

Women, Knowledge, and Reality

Explorations in Feminist Philosophy

second edition

edited by

Ann Garry

Marilyn Pearsall

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past and present*

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Preface

We hope that this collection will be useful to students and instructors in philosophy and women's studies as well as to members of the larger community who still wonder what feminist metaphysics and theory of knowledge could be. As we selected new essays for the second edition, we were mindful of the need to have a range of articles suitable for both introductory courses in philosophy and upper-division courses in feminist theory and in philosophy. Because the field of feminist philosophy has become increasingly complex, a few of the essays may be difficult for introductory students. However, the wider range of topics and approaches made possible by the inclusion of these essays will enrich the study of more advanced readers.

The scope and organization of the papers remain the same in the second edition. We continue to focus on western philosophical traditions, emphasizing contemporary issues. Although many of the authors use historical figures in their discussions, only Genevieve Lloyd's piece on Descartes has an historical focus. We also again exclude essays that are primarily concerned with ethics, social and political philosophy, or other fields of value theory.¹ Of course, many of the authors relate their subject matter to ethics and politics, as one might expect from feminist philosophers.

As signposts for students, we have retained the use of the names of traditional fields of philosophy in section titles and organized our introductory material by fields. We hope that by reading both the general introduction and the introductory material at the beginning of each section, readers will be aided in their appreciation of the many ways in which feminist philosophers are transforming various fields of philosophy.

Instructors organizing courses around topics or themes, whether in women's studies or in philosophy, will find clusters of articles on a theme both within individual sections (for example, the self in both Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind/Body) and also throughout the collection. Consider the following topics: **Subjectivity:** Scheman, Ferguson, Code, Butler, Lugones, Irigaray; **Social Construction:** Scheman, Haslanger, Ferguson, Collins, Nelson, Butler, Bordo; **Rationality:** Lloyd, Jaggar, Code, Shiva, Tanesini; **Emotions:** Lloyd, Jaggar, Lugones; **Differences:** Scheman, Frye, hooks, Torres, Collins, Tanesini, Butler, Lugones; **Iden-**

7. See Herbert G. Gutman as cited in Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Values: A Black Point of View* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 62.
8. Grant, "Black Theology and The Black Woman," 422.
9. Grant, "Black Theology and The Black Woman," 422.
10. James B. Nelson has made extensive use of the concepts of "sexist and spiritualistic dualism" in *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1976). See especially Chapter Three. I have attempted to turn his categories into explicit reflection on Black sexual experience.
11. See John Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion* (New York: Orbis, 1975) and *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970) for further connections made on the nexus between Black spirituality and an integral world-view.
12. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Women, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975), Chapter Five.
13. Grant, "Black Theology and The Black Woman," 422.
14. Eldridge Cleaver, as quoted by Robert Bellah in *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 105.
15. See John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1969), for additional emphasis on the integration of African lifestyles and value systems: epistemology and axiology.
16. Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Racism* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), 197.
17. Aylward Shorter, ed., *African Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 47.
18. James H. Evans Jr., "Black Theology and Black Feminism," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 38 (Spring-Summer, 1982), 52.
19. Jeanne Noble, *Beautiful Are The Souls of My Black Sisters* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 343.
20. Sojourner Truth, as quoted by Olive Gilbert in *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1970), 46–48.
21. Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 43. The *Narrative* also relates Sojourner's affection for her friend Jesus in detail, 48–52, 119–22, and elsewhere.
22. Mary E. Hunt, "... A Feminist Theology of Friendship," in *A Challenge to Love*, ed. Robert Nugent (New York: Crossroads, 1983), 153.
23. Alice Walker, "While Love is Unfashionable," in *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 68. In an interview the author indicates that this poem was written during the period of her marriage to a white man and while they lived in a southern state with laws against miscegenation. I have used the same poem to encapsulate the difficulties and devotion entailed in the love expressed by Black women and men for each other. Although the applications of the poem differ, the larger context in which Walker explains her Black feminist freedom to love in her own fashion and with whom she chooses does not appear to be violated.

Chapter 25

Divine Women

Luce Irigaray

translated by Gillian C. Gill

Writing *Marine Lover*, *Passions élémentaires* and *L'oubli de l'air*,* I had thought of doing a study of our relations to the elements: water, earth, fire, air. I was anxious to go back to those natural matters that constitute the origin of our bodies, of our life, of our environment, the flesh of our passions. I was obeying a deep, dark, and necessary intuition, dark even when it is shared by other thoughts.

