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Ghostly red ink: Hélène Cixous' voice of milk and blood

Abstract:

A number of important writers and artists focus on the once taboo subject of menstruation in their work, drawing attention to the topic of women's bleeding and the female cycle. The menstrual imaginary is a latent poetic source of inspiration in women writers and artists, an imaginary domain outside of language, which is drawn on through symbolism, particularly through references to blood, to eruptions of blood, women's cycles, as well as all procreative functions. Whilst Julia Kristeva theorises menstruation on the side of the abject, my work alternatively seeks to rescue women's menstruation from the abject. In this paper I will focus on the writings of Hélène Cixous, who in my view comes closest to a concept of a menstrual imaginary without actually theorising it. She tends to focus on the aesthetic motif of 'white ink' in her work, which is a reference to the procreative female body as a source of nourishment (Cixous 1994, p. 83). Whilst Cixous does draw our attention to the importance of a voice of 'milk and blood', it is mostly at a subterranean level that we can find evidence for a menstrual narrative running through her writing. I will explore the concept of a feminine writing in 'red ink', in direct contrast to Cixous' 'white ink', as well as consider the domain of woman's volcanic unconscious in relation to the menstrual imaginary.

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

Menstruation – taboo – the feminine imaginary – poetry – creativity – Hélène Cixous

In this paper I will focus on the writings of French intellectual, writer, and poet Hélène Cixous, particularly her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975). Whilst Cixous draws our attention to the importance of a voice of ‘milk and blood’ in her work, it is mostly at a subterranean level that we can find evidence for a menstrual narrative running through Cixous’s writing. Cixous implies rather than reveals the existence of a menstrual narrative that draws from a feminine imaginary, which mostly needs to be excavated in her work to be fully appreciated. Interestingly, Cixous’s mother was a midwife and during her upbringing Cixous witnessed many women birthing, which must have impacted on her greatly, and which we might conclude contributes to her interest in an animalistic procreative female figure in her writing. Cixous’s work establishes the right/rite/write of women to trace the symbolic to the very limit of the speaking being, to primal repression, and the maternal Other, in forging a feminine imaginary.

In these terms, Cixous’s writing serves as a possible template for women to chart their own life experience in *coming to write* their feminine imaginaries, discovered by journeying into/through an abyss, which is transformative, and offers personal renewal. In fact, Cixous’s essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* charts a woman poet’s journey into the abject, which can also be thought of as an exploration of a volcanic unconscious, as I will discuss. Importantly, Cixous’ journey into the abyss differs from Kristeva’s journey insofar as Cixous is centrally concerned with what this journey means for a woman. Kristeva’s concept of the abyss focuses on the male poet’s journey, frequently into the darkness of a woman’s source. It is important to briefly point out here that Kristeva draws on British anthropologist, Mary Douglas, in her important work, *Purity and Danger; An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), in which she argues that pollutants such as menstrual blood are imbued with meaning in religions, and are in fact divested with a socio-symbolic power, which enforces the logic of religion culturally. It is on this basis that a substance like menstruation is tabooed, and becomes exiled fluid, or indeed abyssal fluid. Potentially then, this personal quest of Cixous’ to record poetically a journey to the borders of culture, to become a woman, is related to woman’s status as a cyclical being, as someone who periodically menstruates, ovulates, possibly gives birth, and so on. It is at a sub-textual level of Cixous’s writing that a menstrual narrative can be detected and interpreted, in order to renew positively female identity culturally, against the patriarchal taboo on women’s sexual difference.¹

In her essay *Coming to Writing* (1974), Cixous describes her first menstruation. She says: ‘I got my period – as late as possible. I would so much have liked to take myself for a “woman”’ (Cixous 1991: 27). Delaying menstruation was desirable to Cixous in order to stave off her entrance into ‘becoming a woman’ through the bodily act of menstruating, since becoming a woman also meant to her a domestic role, in which women were expected to reproduce, to ‘lay’ like a caged hen does (Cixous 1991: 27). Cixous is speaking from her own personal subjectivity of being an Algerian exile, a Jew, and a woman, which she has referred to as a condition of being triply oppressed.² She argues that she is more interested in becoming her ‘self’ than a *woman*. In a broader sense, Cixous is also speaking of the oppressive condition of becoming a woman, which she associates here with menarche, and which potentially inhibits the

positive development of women's selfhood in certain cultures. Yet, paradoxically becoming her *self* seems to be closely related to adopting a liberating feminine writing practice related to her body. Cixous's 'red ink' then is perhaps exiled fluid, or indeed diasporic fluid, which threatens to return, to erupt, and most certainly haunts her writing. However, whilst I agree that we can establish a feminine imaginary in Cixous's work, she herself does not explicitly relate it to women's menstrual cycle, which is central to my argument.

