

Beyond the Representation of *Écriture Féminine* and the Poetics of Everyday Life in Zoya Pirzad's "Mismatched" (Lengeh-be-Lengeh)

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Abstract— This paper explores the manifestation of *écriture féminine* in Zoya Pirzad's short story "Mismatched," drawing on the theories of Hélène Cixous. While Pirzad's works has frequently been studied through the lenses of female representation, everyday life, and identity, the linguistic and narrative mechanisms tied to the concept of *écriture féminine* in this story remain under-researched. Employing qualitative textual analysis and close reading, this study demonstrates that *écriture féminine* operates in this text not merely at the thematic level, but through its form, rhythm, silences, everyday details, and the organization of narrative perception. The findings reveal that the "everyday" in Pirzad's fiction is not merely a backdrop for representing women's experiences, but functions as an arena for meaning-making, resistance against established patriarchal linguistic patterns, and the rewriting of lived female experience. Consequently, this paper argues that "Mismatched" articulates a poetics of the everyday, through which *écriture féminine* in contemporary Persian fiction is realized—not through extreme linguistic ruptures, but through a delicate economy of silence, rhythm, and the minutiae of daily life.



Keywords— Post-structuralism, Zoya Pirzad, "Mismatched", *écriture féminine*, Hélène Cixous.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, feminist literary criticism has shifted from a mere focus on the representation of women in texts toward an examination of the linguistic, narrative, and formal mechanisms that shape female experience. Within this perspective, the concern is no longer exclusively about how women are portrayed, but rather how a text facilitates the emergence of a specific female voice, perception, and subjectivity. Accordingly, the concept of *écriture féminine* in French feminist theory—particularly within the thought of Hélène Cixous—gains special significance. This concept posits that female experience manifests not only at the thematic level but also through the movement of language, the rupture of established logic, and the retrieval of the marginalized. Thus, *écriture féminine* is not restricted to women's authorship or the presence of female characters; rather, it refers to a mode of writing that

distances itself from hierarchical and patriarchal linguistic structures, enabling the expression of difference, multiplicity, silence, desire, and the body.

In her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous emphasizes the necessity for women to write from themselves, from their own bodies, and from an experience suppressed by dominant intellectual and linguistic traditions. As she asserts, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing" (Cixous 875). Within this framework, *écriture féminine* is understood as a linguistic and aesthetic act that is incompatible with the logic of certainty, centrality, and monologism; instead, it tends toward the fluidity of meaning, polyphony, interiority, and openness. Charles Bressler, in explicating this approach, emphasizes that French feminism is primarily concerned with language, seeking to demonstrate how meaning is produced through

linguistic signs. Thus, *écriture féminine* is identifiable not in the biological identity of the author, but in the functional mode of the text and the quality of meaning production (Bressler 205).

In contemporary Persian fiction, the works of Zoya Pirzad are among those that, due to their focus on lived female experience, familial relationships, emotional silences, and the minutiae of everyday life, possess a high capacity for an *écriture féminine* reading. Pirzad's fictional world rarely relies on grand, overt events; rather, it reveals complex layers of female experience through seemingly minor occurrences, fragmented perceptions, pauses, objects, and quiet emotional interactions. In this regard, the short story "Mismatched" serves as an ideal case study, as everyday life within it is not a marginal backdrop but the primary arena of meaning-making, where female subjectivity is shaped through details, silences, and the slow rhythm of the narrative.

