

Synopsis

Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing is a poetic, insightful, and ultimately moving exploration of 'the strange science of writing.' In a magnetic, irresistible narrative, Cixous reflects on the writing process and explores three distinct areas essential for 'great' writing: The School of the Deadâ€”the notion that something or someone must die in order for good writing to be born; The School of Dreamsâ€”the crucial role dreams play in literary inspiration and output; and The School of Rootsâ€”the importance of depth in the 'nether realms' in all aspects of writing. Cixous's love of language and passion for the written word is evident on every page. Her emotive style draws heavily on the writers she most admires: the Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector, the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, the Austrian novelists Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard, Dostoyevsky and, most of all, Kafka. (Jacques Derrida)

Book Information

Series: The Wellek Library Lectures

Paperback: 162 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press; New Ed edition (April 15, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231076592

ISBN-13: 978-0231076593

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.4 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (6 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #62,823 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Movements > Deconstruction](#) #17 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > Literary Theory](#) #28 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > World Literature > European](#)

Customer Reviews

I knew of Cixous, had a general idea of her doing work toward a kind of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing), but hadn't actually read her writing until I read this book while tanning in Southern New Jersey this past June. This book was on a recommended reading list for a writing class I was taking, though I think I'm the only one who read it; it's not at all your usual writer's-help book, but that's good. It is dense, genre-breaking academic-poetic writing that I ended up having to get out of the sun to read. This book is comprised of a set of essays originally given as lectures, separated into

"The School of the Dead," "The School of Dreams," and "The School of Roots." The writers that resonate with Cixous are "descenders, explorers of the lowest and the deepest," (a concept introduced in "The School of the Dead") and include some I knew -- Kafka, Dostoevsky, Genet, and Ingeborg Bachmann, and others I hadn't -- Clarice Lispector and Marina Tsvetaeva. I see there's a Derrida "endorsement" both here on the website and on the cover of the book, and so, as you would expect, this book's meditation on the connection between language and desire, between writing and the body, some wordplay and deconstruction of the very shape of letters or the names of writers is what you might expect from a French poststructuralist. What set this book apart for me was its attitude toward the works cited. Cixous doesn't use literature to promote flashy ideas; it's seriously personal work, a "Schooling" on thinking about one's own writing, she's actually interested in defining "truth." The first part of "The Dead," especially the kind of cataloguing of "deaths-as-beginnings" was fascinating. I found the "School of Roots" section absolutely packed with virtuoso readings and ideas.

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