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Paula Aguilera

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"AS IF THE WORLD WERE SPLIT IN TWO:" CONTESTING DUALISMS

I.

In the Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes tells a story that bears resemblance to Freud's discussion of the killing of the totemic father in Totem and Taboo and Lacan's discussion of the symbolic and the real. The story of the killing of the father (and an attempt to construct a feminine symbolic) also appears in Luce Irigaray's work. Here, the similarity stops. In this paper I will discuss the concerns that lead Hobbes towards reinventing the totemic father and those that lead Irigaray away from the myth of founding fathers and brothers and towards a myth of the mother.

Briefly, Freud is attempting to explain "the two taboos of totemism....The first...the law protecting the totem animal...[and] the second rule, the prohibition of incest." (144) The totem animal is an animal that a "primitive" or "savage" clan identifies with and is not to kill or eat. And yet occasionally there are festivals during which the clan as a whole participates in killing, eating, celebrating and finally mourning the totem animal. (140-141)

To explain this behavior, Freud argues that at some point in human history, patriarchal fathers surrounded themselves with women and excluded the sons. The dispossessed sons banded together, "one day" killed the patriarchal father and "cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him." (141-142) The totem meal, then, can be seen as commemorating the killing and eating of the father.

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