

Editor's Preface

Thomas Albrecht

The diversity and extensiveness of Sarah Kofman's body of work make choosing essays and book excerpts that would be somehow representative an impossible task, in some ways not unlike the impossible tasks of the art critic and the psychoanalyst Kofman has written about. And as we learn from Kofman herself, to make claims for the exemplarity or special significance of particular texts in an author's oeuvre, over and above other texts, is always a suspect gesture to begin with, and is usually destined in one or another way to fail. It is suspect insofar as it implies on the part of the anthologist the would-be "gesture of mastery" that Kofman so frequently finds in the texts she writes about. And it is destined to fail insofar as it is often the seemingly insignificant or marginal texts and passages in an author's body of work, rather than those texts and passages commonly regarded as paradigmatic or central, that prove to be the most telling about that author, as Kofman repeatedly demonstrates in her readings. So our task as editors of an anthology entitled *Selected Writings of Sarah Kofman*, given everything that such a title conventionally implies, puts us into a double bind: between a demand and a necessary suspicion of that demand, between the demand and the impossibility of being able properly to fulfill it.

In making our selections, what we have done, therefore, is to relinquish any overt claims to exemplarity or comprehensiveness. We have chosen for inclusion in this volume a series of texts that speak in one or more ways to six topics with which Kofman's work has been in particular identified by its readers, and with which her work has in particular identified itself: (1) Freud's writings; (2) Nietzsche's writings; (3) the figure of woman in

Western philosophy and metaphysics; (4) visual art and aesthetic theory; (5) Judaism and Anti-Semitism in European history, literature, and philosophy; and (6) autobiography. We have divided the book into five sections corresponding to these six topics and then assigned several texts to each section. Some of the included texts are taken from existing English-language publications and may thus already be familiar to readers of Kofman in translation. However, most of the materials in this book have been translated into English for the first time.

The book's opening section, entitled "Reading (with) Freud," presents the aspect of Kofman's work that is perhaps most familiar to her English-language readers, given that much of it is available in translation: her engagement with psychoanalysis in general and with Freud's writings in particular. Its first two selections are "The Double Reading" and "The Impossible Profession," the introductory chapters of two monographs on Freud: *L'enfance de l'art: Une interprétation de l'esthétique freudienne* (1970), Kofman's first book; and *Un métier impossible: Lecture de "Constructions en analyse"* (1983).¹ The former is excerpted from *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics*, a 1988 translation of *L'enfance de l'art*, while the latter, the introduction to a book-length study of Freud's metapsychological writings, appears in English for the first time. The third selection in this section, "Ça cloche," a 1981 essay on sexual difference and the undecidable economy of fetishism in texts by Freud and Jacques Derrida, appeared in translation in 1989 and is republished here in a new translation.²

The book's second section, "Nietzsche and the Scene of Philosophy," is an obvious choice as companion and follow-up to the first section, given that Kofman returned to Nietzsche's texts as often as she did to Freud's, and far more frequently than to any other topic she wrote about. It contains two previously untranslated works: "The Evil Eye," an essay on Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's divergent views of tragedy and their far-reaching implications, taken from Kofman's 1979 book, *Nietzsche et la scène philosophique*; and "Scorning Jews: Nietzsche, the Jews, Anti-Semitism," a longer text originally published in 1994 in book form under the title *Le mépris des Juifs: Nietzsche, les Juifs, l'antisémitisme*. The latter is a relevant and timely contribution by Kofman to the ongoing debate about Nietzsche's anti-Semitism and relation to Judaism, and we are especially pleased that this text, long overdue for publication in translation, has now been made available to English-language readers.³

The book's third section, "With Respect to Woman," also presents an aspect of Kofman's work that is comparatively well known to English-language readers, especially to readers in the fields of feminist theory and Women's Studies. The first selection is an excerpt from another monograph on Freud, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*, a 1985 translation of *L'énigme de la femme: la femme dans les textes de Freud* (1980). The second piece, entitled "The Economy of Respect: Kant and Respect for Women," an essay on the figure of woman in Kant's texts on sublimity and the moral law, is a previously published translation of a chapter from Kofman's 1982 book, *Le respect des femmes (Kant et Rousseau)*.⁴

