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**EROS RE-ROOTED: THE POSSIBILITIES OF INTERPRETING DIOTIMA'S SPEECH**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Open University for  
the degree of Master of Philosophy in Gender Studies

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## Abstract

The thesis sets out to explore the gender-implications of the eros-concept elaborated in Diotima's *Symposium* speech. While seeking the possibilities of interpreting Diotima's teaching, the paper also presents an interpretation of my own. I propose that Alcibiades' speech may serve as a prism that highlights the Dionysiac side of Diotima's eros. The project is realized in an interdisciplinary manner. The philosophy of sexual difference, modern hermeneutics, as well as methods from literary theory and classical philology are employed.

The feminist endeavor of re-reading the philosophical canon has brought about several interpretations of the *Symposium*, which often seem methodologically incompatible with one another. One of the main arguments of the thesis is that these clashing approaches may be reconciled via Gadamer's model of dialogue and a joint use of their methodologies may be achieved through applying Wolfgang Iser's theory of interpretation. The first part of the thesis problematizes these theoretical issues through a comparative analysis of two feminist readings of Diotima's speech, those of Luce Irigaray and Andrea Nye.

The second part investigates the gender-aspects of Diotima's speech. An analysis of Alcibiades' speech shows how the Dionysiac plays an important role in understanding Diotima's eros and in unfolding its gender implications via the philosophy of sexual difference. The notion of sexual difference enables the analyst to recognize Diotima as a male construct of a female image that Plato creates in order to appropriate the female experience of birth to his philosophy. The problem areas dealt with in this section are the mimetic male desire for female experience, immortality, and the figure of the birth-giving male. Alongside Adriana Cavarero's work, the thesis is an attempt to "snatch" back the feminine discourse of Diotima's speech from its male-centered symbolic surroundings through the figure of Dionysus.

# Table of Contents

<b><u>Table of Contents</u></b> .....	1
<b><u>Introduction</u></b> .....	3
<u>The structure of the thesis</u> .....	4
<u>Eros and gender</u> .....	6
<b><u>Chapter 1</u></b> .....	12
1.1 <u>Re-reading the canon, re-reading Plato</u> .....	12
1.2 <u>The <i>Symposium</i></u> .....	16
1.2.1 <u>An introduction to the dialogue</u> .....	16
1.2.2 <u>The content of the <i>Symposium</i></u> .....	19
<b><u>Chapter 2</u></b> .....	29
2.1 <u>The Nye – Irigaray debate</u> .....	29
2.1.1 <u>Irigaray’s “Sorcerer Love”</u> .....	29
2.1.2 <u>Nye’s response</u> .....	33
2.2 <u>The question</u> .....	40
2.2.1 <u>Unfolding the question</u> .....	40
2.2.2 <u>The Nye – Irigaray debate(?) – revisited</u> .....	46
2.2.3 <u>The logic of question and answer</u> .....	48
2.2.4 <u>Intention and meaning</u> .....	49
2.3 <u>Interpretation</u> .....	54
2.3.1 <u>Interpretation as translation</u> .....	54
2.3.2 <u>Interpretation as catalyst for further interpretation</u> .....	57
<b><u>Chapter 3</u></b> .....	60
3.1 <u>Diotima’s speech</u> .....	60
3.1.1 <u>Diotima’s voice</u> .....	60
3.1.2 <u>The Female in the speech</u> .....	62
3.1.3 <u>Hierarchization and individuality</u> .....	65
3.2 <u>Alcibiades’ speech</u> .....	70
3.2.1 <u>Alcibiades’ <i>eros</i></u> .....	72
3.2.2 <u>The Apollonian and the Dionysiac</u> .....	76
<b><u>Chapter 4</u></b> .....	81

<u>4.1</u>	<u>Diotima speaks through the body</u> .....	81
<u>4.2</u>	<u>Sexual difference</u> .....	83
<u>4.3</u>	<u>Snatch</u> .....	88
<u>4.4</u>	<u>Diotima’s speech – revisited</u> .....	91
4.4.1	Mimesis.....	92
4.4.2	Immortality.....	94
4.4.3	Male birth.....	96
4.4.4	Dionysus.....	99
 <b><u>Conclusion</u></b> .....		<b>105</b>
 <b><u>Bibliography</u></b> .....		<b>113</b>

## Introduction

Socrates' statement in Plato's *Symposium* that he had learnt all he knew about *eros* from a woman called Diotima has been longstanding issue for the interpreters of the speech. Most of the traditional scholarly work interpreting the *Symposium* has stripped it from its gendered-ness, and scholars who have dealt with the gender-implications of the dialogue, did so to purify the text's "reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks,"<sup>1</sup> i.e. male-to-male love.

The emergence of gender-sensitivity and feminist re-readings of the *Symposium* brought about new implications of the *eros*-concept elaborated in Diotima's speech. However, the feminist analyses are often methodologically closed to one another, appropriating Diotima's speech for their own – ideologically loaded – interpretation. The goal of this thesis is to explore the methodological problems and possibilities of interpreting Diotima's speech and to suggest a gender-oriented interpretation of my own.

A gender-oriented textual investigation of the *Symposium* with a philosophical perspective can be realized in an interdisciplinary manner. The philosophy of sexual difference, modern hermeneutics, methods from literary theory and classical philology will be employed in the project.

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 50.

## *The structure of the thesis*

The first chapter locates the thesis in its broader framework and articulates its stance within the feminist project of re-thinking and re-reading the philosophical tradition. The feminist project of re-reading the canon problematizes the exclusion of women from the Western philosophical tradition and its intrinsic gender biases. I will provide an overview of the main concepts, issues and directions of this project, based on the works of Charlotte Witt and Nancy Tuana. This will be followed by a brief introduction to the main target of my thesis, the *Symposium*.