Research conducted on Pirzad's works has primarily focused on gender roles, maternal patterns, women's emotional experiences, the gendering of space, social taboos, and certain discursive mechanisms. While these studies are significant in elucidating the social and cultural dimensions of her work, they have less frequently addressed how female experience is constructed at the level of form and language. Furthermore, in Persian academia, the concept of *écriture féminine* has sometimes been applied in a general, undifferentiated manner, often failing to distinguish it from the mere representation of women or women's authorship. Consequently, there remains a lack of study that specifically analyzes "Mismatched" through the lens of *écriture féminine* in conjunction with a poetics of the everyday.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this paper is to read "Lengeh-be-Lengeh" not merely as a narrative about a woman, but as a text that produces female experience through language, narrative, and the organization of perception. This research aims to examine how the "everyday" in this story transcends its status as a subject matter to become a site for the emergence of female subjectivity and a form of *écriture féminine*. The central question of this paper is: what narrative and linguistic mechanisms in "Mismatched" facilitate the realization of *écriture féminine*? The paper posits that by highlighting details, silence, interiority, the suspension of meaning, and a focus on seemingly insignificant experiences, this story constructs a poetics of the everyday that aligns with Cixous's formulation of *écriture féminine*. Utilizing a descriptive-analytical method and relying on close reading, this research attempts to demonstrate that in this story,

everyday life is not a marginal subject, but a field of meaning production and resistance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Zoya Pirzad's works can be broadly categorized into several thematic axes. One strand focuses on the representation of gender roles, female experience, and family structures. For instance, Mousavi (2022) examined gender role schemas in the novel *We Will Get Used to It*, demonstrating that literature can serve as a field for either the reproduction or the critique of gendered expectations. Majidzadeh Dolatabadi et al. (2021), in their examination of maternal patterns in Pirzad's works, emphasized the complexity of women's positioning relative to familial and social structures. While these studies are significant in illuminating the female world of Pirzad's oeuvre, they largely remain at the thematic and sociological levels.

Another group of studies has focused on the relationship between gender, space, taboo, and emotional experience. Moghaddami (2021), in an analysis of *The Tart Taste of Persimmons*, demonstrates that place plays an active role in the formation of gender identity. Al-Ali, Jalali, and Taheri (2024), in a comparative study, examined the application of taboo in contemporary Persian and Arabic fiction, identifying Pirzad's works as a context for representing the repressed. Furthermore, Taheri-Rostam and Mangoli (2024), by examining forbidden love in *Things We Left Unsaid*, underscored interiority, self-discovery, and the tension between individual desire and social structures within Pirzad's fictional world. Although these studies reveal critical dimensions of the female experience, they less frequently address how these experiences are constructed at the level of form and narrative organization.

At a level closer to linguistic analysis, Dehghan Tarzjani et al. (2020) investigated the linguistic tools used to establish the individual authority of male and female narrators in some of Pirzad's works. The significance of this study lies in its departure from mere thematic analysis toward an attention to the discursive mechanisms of the text. However, the framework of this research remains focused on legitimation and narrative authority, and does not directly engage with *écriture féminine* in the Cixousian sense.

In the theoretical domain, the concept of *écriture féminine* in Persian scholarship has often been addressed in a general manner or conflated with women's authorship and the representation of women's issues. Yet, in Hélène Cixous's theory, *écriture féminine* relates primarily to the mode of meaning production, the text's relationship with

the body and difference, and resistance against phallogocentric language. Therefore, the mere presence of a female character or the engagement with women's issues is insufficient to attribute this concept to a text.

A review of the literature indicates that despite numerous studies on femininity, family, space, taboo, and language in Zoya Pirzad's works, there remains a lack of research specifically analyzing the short story "Mismatched" through the lens of *écriture féminine* in conjunction with the poetics of the everyday. The primary gap is the absence of a study that moves beyond representation to demonstrate how female experience in this story is constructed through details, silence, narrative rhythm, and the organization of textual perception. The present research seeks to fill this gap by linking Hélène Cixous's theoretical framework with a close reading of "Mismatched".

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is grounded in the concept of *écriture féminine* within Hélène Cixous's thought—a concept that remains one of the most fundamental formulations of French feminism. *Écriture féminine* should not be conflated with "writing by women" or "writing about women." It refers to a mode of writing where language distances itself from established, hierarchical, and phallogocentric logic, thereby enabling the emergence of difference, multiplicity, the body, desire, and marginalized voices. Therefore, the primary issue in identifying *écriture féminine* is not the author's identity, but how the text functions.