But, as I read *Melusine* for the first time and reread "The Little Mermaid" and other stories,¹ I discovered some of the reasons that led me to consider our relationship to sea, air, earth, fire. I understand now that this relationship has never been decoded and has therefore remained a matter of fables and monsters (particularly in the etymological meaning of the word), revealing and hiding something of our identity, of the difficulties we have in situating ourselves in relation to ourselves and to our fellows, something of the dramas and spells that captivate us, capture us, bind us, and separate us.

We still pass our daily lives in a universe that is composed and is known to be composed of four elements: air, water, fire, and earth. We are made up of these elements and we live in them. They determine, more or less freely, our attractions, our affects, our passions, our limits, our aspirations.

These elements, which, since the beginning of philosophy, have been a focus of meditation of every creation of a world, have often been misunderstood in our culture, which has tended to refuse to think about the material conditions of existence. Poetry recalls the elements, as does science in a different way—endlessly defining new material particles that compose us and form our environment without our naming them or perceiving them, at least consciously. Our so-called

* Of these three books, only the first has been published in English: *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, translated by Gillian C. Gill, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.—Tr.

human sciences and our day-to-day speech steer clear of the elements, moving forward through and with a language that forgets the matter it names and by means of which it speaks. Traces and remains of the elements are often laid down in myths and folk tales as *mysteries*, those stories of birth, initiation, love, war, death, and passion delivered in images and actions with all innocence of knowledge. Such affections have yet to be decoded, thought through, interpreted, not as a "failure" but rather as a stage in history.

Melusine is a love story in both its private and public dimensions. It corresponds to a stage in our imaginary that is still thoroughly relevant. The passions are a matter of fire and ice, of light and darkness, of water and drowning, of earth and finding or losing one's footing, and of breathing in the deepest and most secret aspects of life. Our passions are transformed or transform us into phenomena that can be watery or heavenly, solar or volcanic, blazing with light or lost in shadow, throbbing or dozing. . . . All this is conjured up for us by the cosmic cycles or the signs of the zodiac whose present mode connects with certain moments of interpretation and mutation in history—certain identity crises experienced by humanity and the world. Is it not true that in this age of sophisticated technical apparatus we still frequently turn to the Middle Ages in search of our images and secrets?

Is this because we still need a little time to dream? Or does it point to a driving need to elaborate the opacity of the subject, woman in particular, God in particular? When we question the mystery of the image and all that hides behind it, are we not in fact investigating the transmutational or transfigurational states that may be represented therein, may be figured therein without expressing the totality of a native, natal secret that is always bound up with *touch*? Fish, bird, of course! But what lies hidden behind these partial incarnations, these monstrously composite women, or indeed men, these stages in a becoming that must never be seen or unveiled either in their *physical nudity* in the wife's case, or in their *lineage* in the husband's, since the total consummation of the marriage never takes place.

These marriages—mandatory for saving the one or the other, the one and the other, in corporeal or genealogic destiny, living form or name—always remain *conditional*. No doubt, they perform a symbolic and social function. They procreate children, construct castles, cultivate the earth, build cities. All the same, love in these tales is always star-crossed. Neither flesh, nor spirit, nor body, nor name are allied, generated, regenerated, allowed to flourish. *Melusine* and the myths of the same family—particularly those of the *Chevalier au cygne* (swan knight)—enact this veiled drama of the woman's corporeal avatar and the man's symbolic avatar still separated in the consummation of their wedding.

If we look seriously at this composite and provisional incarnation of man and woman we are brought back to the sense that underlies all the other four senses, that exists or insists in them all, our first sense and the one that constitutes all our

living space, all our environment: the sense of *touch*. This is the sense that travels with us from the time of our material conception to the height of our celestial grace, lightness, or glory. We have to return to touch if we are to comprehend where touch became frozen in its passage from the most elemental to the most sophisticated part of its evolution. This will mean that we need to stay both firm and mobile in our cathexes, always faithful, that is, to the dimension of touch.

We regress and we progress, way beyond all sense of sight, from the most primitive to the subtlest realm of the tactile. Everything is given to us by means of touch, a mediation that is continually forgotten. Anything that emerges into the visible realm, the images of man and the world, remains for awhile in history, but this visual birth does not fulfill all our native potentialities. The figures that have put on fleshly form have not said, not expressed all that there is to be said about the power of incarnation. In the enigmas formed by the popular or the literary imagination, in the monsters produced by culture, we may seek a sense of the darkest part of our becoming, which is the most deeply tactile.

