

Reclamation from Absence? Luce Irigaray and Women in the History of Philosophy

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Luce Irigaray's work does not present an obvious resource for projects seeking to reclaim women in the history of philosophy. Indeed, many authors introduce their reclamation project with an argument against conceptions, attributed to Irigaray or "French feminists" more generally, that the feminine is the excluded other of discourse. These authors claim that if the feminine is the excluded other of discourse, then we must conclude that even if women have written philosophy they have not given voice to feminine subjectivity; therefore, reclamation is a futile project. In this essay, I argue against such conclusions. Rather, I argue, Irigaray's work requires that philosophy be transformed through the reclamation of women's writing. She gives us a method of reclamation for the most difficult cases: those in which we have no record of women's writing. Irigaray offers this method through an engagement with the character of Diotima in Plato's Symposium. The method Irigaray demonstrates is reclamation as love.

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The value of returning to Irigaray for a model, I show, consists in the way she develops the idea that the feminine has been excluded from philosophy and her insistence that this exclusion is a condition of philosophy's possibility. For she does not, based on that work, abandon philosophy, discourse, or reason, nor does she suggest that women have never written anything philosophical. Instead, Irigaray proposes that the logic of discourse must be changed to make possible a culture of sexual difference *and* models how this might be done. Here, I argue that in "Sorcerer Love: A

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Reading of Plato, *Symposium*, ‘Diotima’s Speech’” (Irigaray 1993, 20–33), Irigaray provides a model of reclamation. This model is reclamation as love, and it entails thinking and doing discourse—and thereby philosophy—differently. Indeed, it challenges us to think of and practice philosophy as love. Irigaray thereby challenges us to transform philosophy through the reclamation of women thinkers, rather than bringing women into a discourse that has been predicated on the exclusion of the feminine.

I focus on “Sorcerer Love” as Irigaray’s only text offering a model for reclamation of women philosophers.² The model Irigaray offers is consistent with, and develops themes from, her other work, but this essay is the only one in which I see Irigaray offering a model for how we ought to engage with the philosophical work of a woman in the history of philosophy. I focus on how Irigaray develops her view of love in this essay, but it bears keeping in mind that Irigaray has continued to think about love. In *I Love to You*, to offer but one example, Irigaray deeply engages questions of history, discourse, negative critique, and “the labor that love represents in sexual difference” (Irigaray 1996, 12). My hope is that by identifying the model Irigaray offers in “Sorcerer Love,” reclamationists will return to her work to deepen their thinking about the project of reclamation. Thus, I focus on “Sorcerer Love” not to offer the final word on Irigaray and reclamation, but to begin the conversation.

Relatedly, in this piece, Irigaray links love and philosophy. At one point, Irigaray defines philosophy as a quest for love (Irigaray 1993, 24). This definition is one Irigaray gains from Diotima, who is trying to help Socrates think beyond dichotomies and appreciate intermediaries. The love to which Diotima, and therefore Irigaray, refer is Eros, the not quite human, not quite divine child of *Plenty* and *Poverty* (23). This daimon is never one thing or the other, but the middle that makes relationships possible. We can say, then, that Irigaray’s engagement with Diotima is an erotic engagement and the model of love is an erotic model. Thus, in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray models an erotic engagement between two women. I will explore this engagement in detail below, but here I want to highlight the fact that Irigaray gives us a model (and, in fact, many) for relations between women in the midst of a work on the question of sexual difference. By no means are the criticisms of Irigaray’s heterosexism thereby met, but perhaps attention to “Sorcerer Love” can help us to think more broadly not just about philosophy and its history, but also about erotic love.³

“Sorcerer Love” also tackles the thorniest case of reclamation. Diotima has been an important figure within feminist reclamation projects, beginning with Mary Ellen Waithe’s treatment of her in the first volume of *A History of Women Philosophers*. Yet much philosophical scholarship has simply ignored her reclamation and has continued to treat Diotima as no more than a fictional device employed by Plato.

Acknowledging the trend in philosophical scholarship to think of Diotima as a fictional character, Waithe reports: “it appears that in the 15th century a scholar suggested that it was ‘silly’ to think that a woman would have been a philosopher” (Waithe 1987, xiv). Waithe suggests that the fifteenth-century scholar set the tone

for philosophy's reception of Diotima as a fictional character. Until that time, Waithe explains, Diotima's historical existence was not debated, nor was it considered pertinent to the issue of Diotima's philosophical authority. Waithe also argues that Diotima's views differ from those of either Plato or Socrates. Thus, she seeks to show that analysis of the content of Diotima's speech urges us to consider her a real person with views independent from the author or the character reporting them.

