks with the passionate language of her body. A woman is not bound like men to the logic of a text: her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible.

“When I write, it’s everything that we don’t know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. In one another we will never be lacking” (Medusa CH2p892.)

Toril Moi remains sceptical of the impact of Hélène Cixous’s reasoning:

Anti-essentialist and anti-biologist, her work … seems to displace the whole feminist debate around the problem of women and writing away from an empiricist
emphasize on the sex of the author towards an analysis of the articulations of sexuality and desire within the literary text itself (MT1p108.) Within Cixous’s poetic mythology, writing is posited as an absolute activity of which all women qua women automatically partake. Stirring and seductive though such a vision is, it can say nothing of the actual inequities, deprivations and violations that women, as social beings rather than as mythological archetypes, must constantly suffer. (MT1p121)

The claim that Cixous is anti-essentialist appears contradicted by the statement that “Anglo-American feminists have accused Cixous of promoting “essentialism,” of equating *écriture féminine* with an idealized and un historicized femininity” (Np1940-1,) although she refuses to be called a feminist, arguing that logocentrism subjects thought to the binary, man/woman, and that unpressing one side is likely to reproduce the very structures being resisted on the other. Furthermore, her writing above does appear ferociously biological, and this too would counter Moi’s claim. To understand her point we must assume that this critic is possibly not talking about Cixous’s early work, but about her contemporary *féminine* writing, which is far more heavily weighted toward the imaginary and the poetic.

In ‘The Sandman,’ Freud initially does not accept Jentsch’s (JE1) idea that intellectual uncertainty about the inanimate nature of a lovely, life sized, robotic doll, Olympia, constitutes the uncanny feature of Hoffmann’s plot (Uncanny FS1p352) (HE1.) Cixous contends in ‘Fiction and its Phantoms’ that Freud summarises this tale in a way which suits his own ends. His *legerdemain* in evicting Jentsch’s idea of intellectual uncertainty as defining the uncanny frees him to focus on his own notion that castration is the uncanny feature of the tale. This presents him with a snag: Freud needs to insist on castration, not on the loss of the young protagonist, Nathaniel’s eye to the Sandman, so he rewrites Hoffmann’s story to defend his idea that the loss of an eye is a “mitigated substitution” for castration. In his summary of the tale, Freud drops the Sandman from his
discourse and Nathaniel’s eye with it, leaving him triumphantly brandishing his idea of the uncanny as castration and not Jentsch’s as intellectual uncertainty (Phantoms CH1p24.) Freud also dispels Olympia and “slips under our guard” in a “stratagem of denial:” using “theatrical dialogue,” to curry reader support for his opinion: he reveals his answer as castration before asking his rhetorical question.

Cixous objects that “Freud throws sand in our eyes;” that he eclipses Olympia and that “there can be no more discussion.” Freud has no eyes for the lovely doll: this woman, who appears where she is not wanted in the tale, comes across as “obscene” (Phantoms CH1p21) (Uncanny FS1p348.) And where are the songs? asks Cixous; where are the puppets which dance Hoffman’s scenes of German Romanticism? Freud has dropped them: they didn’t serve his purpose.

Freud discusses the uncanniness of being buried alive; Cixous comments that his fantasy confounds death and life: death in life, life in death, non-life in non-death: but what of castration? It’s another form of being buried alive, she writes: a little too much death in life; a little too much life in death (Phantoms CH1p34:) and what of Oedipal castration by the father? She expects fathers to assume their responsibility towards their child once a woman has “engendered, all at once, child, mother, father, family.” Cixous wishes to escape the dialectic which has it that the only good father is a dead one, or that the child is the death of the parents. The child is the other and should be so without violence. She is “fed up” with the litany of castration that is handed down and “genealogized” (sic) (Medusa CH2p891.)

Derrida claims that Freud is attentive to the process of interminable substitution in Hoffmann’s tale (DJ1p268:67,) and Cixous extends this thought, writing:

"An unending play of substitutions multiplies the eye, and it now sees a blurred image of scattered doubles; of red hot grains, of stars, of lorgnettes, of spectacles..."
for short sight or long sight; a theatrical secret which the Freudian text only mimics, brushes over or even, evades.” (Phantoms CH1p15.)