Surely man favors the visual because it marks his exit from the life in the womb? His victory over the maternal power and his opportunity to overcome a mother whom he experiences as amorphous, formless, a pit, a chasm in which he risks losing his form?

Melusine is clearly a story about the relationship to the mother, and mother nature, and how she fits into society. This myth, like "The Little Mermaid," presents us with the passage from *life in the womb* to *life in the air*: a life situated in ambiguous relations to a society of couples who give birth to offspring but have difficulty with *love*. Because we are still half-fish, half-birds? Not yet women, born women (or men, in fact)? Not yet human and divine? Two that go in parallel. This also means that there are no couples, or very few, who are fertile in any but the strictly bodily sense. Which explains the fact that mothers and fathers are always facing a dilemma, are forever paralyzed by duties that are not the core of our destiny, which is to generate the human, the divine, within us and among us.

How are we to understand the stages taken, the delays suffered in our progress to become divine women—half creatures of sea, half creatures of air—stages that in fact are followed by the representations of the trinitary God (father, son-fish, spirit-bird)?²

When we take a close look at the myth of *Melusine*, its range of diffusion, its different versions, we are in fact investigating something that attracts us, fascinates us even, like a mystery, a key to our identity.

I am far from suggesting that today we must once again deify ourselves as did our ancestors with their animal totems, that we have to regress to siren goddesses, who fight against men gods. Rather I think we must not merely instigate a return to the *cosmic*, but also ask ourselves why we have been held back from becoming *divine women*.

It is important for us to remember that we have to respect nature in its cycles, its life, its growth; it is important for us to recall that events in history, that History itself, *cannot and must not conceal cosmic events and rhythms*. But all this must be done in the context of entering further into womanhood, not moving backwards. If we resist hierarchies (the man/woman hierarchy, or state/woman, or a certain form of God/woman, or machine/woman), only to fall back into the power (*pouvoir*) of nature/woman, animal/woman, even matriarchs/women, women/women, we have not made much progress. Even as we respect the universe as one of our most vital and cultural dimensions, as one of the macrocosmic keys to our microcosm, we must thereby enter further into womanhood, and not become more alien to ourselves than we were, more in exile than we were.

. . .

Man is able to exist because God helps him to define his gender (*genre*), helps him orient his finiteness by reference to infinity. The revival of religious feeling can in fact be interpreted as the rampart man raises in defense of his very maleness.

To posit a gender, a God is necessary: *guaranteeing the infinite*.³ Science does not have the capacity to be constantly positing the infinite of the finite. In fact it is little concerned with positing the finite of the infinite. Science makes limits by closing things off. Thereby banning becoming? Willfully? Or does science have no will? A science that has no subject assumes a theory or a vision of the world that has *no will*.

Are we able to go on living if we have no will? This seems impossible. We have to will. It is necessary, not for our morality, but for our life. It is the condition of our becoming. In order to will, we have to have a goal. The goal that is most valuable is to go on *becoming*, infinitely.

In order to become, it is essential to have a gender or an essence (consequently a sexuate essence) as *horizon*. Otherwise, becoming remains partial and subject to the subject. When we become parts or multiples without a future of our own this means simply that we are leaving it up to the other, or the Other of the other, to put us together.

To become means fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being. Obviously, this road never ends. Are we more perfect than in the past? This is not certain. Could this be because woman has no gender through which she can become? And man, clearly, is able to complete his essence only if he claims to be separate as a *gender*. If he has no existence in his gender, he lacks his relation to the infinite and, in fact, to finiteness.

To avoid that finiteness, man has sought out a unique *male* God. God has been created out of man's gender. He scarcely sets limits within Himself and between Himself: He is father, son, spirit. Man has not allowed himself to be

defined by another gender: the female. His unique God is assumed to correspond to the human race (*genre humain*), which we know is not neuter or neuter from the point of view of the difference of the sexes.

It is true that Christianity tells us that God is in three persons, three manifestations, and that the third stage of the manifestation occurs as *a wedding between the spirit and the bride*. Is this supposed to inaugurate the divine for, in, with women? The female?

Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine. There comes a time for destruction. But, before destruction is possible, God or the gods must exist.

If women have no God, they are unable either to communicate or commune with one another. They need, we need, an infinite if they are to share *a little*. Otherwise sharing implies fusion-confusion, division, and dislocation within themselves, among themselves. If I am unable to form a relationship with some horizon of accomplishment for my gender, I am unable to share while protecting my becoming.