Reactions to Waithe's research and arguments have been varied. In one of the first reviews of *A History of Women Philosophers*, Mary Anne Warren gives special emphasis to Waithe's reclamation of Diotima. She writes: "This careful scholarship lends weight to what is probably the most important finding of the volume—i.e., that Diotima of Manitea was almost certainly an historical figure, rather than a fictional character created by Socrates or Plato" (Warren 1989, 157). R. M. Dancy, on the other hand, writes in his review that: "we have been given no reason whatever for supposing that she must have been a historical person, or that, if she was, she held the views put into her mouth in the *Symposium*" (Dancy 1989, 166). In taking issue with Waithe, Dancy engages her reclamation work to a greater degree than is common in ancient scholarship. Take, for instance, Martha Nussbaum, who, in *The Fragility of Goodness*, does not pause to consider Diotima's possible historicity: "Socrates' teacher is a priestess named Diotima. Since she is a fiction, we are moved to ask about her name, and why Plato should have chosen it" (Nussbaum 2001, 177).

The case of Diotima has a degree of intractability unparalleled in reclamation work: the problem of her historicity has become a bar to engaging with her as a philosophical thinker. I suggest, then, that if Irigaray offers us a means of reclaiming Diotima, then she offers us an important means of reclamation for the less difficult cases. Indeed, I hope the model I outline here will be so used.

Numerous articles have treated "Sorcerer Love." Here, I focus on Andrea Nye's critique of Irigaray because Nye also offers an alternative method for reclaiming Diotima (Nye 1989). I argue that Nye's approach cannot overcome Diotima's absence from the dialogue and, thereby, helps us to see the importance and power of Irigaray's use of Diotima's absence as the basis for engaging the words ascribed to her.

THE PROBLEM OF SPEAKING OF OR ABOUT WOMAN

Irigaray warns: "to speak *of* or *about* woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition" (Irigaray 1985b, 78). The importance of this warning for reclamation cannot be overstated: getting women into philosophical history may be another means of excluding the feminine. For, according to Irigaray, the feminine has been not just lost or accidentally forgotten in the writing of philosophy; rather, the exclusion of the feminine is integral to the history of philosophical thought. Inclusion, this means, cannot be effectively argued for, or achieved, without transforming the way we engage in philosophy. Making such a transformation on Irigaray's account requires transforming the symbolic and imaginary processes of culture—transforming

its logic. We must move from a logic that represses the feminine to one of sexual difference. Hence, any project of reclamation must also be a project of changing the symbolic and imaginative processes of culture. For reclamation, this means the problem is not just that women are absent from philosophical history because they have been excluded, but also that the absenting of the feminine has made philosophical history possible. For Irigaray, therefore, there cannot be reclamation without *transforming* the logic of that history.

When Irigaray warns that speaking of or about women may always be a recuperation of the feminine in a repressive logic, she is warning that approaching the problem of women's oppression discursively may always aid in that oppression. Thus, Irigaray famously counsels: "the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. Which presupposes that women do not aspire simply to be men's equals in knowledge" (Irigaray 1985b, 78).

Irigaray's warning means that we cannot merely advocate for the texts of women philosophers or seek their representation in the canon as the solution to the history of exclusion: that would be the aspiration to be men's equal. Irigaray's work shows us, rather, that we must become the sort of readers who can read women as philosophers. In proposing that we need to jam the machinery, Irigaray commits both to discourse and to the possibility of changing discourse. When we are changed as readers of discourse, when we can jam the machinery with our reading and writing—in that way the sexual indifference of discourse is and can be disrupted. For reclamation, this means that amassing evidence of women's contributions to philosophical history will never change discourse, for it leaves intact how a reader encounters philosophy and the manner in which it appears discourse ought to be written. Nor can women's writing be reclaimed as an alternative to traditional philosophical history. Again, a reader's engagement with discourse would be left intact, unmoved. Nor can philosophy be corrected according to its own ideals, for those ideals have been formed through the exclusion of women. Instead, reclamation must transform philosophy.

But why worry about transforming philosophy? In the "Power of Discourse and Subordination of the Feminine," Irigaray explains that she writes on Western philosophy because it is the back-story of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis's importance stems from the fact that it has uncovered, Irigaray argues, "*the sexual indifference that underlies the truth of any science, the logic of every discourse*" (Irigaray 1985b, 69; emphasis original). But fatefully for the discourse of psychoanalysis, Freud failed to consider the "*sexualization of discourse itself*" (73; emphasis original). That failure, Irigaray maintains, is due to the metaphysical presuppositions the "discourse on discourse" supplies to other discourses (74). Psychoanalysis relies on philosophy's ability to "*reduce all others to the economy of the Same*" (74; emphasis original). The failure of Freud and psychoanalysts more generally to question the sexualization of discourse dictated by philosophy turns psychoanalysis into a tool of masculine logic. Overcoming that failure of psychoanalysis requires, Irigaray argues, engaging with the master discourse and exposing the sexualization of discourse itself.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray engages the master discourse “by ‘beginning’ with Freud and ‘ending’ with Plato” which is “already going at history ‘backwards’” (Irigaray 1985b 68). Yet she has already noted that *Speculum* has no beginning or end; it “confounds the linearity of an outline, the teleology of discourse, within which there is no possible place for the ‘feminine,’ except the traditional place of the repressed, the censured” (68). For even reversal, Irigaray notes, does not make a place for the feminine. The order of *Speculum* coupled with Irigaray’s denial of the book’s linearity offers an example of how Irigaray tries to make a place for the feminine. Exposing moments of the feminine’s repression in the text are not enough, for woman has provided the place for philosophy to unfold. Thus, in *Speculum*, Irigaray writes: “And if one day her sexuality was recognized, if it did enter into ‘History,’ then his-story would no longer simply take place or have a place to take” (Irigaray 1985b, 112). It is not clear from the point of view of the history that has taken place in and through the repression of the feminine *how* discourse could unfold differently. Yet it is clear that continuing to engage in discourse as it has been done will not overcome the repression of the feminine.

