

# READING RESPONSE

## Speculum of The other Woman

(Luís Zanforlin)

In “Speculum of the other Woman” the author Luce Irigaray exposes a number of flaws, inconsistencies and biases on Freud’s publication about Femininity. In it, Luce Irigaray take fragments of Freud’s original publications and surrounds it with her ideas which exposes Freud’s specific mistakes or perhaps intentionally biased theories.

The premise to Freud’s lecture “Femininity” attempts to make sense of the so-called “*riddle of femininity*” through the psychoanalytic understanding of female sexuality. Luce’s first innervation states the lecture was an uninformed analysis made by man and without the analytic input of a woman. (P.13) “*Those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem. So it would be a case of you men speaking among yourselves about woman, who cannot be involved in hearing.*” The writer then points out that Freud doesn’t define the “riddle of femininity” suggesting his mysterious assumptions are based on a male-centric perspective of female sexuality. By simply pointing out differences on female sexual development as extraordinary steps Freud makes it seem woman have a much more complicated and unknown development than man. (P.20) “*So psychology does not offer us the key to the mystery of femininity—that black box, strongbox, earth-abyss that remains outside the sphere of its investigations: light must no doubt come from elsewhere.*”

Freud then proceeds explaining his female sexual development theory. According to him, throughout the first two sexual phases both boys and girls have similar development with the exception that girls have a more developed anal phase due to feminine higher hygienic demands. At the phallic phase however the girl then notices that she does not have a penis like her father and that her clitoris is a failed attempt of her body to produce one, resulting in “penis envy” which causes delays on her sexual development among other potential conflicts. He then makes a parallel suggesting that the behavioral differences between masculinity and femininity are that the male physiognomy is active and the female is passive. The writer exposes Freud’s infantile comparison between the sperm activeness and psychological active behavior. This is all based on the principle that female sexuality is derived from a male standard and the Luce points out the female diminishing consequences of believing in this. (P.18)

*“Woman is nothing but the receptacle that passively receives his product, even if sometimes, by the display of her passively aimed instincts, she has pleaded, facilitated, even demanded that it be placed within her.”*

In order to reinforce Freud’s blinded male-centric perspective, Luce mentions the possibility of boys having “breast envy” due to an obvious anatomical difference. (p.23) *“Which no doubt justifies the fact that there is so little questioning of the effects of breast atrophy in the male.”* Another implication with “penis envy” is that in order to be aware of her lack of penis the little girl must first be aware of the existence of one and that without having seen one it becomes unjustifiable for someone to come to fear losing what she doesn’t have.

Perhaps Freud’s most obvious intervention with the scientific method appears when Luce puts two of Freud’s paragraphs under the same analysis: His claims that the

declarations his patients made that their fathers attempted to seduce them as being a product of their Oedipus complex imagination, and his mentioning that mothers are often responsible for stimulating their children's genitals (P.37) "*It was only later that I was able to recognize in this phantasy of being seduced by the father the expression of the typical Oedipus complex in women.*" - (P.39) "*it was really the mother who by her activities over the child's bodily hygiene inevitably stimulated, and perhaps even aroused for the first time, pleasurable sensations in her genitals.*" This parallel suggests a clear bias on Freud's forgiveness of male behaviors while making females responsible for the neurosis of both themselves as well as on others.

Luce Irigaray's publication successfully challenges Freud's work with a passionate vocabulary and a clever use of Freud's own words. I had the experience that a few times it focused more on bad consequences of the belief on Freud's work rather than on the reasons they are wrong, however she doesn't fail to make clear of those reasons on the first and last chapter (P.13) "*Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem—those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem.*" Luce curiously doesn't attempt to analyze whether Freud's lecture on femininity was consciously constructed in order to accommodate his societal desires, an unconscious conclusion that exposes more about his mind than the nature of woman or even a result of unscientific use of a low number of diverse samples on his research. Nonetheless it stimulates the reader to psychoanalyze Freud's ideas rather than to take them seriously.