

Luce Irigaray

MARINE LOVER
OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

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BAPTISM OF THE SHADOW

And you had all to lose sight of me so I could come back, toward you, with an other gaze.

And, certainly, the most arduous thing has been to seal my lips, out of love. To close off this mouth that always sought to flow free.

But, had I never held back, never would you have remembered that something exists which has a language other than your own. That, from her prison, someone was calling out to return to the air. That your words reasoned all the better because within them a voice was captive. Amplifying your speech with an endless resonance.

I was your resonance.

Drum. I was merely the drum in your own ear sending back to itself its own truth.

And, to do that, I had to be intact. I had to be supple and stretched, to fit the texture of your words. My body aroused only by the sound of your bell.

Today I was this woman, tomorrow that one. But never the woman, who, at the echo, holds herself back. Never the beyond you are listening to right now.

Yes, yes, yes . . . I hear you. And I do not hear you. I am your hearing. Between you and yourself, I ensure the vocal medium. A perpetual relay between your mouth and your ear. Go on, I am singing your memory so that you do not fall into some abyss of forgetfulness.

How I should love you if to speak to you were possible.

And yet I still love you too well in my silence to remember the movement of my own becoming. Perpetually am I troubled, stirred, frozen, or smothered by the noise of your death.

The recollection of my birth still lies stifled under the din of your hate. Or the shroud of your indifference.

For, round and round, you keep on turning. Within yourself. Pushing out of your circle anything that, from elsewhere, remembers.

But I am coming back from far, far away. And say to you: your horizon has limits. Holes even.

You have always trapped me in your web and, if I no longer serve as your passage from back to front, from front to back, your time will let an other day dawn. Your world will unravel. It will flood out to other places. To that outside you have not wanted.

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Yes, I am coming back from far, far away. And my crime, at present, is my candor.

I am no longer the lining to your coat, your—faithful—understudy. Voicing your joys and sorrows, your fears and resentments. You had fashioned me into a mirror but I have dipped that mirror in the waters of oblivion—that you call life. And farther away than the place where you are beginning to be, I have turned back. I have washed off your masks and make up, scrubbed away your multicolored projections and designs, stripped off your veils and wraps that hid the shame of your nudity. I have even had to scrape my woman's flesh clean of the insignia and marks you had etched upon it.

That was the most painful hour. For you had so deeply implanted these things into me that almost nothing was left to recall me to the innocence of my life. Almost nothing to let me rediscover my own becoming beyond your sufferings. All that was left—barely—was a breath, a hint of air and blood that said: I want to live. And why should living always be misfortune? And why should I always be security for your misery? The test of your bad luck? If you care nothing for living, then death will be for you a surer place of eternal peace.

As for me, your death seems too base and miserly to satisfy my mobility. Your calculations and half-measures and half-shades make everything into little enclosures where anyone ceaselessly restless constantly bangs into the fence. My whole body is divided up into neatly ruled sections. Each of them allotted to one private owner or

another. Which belongs to whom?—shrieks such and such a part. And no one replied, for each man claimed the whole. If his whole comes to seem merely a part, then he no longer recognizes it and prefers to give up the whole so he can keep his dream safe and sound.

Since no one was answering "me," I felt free of obligation to anyone and found myself alone in strange country.

The whole was immense, and I knew that I should never fail to be able to go farther on. I had been taught that a woman who belonged to no one was nothing, and I laughed, I really laughed to hear such startling news. How surprising that I had believed them for so long.

Nothing? This whole that always and at every moment was thus becoming new? Nothing? This endless coming into life at each moment? Nothing? This whole that had laid by the mantle of long sleep and was reviving all my senses? Nothing, this unfathomable well?

How could they have been so wrong? Was it deliberate? Absolutely? Only half? Why? And would the gold of their setting sun help me find the strength to say to them: here is the future, in that past that you never wanted. If I melt their gold into light, might they then open their eyes to see a new day dawning?

How to get them beyond their love of gold? To get them to see beyond gold? Is life ever given in exchange for gold? And if indeed one must dig the land in order to put down roots, if a man persists in changing into gold the lode that he finds, is it not death that he worships?

And when I had laughed at your weapons of death, then (I) came out of the earth, and my eyes lit up.

☆

Different bodies, that no doubt makes the likeness. For, in the other, how is one to find oneself except by also throwing one's self-same (son même) there? And, between you (tu)* and me, will there not always be this film that keeps us apart?