In her 1985 text, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, feminist theorist, Toril Moi, argues that Cixous's work bestows 'utopian' imaginary powers on women that brings about 'a series of political problems' (Blyth quotes Toril Moi 2004: 94). Moi finds Cixous's ideas on the feminine imaginary politically naïve. In my view Cixous's so called 'utopian feminine imaginary' invokes a politics of the other/mother/woman self as a revolutionary act of women's writing. It is precisely because women's sexed bodies are cultural bearers of meaning, which have been taken over by institutions and various social registries, that women must write against their categorisation as reproductive other. Women do have a heightened relationship to their bodies through menstruating, gestating, birthing, ovulating, lactating, mothering and going through menopause. These experiences are all linked, are moments that women's bodies infringe upon the natural world, the animalistic, and the abyss, all areas that threaten the male order of rationality, civilization, and control.

White ink and ghostly red ink

Alongside the sorceress and the hysteric, the menstruating woman represents a threat to patriarchal culture because of her proximity to the *natural* world, which through its periodicity has an inherent value, perceived as disorderly, dangerous, even horrific, at the level of society and culture. Throughout recorded history, patriarchal cultures have placed taboos on menstruating women and on menstrual blood. It is women's collective bleeding that potentially threatens masculine power structures, and yet dually offers women power through the commonality of menstrual experience as anthropologists, Buckley and Gottlieb, point out in their text, *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* (1988):

Menstrual blood is seen as polluting when it symbolically encodes an underlying social-structural ambiguity regarding women and things female. On the one hand a society may have a consciously developed an *ideology* of male superiority but, on the other, it may also permit women access to at least some kinds of power, thereby in a sense undermining its own ideology of male dominance. The common fact of menstruation among all women challenges the social order of a male-dominated society and defines and bounds a female subgroup within the society, thereby creating a new separate and dangerous order (Buckley & Gottlieb 1988: 28-29).

The menstruating woman has been considered to be both an hysteric and a sorceress, Freud recognised the connection between hysteria and sorcery. He read the famous *Malleus Maleficarium* (*Witches' Hammer*) for evidence of the connection between hysteria and witchcraft, or female sorcery. Yet, he viewed this connection through a

double male bias, that is, through the subjectivity of a male centred view, as well as through the subjectivity of a physician, who could only consider hysteria as a symptom, which required catharsis through the ‘talking cure’.³

French theorist Catherine Clément explores the link between hysteria and sorcery in her essay *The Guilty One* (1986) revealing that the sorceress is the remembrance of the hysteric.

One must go through the audience of writers, psychiatrists, and judges to reconstitute the mythical stage on which women played their ambiguous role. The last figure, the hysteric, resumes and assumes the memories of the others: that was Michelet’s hypothesis in *The Sorceress*; it was Freud’s in *Studies on Hysteria*. Both thought that the repressed past survives in woman; woman, more than anyone else, is dedicated to reminiscence. The sorceress, who in the end is able to dream Nature and therefore conceive it, incarnates the re-inscription of the traces of paganism that triumphant Christianity repressed. The hysteric, whose body is transformed into a theatre of forgotten scenes, relives the past. Bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering (Clément 1986: 5).

Clément argues that the hysteric exemplifies how women’s bodies have been taken over, contained, controlled, and labelled disorderly through the once dominant discourse of Christianity. Moreover, the hysteric is associated with the sorceress because her repressed memory lives on through the hysterics so called disorders, which is also potentially a non-pathological ‘wild zone’, which delineates women’s ‘blood magic’.

The concept of menstruation as disorder in the West runs parallel to some Indigenous beliefs about menstruation. Clément cites French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, in relation to Amerindian mythic patterns and makes further comment:

“Women’s periods, their uncontrolled flow, too close to nature and therefore threatening,” are the stabilizing element through which runs the split between nature and culture: simultaneously the rule and the unruly (*règle/règles*). A natural and dangerous order, always open to the possibility of lasting, turning into a cataclysm; hence, perceived by culture, by men who take on its value, as disorder... (Clément & Clément quotes Lévi-Strauss 1986: 28-29).