In her critique of the Western intellectual tradition, Cixous demonstrates that this tradition has been founded on unequal binary oppositions: man/woman, reason/emotion, culture/nature, presence/absence. In these oppositions, the first term has always occupied the center, while the second has been relegated to the margin. *Écriture féminine* acts against this logic—not by simply reversing these hierarchies, but by disrupting the established logic of binarism itself. From this perspective, language is not merely a tool for conveying meaning; it is also a site of power and exclusion. Consequently, any attempt to reclaim female voice and subjectivity is inextricably bound to the question of language.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous emphasizes that woman must write herself and restore to the text those realms of experience suppressed in the patriarchal order. "Writing the body" here does not mean reducing woman to the biological; rather, it refers to bringing emotion, desire, memory, pleasure, suffering, and marginalized perceptions back into the text. For this reason, *écriture féminine* is

often characterized by the fluidity of meaning, openness, polyphony, rupture, ambiguity, resistance to linearity, and resistance to imposed coherence. Bressler, in explicating French feminism, emphasizes that such writing does not fix meaning in its process, but produces it within the movement of language and in relation to voice, difference, and the act of writing (Bressler 205).

Nevertheless, *écriture féminine* should not be reduced to a fixed checklist of formal characteristics. It is less a definitive model for classifying texts and more an interpretive horizon for reading them. From this perspective, a literary text enters into a relationship with *écriture féminine* when one can discern in it signs of escaping certainty, the disruption of centrality, the presence of silence and omission, the highlighting of details, and the possibility for marginalized experiences. Thus, this study does not aim to present "Mismatched" as an absolute or complete specimen of *écriture féminine*; rather, the goal is to examine the extent to which the narrative and linguistic mechanisms of this story align with this theoretical horizon.

Meanwhile, the connection between *écriture féminine* and the poetics of the everyday is of decisive importance. In many texts that place female experience at the center, the everyday transcends the level of trivial or marginal matters to become a field for meaning production. Home, objects, repetitive tasks, silent relationships, protracted time, and minute perceptions are not merely realistic elements in such texts; they are mechanisms through which subjectivity, erosion, desire, limitation, and resistance are revealed. Thus, everyday life can be the site for the emergence of a writing that, instead of relying on grand events and explicit discourses, disseminates meaning within silences, pauses, and details.

In reading "Mismatched," it is significant that the narrative relies more on details, interiority, objects, silence, and the slow rhythm of perception than on bold actions and overt oppositions. Therefore, to operationalize this theoretical framework for textual analysis, this study considers five main indices: first, the foregrounding of the everyday as a site of meaning production; second, the role of silence, omission, and the unsaid in expressing female experience; third, interiority and the focus on perception, emotion, and lived experience; fourth, the fluidity of meaning and the avoidance of interpretive certainty; and fifth, a narrative that reveals domination and tension not directly, but within the texture of details and silent relationships.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of the present paper is predicated on the premise that "Mismatched," through its detailed, tranquil, and interiorized narrative economy, provides a possibility for the emergence of

female subjectivity. In this story, the everyday is not merely the subject of the narrative but becomes an aesthetic and epistemological mechanism of the text. In other words, through details, pauses, silences, and the suspension of meaning, the text constructs a poetics of the everyday that can be read in relation to the concept of *écriture féminine*. Such a reading allows us to move beyond the level of representation and demonstrate how female experience in this story is produced within the form and movement of language itself.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative design and employs a descriptive-analytical approach. The text under examination is Zoya Pirzad's short story "Mismatched," which serves as the unit of analysis in this research. The theoretical basis of the paper is the concept of *écriture féminine* in Hélène Cixous's thought, and the analysis is conducted through close reading. Rather than merely extracting explicit themes, this method seeks to examine the relationship among narrative structure, linguistic details, silences, omissions, the rhythm of perception, and the ways meaning is produced within the text.

