

Doutoramento Honoris Causa

JULIA KRISTEVA

10 de outubro de 2019

Son éminence le Cardinal Patriarche

Madame le Recteur

Madame le Professeur Julia Kristeva

Chers Collègues

Mesdames et Messieurs

Je commence en français, avec un très bref mot de salutation à Mme. le Professeur Julia Kristeva, que j'ai l'honneur de vous présenter en tant que récipiendaire du titre de Docteur *honoris causa* décerné par l'Université Catholique du Portugal. Votre rôle, Madame, à l'académie et à la société est sans pareil et aucun discours ne pourra jamais faire justice à l'immense oeuvre académique, sociale, culturelle et humanitaire que vous avez déjà accompli, et dont nous et des millions d'autres sommes les bénéficiaires. Je vais, pourtant, continuer en anglais, une concession à la *lingua franca* que tout le monde peut, plus ou moins, comprendre. Vous même lui donnez le nom de "Globish".

Ladies and Gentlemen

It was with immense pride and joy that I accepted the invitation of our Rector, Professor Isabel Gil, to introduce to you Julia Kristeva, the recipient of the title of doctor *honoris causa*, attributed today by the Catholic University of Portugal. Little did I think, then, what a monumental task lay ahead of me. Because Julia Kristeva is, indeed, larger than life. I never thought, for a moment, that it would be easy to compress the presentation of an outline of her life and work in a few pages, but the complexity of the task far outreached my expectations. As you can see, I am already apologizing for the gaps, the absences, the silences over so many important references that many here present today will no doubt recognize. Because Julia Kristeva, unlike most of us who specialize in a field of knowledge, is recognized world-wide not for one, but for several fields, in which she has not only excelled, but into which she has brought the audacity to think against the grain, to experiment and to innovate, to radically question the acquired, to lay the grounds for new interpellations, new connections, new paths, enthusiastically followed by generations of researchers and scholars. Since we sometimes need labels to help us organize our knowledge in recognizable fields, I would say that Julia Kristeva is a Linguist, a literary and

cultural critic, a psychoanalyst, a novelist, and also a wife, a mother, a reference in the work on disability and vulnerability. Don't think, for a moment, that the more personal references are uncalled for, and that this being an academic occasion, only the academic achievements are relevant. With Julia Kristeva this is not the case. Many aspects of her personal life experience are imbricated in her work, and she acknowledges this in many statements that I was able to read, or listen to, in recent documents made public. She is one in herself, a singularity.

The dimension of Julia Kristeva's impact upon the academic world, and the world at large, might be summarized by facts and numbers. Let me give just a few: hundreds, perhaps thousands of papers, articles, dissertations and thesis, have been published, discussing aspects of her works. A documentary film about her life was released in 2017, called "Who's Afraid of Julia Kristeva?"; a biography is forthcoming, next January, with the title "At the Risk of Thinking". There is a Kristeva Circle; there have been symposia and conferences dedicated to her work. She has received many honorary degrees: from Harvard, Toronto, Bayreuth, Sofia, London, Buenos-Aires, Haifa, to name just a few. She is Emerita Professor of the University Denis Diderot (Paris 7), and visiting Professor at Columbia. She is a *Commandeur* of the French National Order of Merit and of the Legion of Honor; she is a member of the *Institut universitaire de France* (2000) and of the British Academy (2004). In 2004 she received the prestigious Holberg International Memorial Prize for innovative research in language, culture and literature. In 2006 she was awarded the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought and in 2008 the Vaclav Havel Prize. In 2008 she created the "Simone de Beauvoir Prize for Women's Freedom". In 2017 she received Le prix Saint-Simon, for the work *Je me voyage*. Less well known, perhaps, in the academic community, she also founded, in 2003, with Charles Gardou, the *Conseil National du Handicap: sensibiliser, informer, former*.

She has published more than thirty books, countless chapters in books, countless papers, translated across the globe. In Portugal I identified at least six translations of her academic works, and also two translations of her early novels: *The Samourais* published in 1990 and translated in 1991, and *The Old Man and the Wolves (Le Viel Homme et les loups)*, published in 1991 and translated in 1993, both by the distinguished poet and essayist Pedro Tamen, Many more translations into Portuguese were made, on the other side of the Atlantic, in Brazil.

Her name, in academic circles, is now a household word. "Kristeva" already means a body of thought disembodied from the real Julia. The *Kristeva Reader* was published as early as 1986, and more recently *The Portable Kristeva* (2nd. Ed. 2002) illustrate the resonance of her thought throughout the decades.