Clément goes on to suggest that by remembering the sorceress, seeking her mythological trace, a *feminine imaginary* can be drawn out of the past, which is connected with the very root of reproductive difference, against the ascribing of women’s animalistic procreative bodies as monstrous, disorderly, and even horrific. Clément rethinks woman’s body as a self-regulating, potentially life-giving source, which periodically connects with the natural world. It is in these terms that a periodic female power associated with the natural world, the hysteric, and the sorceress can be drawn on, and articulated by women as a menstrual imaginary.

It is this precarious positioning of the hysteric on the nature/culture divide, the space of female sorcery, a ‘wild zone’, which Cixous has called ‘a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage’ (Sandra M. Gilbert quotes Cixous 1986: ix). It is up to women to locate this ‘voice of milk and blood’ as Cixous does in her work. However,

interestingly, Cixous seems to focus more on a 'white ink' that women can draw on through their writing practice, toward the renewal of female identity, against the dominant Western patriarchal discourse on women's bodily processes as potentially neurotic, monstrous, and even abject. I wish to draw on Cixous's idea of 'white ink' in order to propose a related, but different concept of 'red ink'. 'White ink' is nourishing, mother's milk, virginal even. 'Red ink' is associated with blood, menstruation, wounds, death, and rebirth. Where Cixous focuses on 'white ink' as maternal, nourishing, a source of creation, I will focus on 'red ink' as disruptive, explosive, and able to shatter taboos. I believe there is power in the idea that every time a woman menstruates she rebirths her self both with and against abjection. It is perhaps the fact that menstruation and the concept of a periodic 'red ink' is associated with pain as well as pleasure, that it is more difficult to explore, and yet its imaginary, is also extremely important and even healing for women.

In a book of interviews conducted with Cixous titled, *White Ink*, Christiane Makward, asks Cixous about the development of her 'feminine perspective' in relation to writing and particularly how it has evolved in relation to concepts of 'the body, space, to natural cycles, to matter' (Cixous and Makward 2008: 66). Cixous responds that the feminine perspective extends from the body, and it is in this sense that it should be explored, from the 'functional', to the 'libidinal' and the 'imaginary'. She goes on to point out that:

It is beyond doubt that femininity derives from the body, from the anatomical, the biological difference, from a whole system of drives which are radically different for women than for men. But none of this exists in a pure state: it is always, immediately "already spoken", caught in representation, produced culturally. This does not prevent the libidinal economy of woman from functioning in a specific manner which modifies her rapport with reality (Cixous 2008: 66).

Cixous discusses a new work that she was then writing at the time of the interview titled, *La Noire Vole*, which she says is an exploration of femininity with regards to a woman's body, with particular emphasis on 'blood', 'breast', 'milk', as well as 'a meditation on the relation between text and milk', and 'between text and breath' (Cixous 2008: 66). She states that in her text there is a sense of charting a dark continent in white ink, in a state of continual birthing.

We can clearly find evidence in Cixous's work for an imagined woman's body that continually births, or rebirths itself in feminine 'white ink' through writing. And, it is possible to consider that in this following statement Cixous is potentially speaking about her body of work as a whole. Here she elaborates on her idea of 'white ink' and the 'dark continent' of woman.

My text is written in white and black, in "milk" and "night", in fact, and not at all as Mallarmé said: one writes in black ink on white. No, one writes in white, it is in white ink, the white ink which is also the ink of the black woman: this text is called "La Noire vole". For me it really does come through the Bible: "I am black but beautiful". In Freud, I don't think so. I think it is a metaphor which comes quite naturally, which belongs to a kind of pseudo-colonialist imagery (Cixous 2008: 76).