To operationalize the theoretical framework, five principal indices guide the reading of the story: the foregrounding of everyday life as a site of meaning production; the role of silence and the unsaid in expressing female experience; interiority and the focus on perception and emotion; the fluidity of meaning and the avoidance of interpretive certainty; and finally, the representation of tension and domination at the level of details and silent relationships rather than solely through overt oppositions. Accordingly, the present analysis aims to show how "Mismatched," through its quiet and detail-oriented narrative economy, makes possible the emergence of a form of female subjectivity and transforms the everyday into a domain of meaning and resistance.

Analysis of Zoya Pirzad's "Mismatched" through the Lens of Hélène Cixous's *Écriture Féminine*

1. Writing the Body, Dreaming, and Rupturing Established Female Roles

One of the most fundamental components of Hélène Cixous's theory is the nexus between writing, the body, desire, and female lived experience. Farshid Norouzi and Mohammad Ghafari (2021), in their article "Hélène Cixous's Theory of *Écriture Féminine*: From Illusion to Reality," note that Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," calls upon women to write about their bodies without fear or guilt, and to narrate based on a corporeality and sexuality that have been suppressed for centuries. In this

regard, Cixous asserts: "I write woman: woman must write woman" (Cixous 877). This invitation to write from the body and from female experience is well manifested in the short story "Mismatched".

Describing one of her inner desires, the narrator states: "Some mornings when I woke up, I wanted to sit in front of the TV in my worn-out nightgown, hair uncombed, wearing mismatched socks" (Pirzad 89). This sentence is not merely a report of an appearance; it articulates a desire to break free from social discipline and from the model of the woman who is always tidy, controlled, and harmonious. Here, "mismatched socks" becomes a sign of silent rebellion—a form of writing with the body that transcends the level of attire and transforms into a language of protest. In the same vein, the narrator asks: "I sat silently and thought: why should I wear nylon socks when I hate them, and furthermore, why shouldn't I say that I hate wearing them?" (Pirzad 89). This reflects both the narrator's awareness of cultural impositions and a moment of female self-realization; a moment where the body is no longer a subject of discipline, but a site of resistance.

On the other hand, *écriture féminine* in Cixous's thought entails breaking female and maternal stereotypes. In Pirzad's story, this issue manifests in the realm of dreams and fantasy. The narrator says: "I wished to be Cinderella... waiting for my prince to turn my pumpkin into a golden carriage..." (89). At first glance, this image seems like a return to female fairy-tale imagination, but as the text progresses, this fantasy is called into question, becoming a ground for realizing the gap between myth and reality. As the narrator notes elsewhere: "I thought about marriage... which young girl would covet my tired, ill-tempered, and broken-down prince?" (Pirzad 90). This phrase is no longer a reflection of a romantic dream but an articulation of its collapse. The narrator realistically realizes that there is no "prince," and this moment marks an awakening and a rupture from the phallogocentric narrative model.

The challenge to established female roles concerning motherhood and domesticity is also made explicit: "A palace where there is no cooking, dusting, or laundry... where the crying of my nursing baby does not wake me up at night..." (Pirzad 89). This sentence explicitly questions the pressures of the roles of mother and wife, showing how what is traditionally considered a "female virtue" can become exhausting and restrictive in lived experience. Even on another level, the desire for a support is formulated in a non-stereotypical way: "If only one always had something to hold onto... laundry or the golden railings of a shrine..." (Pirzad 89). This "clinging" can be

interpreted both as an allegory for the woman's psychological need for support and as a sign of her state of suspension and instability in an order that has drained her usual anchors of meaning.

From this perspective, "Mismatched" can be considered a text where the woman is not only the subject of the narrative but the source of perception and meaning production. The body, attire, desire, fantasy, and everyday dissatisfaction all become components of a writing that aligns with Cixous's theoretical horizon. Writing woman in this story is achieved not through slogans, but through the most minute daily experiences and the silent resistance embedded within them.