Note how Irigaray concedes and performs the difficulty of conceptualizing discourse differently:

what a feminine syntax might be is not simple nor easy to state, because in that “syntax” there would no longer be either subject or object, “oneness” would no longer be privileged, there would no longer be proper meanings, proper names, “proper” attributes ... Instead, that “syntax” would involve nearness, proximity, but in such an extreme form that it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation. (Irigaray 1985b, 134)

In other words, Irigaray’s positive project is *all but* unimaginable. Even the notion of “syntax” must be suspended in its meaning when projecting what might be.

But Irigaray is not without suggestions for how a place might be made for the feminine. Foremost among them: mimicry, which means for a woman “to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the ‘perceptible,’ of ‘matter’—to ‘ideas,’ in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language” (Irigaray 1985b, 76). The mimic is a role that Irigaray argues is already assigned to the feminine (76). Thus, Irigaray is suggesting that women exploit a position already assigned to woman. We cannot skip to representing the feminine in language, but must use the role already assigned to women, that of mimic, to jam those operations of philosophy. The moments of textual repression can become opportunities for imagining new possibilities.

At this point, for reclamation the following question becomes pressing: were women and their work systematically excluded from philosophy throughout its history through specific mechanisms and practices *or* is the feminine the excluded other of

philosophical thinking that makes it possible? In the first case, there is significant work to be done to understand the history, to overcome those mechanisms and practices, and both to understand and overcome the systematic historical trend—reclamation is not just possible in that case, but vital to overcoming the history of exclusion. In the second, however—and this seems to be the way Irigaray is most often read in reclamation literature—reclamation seems impossible; the repression, censorship, and nonrecognition of the feminine, its disavowal, is the condition of possibility for philosophical work including, presumably, reclamation work. So, although it may be important for feminist projects to examine philosophical history, the goal would have to be, it seems, overcoming philosophy. These two lines of thinking appear incompatible, but I suggest that Irigaray shows us that this dilemma is a false one.

Irigaray, as I have explicated her project, *seems* to offer a structural explanation of the feminine's relationship to philosophy and, thereby, *seems* to thwart the possibility of reclamation. The claim that woman has not spoken *seems* to lead to the conclusion that women have not spoken, at least, not using women's voices. Thus, historical women who have spoken have not given voice to feminine subjectivity. Since reclamationists seem to read her this way, I will elaborate this structural problem for reclamation by considering a passage from "Any Theory of the 'Subject' Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine,'" an essay title that itself seems to bolster the structural view. Irigaray writes:

But if, by exploits of her hand, woman were to reopen paths into (once again) a/one logos that connotes her as castrated, especially as castrated by words, excluded from the work of force except as prostitute to the interests of the dominant ideology—that is of hom(m)osexuality and its struggles with the maternal—then a certain sense, which still constitutes the sense of history also, will undergo unparalleled interrogation, revolution. But how is this to be done? Given that, once again, the "reasonable" words—to which in any case she has access only through mimicry—are powerless to translate all that pulses, clamors, and hangs hazily in the cryptic passages of hysterical suffering-latency. Then.... Turn everything upside down, inside out, back to front. *Rack it with radical convulsions*, carry back, reimport, those crises that her "body" suffers in her impotence to say what disturbs her. Insist also and deliberately upon those *blanks* in discourse which recall the places of her exclusion and which, by their *silent plasticity*, ensure the cohesion, the articulation, the coherent expansion of established forms. (Irigaray 1985a, 142)

At first, Irigaray seems to suggest that there are paths to be reopened into discourse that will overturn its sexual indifference. She reiterates the sense of reopening by saying that woman would *once again* do so with the exploits of her hand. Thus, perhaps, one might hopefully propose, the exclusion of women has been historical and not structural. But, she continues, woman has only had access to reasonable words through mimicry. And those words are put into question as truly reasonable by

Irigaray's use of quotation marks. Woman's exclusion can only be recalled by attention to *blanks* in discourse that lend themselves *silently* to many forms that ensure discourse.