She challenges Freud’s concept of substitution as mitigation, arguing that the substitution of any organ, castratable or not, by any other would arouse the same degree of distress. Freud’s fear-of-castration idée fixe is no different from fear of the loss of any body part. Derrida’s essay on dissemination, on the impossible return of castration to the re-joined, underpins her position: it is a “non-origin;” it cannot be a “place to harbour truth;” there can be no deeper secret, no other meaning (DJ1p268:67) and it follows that subjection of women to the penis is as empty of signification as it would be to any organ. This argument attacks one of Freud’s premises and, as such, is deconstructive; it searches to destabilise meaning. Deconstruction is based on discursive, deductive logic to challenge premises, and by its nature, can emerge as defying, disputing, engaging a power struggle in phallocentric style. Again, Cixous uses a strain of discourse rooted in aggression to fight her perception of phallocentrism.

She writes on the uncanny that:

“It is indeed from the event - as a place, where the strange effect, the relational signifier, which is the uncanny, resonates (rather than emerges.) A relational signifier: as the uncanny is in fact composite, it pervades the gaps, it sustains the breach where one would rather find the connection15,”

as if bouncing around from one supplement to another in an endless trace: the uncanny resides in ghostly codicils, which are neither present nor absent: it “haunts the interstices;” it roosts in the gaps (italics mine) where what is hidden does not come to light (Phantoms CH1p25.) “It is the in-between”, says Cixous, “that is tainted with strangeness.” Did Derrida have such ideas of the uncanny in mind, and not just différence, when he wrote, “There is no literature without a suspended relation to meaning” (RN2p15;33:) was he not also referring to such a suspended intemporal relation bridging an uncanny gap? Her use of the words, “resonates (rather than emerges)” intriguingly describes the uncanny as a
disturbing background vibration, a tension arising in the text, rather than sudden heart-stopping horror. As the uncanny *roosts in the gaps*, Cixous finds herself in that part of her that leaves “a space between herself” (Medusa CH2p882.) Psychoanalysis concerns itself with the gaps and Freud’s contribution is to demonstrate that these gaps constitute a system that is entirely different from that of consciousness: the unconscious (MJ1p2,) and because a text contains gaps and silences, it is always incomplete (MT1p9216,) as Jacques Derrida demonstrates in his theme of the supplement.

Preparing her assault on Freud’s castration complex, Hélène Cixous stiffens her argument to show how his repressions double back to haunt his writing. In the first of two short stories, he appears in a state of denial, hiding under a sort of prudishness which leaves him comically exposed: a “psychoanalyst psychoanalysed by the psychoanalysis he teaches.” There “can be no doubt” about the nature of the Italian streets he finds himself in, where women wear rouge to look like dolls. How much repetition does it take until his queer distress becomes comical? “He wants to stay on the right side of ridicule,” but in doing so, she quips, “he misses an opportunity for castration (*sic*)” (Phantoms CH1p29.)

Freud finds being buried alive, creepy, like “a certain lasciviousness- the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence” (Uncanny FS1p367.) Cixous paraphrases this as a return to the “horrible, voluptuous” “oven” of the “maternal body,” joking that “the uncanny re-entering the canny headfirst, is born backwards” (Phantoms CH1p33:) these strange formulations don’t appear in Strachey’s translation of Freud. She elliptically alludes to homosexuality, writing that Freud designates Coppelius as the feared father, the pig-god in ‘The Sandman.’ Following Derrida’s suggestion in the ‘Double Session,’ she cites something of Freud’s Wolf-man case in her essay too, where fear of a butterfly is really the subject’s fear of castration and where an enema administered to him by a man is really
a homosexual-wish fantasy to present his father with a child at the price of his own masculinity (FS3p269:67.) In ‘The Sandman,’ Spalanzani assumes the role of the tender father, and Freud decrees that Olympia can be nothing else than a personification of Nathaniel’s feminine attitude towards his father during his infancy (Uncanny FS1p354.) Hertz writes that this is “The psychological truth of the situation in which the young man, fixated upon his father by his castration complex, becomes incapable of loving a woman” (HN1) “Homosexuality returns under this charming figure,” writes Cixous as if she spots a homosexual double in Freud17 (Phantoms CH1p26,) but she speculates no further on his possible homosexuality, suspected after Freud’s account in a 1910 biographical essay on Leonardo da Vinci (FS4.)

Cixous writes of “self-effacing, merger-type bisexuality” as “neuter,” like the proud hermaphroditic Androgyne18. In Freud’s tale of ‘Un,’ where the Unheimlich (uncanny,) means, according to his “children’s dictionary,” the same thing as the Heimlich (canny,) then the two would pair off and neutralise each other, but Freud makes too little of the outcome of this bisexual closure of meaning, writes Cixous (Phantoms CH1p19,) alluding to Derrida’s affirmation that unity is impossible after dissemination (DJ1p268.) Now that he has added some “sexually charged” material, Freud sidesteps the problem by repositioning these ‘un-’ opposites and, where they now meet, their opposition is blunted: meaning resurges from the gap like a phoenix reborn (Phantoms CH1p19,) but he doesn’t resolve his riddle.

