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Review of *Thinking the Difference* by Luce Irigaray

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virtue of belonging to the species *homo sapiens*”—is so transparent as to constitute evidence of desperation in the master builder of ethical foundations—and the truth is that Schopenhauer absolutely needs the doctrine of the coexistence of freedom and necessity to complete his philosophical monism for the metaphysical ground. As deceptions go, this one is quite poor.

There are strange fulminations in this essay, to be sure, but often they seem to arise from an incongruity of philosophical method and psychological observation, as when Schopenhauer indulges in a deeply weird mathematics of injustice reminiscent of the Lear syndrome: “I therefore lay down the following formula: The amount of injustice in my conduct is equal to that of the evil I thereby inflict on another divided by the amount of advantage I thereby obtain.” He has another formula for justice, equally incapable of actual solution. He does not appear to be kidding.

The value of this treatise lies in its reliance on psychology and empiricism for an examination of and accounting for moral behavior in everyday life. The grounding of ethics in a well-defined concept of compassion is an achievement that squares theory with experience; it is not, as Schopenhauer would say, an abstract concept waiting for thousands of years to be plucked from thin air.

It certainly feels a little odd to be reviewing a 155-year-old book, but as it is not commonly read and as it does constitute a serious contribution to the hotly contested nineteenth-century debate over the foundation of ethics, it seems pertinent to point out just what kinds of issues can be found in this now readily available edition. Schopenhauer is not usually accorded much attention in this arena, but this work deserves to be more widely read and known, at the very least as an antidote to the more famous Kant and his frequent obfuscations.

Auburn University

James P. Hammersmith

Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution. By Luce Irigaray.
Translated by Karin Montin. New York: Routledge, 1994. xviii
+ 113 pp. \$13.95, paper.

Luce Irigaray is best known in this country as the author of such classic French psychoanalytic studies as *Speculum of the Other Woman*

(1985), *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985), and such well-known and widely anthologized essays as "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" and "Women's Exile." These works are known for their linguistic fluidity, their flights of purposeful illogic, and their tendency to take stunning risks (one of which cost Irigaray her teaching appointment at a French university). Her most recent book, *Thinking the Difference*, continues in this tradition and consists of a series of four lectures she delivered in Italy under the auspices of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) from 1986 to 1989. These lectures reveal what seems to be the evolution of her incipient political consciousness, but one is forced to conclude after reading this book that Irigaray's grasp of political realities is weak at best.

The first essay, "A Chance to Live," was delivered in 1986 in response to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Russia. Irigaray uses the specter of nuclear meltdown to condemn "nature and war" because "at Chernobyl, nature turned out to be a vehicle of greater destruction than any war." Exactly how "nature" was at fault for Chernobyl she never explains, nor does she ever define "patriarchy," but she does not hesitate to blame this amorphous "patriarchy" for all the ills we now recognize in modern life. Thus we are told, "[t]his warlike method of organizing society is not self-evident. It has its origin in patriarchy. It has a sex"; "[p]atriarchal culture is based on sacrifice, crime and war"; "[w]omen are not genuinely responsible subjects in the patriarchal culture." All of these statements lead to Irigaray's thesis: "[t]he possibility of sex-specific cultural and political ethics is our best chance today." And by "sex-specific" Irigaray means "mother-daughter" defined. In this first essay Irigaray proposes to reform the "carnivorous," "cannibalistic" patriarchy she so despises by erecting statues of mothers and daughters together throughout the streets. On a more practical level, she proposes that genealogical lines of descent should be determined through the mother and that language should be made gender-neutral.