Our theological tradition presents some difficulty as far as God in the feminine gender is concerned. There is no *woman* God, no female trinity: mother, daughter, spirit. This paralyzes the infinite of becoming a woman since she is fixed in the role of mother through whom the *son* of God is made flesh. The most influential representation of God in our culture over the last two thousand years has been a male trinitary God and a virgin mother: a mother of the son of God whose alliance with the father is given little consideration. Is she the wife? By what mediation? The spirit? Who is represented as an angel, a young man, or a bird? The virgin's relations with the Father always remain in the shadow. Just as the Father himself? Her relations with the spirit are presented a number of times: the annunciation and the Pentecost, at the very least. The angel (plus bird in the habitual iconography) and the fire would seemingly be the representatives or vehicles of the spirit.

Is the angel of the Annunciation an appearance of the Father (as well as of the spirit)? Coming to visit and announce the virgin's fertile condition. But the Father is not single. He is three. The virgin is alone of her sex. Without a daughter or love between them, without a way of becoming divine except through her son: God-man, without a divine bridegroom. Unless we have known only two stages in western culture and the third, the stage of the spirit and the wedding with the bride, has yet to come.

Would this correspond to what the astrologers announce as the stage of science? Which stage? And this era is prefigured or prophesied in the Old and the New Testament.

If this were the case, women would have some reason to be interested in religion, in science, in the relations between them, since women are represented as receivers of the spirit and not just as rather malformed monsters: manifestations of the eras of transitions, between this incarnation and some other.

. . .

The love of God has often been a haven for women. They are the guardians of the religious tradition. Certain women mystics have been among those rare women to achieve real social influence, notably in politics.

Religion marks the place of the absolute *for us*, its path, the hope of its fulfillment. All too often that fulfillment has been postponed or transferred to some transcendental time and place. It has not been interpreted as the infinite that resides within us and among us, the god in us, the Other for us, becoming with and in us—as yet manifest only through his creation (the Father), present in his form (the son), mediator between the two (spirit). Here the capital letter designates the horizon of fulfillment of a gender, not a transcendent entity that exists outside becoming.

This God, are we capable of imagining it as a woman? Can we dimly see it as the perfection of our subjectivity? Which assumes respect for these two dimensions: the nocturnal-internal dimension of motherhood, whose threshold is closed during gestation and opened (too wide?) for and after birthing; the dimension between darkness and light occupied by the female, whose threshold is always half open, in-finite. The becoming of women is never over and done with, is always in gestation. A woman's subjectivity must accommodate the dimensions of mother and lover as well as the union between the two.

Our tradition presents and represents the radiant glory of the mother, but rarely shows us a fulfilled woman. And it forces us to make murderous choices: either mother (given that a *boy* child is what makes us truly mothers) or woman (prostitute and property of the male). We have no female trinity. But, as long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming. Woman scatters and becomes an agent of destruction and annihilation because she has no other of her own that she can become.

The (male) ideal other has been imposed upon women by men. Man is supposedly woman's more perfect other, her model, her essence. The most human and the most divine goal woman can conceive is to become *man*. If she is to become woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of *her* subjectivity.

The impotence, the formlessness, the deformity associated with women, the way they are equated with something other than the human and split between

the human and the inhuman (half-woman, half-animal), their duty to be adorned, masked, and made up, etc., rather than being allowed *their own* physical, bodily beauty, their own skin, their own form(s), all this is symptomatic of the fact that women lack a female god who can open up the perspective in which *their* flesh can be transfigured.

The only diabolical thing about women is their lack of a God and the fact that, deprived of God, they are forced to comply with models that do not match them, that exile, double, mask them, cut them off from themselves and from one another, stripping away their ability to move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfillment.

. . .

Women have rarely used their beauty as a weapon *for themselves*, even more rarely as a *spiritual* weapon. The body's splendor has rarely been used as a lever to advance self-love, self-fulfillment.

Maternal beauty has been glorified in our religious and social traditions, but womanly beauty for centuries has been seen merely as a trap for the other. The transfiguration of a female body by beauty, the active share that the woman can have in that transfiguration, are today often misunderstood. Perhaps they have been forgotten. Beauty is not presented or represented as the spiritual predicate of the flesh. Yet, it is not impossible to imagine that a body can be, can above all become, intelligent or stupid, that our relation to corporeal love can be actively aesthetic or passively abject, reduced: for example, to a pseudoanimality (animals themselves are beautiful in their sexual displays; bestial is an animal quality negatively attributed to man) or to motherhood, with its associations to bodily deformity and the link often made between it and chastity.