Both Freud and Cixous write with doubles. The double tunnels into fiction like a second subject, as being two to write, two to think: it shines another light onto the supplement19. She explicitly identifies “Hesitation” and implicitly, homosexual man, as Freud’s doubles.
Derrida writes that Freud is attentive to the play of the double (DJ1 268:67) bundling various themes and inviting the puzzled reader to choose among them: Freud pulls at a thread, “but the tapestry remains” (Phantoms CH1p27.) A tangle of fiction, where the primitive spirit turns to images, appealing to “Egyptian art” and to the “child’s narcissistic soul,” using metaphor and the unconscious, is decoded by a psychoanalyst’s “algebraic sign” (Phantoms CH1p28.) Cixous’s mysterious arithmetic and imaginative prose refers here to Freud’s remark that “the language of dreams is fond of representing castration by a doubling or by a multiplication of the genital symbol” (Uncanny FS1p357:) this is one example of her arcane rhetoric, where, only by re-reading Strachey’s clear prose does such imaginary writing find its context (Uncanny FS1p357.) In the background, she writes, a silent language of death; the appearance of the ego, where she doesn’t seem to notice Freud presenting the ego as ‘conscience,’ as a self-observing double in a quasi-religious sense (Uncanny FS1p357.) She breathlessly adds that Freud’s text becomes convoluted, revealing new paths, asking other questions. Toril Moi aptly writes that “Cixous’s text will always finally gather up its contradictions within the plenitude of the imaginary” (MT1p119.)

Not all of Freud’s readers are so critical of his hesitant style. He ultimately writes to discover: Patrick Mahony portrays his capacity to juggle probabilities while following his life-long road to finding truth in a nascent, imprecise and hermetic science: much of what he finds is based on inexplicit, intimate inspection (MP1.) Derrida is more tongue-in-cheek, writing that Freud is “more than ever attentive to undecidable ambivalence” (DJ1p268:6.)

Cixous’s own writing is doubled in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ by her biological body, by the mother and, in ‘Fiction and its Phantoms,’ by an Amazon, a female warrior. She rejoices in the integrity of the female body, experimenting with her own: she calls women black, beautiful labyrinths, their libido producing effects greater even than political or social change (Medusa CH2p884:) the oral, anal, vocal and gestation drives are her
biological strengths: giving birth is just like the desire to write: it is neither losing nor increasing, it is adding, adding another to life. A woman is never far from a mother: with her mother's milk, she writes in white ink (Medusa CH2p881,891.) Cixous’s body is a striking biological double; she is two to protest, including this “nasty companion,” with its inhibitions: “censor it and you censor breath and speech” (Medusa CH2p880.) The mother is the ultimate giver, who nourishes and resists separation. A woman gives with no assurance that she will get back; she is unafraid of lack as when she is left out of her inheritance. A woman finds not her sum but her differences (Medusa CH2p878.) Cixous quotes Derrida’s gift that takes20 as that of the man who doesn't give, if not to take; but the mother, knows how to “depropriate” unselfishly (Medusa CH2p889:) she gives that there may be life.

Cixous’s discourse mixes wit, irony21 and a few faux pas of translation: she haughtily overlooks Freud’s comments on the omnipotence of thoughts, magical powers, wish fulfilment, secret powers to do harm, the theme of a haunted house being “too purely gruesome” and Freud’s remarks on spiritualism (Uncanny FS1p363-5.) She writes that the French don’t understand gothic fantasy and generally distrust superstition. Freud, wavering between the literal and the figurative, arrives at a minor epiphany quoting Schelling’s (SJ1) definition that “everything is uncanny which ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.” Schelling, who has suddenly appeared in the lexicography, “pulls the curtain on everything that should have remained hidden,” jokes Cixous; he prudishly links the uncanny to a sin “against modesty.” (Phantoms CH1p19.) Cixous paraphrases Freud’s remarks on Jentsch’s essay (JE1) as interesting but disappointing: this inadequate but respected “layperson” (meaning Jentsch) advocates an “intellectual,” non-analytical point of view: his is a “phenomenological”22 approach to strangeness. Jentsch fails because he hasn’t read his subject closely: the daily practice of
psychology is just not good enough for Freud; and Jentsch loses any claim to priority. According to the Strachey translation, we don’t find Freud aiming this criticism at his rival, at all, although Cixous clearly writes that he does: in fact, Freud humbly aims it at himself. Despite the competition between the two, Freud writes nothing more diabolical than that Jentsch’s paper is “fertile but non-exhaustive.” Freud admits he has not read enough on the topic, and that his own “modest contribution” has “no claim to priority.” He even compliments Jentsch for mentioning “general insensitivity” to the uncanny, and laments his own obtuseness. Cixous translates this as Freud boasting about his own exemplary sensitivity, which is different from that of the singularly obtuse, average man in the street; it is also different from the Strachey translation (Phantoms CH1p17) (Uncanny FS1p340.)