So, for Cixous, it is a 'white ink' written by the metaphorical black woman, or so called 'dark continent', the repressed of culture who returns, rises up, to speak her truth. To this end, it is Cixous' project to invest in the 'power of language' as a symbolic force for rupturing women's identity at the level of culture, through writing in 'white ink', towards the possibility of writing 'new, sustainable, forms of subjectivity' (Shiach 1991: 68). As such, Cixous is interested in exploring a feminine writing practice in close proximity to the prohibited figure of the mother and particularly her 'white ink' (Cixous 1994: 83). Yet, as I will go on to uncover, Cixous explores a blood speech act in poetic language associated with the mother, through the narration of her own personal history, on a subterranean level, particularly in her essay *Coming to Writing*. What is lost by not actually naming this red fluid is the idea of a menstrual imaginary, that is, a potential source of literary, poetic, and artistic images and motifs, which serve as a source, or well spring for women in their creative endeavours. There is the sense that a ghostly red ink haunts Cixous's texts, just under the surface, at the subterranean level. It is an unruly, eruptive, and animalistic voice, which cannot be contained. It is a menstrual voice.

The volcanic unconscious

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she is not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter (Cixous 1994: 88).

In her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous makes a claim for the inexhaustible resource of women's imaginary, particularly in relation to women's procreative body, the figure of Medusa, and the need for a discourse on this aspect of femininity. She talks about 'waves' and 'floods' of poetry, of 'outbursts' that must be expressed by women (Cixous 1994: 79).

Where is the ebullient, infinite woman, immersed as she was in her naïveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallogocentrism, hasn't been ashamed of her strength? Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a...divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble (Cixous 1994: 79).

Cixous alerts us to the need for women to access her bodily drives as a means of gaining access to a vital feminine imaginary. She argues that this will constitute a return to culture, as from Freud's 'dark continent', which is historically how phallogocentric culture has discursively positioned women, as a dark dangerous territory. It is this repressed landscape, this 'dark continent' of rational discourse, of an imposed masculine symbolic authority, which needs to be critiqued. And, perhaps Freud's 'dark continent' is also directly related to Africa as place of human origin, in

which case to return to the dark continent for a woman, would be to seek to reimagine the feminine in relation to the black woman's body as a source of human life. Moreover, connected with the black goddess.

Interestingly, Cixous invokes a re-configuration of the unconscious as a means of bringing forth a poetic feminine writing. 'Because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women' (Cixous 1994: 81). She is arguing for a woman's writing practice that draws from her libidinal surges, her erotic drives, against the pathologising of women's bodies, against the notion of woman-as-monster, a Medusa, who must be controlled, and contained. In my view, Cixous seeks to rupture the authority of a Freudian masculine unconscious construct by arguing for what is best described as an eruptive unconscious.

The concept of a volcanic unconscious is a re-configuration of abjection, an outer limit of the Freudian unconscious that is periodically eruptive, and is intimately associated with the abyss, the animalistic maternal body, and a symbolic language, which can be abreacted by the female poet in the forging of her own menstrual imaginary. Celebrated French/American artist, Louise Bourgeois, was one of the first people to discuss the concept of a volcanic unconscious, which I will draw on to develop my concept of the menstrual imaginary.⁴ The volcanic unconscious is a pertinent concept for a theorisation of the menstrual imaginary because it draws attention to metaphors of eruption from the depths and taking from the unconscious for inspiration. Moreover, if we consider Bourgeois's terminology of the volcanic unconscious in relation to Cixous's forging of a feminine imaginary in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, then we would be arguing for a woman's volcanic unconscious as a significant source of symbolic material, which she potentially draws on in 'red ink', rather than 'white ink', in the forging of her own menstrual imaginary. Cixous also refers to a feminine text as 'volcanic', which I will come back to in a moment.

I will very briefly take a moment to talk further about the volcanic in poetry as discussed by celebrated poet and feminist writer Adrienne Rich, who writes about Emily Dickinson's poetry and life in her article *Vesuvius at Home*. Rich tells us that Dickinson adopted a 'dialectic of metaphor' to convey 'original' and 'unorthodox' poetry that is volcanic, not only because of her voluminous output, but also because her poetry stands testimony to a woman's extreme psychic states. The fact that Dickinson said yes to her poetic powers and let her creative energy burst out, volcanically, even from the domesticity of her bedroom, during the nineteenth century seems revolutionary. Rich advises that 'Poetry [as opposed to other literary forms like the novel] is too rooted in the unconscious; it presses too close against the barriers of repression; and the nineteenth century woman had much to repress' (Rich 1976). But, Dickinson rode the boundary repeatedly, perhaps to/from the transformative abyss on a regular basis, maybe even periodically, to renew herself against the dominant patriarchy of her time.