2. Details of Everyday Life, Fluidity of Language, and the Formation of *Écriture Féminine*

One of the most significant aspects of *écriture féminine* in "Mismatched" is the transformation of the everyday into a site of meaning production. Instead of relying on grand events and overt crises, Pirzad constructs the narrative world through repetitive, minute, and seemingly trivial matters—matters often relegated to the margins in phallogocentric literature. The narrator states: "... I would press the green, red, or yellow button, and the machine would wash the clothes" (90). Ostensibly, this sentence is a simple description of washing, but at a deeper level, it provides an image of the repetition, ennui, and the everyday mechanism in which the woman is ensnared. Thus, the everyday transcends the background of the narrative to become the locus for the emergence of tension and awareness.

This state reaches its crescendo in a longer passage where, following her mother's words, the narrator recalls a fluid list of desires, cravings, and markers of social success: "Thank God you don't have to scrub laundry with a stick and cold water, in our time—and I thought, if only one always had something to hold onto. Laundry, or the golden railings of a shrine, the hope for a promotion, New Year bonuses and raises, a savings account at the bank, the dream of a larger house with steel chairs, a car, a diamond ring, a Louis Vuitton bag, a Rolex watch, a wedding in such-and-such hotel, chubby children with report cards full of A's, friends with whom one could discuss the right way to cook fesenjan¹, or gossip about other friends, or go to the beauty salon" (Pirzad 91). This long, fluid list diverts the language of the text from a linear, orderly path, transforming it into a pluralistic stream of consciousness. This very rupture from linear, rationalistic order aligns with *écriture féminine*.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," regarding this fluidity, Cixous writes: "Woman's imagination is inexhaustible, like music, painting, and writing. Their flow of fantasy is incredible... The world is an expansion of a knowledge based on bodily experimentation... Every stage of pleasure and euphoria marks a powerful conception, a composition, and something beautiful" (876). In this light, the fluidity of language in Pirzad's story is not merely a stylistic feature; it is the translation of the structure of female experience—an experience in which meaning is constructed through the free association of details, memories, fantasies, and objects.

In this context, the presence of sensory and visual elements also gains significance. The narrator says: "There was no laughter on your face, but I could feel it," and in another sentence, we read: "I lifted the paper. A smiling face had been drawn" (Pirzad 93). Furthermore, the expression "draft paper" (87) serves as a symbolic image of a readable text that is still in the process of formation and thus cannot be fixed. Here, writing is not the product of certainty, but the result of movement, incompleteness, and process—precisely what is articulated in Cixous's theory as the connection between language, the body, and the multiplicity of meaning.

Thus, everyday life in "Mismatched" is not merely represented; it becomes a semantic system wherein laundry, household items, the listing of needs, and even simple objects are transformed into the language of female subjectivity. Through this avenue, the story approaches the horizon of *écriture féminine*: a writing in which the trivial is the site of meaning production, and details, rather than being peripheral, constitute the main text of experience.

3. Silence, the Inner–Outer Divide, and Quiet Female Resistance

Another central component of *écriture féminine* in "Mismatched" is the presence of silence, the suppression of speech, and the gap between interiority and outward appearance. The narrator lives in a world in which she must conceal many of her feelings and disagreements. This condition is clearly manifested in the following statement: "My husband smiled, squeezed my arm, and said, 'Calm down, darling.' And I realized that what he meant was: don't speak" (Pirzad 89). In this sentence, language that appears calm and affectionate in fact functions as a mechanism for silencing the female voice. Domination thus reveals itself not in the form of overt violence, but in its soft and everyday guise.

The same tension is represented on a more interior level when the narrator says: "I draw smiling faces ... but I do not smile" (Pirzad 93). This sentence vividly exposes the gap between appearance and reality, social image and

¹ A Persian food

inner truth, and between what a woman is expected to display and what she actually feels. The smiling face becomes a metaphor for the very social role imposed upon her—a role she must perform in order to remain acceptable, even when her innermost experience is at odds with it.