Because she started very young. Incredibly young for such an overwhelming success, so soon and so complete. She came to Paris from her native Bulgaria in 1965, with a scholarship from the French government – *bourse De Gaule* – to continue her thesis in comparative literature. Two events took place almost at once.

One, was the quick recognition by the French *intelligensia* of the extraordinary powers of her mind and the already enormous breadth of her culture. Very soon, she was a part of the set of intellectuals publishing in the journal *Tel Quel*, people like Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, to name just a few. Barthes wrote an essay about her in 1970, called “L'étrangère” – and, in fact, this characteristic of being an “other” is a part of who she is. “Déplacement”, displacement, is what she has been doing all her life. She would state, recently, “L'étrangeté est mon pays”.

The other event was meeting and marrying Phillippe Sollers. They met five months after she arrived in France, and, in her own words, “une grande passion commence”. Their love story lasts a lifetime. They celebrated it together in the book *Du mariage considéré comme un des beaux arts*; or, on marriage as one of the fine arts, published in 2015. And again, quoting her own words, albeit in English, “he made me Mme. Julia Joyaux, his family name. And my desire for France took root in family life and in maternity with the birth of our son David, together with a thought in research that never leaves me: linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, feminism.” And Phillippe Sollers wrote, in 2016, a beautiful tribute to her, to her beauty, elegance, charm, wit, intelligence, compassion: “Loving Kristeva: a memoir”. At some point, he says: “In her courses and lectures, in French or English, Julia is clear, documented, passionate. Her students adore her, her male and female patients respect her, whereas the psychoanalytic and academic clerisy hold a huge grudge against me. Naturally the suitors, sometimes very well known, have been numerous. How strange, though. I've forgotten their names.”

Before the sixties were over, she was already leaving her critical and subversive mark in the new trends that were then shaking traditional literary criticism: structuralism, semiotics, intertextuality, deconstruction; psychoanalysis and poststructuralism soon after. *Sèmiôtikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, was published in 1969. In quick succession, she would publish *Le Langage, cet inconnu: Une initiation à la linguistique*, also in 1969, *Le Texte du roman: Approche sémiologique d'une structure discursive transformationnelle* (1970), *Revolution in Poetic Language (La Révolution du langage poétique: L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé, 1974)*, among a large number of articles and papers, published in *Tel Quel* and other journals.

In 1974, Julia Kristeva went to China, and wrote about Chinese women (*Des chinoises*). She also went to New York, and became a visiting professor at Columbia University, sharing the chair of Literary Semiology with her famous compatriot Tzvetan Todorov and with Umberto Eco. Then, in the words of one of the many scholars dedicated to her work, “in the period from about 1974 to 1977 her intellectual interests did undergo an obvious shift: away from the purely linguistic or semiotic work which culminated in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and towards a more psychoanalytically oriented examination of the problems of femininity and motherhood, either as embodied in Western representations of women or mothers, or as an area posing new theoretical problems for the psychoanalyst. This shift is not unrelated to the fact that during this period she herself became a mother (her son was born in 1976), and completed her training as a psychoanalyst, starting her own psychoanalytic practice in 1979.”

Kristeva’s works expanded, throughout the eighties and nineties, into other fields of inquiry in which she also left her mark. *Powers of Horror: essay on abjection (Pouvoirs de l’horreur: essai sur l’abjection* (1980), *Psychoanalysis and Faith (Psychanalyse et foi* (1985), *Tales of Love (Histoires d’amour* (1985) *Black Sun: depression and Melancholia (Soleil noir: dépression et mélancholie* (1987), *Strangers to Ourselves (Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, 1988), *New Maladies of the Soul (Les Nouvelles Maladies de l’âme*, 1993), *The Sense and Non-sense of a Revolt (Sens et non-sens de la révolte*, 1996), *Intimate Revolt (La Révolte intime*, 1997), *L’Avenir d’une Révolte*, 1998, *Le féminin et le Sacré* (1998) are among the many texts she published during those years. She examines the keys that psychoanalysis may provide for a new understanding of love, an ethics of love, and examines, among others, the great Catholic theologians of love, St. Bernard and St. Thomas. And, along with her academic writing, she publishes three novels: *Les Samouraïs* (1990), *The Old Man and the Wolves (Le Vieil Homme et les loups* 1991), *Possession* (1996).