Such a description does not sound promising for reclaiming women's writing; woman appears only as blanks and not as an articulator of philosophical discourse. But rather than concede the impossibility of reclamation, let's look more closely at the passage, for it seems to suggest a way forward. First, note that Irigaray speaks of "woman," not "women." We misplace hope for the reclamation of women's writing if we put it on the idea that *woman* reopens paths with the exploits of her hand. Rather, by using *woman*, Irigaray repeats a trope of discourse, one we can see in formulations like "The Woman Question," but she also speaks through it. Speaking through woman has the sense both of speaking by way of woman and of woman being a concept through which Irigaray strains to be heard: the difference between speaking through a receiver and speaking through a wall. Woman both sustains the possibility of speaking and troubles it, which does not yet easily lead to any sense in which individual women's work or writing might be reclaimed.

Irigaray signals with her use of "woman" that the unparalleled interrogation and revolution of a certain sense, which still constitutes the sense of history also, will not be achieved by enfranchising certain voices into discourse. Woman does not speak. Woman is a trope of discourse. Words, like woman, are powerless to translate all and will always be so, but we do not have to leave uninterrogated the sense, which is the sense of history also, with which we engage discourse. Body thus appears in quotation marks in the above passage. When we write "body" we no more bring that which exceeds discourse into discourse than when we write "woman." Marking off "body" in quotation marks encourages an encounter with it as a concept that has a history in discourse of marking some sort of limit, excess, or disturbance. Irigaray invites us to see every appeal to "body" as a citation with which we engage and through which we are constituted in discourse. Words, as Irigaray writes, are powerless to translate all that pulses, clamors, and hangs hazily in the cryptic passages of hysterical suffering latency, but that does not lead her to abandon discourse. Instead, she tells us to turn everything upside down, inside out, back to front. She tells us to insist, insist on the blanks of discourse and not on the coherence they enable.

This means the history of our relationship to discourse can be changed. We can become readers who pay attention to the blanks of discourse, who read with a sense of the history of discourse, who write with an ear for silences and the history upon which our meaning relies. That does not mean we can master discourse. Rather, we can read with a sense that mastery is always what is at stake in discourse. And mastery is what discourse cannot offer us. Exclusion has been both historical and structural. The structure is changed by reading and writing differently, thereby giving us a new historical relation to discourse. As Elizabeth Weed writes: "Consciousness has a history—perhaps, Irigaray observes, the logic of consciousness and the logic of history 'add up to the same thing in the end, in a way'—and that history can change and be changed" (Weed 1994, 101). Consciousness's history, the logic of consciousness, can be changed. This is the point missed by reclamationists who dismiss Irigaray.

The power of discourse will always be its power to subordinate—to fix everything along vertical and horizontal axes to determine what is above and what is below. But must we remain powerless in the face of this power? Must we accept the feminine as that which provides the place of this ordering? In “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” Irigaray indicates a different possibility. The power of discourse has been the subordination of the feminine, but we can read, write, and rewrite differently. And in practicing discourse differently, we can create the possibility of reclaiming women’s work through our practice. We can make a history in which women’s writing is part of history, not as the other to discourse and not as its alternative, but as part of a discourse we are powerful enough to read, write, and rewrite.

In “Power of Discourse,” after describing philosophy’s power to “*reduce all others to the economy of the Same*,” Irigaray writes:

Whence the necessity of “reopening” the figures of philosophical discourse—idea, substance, subject, transcendental subjectivity, absolute knowledge—in order to pry out of them what they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine, to make them “render up” and give back what they owe the feminine. This may be done in various ways, along various “paths”; moreover, at minimum several of these must be pursued. (Irigaray 1985b, 74)

Irigaray does not dictate what sort of readers we must be; at minimum, we must pursue several paths. Irigaray’s work records many different attempts at prying out of discourse what it has borrowed and writing discourse differently. Here, I focus on the path of reclamation that she presents in “Sorcerer Love.”

SORCERER LOVE

How will being such readers help us with reclamation? I focus on Irigaray’s development of the “sensible transcendental” to propose a manner of reclamation guided by her. The sensible transcendental resists a neat division of the world into matter and discourse. Or, perhaps more helpfully, the phrase helps us acknowledge that “matter” is already a discursive formation with a history that cannot be purified from it even when deployed as a critical category. Yet the sensible transcendental does not only mark a failure of discourse to achieve contact with matter. The sensible transcendental also resists the opposition of the sensible to the transcendental by ostensibly bringing them together in a concept. By noting our difficulty in thinking about the sensible transcendental, we help it do the work of troubling the notion that what exceeds discourse somehow enters it if we use ideas like matter, material, woman, or the feminine. The sensible transcendental alerts us to the history of the discourse/matter opposition and to the history of critique that advocates for the matter side of the dichotomy. If Irigaray warns that discourse is always masculine, she also warns us against seeking refuge in ideas of what exceeds discourse.