Her early essays today show the operation of Derrida’s différences. Written shortly after the end of the Vietnam war and of the violent 1968 student riots in Paris and in Washington, the ‘past’ present of her writing reflecting those times is militant, unforgiving, vibrant, sexually explicit: it is far removed from the homo-erotic, poetic féminine language she writes in this different world of the ‘present’ present. Half a century later, Cixous is différente, but with ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ her écriture remains as a genre fostered by Kristeva, Irigaray, Ettinger and Gagnon: she might include Lispector, Genet and even James Joyce in her list.

She has been a shrewd campaigner, harnessing the remarkable work of her confrère Jacques Derrida to counter Freud’s castration complex and writing performatively in order to fight it. ‘Fiction and its Phantoms’ draws heavily on Derrida’s œuvre itself influenced by Freud’s ideas on substitution, repression and Rank’s double (RO1.) Derrida brings to her other avenues too from his own arsenal of phallocentrism; death in a name; closure in ‘Dissemination;’ transcendental and relational signification; deconstruction and others.
Her deconstructive strategy of cunningly attacking the Achilles heel of Freud’s notion of mitigating castration by substituting it with the loss of an eye, is *adroit*, as indeed is the Derridean aporia she surfaces in Freud’s inability to close the meaning of ‘Un.’ Her critique of ‘The Uncanny’ surfaces the compelling viewpoint that it inhabits the gaps of literature, revealing uncanniness occurring in the catchment area of the unconscious: this supports Nicholas Royle’s elucidation of it as a reading effect, where the form, rather than the theme of a narrative evokes it (RNp32;44.) Toril Moi describes her texts perhaps harshly as imaginary, anti-theoretical and even utopian:

“her central images create a dense web of signifiers that offers no obvious edge to seize hold of for the analytically minded critic” (MT110.) Her work has to confront intricate webs of contradiction and conflict where a deconstructive-view textuality is countered and undermined by an equally passionate presentation of writing as female essence…Marred as such by its lack of reference to recognisable social structures as by its biologism her work constitutes nevertheless an invigorating utopian evocation of the imaginative powers of women (MT1p124-5.)

Cixous surfaces nothing of Mahony’s *bonhomie* in defending Freud’s ambivalence (MP1:) in fact, she shows at times curtness with his discourse: the Freudian *castration-complex-defining-women-by-lack* notion endures her most vitriolic remarks. However, her work is entwined in a crusade of love and war: hers is the belligerent strike of an Amazon warrior, wearing not a feather, but a quill, at the head of her imaginary women’s horde.

Her two essays are perfectly complimentary, one of which cannot perform without the other: where ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ defines the battlefield, ‘Fiction and its Phantoms’ closes in for the kill: where her first is her ‘*cri du cœur,*,’ her second is her ‘*cri de guerre,*,’ and together they form her ‘*cri de femme.*’

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Cixous writes, “Our naphtha will spread, throughout the world, without dollars-black or gold-non-assessed values that will change the rules of the old game.” (Medusa CH2p880)

2 Term coined by Jacques Derrida: "I speak mostly, and have for a long time, about sexual differences, rather than about one difference only - twofold and oppositional - which is indeed, with phallocentrism, with what I also nickname ‘phallogocentrism,’ a structural feature of philosophical discourse that will have prevailed in the tradition. Deconstruction goes down that road in the first place. Everything comes back that way. Before any feminist politicalization (and, although I've often associated myself with it, on certain conditions), it is important to recognize this strong phallogocentric underpinning that conditions just about all of our cultural heritage. As for the properly philosophical tradition of this phallocentric heritage, it is represented, certainly in different but equal ways, in Plato as well as in Freud or Lacan, in Kant as well as in Hegel, Heidegger, or Lévinas. In any case I've gone to some length to show as much." Interview of Jacques Derrida published in ‘Le Monde de l’Éducation’ (Tr. Carole Dely: September, 2000)

3 Derrida published his essay, ‘Dissemination’ in 1972 (DJ1,) four years before Cixous’s 1976 ‘Fiction and its Phantoms.’