The book's fourth section, "The Truth in Painting," introduces work on visual art and portraiture, a particular area of interest for Kofman toward the end of her career. In contrast to the material included in the previous sections, this work is likely to be unfamiliar to most readers of this anthology, as very little of it has thus far been translated. The section includes two chapters from Kofman's 1985 book, *Mélancolie de l'art*, "The Melancholy of Art" and "The Resemblance of Portraits: Imitation According to Diderot," and concludes with Kofman's last text: "Conjuring Death: Remarks on *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp* (1632)," an incomplete fragment of an essay on Rembrandt on which Kofman had been working at the time of her death in 1994, which also appears in English translation for the first time.⁵

The book's final section, "Judaism and Anti-Semitism / Autobiography," contains a poem by Kofman on needful memory and potential obliteration of the Holocaust as well as a series of five short autobiographical texts, here brought together for the first time, several of which speak specifically to Kofman's childhood experiences during the Holocaust and to her Judaism.⁶

As readers at all familiar with her work are aware, Kofman's way of quoting from the texts she writes about is informal, inconsistent, and idiosyncratic. More than a few quotations are not attributed, or only very generally attributed, to source texts, and some are incorrectly attributed. In addition, Kofman sometimes modifies the lines and passages she quotes, in accordance with her specific purpose or meaning or with her memory of the texts she is discussing. In the translations that were prepared specifically for this volume, the translators and editors have attempted to identify as many of the unattributed quotations as we were

able, quoting from and giving reference to existing English translations whenever possible. In some cases, we have modified the quoted translation, in accordance with Kofman's version of the passage in question, or with her meaning. In cases where no English translation exists, we have whenever possible translated from and made reference to an identified foreign-language source. Any attributions by Kofman of quotations to incorrect page, section, or volume numbers in a given source text have been silently corrected; the occasional attributions of quotations to incorrect source texts have been marked as such and corrected. In our translations of Kofman's notes, we have, for reasons of space, limited ourselves to making reference to existing English translations. In the absence of any English translation, we have kept the original foreign-language reference, supplying full publication information and page numbers where possible. The previously published translations included in this volume have been left largely unaltered, except that we have updated their notes so as to identify previously unidentified references, and so as to refer to any English translations of Kofman's sources (including her own texts) that have appeared since the translations' original publication. Any inaccuracies in the notes and references have been silently corrected.

The intentional tentativeness of this book's structure should be noted. The five topical sections to which the individual selections have been assigned are meant to be entirely provisional categories. Although their use is of course a standard convention for organizing an anthology like this one, they are also susceptible to—and symptomatic of—all the limitations inherent in such a convention: the limitations inherent, for example, in the assumption of certain thematic categories (over and above others), in the assumption of categories as such, and in the accompanying reduction of complexities and specificities. We intend them to be taken as similar to what Freud calls *constructions*, or to what Kofman calls *speculations*: fictions whose function and very being is provisional and whose durability and self-identity is always open to question. It will be obvious to readers that most of the selections included in this book could be classified under several of the organizing rubrics, and that all of them speak to more than just a single topic and to more than their most manifest topic. In addition, the selections directly and indirectly speak to and echo one another across the topical lines between them, among other ways through explicitly shared formulations, motifs, themes, metaphors, and references. In making the selections that we did, we have therefore tried

to bring out not only the richness and heterogeneity of Sarah Kofman's body of work, but also its surprising coherence. We encourage readers of this book to take as their guide Jacques Derrida's insistence in his introduction that we

take into account, each time we evoke a theme or motif in the work of Sarah Kofman, the intertwining threads that weave and displace the insistence on a motif in the long series of books, each very different but each bearing in itself the metonymic reference to all the others, in what is a sort of open quasi system, a coherent network that is nonetheless without closure, at once consistent and structurally interminable, an incomplete–incompletable seriality.