In her second essay, "How Do We Become Civil Women?", delivered two years later, Irigaray focuses on the importance of the mother to both boys and girls, the need to reform job titles for women, and once again the complicity of language in maintaining a power structure of oppression as codified in sex-specific identity and status. Irigaray is very exercised on the issue of language, and her most practical suggestion for language reform, based, she claims, on "little language tests" she administered to high school students, proposes

that the "mixed plural [noun form] will be masculine one year; feminine the next. The effects of this genuinely democratic process should be analysed in order to alter the inertia of linguistic norms." But if language is one of the evils in Irigaray's universe, so is patriarchal law. Irigaray proposes that the legal system should be changed, "enshrining in law virginity as a component of female identity that cannot be reduced to money, cannot in any way be converted into cash by the patriarchal family, state, or religion." Irigaray is convinced that fathers are selling their virgin daughters, and that this system of "traffic in women" undergirds the patriarchy's economic and political power.

In her third essay, "Civil Rights and Responsibilities for the Two Sexes," Irigaray dwells on the story of Antigone as a model for the strong rights and responsibilities that all women should possess in civil society. Focusing again on "real incest within the family," Irigaray proposes that the rights and duties of mothers should be increased toward their children: "Of course, fathers must keep some rights with regard to their children. But experience shows that their rights must not take priority, because many fathers abuse them or use them without fulfilling the corresponding duties."

In the final essay in the collection, "The Forgotten Mystery of Female Ancestry," Irigaray returns to the world of Greek myth to retell the fall of the matriarchy and the usurpation by the patriarchy, all of which actually occurred, she tells us, around the time of Jupiter. Human beings under matriarchy knew they were connected with the divine, but the patriarchy has severed that alliance and tried to convince human beings that they are basically animalistic. Freud comes in for a bashing here, as do Zeus and Hades. The heroine of Irigaray's mental universe appears to be Demeter, who managed with the help of Hecate to rescue her daughter Kore/Persephone from the underworld at least part of the year.

If I have failed to suggest the eccentricity of this book, I apologize. French feminism has long been controversial in this country (as well as throughout Europe) for promoting what has been labelled "phallomorphic logic"—or shall we say illogic? Trying to promote a politics of difference based on gender specificity would appear to be Irigaray's agenda in this slim volume. But her simplistic solutions, her naïve grasp of historical realities, and her heavy reliance on mythology make her suggestions untenable. This is someone who genuinely appears to have gained her knowledge of life through books; hence her

beliefs that she can set a few literary tropes or mythological characters against each other and that those moves mean anything in the real political world.

American feminists have been criticized by French feminists for failing to take into account the importance of psychoanalytical categories, while American feminists have castigated their French counterparts for their lack of experiential knowledge. I do not intend to fall into that quagmire, but surely when a French feminist attempts to propose real solutions to a Communist Party she ought to move beyond talk about statues, mystery religions, and a return to feminine noun forms. Finally, as a mother I am repelled by Irigaray's attitude toward motherhood. At one point she muses that "it is touching and anachronistic to see a pregnant woman," while at another point she talks about the need to nurture children, "cook, wash, keep house—all boring, repetitive tasks like the ones that some people pity labourers for doing." While ostensibly celebrating the mother-daughter tie, she finally comes out of the closet (so to speak) and admits her real attitude toward generation and the female body: "And when women are banished from love or dispossessed of it, when their divinity as lovers is forgotten, love once more becomes drives that verge on animality, disembodied sublimation of them, or death." In other words, if women cannot be goddesses or treated like goddesses, then they are nothing more than animals. This strange dichotomy—a version of the virgin/whore syndrome she condemns when she detects it in the patriarchy—is actually the basis of her own intellectual universe. Poor Luce.

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Diane Long Hoeveler

The Gothic Sublime. By Vijay Mishra. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. x + 342 pp. Npl.

"The Gothic, as we have seen, is a moment in literary history when realistic representations are questioned." So argues Vijay Mishra in this fine new book—ambitious in its purpose, wide in its range, and fairly fresh and original in its focus. While we've had an abundance of first-rate studies of the sublime—from Samuel Monk's pioneering *The Sublime*, to Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime*, to Neil Hertz's continuing work on the subject—and while Montagu