One way to understand the sensible transcendental is as a highly condensed act of mimesis. Irigaray uses the form of a concept, a basic unit of discourse, but in an anomalous repetition. Our eyes cannot glide over the concept, but we must repeat the terms to ourselves and try to pull together “sensible” and “transcendental.” It plays the game of discourse, but it uses the rules to disrupt discourse. Sensible and transcendental do not belong together, but in opposition, comfortably across the chasm within discourse.

Irigaray develops the idea of the sensible transcendental in “Sorcerer Love” as something attainable; it is “the material texture of beauty” (Irigaray 1993, 32). In a sense, the sensible transcendental is the accomplishment of the text, one prefigured by Irigaray’s use of the “accessible transcendental” and an “inaccessible transcendent” in “Sorcerer Love.” In order to resist the easy deployment of the sensible transcendental as a definable concept, however, I insist that we must appreciate “Sorcerer Love” as a lecture by a woman giving a reading of a woman’s speech that is voiced by a man in a text written by a man. Irigaray’s reading reclaims Diotima’s voice from its double remove as a report of what she said by a character in a dialogue, but it cannot do so by putting the words back into Diotima’s mouth; Irigaray speaks “Diotima’s Speech.” Further, in her lecture, Irigaray does not decide the issue of who should take the blame for problems of argumentation. Indeed, Plato is mentioned only in the title to the piece and once obliquely in the text; thus, the author is all but absent from the text. Irigaray will suggest that missteps in arguments are perhaps Socrates’ fault, but she also speaks of these missteps as errors in Diotima’s method. Irigaray’s voice, as reader of the speech, tells us what is true to Diotima’s argument and what is a departure from it.

The central theme of the lecture, Diotima’s proper argument, is that love is an intermediary between us, that it is the means of our immortality and what makes a progression from ignorance to wisdom possible. By focusing on this theme, lending her voice to Diotima to elaborate this argument, Irigaray also asks us to engage with her as listeners and readers. Thus, “Sorcerer Love” does not ask us to trust this instance of discourse because it is a woman reading a woman, reclaiming her from her embedding in a man’s text. Rather, she asks us to perfect ourselves in wisdom by being the readers of her reading, which will also make possible her perfection in wisdom. The immortality in such exchange comes, in this case, from the constant movement between text and reader. Fixing the truth of Diotima’s speech or Irigaray’s reading of it would already place the possibility of immortality in what we produce by engaging the text—another text, for instance. For Diotima, Irigaray writes: “Love is fecund prior to any procreation. And its fecundity is *mediumlike*, *daimonic*, the guarantee for all, male and female, of the immortal becoming of the living” (Irigaray 1993, 25–26).

Indeed, Irigaray writes that Diotima “miscarries” when she suggests that procreation is the cause of love. Irigaray writes: “Something becomes frozen in space-time, with the loss of a vital intermediary and of an accessible transcendental that remains alive. A sort of teleological triangle is put into place instead of a perpetual journey, a perpetual transvaluation, a permanent becoming” (Irigaray 1993, 27). The perpetual journey, the perpetual transvaluation, the becoming of dialogue that flows between

people are what Irigaray calls the accessible transcendental. We can attain immortality not through what we “leave behind”—legacies, children, texts—but with each other in the becoming of dialogue. The image of the child as *telos* is a sad image compared to the child who, empowered to love and be loved, achieves immortality through loving. Irigaray does not negate the importance of children or texts, but is rather trying to help us re-evaluate familiar images and ways of thinking about love that would funnel our thinking immediately to procreation and productivity—to alienation as the means of immortality.

The *inaccessible* transcendent becomes “the ideal when daimonic love is suppressed” (Irigaray 1993, 30). Thus, when children, texts, the truth become the means to immortality, the transcendent becomes inaccessible to us. When the circulation of dialogue becomes subordinate to the product of its work, then the transcendent becomes inaccessible—we are merely mortal with dreams of achieving an immortality totally alien from us. This is not to say that we should not have children, write texts, or pursue the truth. Indeed, if Irigaray attempts in “Sorcerer Love” a daimonic reading of Diotima’s speech, it results in a text. She is dependent on our reading of it, whether we hear the lecture or read it. If we read the text as the goal of Irigaray’s engagement with Diotima, Socrates, and Plato, then we have certainly taken up one possibility of that text. But in having done so, we stop the circulation of dialogue, and the text becomes inaccessibly transcendent. We might agree or disagree with it, but it is not ours to change through engagement with it, but rather something that subsists through our interpretations of it. The text becomes, to use Irigaray’s words, *beloved*, rather than a *lover*.

Irigaray gets these categories—lover, beloved—from Diotima, but she also argues that Diotima is inconsistent in her treatment of love. Diotima, she suggests, also maintains that procreation becomes the goal of love. On such a view:

[love] risks losing its internal motivation, its “inner” fecundity, its slow and constant generation, regeneration. This error in method, in the originality of Diotima’s method, is corrected soon afterward only to be confirmed later. Of course, once again, *she is not there*. *Socrates relates her words*. Perhaps he distorts them unwittingly or unknowingly. (Irigaray 1993, 27)

Irigaray exposes a contradiction in Diotima’s argument. Love is first daimonic, but then Diotima miscarries and links love to procreation. But we cannot be sure who is speaking, whose error and whose method we encounter in the dialogue. Perhaps Socrates is to blame, Irigaray suggests.