If you were to gaze on yourself in me, and if in you also I could find my reflection, then those dreams would unlimit our spaces. But

*At this point the speaking subject addresses a masculine "tu" as opposed to the masculine "vous" of the opening section.—Tr.

if I keep your images and you refuse to give me back mine, your self-same (ton même) is but a prison. Love of you but a paralysis. The moving universe of our entwining mirages becomes the mirroring outline of your world. The mists rising from our encounters become a cloud blotting out the sun, blocking off the horizon.

The sun? What sun? And why should it hide the sun from us unless it is the same sun that you have taken over as the projector of your circle?

But this torch, your lamp, makes shadow. Even (même) at noon. Even/self (même) seeing itself. Your noon leaves in the darkness the other side of the earth, and its inside, and the depths of the sea.

Does your noon itself not have an other side? Do you see behind your sun? What does your sun illumine that is added or taken away from the fullness of your hour?

And are there no other stars more brilliant than a sun? Where are those fires burning at the time of your highest light?

And why weariness and sorrow at the most perfect hour of your day? Whence comes the evil that you should fret over past or future? So bitter and hesitant, despite the wonders you flaunt. As you steady yourself and hang on tightly to the shore to be sure of a peaceful haven.

Might your hour be only that of sleep? Might you have been gone too long to want anything but to nod off at high noon?* Eyes open, and the soul alert.

But the soul is long and weary, as on the evening of a seventh day. Stretched thin and forced to stretch out thinner yet over her ages, and now anxious simply to melt into the shadow of the silence of the earth.

Lips closed but puckered as of one who doesn't yet know if he still can wish, who is still hanging on by some thread to his old anchor-age.

An old noon your hour is, and the sun has to give his all for a single drop to be drunk from it. From so high and so far and with

* In translating this passage I have relied in some measure on Walter Kaufman's rendering of the "At Noon" section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 387-390 in *The Portable Nietzsche* (Penguin Books, 1954).—Tr.

such force must he beat down if the taste of a single moment is again to be savored. Quite separate from the feasts and plenty of old.

For the taste is spoiled by an excess of good things. Little is enough to one who knows how to live. The smallest of trifles is surely wealth to one learning not to love gold. Surely the lightest, liveliest caress means more than thick layers of hoarded possessions. Is this not so?

But to help you make such finds you have only the breath of air still allowed at the fullness of noon. That still touches you and makes you shiver in the still circle of the height of your day. That perfect round you stand in. Were it not for that invisible breeze that still moves in and around your heavy noon, who would pull you out of your deep, deep dreams? From your well of eternity?

Only a breath of wind needs to stir and your perfection is ready to vanish. Such is your highest hour.

And are your legs not too old now to run after perfection? Too weak to chase her down? Which way?

If your heart is broken, is it not better for you to go back to sleep than dare to wake up? In order to live that half of eternity still left you.

Yes, of course, better the whole than the half. And better to give your soul back to the abyss of noon than to share your hour, if she can gulp you down into her eternity.

But how to turn back, and as a (female) whole, into that from which one comes? For either your soul loses its wondrous roundness, or the place of turning back is merely a bottomless well.



You fold the membrane between us in your own way. Either it is right side up and thrust out, or turned faltering back into yourself. For holes mean only the abyss to you. And the further out you project yourself, the farther you fall. There is nothing to stop your penetration outside yourself—nothing either more or less. Unless I am there.

The membrane was not yours to have. We formed it together. And if you want it for yourself, you make a hole in it just because I lack any part. And don't you make God out of that absence?

But if your God dies, how keen is your distress. Endless is your

To write that "from the very first nothing is more foreign . . . to woman than truth," and then that "her great art is falsehood, her chief concern is appearance and beauty" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 232)* is surely to say the same thing twice, with the exception that one word has been forgotten the second time, the word *foreign*.

Neither falsehood nor appearance and beauty are "foreign" to truth. They are proper to it, if not its accessories and its underside. And the opposite remains caught up in the same. It grounds the economy—or economy—of sameness. With a flip of the coin, it forms the basis for its representations. Foreign, for its part, beckoned toward an outside. But it was *forgotten*.

Mimesis is not to be outflanked this way. Certainly not by "woman"—double. Her only function is to go along with the movement, clothing it well or badly, but letting it develop freely, undistorted. By "femininity" least of all.

But woman? Is not to be reduced to mere femininity. Or to falsehood, or appearance or beauty. Short of staying out of it, (*idem*, p. 232)† and projecting at (from) a distance that other of the self to which truth is, from the outset, hostile: falsehood, as well as beauty and appearance. . . . Although femaleness has taken it/them as part of her forms, although she cannot do without it/them if she is to pass for what is: the truth.