Importantly, Cixous's 'volcanic unconscious' can be considered to be a configuration of writing abjection, (though written prior to both Douglas and Kristeva's writing of the abject) and certainly unique in its own encounters with an abyss that is

transformative, as well as positive, rather than terrifying. As Bourgeois explains it is 'through the shock of our encounters with people' that we experience the volcanic unconscious (Michael Glover quotes Bourgeois 2010). In my view, encounters with mythological female figures such as the Medusa also give rise to the volcanic unconscious. In this sense, elemental mythological women figures are used by Cixous for the purpose of drawing out her own feminine imaginary in poetic writing. It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss Cixous's readings of the Sphinx and *Little Red Riding Hood*, in her essay *Coming to Writing*. It is at such times in Cixous's writing that she seems to swap her aesthetic motif of 'white ink' for a 'red ink', which runs beneath the surface of her text.

In *The Laugh of the Medusa* Cixous seems to be referencing writing in relation to an imaginary maternal power that has been repressed, but returns, to exert its influence in 'red ink', rather than in an exclusively 'white ink'.

We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bebies – we are black and we are beautiful.

We're stormy, and that which is ours breaks loose from us without our fearing any debilitation. Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we're not afraid of lacking (Cixous 1994: 80).

The mother's blood flows in poetic writing. Cixous goes on to describe a linguistic maternal influence that is rhythmic, prosodic, and can be potentially drawn on. It is a poetic evocation of woman's force, desire, and power to erupt into language in relation to the maternal figure (Cixous 1994: 83). Could it be that she erupts periodically in a controversial 'red ink', a ghostly red ink, which perhaps haunts Cixous' writing?

An active volcano is not unlike a powerful menstruation – a hot lava, a warm viscosity, made of multiple fleshs, and fluids, red, dark, and chaotic, surging, sometimes explosively, out of a womb of the earth. The volcanic is a great mother, a Medusa, periodically surging into the world, from the abyss, with her feminine imaginary at the ready, describing phenomena, as she experiences it. In her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* Cixous constantly draws on this nourishing fluid of the mother that feeds her writing practice, which she clearly reveres. A volcanic unconscious spews forth the most active elements of the psyche, which must be brought up, can no longer be repressed, towards the assertion of one's identity, partially drawing from the maternal body, but dually as a means of continually separating from the maternal body. Re-birthing against abjection. And yet, a woman is unavoidably connected to this maternal influence through blood ties, through libidinal flow, whilst needing to forge her own path in the world, in poetic writing.

Cixous makes a special claim for women's bodies and a feminine imaginary trapped 'within' phallogocentric discourse, constricted within man's unconscious construct of the feminine Other: a dark continent. She petitions women to write their way out of this exile space, *explosively*.

If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this “within,” to explode it, turn it around, seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you’ll see with what ease she will spring forth from that “within” where she so drowsily crouched – to overflow at the lips she will cover the foam (Cixous 1994: 87).

It is as if Cixous’ ‘white ink’ has been bitten into, so that it bleeds, so that what springs forth from ‘within’ is Medusan ink. Cixous goes on to give a close reading of the Medusa, the so-called monstrous or animalistic maternal figure, who stands on the cusp of civilisation and is laughing riotously, and blowing apart the old law of the symbolic, shattering its structures, its institutions, its old way, with her volcanic symbolic guffaws. She is not castrated, that was Freud’s phantasy. Rather, she is the muse of women’s future texts and the ‘new’ feminine writing, which has already happened, and continues to happen in Western culture. According to Cixous it is therefore Medusa’s symbolic strength that women writing the feminine can draw on. Moreover, Cixous urges women to write feminine texts that are eruptive, that blow apart the old law, and its institutions.

Finally, in her essay Cixous talks of woman’s desire to have a child, which she argues is clearly a woman’s choice, to have a child or not, standing against the patriarchal biological determination of woman historically. Cixous points out that giving birth is a potential drive, a desire, a peak bodily performance, which speaks volumes of women’s strength, and she compares it to writing.

We won’t advance backward anymore; we’re not going to repress something so simple as the desire for life. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive – just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood (Cixous 1994: 90).

