

black liberation struggle. Hooks, however, is almost solely an observer of Western postmodern critique in *Yearning* and she occasionally disappoints by not employing extended postmodern analysis.

In her fascinating essay, "Saving Black Folk Culture: Zora Neale Hurston as Anthropologist and Writer," hooks shows how Hurston deconstructed the subject/object relationship of conventional anthropology in her work. Hooks also suggests that, by popularizing black folk culture and simultaneously producing an autobiographical quest narrative, anthropologist Hurston was being deeply subversive. However, she does not take us down into a more intricate postmodern analysis of Hurston's critical and cultural place in world culture. This is the strength as well as the weakness of *Yearning*. Hooks, like Hurston, is a brilliant popularizer whose books are feeling intellectual autobiographies, not simply academic essays.

If hooks did employ the standard critical vocabulary of postmodernism, her work, like that of so many postmoderns, would become inaccessible to many of her readers. Thus, one asks, will hooks use more postmodern insights in her next book and somehow frame those analyses in less elitist terms than her academic colleagues? Or will she continue to observe the potential uses of postmodernism for African-American studies and give us more intellectual autobiography to send us off on our own to read African-American and Third World writers?

Hooks gives biting, effective examples of racist discourse and situations throughout the essays in this book to drive home the long, hard work that needs to be done to eliminate racism in America. The essays range in topic from her grandmother's quilting to the novels of Alice Walker and the films of Spike Lee, Stephen Frears/Hanif Kureishi, Wim Wenders and Euzan Palcy. One of the controversial essays in the book, "Seductive Sexualities: Representing Blackness in Poetry and on Screen," celebrates the vulnerability and ordinariness of black male bodies in the film "Looking for Langston" as well as the collective experience of gay black men. It should be read beside "Representations: Feminism and Black Masculinity," where hooks suggests

that the harsh censorship of black misogyny by feminists contains racist (excessive) fear of black masculinity.

Hooks is not always comfortable to read, nor does she intend to be. The most "comfortable" parts of *Yearning* are hooks' nostalgic, often romantic memories of black communities before integration and this, of course, is a troubling aspect of the book. Hooks' dialogue with Cornel West, "Black Women and Men: Partnership in the 1990s," does not talk about multiple strategies for black liberation in the America of the '90s but rather about a vague return to black community and service in unified terms. The pain of hooks' very important intellectual accomplishments is understandably plain and sobering. Perhaps her troubling romanticism masks a practical pessimism born in the Reagan years.

Yearning is an accomplished, canny, sometimes angry book by a talented, determined black writer and scholar. Hooks deserves her popular following.

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Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine. Margaret Whitford. *London & New York: Routledge, 1991, Pp. 241.*

Margaret Whitford's aims is to re-establish Luce Irigaray's status as a philosopher, and *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* succeeds in doing just that and more. The book is extremely readable, and provides a provocative discussion of Irigaray's major works available in English translation, as well as those currently available only in French. It should serve both as an introduction to those unfamiliar with Irigaray's texts, as well as present a challenging and sympathetic feminist re-reading for others. Whitford claims at the outset that Irigaray is "engaged in that most philosophical of enterprises: philosophy examining its own foundations and its own presuppositions"; that she is "trying to work out the conditions of ethics and to rethink the social contract" (2).

Whitford wishes to present Irigaray as a "*feminist philosopher*" rather than "seeing her as one of an allegedly more or less homogeneous group of proponents of *écriture féminine*" (3). She spends quite a good deal of time defending Irigaray from her critics and from those sceptical of feminist theory in general. Some of these criticisms include: Irigaray's inaccessibility, her unfeminist stance, her lack of sensitivity to racial and class differences and, most importantly, her essentialism. Through a chapter by chapter detailed discussion of such topics as "feminism and utopia," "subjectivity and language," "maternal genealogy and the symbolic," and "women and the social contract," Whitford contends that Irigaray's feminism is very much rooted in the "social situation and struggles of women" (7), and that she is a "philosopher who is redefining the terrain of philosophy by investigating and exploring what philosophy until now has been unable to allow in" (7). Whitford uses a spatial metaphor and argues that Irigaray is involved in "an act of land reclamation ... which is intended to be of immediate relevance to the lives of women and to the symbolic organization of society as a whole" (7).

Although this assertion seems to be a large one, Whitford's tone is very un-authoritative and agreeable. She points out, for instance, that her "reading is neither comprehensive nor conclusive; it is interpretation in process" (3). She says that she is "interested in the creative relationship between reader and text, rather than idealizing the text itself" (4). I think her attitude encourages other interpretations and other readings. Irigaray has been known to be a complex theorist, and Whitford acknowledges not only the intricacy of her ideas, but also the difficulties in grappling with her associative style. Whitford confesses: "Far from feeling in tune with Irigaray, on the contrary it has taken me a long time to understand her.... it has been a struggle to read and elucidate her, and to come to some understanding of her critique of rationality which appeared to go against my whole intellectual training" (4). Irigaray not only discusses "otherness," but she "represented an otherness" which, Whitford says, "fascinates me despite myself and in a completely different way" (4).