5 She exclaims, “Castration? Let others toy with it:” "What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meagre desire” (Medusa CH2p891)

6 Maud Ellman explains in her introduction to ‘Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism’ how writers such as the Austrian psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein, and the French socialist existentialist, Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote ‘The Second Sex’ (1949,) have questioned Freud’s sexual theories (EM1.)

7 Cixous’s activist essays are written in the wake of the 1968 Paris riots. Her ‘Medusa’ essay is part of a wider project, which includes in the same year ‘Sorties’ (CH4,) written with Catherine Clément as an explicit critique of hierarchical, sexual, binary oppositions in a patriarchal society.

8 The Medusa was a winged human female with a hideous face and living venomous snakes in place of hair. Gazers on her face would turn to stone.

9 A feather here, ‘une plume,’ is a colloquial French signifier for a penis.

10 In her short essay, “Writing blind” (CH3,) Cixous presents her partner gently asking her name before they separate: “with timidity she went back into her name and turned it toward me as if she felt encloistered behind the door. And so out aloud I said her name, she said that she did not have one and I said that no one had one…”

11 “The name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man’s name, a name of death.” Derrida in ‘The Ear of the Other’ (Schocken Books, 1985)

12 Nicholas Royle writes on Freud’s fantasy of live burial and of intra-uterine existence in his book The Uncanny: “Freud presents us...with the story of life from A to Z, or from Z to A, from death to birth, from the imminence of birth to the timeless pleasure of womb-life, from terror to lasciviousness, from death to the mother” (RN2p142.)

13 Hélène Cixous writes that non-reductive bisexuality, the non-exclusion of either sex, inscribes desire in the woman, who is whole: she can desire the other for the other, whole and entire, male or female (Medusa CH2p884.)

14 The Tales of Hoffmann (1881: in French: Les Contes d'Hoffmann) is an opéra fantastique by Jacques Offenbach, which includes ‘The Sandman’ as one of three tales.

15 “C’est bien depuis l’ayant-lieu comme lieu que resonne (et non point surgit) l’effet d’étrange, le signifiant relationnel qu’est l’Unheimliche. Un signifiant relationnel : car l’Unheimliche est en effet composite, il s’infiltre aux interstices, il affirme le baillement ou l’on voudrait s’assurer de la jointure” (Phantoms CH1p25)

16 quoting Eagleton’s Marxism and literary criticism p34.

17 …a person’s past inescapably clings to him and...it becomes his fate as soon as he tries to get rid of it (RO1p6.)
The Androgyne of Plato’s Symposium was cut into two by Zeus: left desiring its other half, it kept its arms around it, longing to grow back into one.

According to Ralph Tymms, “Otto Rank bases his interpretation of the whole theme of the double on the Freudian theory of Narcissism. According to this view, the double represents elements of morbid self-love which prevent the formation of a happily balanced personality.” (R. Tymms. Doubles in Literary Psychology. Cambridge. 1949.) Tymms himself presents the double as an allegorical representation or projection of the second self of the unconscious. It is also described as the antagonist; as the bad or threatening self (RO1pxv.)

(Derrida) seeks to acknowledge the insidious extent to which narcissistic self-gratification or unconscious gratification may be at work in the act of giving (RN3p138.)

She teases Freud about ‘The Uncanny;’ about this “puppet theatre” produced by an all-powerful, capricious stage manager (Phantoms CH1p13;) about Freud imputing elastic meaning to the uncanny, as if vagueness were part of the idea; that he clothes the unscientific with the dignity of the scientific; that he makes indecision an opportunity for progress (Phantoms CH1p17;) that he searches the “polymorphous perversity” of his “children’s dictionary” (Phantoms CH1p18;) that he appropriates Jentsch’s definition “in the manner of children: this doll belonged to me” (Phantoms CH1p20;) that he plays all the descriptive and hypothetical games of a pre-theoretical mind (Phantoms CH1p27;) that his discourse on the evil eye alights somewhere between superstition and ophthalmology (Phantoms CH1p30;) and that he writes a dazzling chapter on death using the French word ‘éblouissant,’ which smacks dazzlingly of irony (Phantoms CH1p32.)

The word ‘phenomenological’ does not appear at this position in Freud’s text of ‘The Uncanny,’ and ‘strangeness’ in French, is a stand-in for uncanniness.

Nicholas Royle writes of ‘Fiction and its Phantoms’ in ‘Portmanteau,’ “In its ghostly pursuit of Freud and Derrida, it articulates with relentless out-of-breath beauty the peculiar passion of strangeness and familiarity, intimacy and foreignness” (RN1.)

A woman warrior in Greek mythology.