Cixous suggests that pregnancy is a time when a woman takes power, ‘doubles her market value’, and ‘takes on intrinsic value as a woman in her own eyes and, undeniably, acquires body and sex’ (Cixous 1994: 90). And of course, we can draw on menstruation as a time that a woman acquires body, and sex, which can be written by women, against the still dominant narrative on menstruation in Western culture, which claims that women are potentially periodically neurotic, even monstrous. Women’s blood time is also potentially a time of regaining voice, body, sex, and meaning. It is a time of drawing on the volcanic unconscious to write in ‘red ink’ of women’s experience, and adding to an already existing menstrual imaginary.

Bourgeois’ volcanic unconscious is important in relation to my theory of the menstrual imaginary. In *The Foundations of the Unconscious*, Matt Ffytche gives an historical account of the unconscious prior to psychoanalysis, particularly as it relates to Romantic psychology and early nineteenth century thought. He points out that the unconscious doesn’t have a specific ‘provenance’ as such, rather it is a broad and interdisciplinary concept, pervading ‘psychiatry, medicine and psychology, but also philosophy, religion and metaphysics and theories of nature and history, as well as

more popular psychology and cultural elaborations in novels, poems and moral essays' (Ffytche 2012: 9). If we think about the unconscious in these broader terms, pre-psychoanalysis, then we can re-evaluate a concept of the psychic unconscious that reaches beyond Freud and Jung.

Ffytche sets out the ways that the 'psychological individual' seeks to search for new foundations for a concept of themselves as 'autonomous rational agents' in the Romantic period (Ffytche 2012: 27). He finds that with the emergence of the unconscious psyche, human subjectivity comes to be understood in terms of the de-centred subject. 'There is a process within our minds and bodies which seems to operate unconsciously, and there are states of mind (dream, madness, poetic invention) of which we are not wholly consciously in control' (Ffytche 2012: 27). Moreover, an unconscious aspect of the human mind comes to be related to 'processes of nature, empirically (theories of instinct, for instance) or spiritually and mystically' (Ffytche 2012: 27). Finally, a dimension of 'irrationalism' is built into subjectivity, which is favoured by Schelling. In fact, all of these emerging modalities for thinking the human subject are related to the idea that the unconscious exists as an organic thing, or state, that sets up a concept of boundary, which Ffytche doesn't actually signpost. Perhaps, claiming a concept of the psychic unconscious aligned with boundary is the most subversive way a woman can position herself in relation to existing modalities of subjectivity in Western patriarchy.

As Kristeva argued, woman is more closely aligned with boundaries because of her menstrual cycle and the fact that she gives birth. When a woman menstruates and gives birth she opens up the borders of her body and transgresses a limit of the 'proper', clean, and ordered body. At such times her psychic unconscious expands to encompass, or take in the boundary, and see beyond. At these times a woman can gather to herself new meaning, new ideas, take from her own symbolic, and return through writing, or making art, to share what she knows about the human subject beyond the limitations of selfhood in patriarchal culture. Thus, undoing the rationalist model, or patriarchal stronghold. Certainly, Cixous' writing would agree with the idea of a woman subject armed with procreative powers, a special mediator of boundaries, who touches on the abyss, not a terrifying abyss, rather a transformative abyss, to return repeatedly in poetic writing. It is this 'red ink' in women's writing practice that needs to be identified to be a powerful source of feminine writing, which haunts Cixous's writing rather than breaks through. As if, there were still operating a pressure, even with this break-through feminist, to sublimate into the more *seemly* and clean and relatively 'proper', 'whiteness' of milk.

Endnotes:

¹ The patriarchal taboo on menstruation differs from culture to culture and from one religion to another. For example in the Orthodox Jewish religion 'niddah' is observed, which involves the stringent separation of menstrual substances, as well as ritual cleansing practices.

² Cixous's father was a Pied-Noir Seraphic Jew, who died when she was young. Cixous has written that her father is a major influence in her writing, and no doubt his Jewish diasporic identity has partially shaped her sense of self.

³ Freud's view was radical compared to those of his colleague Charcot. Freud's 'talking cure' was in fact founded on the medical errors of Charcot.

⁴ French/American artists Louise Bourgeois wrote in her diary about the shocking nature of her work: 'The only access we have to our volcanic unconscious and to the profound motives for our actions and reactions is through the shocks of our encounters with specific people'.

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