Perhaps the most important charge which has been laid against Irigaray is her essentialism, or her insistence on distinguishing between females and males in Western culture. To the branch of contemporary feminism which attempts to seek social and economic equality for women, this stance seems counterproductive. However, Whitford successfully explains why Irigaray maintains her position on this issue. She demonstrates that Irigaray's essentialism is not based on biological difference, but in psychoanalysis, philosophy, and myth. For her, Irigaray is a "cultural prophet" who attempts to "dismantle the defences of the western cultural unconscious, to undo the work of repression, splitting, and disavowal, to restore links and connections and to put the 'subject of philosophy' in touch with the unacknowledged mother" (33). Irigaray does not believe that the "feminine" is there already "just waiting to find expression" (38), but that female subjectivity still has to be established. The problem for women is that the body of the mother is linked to the corpus of language in psychoanalysis. While "men's relationship to the phantasied mother is exemplified by the *fort-da*," women cannot objectify their mother in the same way because "a woman *identifies* with her mother" (44). As Whitford explains: "Using language then presents a woman with the choice between remaining outside the signifying system altogether (in order to stay with her mother) or entering a patriarchal genealogy in which her position as object is already given" (45). Irigaray envisions a speaking position for women that would incorporate the "maternal-feminine in language" rather than one that "presupposes woman as universal predicate" (45).

Whitford tends to be slightly repetitive about Irigaray's attempts to search for a female imaginary, but perhaps this is necessary as she sees it as one of the theorist's main contributions to feminism. Two excellent chapters, Chapters Two and Three, which have been published previously in anthologies, explain the importance of the imaginary and the symbolic, terms Irigaray borrows from Lacan. Irigaray points out that the "unconscious is not *literally* an undiscovered continent" (53), but that this unconscious phantasy or the imaginary in Western culture is sexed. In Whitford's words: "The imagi-

nary morphology of western rationality is characterized by the principle of identity, ... the principle of non-contradiction, ... and binarism.... An equation is made between the (symbolic) phallus, stable form, identity, and individuation" (59). According to Irigaray, the female "functions as a *hole*" (66). Women are "residue" or a "sort of magma ... from which men, humanity, draw nourishment, shelter, the resources to live or survive for free" (67). Whitford stresses that Irigaray is "not *prescribing* what the female should be, but *describing* how it functions within western imaginary and symbolic operations" (67) in order to change it. The imaginary is "not confined to philosophers and psychoanalysts, but is a social imaginary which is taken to be reality, with damaging consequences for women, who unlike men, find themselves 'homeless' in the symbolic order" (69). What Irigaray envisions is an alternate imaginary, where the female is not equated with waste, debris, and death, but where both desirable and undesirable qualities are divided up within each sex.

Related to the structure of the imaginary is the problem of the absence of women in the symbolic. Whitford discusses Irigaray's expression of women as the "dark continent" in lucid terms: "An unsymbolized mother-daughter relationship makes it difficult if not impossible for women to have an identity in the symbolic order that is distinct from the maternal function" (77). Irigaray links "clichés of psychological or psychoanalytic descriptions (hatred of the mother, rivalry between women, women as women's own worst enemies), and the symbolic order" to suggest that a "different symbolization could have effects on women's relationships with each other" (78). As things stand, women "suffer from drives without any possible representatives or representations" (79). Metaphysically, they are not individuated: "there is only *the place of the mother*, or the *maternal function*" (80). Whitford explains: "Unless one accepts the need for women to be able to represent their relation to the mother, and so to origin, in a specific way, i.e. not according to a masculine model, then women will always find themselves devalued. Neutral/universal/single-sex models always turn out to be implicitly male ones" (85-6). The relation between the girl-child and the

mother needs to be symbolized in such a way as to allow one to be a mother *and* a woman, so that "women [are] not forever competing for the unique place occupied by the mother" (88-9). At times, the manner in which Whitford summarizes Irigaray sounds like she is something of a prophet: "Irigaray says that women need a religion, a language, and an economy of their own" (89).

Finally, Whitford also manages to clear up Irigaray's infamous metaphor of "two lips." Again Whitford suggests that the metaphor "is *not* a definition of women's identity in biological terms" but should be regarded as a "discursive strategy" (171). She agrees with critics like Carolyn Burke, Jane Gallop, and Elizabeth Grosz who read the metaphor as one that "implies plurality, multiplicity, and a mode of being 'in touch' that differs from the phallic mode of discourse" (172). The notion of multiplicity is crucial for feminist politics. As Whitford eloquently puts it:

it allows for differences between women as aspects of their multiple identity. It allows for exploration, failures, and mistakes, since Woman is becoming, perfectibility and not static perfection. It allows for ethics and for responsibilities, a symbolic home for women in the genre which does not limit their capacities arbitrarily. It provides a framework for thinking further the problems of identity and negativity (violence). And it also allows for the possibility of dialogue with Irigaray herself. (144)

In this well-written and thoughtful study, Whitford's own dialogue or exchange with Irigaray has certainly proved to be a fruitful one.

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Left Politics and the Literary Profession. Leonard J. Davis and M. Bella Mirabella (eds.). *New York: Columbia UP, 1990, Pp. 316.*

This deftly edited anthology aims "to assess the politics of literature as it has evolved over the past twenty years as the function of a particular time