Female beauty is always considered a *garment* ultimately designed to attract the other into the self. It is almost never perceived as a manifestation of, an appearance by a phenomenon expressive of interiority—whether of love, of thought, of flesh. We look at ourselves in the mirror to *please someone*, rarely to interrogate the state of our body or our spirit, rarely for ourselves and in search of our own becoming. The mirror almost always serves to reduce us to a pure exteriority—of a very particular kind. It functions as a possible way to constitute screens between the other and myself. In a way quite different from the mucous membranes or the skin that serve as living, porous, fluid media to achieve communion as well as difference, the mirror is a frozen—and polemical—weapon to keep us apart. I give only my double up to love. I do not yield myself up as body, flesh, as immediate—and geological, genealogical—affects. The mirror signifies the constitution of a fabricated (female) other that I shall put forward as an

instrument of seduction in my place. I seek to be seductive and to be content with images of which I theoretically remain the artisan, the artist. I have yet to unveil, unmask, or veil myself *for me*—to veil myself so as to achieve self-contemplation, for example, to let my gaze travel over myself so as to limit my exposure to the other and repossess my own gestures and garments, thus nestling back into my vision and contemplation of myself. Which is not a kind of cold narcissism but rather a way that, as an adult, I can supplement and support the different houses, the different bodies that have borne me, wrapped me, rocked me, embraced me, enlaced me. The mirror, and indeed the gaze, are frequently used as weapons or tools that ward off touching and hold back fluidity, even the liquid embrace of the gaze.

Though necessary at times as a separating tool, the mirror—and the gaze when it acts as a mirror—ought to remain a means and not an end that enforces my obedience. The mirror should support, not undermine my incarnation. All too often it sends back superficial, flat images. There are other images that generate volume better than the reflection in the glass. To work at beauty is at least as much a matter of working at gestures as they relate to space and to other people as it is a matter of gazing, usually in anxiety, at one's mirror. The mirror freezes our becoming breath, our becoming space. Our becoming bird, perhaps? Though it may at times help us to emerge, to move out of the water, the mirror blocks our energies, freezes us in our tracks, clips our wings. What protects me from the other and allows me to move toward him or her is more often the settling of a space, an enclave of air rather than the interposition of mirrors and glasses whose cutting edge all too often threatens to turn against me. Once we have left the *waters* of the womb, we have to construct a space for ourselves in the *air* for the rest of our time on earth—air in which we can breathe and sing freely, in which we can perform and move at will. Once we were fishes. It seems that we are destined to become birds. None of this is possible unless the air opens up freely to our movements.

To construct and inhabit our airy space is essential. It is the space of bodily autonomy, of free breath, free speech and song, of performing on the stage of life. We still are not *born women*. We are still and always guardians of the phylogensis of the human race (with man, on the other hand, guarding its ontogenesis?), we are still and always between different incarnations, and devoted to the task of assisting man in his incarnation: a terrestrial and marine place for man's conception and gestation, with the mother feeding him, guiding his steps, fostering his growth, aiding him to develop in relation to his established gender, his Man-God. Thus women are traditionally the guardians of the multiform embryo, of the growing child, of the suffering man. This is apparently the role women must fill in the redemption of the world. And, it seems that women go to heaven only once the son has ascended in glory and comes back to lead his mother on high.

This vocation for collaborating in the redemption of the world through suffering and chastity (which is viewed as privation) ought not to remain our only destiny, our only horizon, should not constitute the only means or path to our fulfillment as women.^{4*}

Suffering does not in any way constitute a perfection, it is merely a means of restoration. As such, suffering corresponds not to a kind of saintliness but rather to an established kind of human perversity. Suffering, if it lasts more than a redemptive moment, is simply a denial of the divine. "If feeling seems to thee a glorious attribute, it is then, *per se*, a divine attribute to thee" (Feuerbach, p. 63).

"God is the mirror of man" (Feuerbach, p. 63). Woman has no mirror wherewith to become woman. Having a God and becoming one's gender go hand in hand. God is the other that we absolutely cannot be without. In order to *become*, we need some shadowy perception of achievement; not a fixed objective, not a One postulated to be immutable but rather a cohesion and a horizon that assures us the passage between past and future, the bridge of a present *that remembers*, that is not sheer oblivion and loss, not a crumbling away of existence, a failure, simply, to take note.