Yet for Cixous, *écriture féminine* is not merely the registration of repression; it is also a means of moving beyond it. She writes: "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing ... Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (Cixous 875). From this perspective, writing means bringing into language what has been repressed and transferring interiority into the realm of expression. Elsewhere in her thought, writing is also conceived as the "possibility of change" and as a platform for disruptive thought. Therefore, wherever the narrator gives language to experiences of imposition, silence, or dissatisfaction, she is in fact initiating the very act of resistance.

The text offers numerous examples of this quiet resistance. The narrator says: "I washed them all together ... my mother used to say: that's unhygienic ..." (Pirzad 91). On the surface, this is simply a remark about washing clothes, but on a symbolic level, it suggests disobedience to an imposed familial and cultural order. Likewise, the statement "I have thrown away all my nylon stockings ... and she always wears mismatched socks ..." (Pirzad 93) records another form of defiance at the level of the body and clothing. In both cases, the woman marks her distance from dominant norms through small yet meaningful acts.

Even apparently simple references to domestic gifts become significant within this framework. The fact that on her birthday the narrator receives "a dishwasher," and as a New Year's gift "a juicer," is not merely a report of family life; it reveals how female identity is reduced within the social structure to domestic labor and a service role. Yet the very recording of such details is itself an act of exposure. By writing what is usually regarded as trivial and natural, Pirzad lays bare the hidden mechanisms of domination. From this perspective, silence in "Mismatched" is never neutral; it carries a critical force and, through writing, is transformed into resistance.

Consequently, "Mismatched" may be read as a narrative in which female experience is shaped through the tension between inner and outer, silence and speech, apparent conformity and inward protest. The story demonstrates that female resistance does not necessarily appear in the form of grand or explicit acts; rather, it can be embodied in silence, in clothing, in memory, in a half-spoken sentence, and in the recording of everyday details. It is precisely this

feature that brings the story close to the theoretical horizon of *écriture féminine*.

V. CONCLUSION

Drawing on the concept of *écriture féminine* in Hélène Cixous's thought, the present study analyzed Zoya Pirzad's short story "Mismatched" in order to demonstrate how female experience in this text is articulated at the level of language, narrative, and the organization of everyday details. The central question of the article was how, and through what mechanisms, *écriture féminine* may be identified in this story. The analysis showed that Pirzad's text, through its focus on a female point of view, the foregrounding of the protagonist's inner experience, and its departure from linear and rationalistic modes of narration, approaches structures that Cixous's theory identifies as characteristic of *écriture féminine*.

The findings of the study indicate that in "Mismatched," everyday life becomes the center of meaning production. Objects, repetitive acts, and seemingly trivial situations do not merely serve a background function; rather, they become instruments for revealing the hidden tensions embedded in relationships and gender roles. From this perspective, the narrative forms a poetics of everyday life through its focus on concrete details and sensory experiences, within which female subjectivity is constructed through subtle perceptions, inner feelings, and the narrator's mental reflections.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that corporeality, linguistic fluidity, and the presence of silences and the unsaid are among the major components shaping this mode of writing. In Cixous's theoretical framework, *écriture féminine* is understood as a means of reclaiming women's voice and lived experience—a possibility realized through a rupture from the fixed patterns of phallogocentric language. In Pirzad's story, likewise, the articulation of everyday experience, the recording of domestic details, and the representation of the female character's inner feelings and hesitations give rise to a fluid and multilayered mode of expression that distances itself from the definitive and hierarchical logic of dominant language.

On this basis, it can be concluded that "Mismatched" is not merely a narrative of a woman's everyday life, but a text that, through its particular organization of language and narrative, brings female experience into the domain of literary expression. In this story, everyday details, sensory perceptions, and the female character's inward reflections become mechanisms for representing and rethinking feminine identity, and in doing so, the text implicitly challenges the dominant, male-centered structures of

language and culture. It may therefore be argued that a reading of "Mismatched" in light of Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine* demonstrates how contemporary Persian fiction can provide a space for representing women's lived experience and redefining female subjectivity. From this perspective, the present study seeks to contribute to the broader application of the concept of *écriture féminine* in the analysis of Persian narrative texts and to open a path for further research in this field.

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