The turn of the century gives evidence of a renewed outburst of productivity. Her three-volume work on the “female genius” begins with the volume on Hannah Arendt, in 1999, followed by Mélanie Klein in 2000, and Colette, in 2002. And her vital interest in the feminine and in the reading of illustrious women never ceases: she publishes *Seule une femme* in 2007, *Beauvoir présente* (2016), and also publishes autobiographical and critical texts like *Passions du Temps* (2013) or *Je me voyage* (2016). She gives interviews, she takes part in national debates, she writes on art and representations of decapitation as in *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, she teaches, she lectures around the world. She writes new novels, like *Murder in Byzantium (Meutre a Bizance* 2004) and *The Enchanted Clock (L’Horloge enchanté* 2015).

Her thoughts seem to turn, more and more, to a reflection on the contemporary conditions of culture and civilization in the world, on the condition of a Europe that lost its faith in the name of Enlightened reason, calling for a new Humanism grounded on the need to believe. Because, as she says, the need to believe, and the desire to know, are the foundations of our capacity to be *speaking beings*. *Hatred and Forgiveness (La haine et le pardon 2005)*, *This Incredible Need to Believe (Cet incroyable besoin de croire 2007)*, are works that take us into the complexities of this powerful mind, striving to find, in psychoanalysis and religion, the keys for a new hope, for a new humanism. Although she declares, *carrément*, that she is not a believer, she has a knowledge of the Christian/Catholic texts – Old and New Testament, the Fathers of the Church, the philosophers of the Middle Ages – worthy of a theologian. She is fascinated by the mystical experiences of Meister Eckhart, of St. John of the Cross, but mostly of St. Teresa of Avila, about whom she published *Thérèse my Love: an Imagined Life of the Saint of Avila* in 2008. With her sharp critical mind and her monumental box of critical and analytical tools, she has been consistently analysing European culture and the role of Christianity throughout the centuries. Defining herself as an “energetic pessimist”, who only appreciates intelligence active in its thinking process, or the actuality of the intelligence, she has been insisting on the fundamental importance of religion in the present, of the Catholic Church, of the urgency of a refoundation of the authority of the Greco-Judeo-Christianity that gave the world the desire for a “common world”. What she calls “the genius of Christianity”, introduced and continues to diffuse radical innovations concerning the religious experience of speaking beings, as she states. And, among those, the experience of suffering and of compassion are perhaps the most radical.

Her work on behalf of a new consciousness about the handicapped led her to address an open letter to the President of the French Republic in 2003, followed by the foundation of the *Conseil National du Handicap* and then the *États Généraux du Handicap*. She is now recognized worldwide as a voice that, perhaps for the first time, addressed the condition of disability and vulnerability in a completely new way: as a singularity, not as a difference. She corresponded for a year with Jean Vanier, the founder of *L'Arche* – sadly deceased last May - and that correspondence, under the title *Leur regard perce nos ombres* (2011), is the very essence of a dialogue on the acceptance of the Other. And it is with a genuine spirit of exchange, led by the idea that “no one owns the truth” – “*nul n'est propriétaire de la vérité*”, that she has been engaging in a ceaseless dialogue with thinkers from all religions. In fact, she keeps following and developing the challenge opened by Pope Benedict XVI, when he invited her to the “Meeting on Peace and Justice in the World” that he organized in Assisi in 2011.

But, before she met Pope Benedict, she had met Pope John Paul II, in Sofia, for the celebration of the Cyrillic alphabet. On his death, she wrote one of the most moving testimonies on the life of this man who, in his suffering and handicapped body, embodied the “genius of Catholicism”, the man who wrote *Personne et acte*, the man who proclaimed *urbi et orbi*: “Don’t be afraid!”. For Julia Kristeva, this injunction went further: “Don’t be afraid of European culture!” And this is, perhaps, the most important exhortation that this unique, fabulous, woman can give us now, as a wake-up call to face the need to believe, to rethink humanism and to re-appraise the role of the Catholic church in the contemporary world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mesdames et Messieurs

Laissez moi finir en français, avec les mots mêmes de Mme. Kristeva en 2006, en parlant du Pape Saint Jean Paul II:

«N’ayez pas peur du christianisme, et ensemble nous n’aurons pas peur des religions!», ai-je envie de dire, pour ma part, à mes amis agnostiques, humanistes, athées. Nous venons du même continent de pensée, nous nous dressons souvent «contre » les uns et les autres parce que nous sommes en réalité « tout contre » ; continuons l’analyse... Et je fais un rêve : que de véritables complicités, nécessaires devant la barbarie montante, puissent être tissées non seulement, et à mon sens probablement moins entre le christianisme et les autres religions aujourd’hui tentées par l’intégrisme, qu’entre le christianisme et cette vision à laquelle j’adhère, issue du christianisme, bien que désormais détachée de lui, et qui ambitionne d’élucider les voies risquées de la liberté.”

Merci, Mme. Kristeva.