A *female* god is still to come. We are not purely redeeming spirits, not pure flesh, not a veil for the wisdom of the world, not mere mothers, not mere devils. . . . All these predicates speak to something of us, often of us as we are seen by men and as men need us to be.

How is our God to be imagined? Or is it our god? Do we possess a quality that can reverse the predicate to the subject, as Feuerbach does for *God* and *man* in the analysis of *The Essence of Christianity*? If there is no one quality, which of the many would we choose to conceive our becoming perfect women? This is not a luxury but a *necessity*, the need for a finalized, theoretical, and practical activity that would be both speculative and moral. Every man (according to Feuerbach) and every woman who is not fated to remain a slave to the logic of the essence of man, must imagine a God, an objective-subjective place or path whereby the self could be coalesced in space and time: unity of instinct, heart, and knowledge, unity of nature and spirit, condition for the abode and for saintliness. God alone can save us, keep us safe. The feeling or experience of a positive, objective, glorious existence, the feeling of subjectivity, is essential for us. Just like a God who helps us and leads us in the path of becoming, who keeps track of our limits and our infinite possibilities—as women—who inspires our projects. These might include not just *opposition to*, *criticism of* but also *positing new values* that would essentially be divine. To have a goal is essentially a religious move (according to Feuerbach's analysis). Only the religious, within and without us, is fundamental

* For the verb *s'épanouir*, which is rendered as "emerge" in Manheim's translation from the German, I have preferred the verb *fulfill*—Tr.

enough to allow us to discover, affirm, achieve certain *ends* (without being locked up in the prison of effects—or effects). Our goal has always come to us women from outside: from man, child, city. We have failed to place our goal *inside as well as outside ourselves*, failed to love, failed to *will* ourselves and one another. Because this can only be a divine project. God conceives and loves himself. That part of God has always been denied us. Thus we women have become weak, formless, insecure, aggressive, devoted to the other because unaware of ourselves, submissive to the other because we were unable to establish our own order. If we are not to obey the other, we have to set a goal of our own, make our own law or laws. If we are to escape slavery it is not enough to destroy the master. Only the divine offers us freedom—enjoins it upon us. Only a God constitutes a rallying point for us that can let us free—nothing else. These words are but a statement of *reason*. So far it requires no faith other than the faith in the possibility of our autonomy, our salvation, of a love that would not just redeem but glorify us in full self-awareness: thought directed at the self and for the self that is free to love but not obliged.

To be capable of autonomy, to be capable of our God (still in the darkness, already made flesh, mediation between), is this not the test women must undergo if we are to become what we are and realize in a different mode our individual and collective task? Community means only dependence as long as each man, each woman, is not free and sovereign. Love of other without love of self, without love of God, implies the submission of the female one, the other, and of the whole of the social body.

No one has truly taught us love of God. Only love of neighbor. But how can one love one's neighbor without loving God? This is no more than a moralism of guilt, impossible to sustain, a kind of egotism or even death. Certain social doctrines, certain political regimes have already shown us how difficult it is to "love one's neighbor" without loving God. The obstacle is also an economic one. Men seem to lack the generosity to care for the good of others before caring for their own. God is man's good and his goods. Love of neighbor is an ethical consequence of becoming divine. To claim that man is capable of caring about his neighbor's good, careless of his own, seems an idealist and utopic hypothesis that brings in its wake physical and psychic misery, the decline of the mother-earth culture, and of the values of speech and spiritual autonomy.

Love of God has nothing moral in and of itself. It merely shows the way. It is the incentive for a more perfect becoming. It marks the horizon between the more past and the more future, the more passive and the more active—permanent and always in tension. God forces us to do nothing except *become*. The only task, the only obligation laid upon us is: to become divine men and women, to become perfectly, to refuse to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel and die that have the potential for growth and fulfillment.

And in this we still resemble plants. We climb toward God and remain in Him, without killing the mother earth where our roots lie, without denying the sky either. Rooted in the earth, fed by rain and spring waters, we grow and flourish in the air, thanks to the light from the sky, the warmth of the sun.

There is no *individual law* that concerns divine becoming, no *collective law* passed down to the race of woman. . . . But, if we do not have that—divine—perspective, we—as divine—cannot incarnate our gender or make a race.

. . .