Irigaray reminds us that no one can read the words of Diotima. We can read Plato’s rendering of Socrates’ speech that he attributes to Diotima. As Irigaray repeats throughout “Sorcerer Love”: *she is not there*. The challenge before Irigaray is reading and voicing (for “Sorcerer Love” is a lecture) Diotima’s speech without appeal to it as a historical text on which our authority about matters of love and beauty can be grounded. *She is not there*, and yet we can be lovers in the style Diotima suggests. Diotima fails to be present at all *and* yet she has something for us. Diotima’s absence and

the importance of her lesson allow us to see authority differently. Irigaray becomes the author of Diotima's speech in dialogue with Plato's authorship. Authority in and through dialogue, open to future dialogues, is the basis of Irigarayan reclamation. In "An Ethics of Sexual Difference," Irigaray writes:

Beyond the circularity of discourse, of the nothing that is in and of being. When the copula no longer veils the abyssal burial of the other in a gift of language which is neuter only in that it forgets the difference from which it draws its strength and energy. With a neuter, abstract *there* is giving way to or making space for a "we are" or "we become," "we live here" together.

This creation would be our opportunity, from the humblest detail of everyday life to the "grandest," by means of the opening of a *sensible transcendental* that comes into being through us, of which *we would be* the mediators and bridges. Not only the mourning for the dead God of Nietzsche, not waiting passively for the god to come, but by conjuring him up among us, within us, as resurrection and transfiguration of blood, of flesh, through a language and an ethics that is ours. (Irigaray 1993, 129)

The importance of intermediacy is apparent in this passage. What Irigaray called immortality in "Sorcerer Love" appears divine in this description. Not the God of divine authority that all but died with the advent of modernity, nor God the son who will rise again to end our human suffering, but a divine within us. And that divinity is "a new birth, a new era in history" only when we have moved beyond the sexual indifference of discourse that pretends to neutrality through forgetting the placenta that sustains it (Irigaray 1993, 129). The becoming is both divine and mucosal; transcendental and sensible. It does not close itself off through the forgetting of the maternal body, the elements, especially air, that sustain it. We can be readers who remember: "Language, however formal it may be, feeds on blood, on flesh, on material elements" (127). We can be readers who resist the closure of discourse, jamming the machine with love.

How can love jam the machinery? This question introduces a positive trajectory into the project of jamming the machinery without simply replicating the imperative to produce more discourse. For love, as Irigaray reads Diotima, is an intermediary that does not end in the production of discourse, but rather flows through dialogue with each other, texts, and readings. The machinery of discourse production is jammed by lovers who do not value the product of discourse as a means to immortality, but rather the becoming that is possible with each other, even in and through discourse. That possibility of discourse circulating differently is the opening for reclamation. For the circulation of philosophy does not have to be guaranteed by the disavowed place of its happening; other norms can shape the circulation of discourse. The machine is jammed in order to make discourse circulate differently—but not just differently, lovingly.

Reclamation as a practice of love does not have a telos outside itself; it opens up room to experience ourselves as readers of texts and the way the text responds to our reading. Irigaray writes: "Like love, the philosopher would be someone poor, dirty, rather down-and-out, always unhoused, sleeping beneath the stars, but very curious, skilled in ruses and tricks of all kinds, constantly reflecting, a sorcerer, a sophist, sometimes exuberant, sometimes close to death" (Irigaray 1993, 24). Reclamation that is divine and mucosal will have to be skilled in ruses and tricks of all kind. But it is also dependent upon readers who are sometimes exuberant, sometimes close to death. Readers who wonder at what they encounter, capable of "attraction to that which is not yet (en)coded" and "curiosity (but perhaps in all senses: sight, smell, hearing? Etc.) vis-à-vis that which we have not yet encountered or made ours" (75). Wonder, as Irigaray reads Descartes, exceeds appropriation.

How can we be readers who exceed appropriation? This is the challenge Irigaray puts to reclamation. The heterogeneity with which she reads, rewrites, mimics the texts of philosophy does not just jam the machinery once, setting up a situation in which we wait for new parts to be ordered or a new machine to be built. Irigaray's readings offer a model of reclamation in which discourse is jammed with dialogue and style interrupts meaning. Her writing models an invitation to the reader to become author also, as the partner in an exchange that may result in texts, but that does not end in texts. Reclaiming women as philosophers and reclaiming philosophy for women does not require that new idols be erected for our reverence and obedience. But if they are not to become such figures, we must be readers powerful enough to wonder at what we have not yet appropriated.