This operation also will be attributed to woman. Or is it to femininity? As a preparation for "woman." Who may be said to play with it as with a setting, framing, mounting, glazing. Until the time

* Quotations from Nietzsche's works are made from the following translations: *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufman (Random House, Modern Library Giant, 1968); *The Gay Science, with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, translated with a commentary by Walter Kaufman (Random House, Vintage Books, 1974); *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by Francis Golting (Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956); *The Twilight of the Idols in The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufman (Penguin Books, 1954); *Daybreak*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1982).—Tr.

† In the French translation, "rester entre soi."—Tr.

she? gets out? If in fact she ever plays. But so many things are attributed to whoever remains foreign to self-definition. Who risks—the abyss. If that stays a little while, without return to the same.

Hence the comedy of the other. Another aspect of its performance that truth does not always appreciate: the comic. To attribute this to the other is once again to clothe it in a mask, but meanwhile reserve the right to make use of it from time to time. To take back, when the moment or the desire demands, something that is never given except as a loan. That can therefore be used freely, without incurring any debt. It was only held in trust.

The problems arise when the body by which this guarantee of dissimulation is ensured is in some way reactive. As is the case with “our hysterical little women,” for example, It is as well not to count on them for that affirmative dissimulation which seduces and plays the truth. Their feeling of resentment spoils “our” appearances.

How can one recognize oneself in their writhings and grimaces without being repelled? These are scarcely even caricatures of a work of art. When you come right down to it, it’s phony, false, fake, deceptive, etc. And undisguisedly so.

Mastery asserts itself by skirting such a naked obscenity. A disgrace to the whole theater of representation. Irreducible contortion of a nature mimicking the residue of a properly staged mimicry. Why do women, our women, lie so poorly?

And how is one to get through that absence of veils: horror. Immodest display of the mummified remains of the Dionysiac. Not those/its excesses overflowing in the Apollonian festival, but that extra element from before—and from “the fraternal union of the two deities” (*Birth of Tragedy*, p. 21)—that suffers from being cut into pieces by individuation even though it has never known completeness. Dispersal into fragments that do not tear apart unity, and can therefore never be put back together.

Except in the phantasy of the other. Of the same. Its veil(s). And what “operation” will cut through that cloth—phantasy? The “production” of another phantasy? Another phantasy of the other? Attributed to the other? Of the same. Male/female in its depth/superficiality according to the way they want to deck it out. So that the inside or the outside can be laid down or laid away in it. According to the pleasure or the pain that is wished for, the death wish that will be celebrated, at one moment in history.

Thus, if error becomes the “truth” of pleasure, the “idea” becomes woman. Woman becomes the possibility of a “different” idea, which amounts to a store of strength. “The eternal feminine” moves away, goes into exile in another representation: that will find pathos in the crucifixion of Christ, that scion of Dionysos.

“(Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible—it *becomes female*, it becomes Christian.)” (“How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable. The History of an Error,” in *The Twilight of the Idols*.) This point is made with special emphasis by being tucked away—perhaps necessarily here?—behind brackets. One kind of distancing that pins down the feminine in a display. Woman, even Christ, would merely serve as dummies to be clothed in the finery needed to capture the pleasure of the idea. When she was too cold, she was boring; when too synonymous with being, she no longer left any place for the perceptible; too theoretical, she neutralized even the *pathos* of death. . . . Something red was lacking, a hint of blood and guts to revive the will, and restore its strength. A wound. Which however will only be opened up in its representation from within that extra setting: the brackets.

The articulation of two repetitions, of two different circles around the re-beginning, isn’t this always, and still, the way a sign is made? And is “woman”—plus femininity—anything but that residue of ideas that, once it has been doubly wrapped up, serves to capture doing as sign?

This may be read as: she gives herself out to be: what she is not.* This operation would be implied in the game of the other. Of the same. Interpreted in this way, she stakes him in a new game without his needing to borrow from the kitty. And therefore go into debt, risk losing. Mastery. Which the other (of the same) threatens him with. From afar, given the way he is placed at a distance by the economy of truth.

How to defend oneself from an adversary who is so subtly absent? The danger is dizzying in its deceit. How to finance the death of one’s other? Since one is master only at that price, which is not even really paid. By oneself. And the other, in its mirage, threatens only by a recall of what one has secretly confided to its care: this deposit of death. That the master needed. But not for self.

And if he once had made the tour of his properties, and found

*In the French, “elle se donne pour.”—Tr.