Can the word *woman* be subject? predicate? If it can be neither one nor the other, what status does the word have in discourse? The status of "women" as indeterminate plural, as obscure part of the human race. Must we assume that man is "women" (one + one + one . . .) *plus* a penis? or that God is "women" (all women), *plus* something that fences in the infinite: a difficult figuration of a relation men have to their penis or their gender? Since only man and God are subjects.

This "women" would amount to a kind of chaotic, amorphous, archaic multiple which, if it is ever to achieve a form, needs some representation of unity to be imposed upon it. "Women" would be like the soup, the clay, the earth and blood, the water, the ocean, out of which man emerges as man, and God as God. Woman, the one, single, *unique*, would at best be viewed as a place of procreation or of partition into objects of seduction.

If there is ever to be a consciousness of self in the female camp, each woman will have to situate herself freely in relation to herself, not just in relation to the community, the couple, the family. Feuerbach writes that without the woman-mother (but he seems to take little account of the difference between woman and mother, hence there is no correspondence with a possible state of identity for the woman as woman) there is no God. The mother of God is the keystone of theology, of the Father-son-spirit relationship. Without the mother of God, there can be no God. And Feuerbach adds that Protestants, who have done away with the mother of God—she who gives birth to the Lord as flesh—should logically have renounced God purely and simply: "Where faith in the Mother of God sinks, there also sinks faith in the Son of God, and in God as the Father. The Father is a truth only where the Mother is a truth. Love is in and by itself essentially feminine in its nature. The belief in the love of God is the belief in the feminine principle as divine. Love apart from living nature is an anomaly, a phantom. Behold in love the holy necessity and depth of Nature" (*The Essence of Christianity*, p. 72).

Feuerbach claims that we are sick today because God is sick. God undergoes his own process of development: He "has wrestled himself out of the obscurity of confused feelings and impulses into the clearness of knowledge," the "nervous tremours of darkness precede the joyful consciousness of light" (p. 89).

In our tradition hasn't God always been sick because he never married? Except in the forms of annunciation our God never speaks to us of the joy, the splendor, the fulfillment that lies in the alliance of the sexes. He remains bound to a father or a mother, and a fault—which?—that must be redeemed if love is to become, or again become, possible.

We have often been told that weddings take place only in heaven. But, from the representation we have of heaven can we deduce something of a female divinity? Establish some *concrete* qualities of divine life that have often been forgotten in the transcendence of the all-powerful God? Of God the Father we know very little. Making images of Him is no simple matter and remains subject to rigid rules. But we can ask ourselves whether the promises of heaven made to us do not imply something of the female gender that has been excluded from God. In heaven, there will be music, colors, movement, dancing . . . none of the austerity often attributed to God the Father. Doesn't heaven constitute an actualization of qualities that have been left to women but in women become instruments of unheavenly seduction? The predicates of heaven are often sensual, artistic. Religion is in fact a major producer of art. And Freud would have it that art corresponds to the sublimation of hysteria, that female neurosis par excellence.

But it seems that women have no God to sublimate their hysteria—they can merely give birth to the redeeming God. Why would women have no God to allow them to fulfill their *gender*? So that heaven does not come to pass on earth? So that women should remain the ones who give birth to the child god, the suffering god, the redeemer son? Is this a way for women to become divine in their gender? And man? Neither men nor women are able to grow to adulthood together, to become gods together. Woman's not becoming God is a loss for herself and for the community. Perhaps for God. Certainly for the fulfillment of the universe, which she brings into being through her *female* sex according to certain traditions. If she is to be faithful to her natural and political gender, if she is to make that gender divine, women must accept it and fulfill it as a limit that is also *morphological*.

This divinity of woman is still hidden, veiled. Could it be what "man" seeks even as he rapes it?

We women, sexed according to our gender, lack a God to share, a word to share and to become. Defined as the often dark, even occult mother-substance of the word of men, we are in need of our *subject*, our *substantive*, our *word*, our *predicates*: our elementary sentence, our basic rhythm, our morphological identity, our generic incarnation, our genealogy.

To be the term of the other is nothing enviable. It paralyzes us in our becoming. As divinity or goddess of and for man, we are deprived of our own ends and means. It is essential that we be God *for ourselves* so that we can be divine for the other, not idols, fetishes, symbols that have already been outlined or determined

(see *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 182). It is equally essential that we should be daughter-gods in the relationship with our mothers, and that we cease to hate our mothers in order to enter into submissiveness to the father-husband. We cannot love if we have no memory of a native passiveness in relation to our mothers, of our primitive attachment to her, and hers to us.