DIOTIMA

In "The Hidden Host: Irigaray and Diotima at Plato's Symposium," Nye presents a different Diotima, one whose argument is consistent throughout the speech in the *Symposium*. The successful student of Diotima, Nye argues, "glimpses no universal, abstracted from imperfect particulars, but an indwelling immortal divine beauty, an attracting center that foments fruitful creation in all areas of existence" (Nye 1989, 47), and Diotima never wavers from developing this line of thought. Nye agrees with Irigaray's daimonic reading of Diotima's speech, but disagrees that Diotima's speech ever miscarries. Nye writes: "Irigaray judges Diotima as a lapsed French feminist struggling to maintain the 'correct method' against philosophical orthodoxy" (47). In other words, Nye's criticism is not only that Irigaray relies on an over-literal translation of the *Symposium*, which she also argues, but that Irigaray's method of reading causes her to misread Diotima and to misread her as failing in the French feminist method of reading. The source of Irigaray's misreading, Nye contends, is in the "conceptual infrastructure of Irigaray's feminist strategy in deconstructive method and textual practice, in '*écriture féminine*,' and in the concept of feminine '*jouissance*'" (49). Deconstruction, *écriture féminine*, and *jouissance* are Nye's explanation for Irigaray's inability to read Diotima well.

It is tempting to respond to this criticism by showing the complicated manner in which Irigaray adopts deconstructive methods to counter the image of her as an acolyte of Derrida, or to mention that Irigaray does not use the term “*écriture féminine*,” or to analyze the way that Irigaray deploys “*jouissance*” with and against Lacan. Indeed, it is tempting to show that Nye fails to be the historically informed, subtle reader of Irigaray that she claims Irigaray fails to be of Diotima. But here, we must remember, although Nye can read Irigaray, no one can read the words of Diotima. We can read Plato’s rendering of Socrates’ speech that he attributes to Diotima. As Irigaray repeats throughout “Sorcerer Love”: *she is not there*. Thus, Irigaray’s problem is not that she “judges Diotima within the context that gives meaning to her own deconstructive practice as if Diotima were a twentieth-century Parisian ‘*intellectuelle*’ struggling against the authority of a male academic establishment to produce an ‘*écriture féminine*’” (Nye 1989, 52). Irigaray’s problem is not that Diotima fails as a French feminist; rather, it is that she fails to be present at all *and* yet she has something for us.

Nye and Irigaray, I argue, disagree about authority. For Irigaray, Diotima’s absence and the importance of her lesson allow us to see authority differently. Irigaray becomes the author of Diotima’s speech, not as Plato did, but in dialogue with Plato’s authorship. Irigaray’s approach to establishing Diotima’s authority is consistent with her view of the exclusion of sexual difference from philosophical discourse. Diotima’s absence from the scene of philosophy is imperfect, for a view is still attributed to her, even if quite tenuously. Yet Irigaray takes the role given to a woman and exploits it to raise the question of sexual difference. Further, she does so by engaging with the assigned role as though it generated a woman’s speech.

Nye, of course, is not unaware of the means by which Diotima’s speech has been transmitted. There are two ways she negotiates worries about the authenticity or veracity of Socrates’ via Plato’s rendering of it. First, Nye provides historical detail about “a sophisticated Minoan culture” that persisted through Greek culture that granted some authority to women, especially in religious contexts (Nye 1989, 53). This contextualization helps to account for Socrates’ appeal to the authority of a woman, according to Nye, and his reverence for her as his teacher. Nye contends that even though Diotima was absent *she could have been an authority*. This, Nye’s argument suggests, is grounds for considering her an authority now.

Nye’s second strategy is more complicatedly related to Irigaray’s work. Nye claims that Diotima is the host of the *Symposium*. In her introduction to the essay, she writes:

The root meaning of “host” is a physical body on whose flesh parasites feed. The host is the nourishment they steal and convert to prolong their own dependent existences. The host is a sacrificed animal body offered up to placate heaven. The host is the physical bread the faithful eat at communion to become one with the insubstantial god. If we take “host” in these root senses, then, as I hope to show, it is Diotima and not Agathon, Socrates, or Plato who is the real host of the *Symposium*. (Nye 1989, 46)

It is not clear from this etymological lesson why Nye wants to show that Diotima is the host. It appears as if she would then be: (a) the physical body feeding parasites so that they may, in dependence, prolong their existence; (b) the animal body placating heaven; or (c) the physical bread through which the faithful make contact with an insubstantial god. None of these are, on the face of it at least, obvious bases for establishing Diotima's authority.

