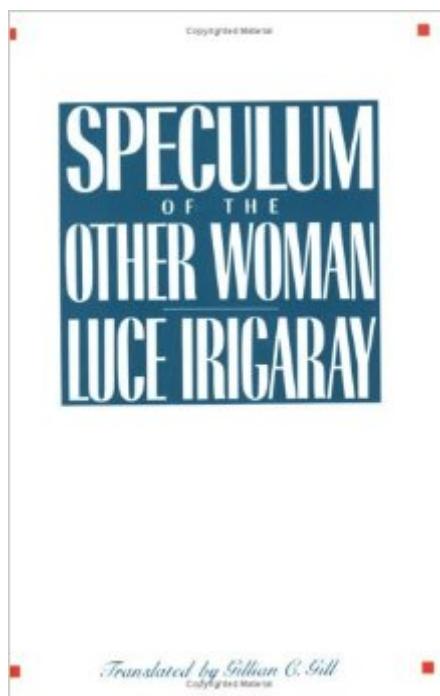


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Speculum Of The Other Woman



Synopsis

Speculum of the Other Woman by Luce Irigaray is incontestably one of the most important works in feminist theory to have been published in this generation. For the profession of psychoanalysis, Irigaray believes, female sexuality has remained a "dark continent," unfathomable and unapproachable; its nature can only be misunderstood by those who continue to regard women in masculine terms. In the first section of the book, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry," Irigaray rereads Freud's essay "Femininity," and his other writings on women, bringing to the fore the masculine ideology implicit in psychoanalytic theory and in Western discourse in general: woman is defined as a disadvantaged man, a male construct with no status of her own. In the last section, "Plato's Hystera," Irigaray reinterprets Plato's myth of the cave, of the womb, in an attempt to discover the origins of that ideology, to ascertain precisely the way in which metaphors were fathered that henceforth became vehicles of meaning, to trace how woman came to be excluded from the production of discourse. Between these two sections is "Speculum" — ten meditative, widely ranging, and freely associational essays, each concerned with an aspect of the history of Western philosophy in its relation to woman, in which Irigaray explores woman's essential difference from man.

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Cornell University Press (May 10, 1985)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801493307

ISBN-13: 978-0801493300

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (9 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #138,717 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > Philosophy #229 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Sexuality #244 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Feminist Theory

Customer Reviews

In *Speculum of the Other, Woman* (1974), Luce Irigaray began what would eventually be seen as an ongoing controversy in her struggle to end the millennia-old stranglehold that a western patriarchy held on women. Losing her job as a college professor merely due to her upsetting the

psychoanalytic tenets of Freud and Lacan did not deter her from devalorizing this masculine-centered phallocentrism that had been shackling women since Plato. Irigaray focuses on how the West has been viewing women in their collective roles as mothers. This patriarchy did not even exclude women who had not borne children. All women were labeled as mothers or potential mothers. Irigaray notes that men were designated as worthy as being subjects in their own right. A "subject" is a doer and shaker, a Power That Be, or an active creator of all things. Truly to be a man is an empowering feeling. Women, by contrast, are not subjects, nor can they ever be so. They are relegated as objects. An "object" is inert, passive, quiet, and unobtrusive. It is men who direct women and it is women who are fated by inexorable nature to be directed by men. Truly to be a woman is to live her hardscrabble life out on a playing field solely as watching bystanders in the seats. After all, Freud and Lacan suggested, this is the Way Things Are. Men therefore help women in all aspects of life for women need this help to get by. From these dubious claims of patriarchal supremacy, Irigaray makes a totally unexpected assertion: Innate sexual and gender differences do not exist since if they did both genders would be equally qualified as subjects, a claim that Freudian and Lacanian acolytes would be loathe to grant. Men, Irigaray asserts, have been using their phalluses since Paleolithic times as a metaphorical club to bash women into subservience.

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