Current theory, even theological theory, makes women out to be monsters of hatred and thus makes us submit to an existing order. Does respect for God made flesh not imply that we should incarnate God within us and in our sex: daughter-woman-mother? Yet this duty is never imposed upon us—quite the contrary. What a strange error in human ethics! By our culture, our religion.

This error is protracted and encouraged by the spiritual technicians: the psychologists, psychoanalysts, etc. And yet, without the possibility that God might be made flesh as a woman, through the mother and the daughter, and in their relationships, no real constructive help can be offered to a woman. If the divine is absent in woman, and among women, there can be no possibility of changing, converting her primary affects.

The God we know, the gods we have known for centuries, are men; they show and hide the different aspects of man. He (they) do(es) not represent the qualities or predicates of the *female* made God. Which explains, perhaps, why *women who have grown used to the God/s of men will have no more to do with Him/them* (as men do?) and are ready to give up their own divinity. They renounce the path of becoming or being women. For how can that goal, that project, be sustained without a divine that marks or establishes its realization, that figures its incarnation, its mediations?

When women get bogged down in their search for freedom, for liberation, there seem to be many themes: the absence of a God of their own and inadequate management of the symbolic. The two things are linked and necessary to the constitution of an identity and a community. Many women have made or are making great efforts to fall back under the thrall of the phallocratic and patriarchal monopoly on values. They lack, we still lack, the affirmation and definition of values *of our own*, values often condemned by women themselves, even in dealings with other women. This leaves us in our infancy, in our bondage, slaves to male paradigms and to the archaic powers and fears of elementary struggles for life that are divided between submission to a technical imperialism alien to us and regression to *magical* thinking.

According to this world, these worlds, female identity always comes down to empirical parameters that prevent a woman, and the world of women, from getting *themselves* together as a unit. The sexual-familial dimension remains one of these parameters. "Are you a virgin?" "Are you married?" "Who is your husband?" "Do you have any children?" these are the questions always asked, which allow us to place a woman. She is constituted from outside in relation to a social *function*,

instead of to a female identity and autonomy. Fenced in by these functions, how can a woman maintain a margin of singleness for herself, a nondeterminism that would allow her to become and remain herself? This margin of freedom and potency (*puissance*) that gives us the authority yet to grow, to affirm and fulfill ourselves as individuals and members of a community, can be ours only if a God in the feminine gender can define it and keep it for us. As an other that we have yet to make actual, as a region of life, strength, imagination, creation, which exists for us both within and beyond, as our possibility of a present and a future.

Is not God the name and the place that holds the promise of a new chapter in history and that also denies this can happen? Still invisible? Still to be discovered? To be incarnated? Archi-ancient and forever future.

NOTES

1. The texts that I read or reread for this essay are, first, the story of *Melusine* as recounted by Jean (le Teinturier) d'Arras and published in 1478; the comparable stories in the Andersen and Grimm collections of fairy tales; the analyses of the Melusine myth by Jean Le Goff and Emmanuel Leroy Ladurie in *Les Annales*, May-August 1971, a special issue dedicated to "History and Structure"; *Méluine et le chevalier au cygne* by Christian Lacouteux (Paris: Payot, 1982); *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach (translated by George Eliot, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957).
2. The constellation we call Pisces is composed of two fishes: one goes upwards to the heavens, the other goes down to the earth, the sea. From the reading of these myths that concern us here, it would seem that the fish going upward is exclusively a male, the fish going down, a female. The descent into the sea is interpreted as "fabled" and later "diabolical," whereas in fact it also connotes a return to, and a fidelity toward, the original fertility. Moreover, these fairy tales often present woman as bird, usually in a derogatory fashion. Yet we should not forget that in certain cultures of the far East, such as India or Tibet, the dragon (half serpent-fish, half bird?) is the emblem of life and the divine word, of the creative and saving word of life on earth. This is only one example of the way contemporary western writers have diabolically transformed and interpreted an ancient symbol of the potency (*puissance*) of life and word.
3. This interpretation of the "essence of man" and of the difference between man and animal is developed by Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity*, especially in the introduction. Readers interested in an exact understanding of "Divine Women" should refer to this essay.
4. *Shépanouir* corresponds to one of the three translations for the etymology of the word to be that Martin Heidegger gives: "to live, to emerge, to linger or endure." It means to accomplish one's form. (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Ralph Manheim, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959, p. 72).

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