Nye does not return to the image of the host to provide alternate meanings or to help us re-evaluate the meanings she made available in her introduction. But Nye does return to the idea of Diotima as the host. In her conclusion, Nye writes:

If, with Diotima, [Irigaray's] usual sure touch falters, it is because Diotima does not play the feminine role as deconstruction or Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has conceived it. She is not the uninvited gatecrasher, but the host of the *Symposium*. She is the spokesperson for the ways of life and thought that Greek philosophy feeds on, ways of thought whose authority Plato neutralized and converted to his own purposes. (Nye 1989, 57)

Diotima is the host upon which Greek philosophy feeds and the basis for the authority that Plato neutralizes and converts. Interestingly, the image that Nye gives of her here resonates with Irigaray's rendering of the feminine as the disavowed material of discourse; for Nye, Diotima is the absent body on which the *Symposium* feeds. Diotima, who by the history Nye gives us should have some authority to speak her own ideas, does not speak in the *Symposium*. She is not the gatecrasher at the party because *she is not there*. Nor can she be, in her absence, the spokesperson for a way of life and thought. Plato or Socrates, perhaps, but not Diotima; *she is not there*.

Nye's strategies give us a clue to Irigaray's interpretive strategy. Nye urges that through contextualization and proper translation we can gain access to what Diotima really meant, despite even the difficulty that the text we have of her speech does not pretend to be an accurate record of her speaking. Nye's work raises questions about the style we ought to use to write about, represent, and give voice to women's thinking. In other words, Nye's critique raises central questions about reclamation. At the heart of Nye's condemnation is the observation that Irigaray does not take up questions of historical accuracy or the project of contextualization. Irigaray, Nye suggests, cannot be trusted as Diotima's reader because she is not sufficiently knowledgeable, she has not taken the care the text requires, and there is too much of her in the material. Yet, as I have argued, Nye's approach cannot bring Diotima into the scene of philosophy. Diotima was not there.

Nye argues that a woman like Diotima could have been an authority; thus we can consider the speech hers. Irigaray reclaims Diotima from the priestess's absence. Irigaray uses the fact that Diotima was represented as an authority in her absence to bring the question of sexual difference to the *Symposium*. The uncertainty of what the *Symposium* presents us becomes an opportunity in Irigaray's hands to bring our concerns and needs to the text. *As though* Diotima were her interlocutor, Irigaray reflects what she hears in the speech, endorsing part and finding fault with part. Diotima's absence

becomes an opportunity for Irigaray to bring the question of sexual difference to the materials at hand. Rather than appropriate Diotima's speech, either as the words of a woman in the history of philosophy or as Plato's view or as Socrates' speech, Irigaray talks *with* the text. Under Irigaray's treatment, Diotima becomes an interlocutor, not on the basis of her reclaimed historicity, but through the love we can share with her.

Although Irigaray helps us move forward on a problem that Nye cannot dislodge—namely, Diotima's absence from the scene of philosophy—I do not mean to dismiss Nye's contribution. Nye continues the dialogue with her response to Irigaray. Indeed, Nye's case that Diotima could have been Socrates' teacher helps to further establish her absence from the dialogue. That is, it was not unthinkable for a woman to have and teach views about love, but still Plato absents her, still we have no record of her and scant records of the words of her female contemporaries. Irigaray's reclamation strategy does not make attention to historicity and contextualization irrelevant to reclamation, but we do not have to start with that work in place, nor must we be thwarted by the inadequacy of the historical record in regard to women.

Women have long been assumed to have been absent from philosophy's history; Irigaray gives us a means of exploiting that assumption to reclamationist ends. Yet Irigaray has a tendency to speak as though no women contributed to the history of philosophy. We must be cautious with Irigaray's approach not to become overly invested in women's absence. Women have not been literally absent, though their work has certainly been excluded; feminine subjectivity has been absented. The distinction is crucial for us to be able to look for women we have not been taught to acknowledge as philosophers: suffragettes, blues singers, and itinerant preachers, to name a few. Their absenting is our opportunity to engage them, but we must believe that women practiced philosophy. Reclaiming Diotima is important, both because she is a voice from the beginnings of philosophy and because feminist theorists have developed such a strong discourse about her. Reclaiming Diotima is, however, only part of transforming philosophical practice. We have, and we have hope of finding more, women's writing—writing that can be engaged using Irigaray's method.

NOTES

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1. Deutscher 1997 offers an illuminating discussion of how Genevieve Lloyd, Karen Green, and Moira Gatens, among others, defend against feminism of difference in work on the history of philosophy and fail to see the resources in Irigaray for analyzing the role of women and the feminine in the history of philosophy.

2. In *La Mystérique* (in Irigaray 1985a, 191–202), Irigaray explores the role of the female mystic. Reclamationists have done important work engaging the writings of mystics. Thus, it seems that *La Mystérique* might also be an important resource for reclamation. It is—in a sense. Irigaray exposes the contradictions of the mystic's role, the

countervailing excesses of the only opportunity for woman to speak and to speak publicly. That exposure can help us to lovingly engage the thinking of mystics, but it is not the direct modeling of reclamation that occurs in "Sorcerer Love."

3. Diotima's teachings are not by any means the only place in Plato's work we find philosophy treated as a discourse of love. I must here leave aside the question of how Diotima's view relates to views elaborated elsewhere in Plato's work, but I want to mark its importance for reclamation and Irigaray's reading.

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