

CONCLUSION

It has been my aim in this study to show that Irigaray's claim that a female divine is necessary if women are to become subjects poses numerous complex and interesting intellectual challenges. Hence, I have read her philosophy of sexual difference through the question of the divine. I have attempted to demonstrate the significance of the divine for any understanding of her thought and its relevance at each stage of her work. In the process I have put forward a reading of Irigaray as a universalist thinker who desires to bring about an era of sexual difference structured by two sexed divines, the feminine and the masculine. While not refuting her philosophy of sexual difference, I have criticized the feasibility of its realization through universalist divines.

This criticism relates to the further challenge we must confront with any philosopher of change, which is the dynamic element of their thought that anticipates or demands the evolution of history. Ever since Marx there has been a tendency to demand the freedom of critical thought from the lure of intellectualism and to give it some concrete relevance in the world. Yet so often the apparent freedom of engagement with the world has meant that thinkers settle on inhabiting the cul-de-sacs of conventional wisdom. Luce Irigaray is a thinker who remains steadfastly committed to pursuing the pathways of her one poem — the necessity of sexual difference — but who persistently creates imaginative new worlds of thought. Thus my emphasis has been to show that she is a radical and distinctive philosopher of sexual difference within the phenomenological, dialectical and psychoanalytical traditions, best appreciated in the context of contemporary French thought as a whole. Her philosophy does not automatically fit into the anglophone debates on essentialism, however useful the appropriation of her work has been to those debates. As a universalist thinker, her thought manifests much of the sweeping grandiosity characteristic of French tradition which demands the articulation of structure before the fact and appears to fly in the face of the insistent and sometimes wearisome empirical complexities of 'life' itself. Yet the insistence upon complexity in her writing leads many to bemoan it, a criticism which suggests that some are content with a thought that is more readily accessible than 'reality', thus perhaps reducing critical thought to conventional habitats.

Given the breadth and scope of Irigaray's thought, I have attempted to emphasize its relevance to questions pertaining to the cultural order and its 'economy'. Her critique need not be restricted to textual analyses, however valuable

these may be, since it has the potential to inform social and cultural investigations in the most general sense. Hence, I set out Irigaray's analysis of patriarchy as an economy guaranteed by divine value in the masculine which has pretensions to a single universality. Her analysis is unequivocal: patriarchy is an appropriative order that erases value in the feminine by denying the potential feminine subject and using her as matter or body for its idealized productions. This is a structural argument, one that admits the evolution of structure in history and therefore cannot be considered ahistorical. Again, in keeping with a certain philosophical tradition, Irigaray's own work lacks the specificity of historical analyses, yet it could provide the structures and parameters for historical investigations. The outcome of these investigations need not necessarily concur with all of Irigaray's own conclusions. For example, my own view that she believes feminine value to be less undecidable than immanent in patriarchy is a question that might yield an informative study in a more specific context. However, my assessment of Irigaray's analysis stresses her acceptance of the categories of masculinity and femininity within patriarchy and their necessity to her philosophy of sexual difference, thus such categories would constitute the essential elements of any investigation undertaken in pursuance of her thought. It is to be hoped that as the full implications of a philosophy of sexual difference filter through, further studies will be undertaken which take seriously its implications even if the question of its truth is suspended rather than accepted.

Irigaray's own response to her critique of patriarchy has been to call for a female divine, which is a call for the *creation* of a female universal to found a culture between women and to enable the possibility of exchange between them. This is very much a response informed by a philosophical analysis steeped in the history of philosophy, as I stressed in examining her use of Feuerbach to support her call. It is an open question whether Western audiences are prepared to listen to such a call given its tone of religiosity; in Italy, at least, religious language does not appear to be a barrier to her thought. Irigaray is not a populist, however, and for her the requirements of a language of truth will always surpass any attempt to pre-empt the demands of a mass audience. This is evidenced in the dialectical model of sexual difference she proposes which is at once imaginative and rigorous, attempting to further Hegelian thought in the name of sexual difference. Her model of sexual difference as a model of two sexed divines involving two absolute others is, I believe, a truly radical attempt to bypass the one and the many. I also believe that it provides a useful key to understanding her thought as a rhythm of two rather than a separatism or multiplicity. However, any response to this model

must be informed by an assessment of the utopianism of Irigaray's notion of love, and the question of whether the two can truly have a dialectical relationship without sharing a single term of mediation. The latter is, perhaps, a matter of technical philosophical debate; the former less so, although a decision on either is ultimately as much a matter of history as of debate *per se*. Certainly, any informed debate here would be premised upon a particular understanding of history as an evolutionary process. In this respect, I have cast doubt upon the privilege Irigaray appears to attribute to the feminine, not only as the apparently favoured mode for articulating the model of sexual difference itself but also as an 'agent' for bringing it about. Even if history will decide this matter, my argument remains that this privilege threatens to undermine her philosophy of sexual difference as a model of absolute otherness.

Irigaray's own proposals for female ideals to bring about the female divine will provide fertile ground for thought and in some cases, for action. I have in this study indicated my fascination with her re-interpretations of Christianity, as well as my unease with her use of the Christian tradition in the context of attempting to create *universal* symbols of a female divine. In this respect, I am drawn to Nietzsche's arguments against the universality of the Christian God to support my doubts regarding the feasibility of universal sexed divines. My principal concern is the ineluctably general nature of these universals, of which the ideal of virginity is a case in point. However, given the historical importance of virginity, differently defined, across many cultures, it would be interesting to consider further Irigaray's proposal as a general ideal. Nevertheless, it is my belief that any potentially universal ideal will reveal the particularity of a given culture, which is evident in Irigaray's choice of Mary as a symbol of the divine for women, for example. No universal can be anything but particular. The debate to be pursued in this case is how far this confounds the claims of universality intrinsic to Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference.

Irigaray has interpreted the figure of Christ as a bridge to an era of sexual difference in which women will find their female divine value and men their incarnation at last. These divines would be passionate and intimate for the subject and her or his other. While many may balk at such a spiritual discourse, and others still may reject its spirituality as heretical or even atheist, it needs to be emphasized that Irigaray's divine are ideals that aim to give people a place in the world as men or women. Her philosophy is, in this respect, admirably positive and creative; it stands out against modern rationalism, ultra-modern multiplicity and *fin de siècle* pessimism. It would undoubtedly be fruitful if Irigaray's aim to create a creative discourse and debate regarding

possible divine ideals were to commence. Yet whether the feminine can bear the weight of historical responsibility Irigaray attributes to 'her' remains to be seen. The feminine can only engender sexual difference by always leaving space for the absolute otherness of the other — an awesome task. It may be that Mary and her feminine value are themselves bridges within Irigaray's model of sexual difference which will constitute a bridge to another era of sexual difference as yet unimaginable. Certainly, I do not believe that to cast doubt upon the feasibility of Irigaray's proposals for sexed, divine ideals is to reject the fundamental nature of sexual difference. However, it seems unlikely that such ideals could be realized as actual universals and more likely that they will take shape in accordance with a multitude of cultural traditions. Yet this issue is one which the question of the divine attempts to open rather than resolve, for any realization must be historical as well as theoretical. The potential of the opening is there because for Irigaray the divine is a becoming that is always becoming.