In Chapter Two, I will introduce Luce Irigaray and Andrea Nye's articles on Diotima's speech. These articles and the methodological clash between them will be used as a starting point to explore different aspects of Diotima's speech and different ways of approaching it. First, I will elaborate on the question of interpretation, then based on my findings will turn to the other issues addressed by the two articles in Chapter Three.

The Nye – Irigaray debate problematized from a wider perspective leads us into the realm of hermeneutics. My presupposition is that Hans-Georg Gadamer's dialogical approach to interpretation might serve as an intermediary between the methodological positions represented by the two articles and enable them to enter into dialogue with each other as well as with Plato's text. I am not to judge which article provides a more adequate interpretation to Diotima's speech, rather, I accept both approaches as relevant and will show that a joint use of their methods may illuminate deeper and more complex implications of Diotima's teaching.



After opening up Diotima's speech as well as the two articles for dialogue, I will evoke Wolfgang Iser's model of interpretation as an aid to keep the text open, so that it cannot be appropriated by any one way of reading. I will analyze Wolfgang Iser's concept of liminal space, the intermediary between reality and knowledge, to show how that intermediary is shaped by and also shapes the register of interpretation – providing energy for further interpretation.

The extensive discussion about the theoretical considerations of Gadamer and Iser in relation to the Nye – Irigaray discord is to emphasize the importance of developing a carefully selected set of tools in order to enter into dialogue with a text – a collection of methodological instruments which are apt to change in the process of questioning and being questioned by the text.

Chapter Three will turn to the different aspects of Diotima's speech as pinpointed by Irigaray and Nye. These aspects concern Diotima's voice, the female in the speech, and hierarchization. I will analyze these questions on the basis of several existing interpretations of Diotima's speech, while expressing my own stance regarding these matters. My thesis is that Alcibiades' speech serves as a prism through which Diotima's speech can be understood: Alcibiades highlights the Dionysiac side of Diotima's teaching and I assume that this Dionysiac side has an important role in understanding Diotima's *eros* and in unfolding its gender implications.

The analysis of the main aspects of the speech from a gender point-of-view pursued in Chapter Three opens the ground for a semiotic investigation of Diotima's speech in the light of sexual difference. This will be carried out in Chapter Four. The notion of sexual difference enables us to recognize Diotima as a male construct of a female image that Plato creates in order to appropriate the female experience of birth

to his philosophy. David Halperin's study on Diotima and Adriana Cavarero's work will be used to explore this territory. My analysis is in alliance with the hermeneutic project of Cavarero, which sets out to dismantle the workings of the patriarchal symbolic order and re-appropriate its female mythic figures with the intention of sketching a female symbolic order, where female sexual difference does not get contained and the female can be positively represented, not merely as lack or the other. The problem areas investigated in this chapter are: mimetic male desire for female experience, immortality, and the figure of the birth-giving male. I attempt to "snatch" back the feminine discourse of Diotima's speech from its male-centered symbolic surroundings through the Dionysiac.

Finally, the Conclusion will weave together the central themes of the thesis, summarizing what it has achieved and also pointing out possible directions in which further investigation(s) of the dialogue may be carried out.

### ***Eros and gender***

The two concepts arcing over this thesis are gender and *eros*. It is important to clarify how I shall use these notions:

#### **a, *eros***

To say that the *Symposium* is about love would be an oversimplification, since *eros* is a certain type of love and the notion of *eros* becomes an epistemological concept in Plato's oeuvre. Different understandings of the concept of *eros* will appear throughout the entire thesis, based on the different meanings attached to it both by the speakers

and the interpreters of the dialogue. Here, at the beginning, I would simply state that *eros is a desire the goal of which is beyond itself*. This desire may be a drive towards both physical and intellectual knowledge, as well as towards acquiring virtue(s). *Eros*, conceived of this way, is a process that takes place in the form of relationship and interaction, i.e. dialogue, between human beings. Platonic dialogue is in this sense erotic, and the same way Platonic *eros* is philosophic, as it emerges through dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

An important focus of gender-conscious analyses (e.g. Irigaray and Nye) of the *Symposium* concerns the role of the female in this desire for physical and intellectual knowledge. Due to the variant meanings of *eros*, I will use the word in italics throughout the thesis except for the section where I summarize the speeches of the *Symposium*. There I shall stick to the spelling used in W. R. M. Lamb's edition: »Eros«.<sup>3</sup>

## **b, gender**

The multifarious, often conflicting, understandings of the concept of gender within scholarship make the term highly problematic. I will restrict the following description to my understanding of the notion, as it is used in the thesis. It is a strategic move not to define gender, as defining it would solidify the notion, universalizing it into a ready-made concept that can be applied to different socio-cultural settings, while in fact gender manifests itself simultaneously through and together with those settings themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Mária Joó, "A platóni 'erósz'-ról – feminista interpretációk kapcsán (On Platonic 'Eros' – Considering Feminist Interpretations)," *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* (1996/1-2-3): 1-29, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Lysis; Symposium; Gorgias*, edited and translated by W. R. M. Lamb (London: Heinemann, 1925). All quotations from the *Symposium* throughout the thesis, unless marked otherwise, are from this edition and were compared with the original Greek text.

This conceptualization treats gender as a process, interaction, relations acted out within specific contexts in different times and places. It is a fruitful approach as, on the one hand, it brings about the immediate recognition of gender's embeddedness in a network of power relations and highlights other forms of oppression, including those based on race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation; while, on the other hand, it helps one avoid false generalizations and attempts at universalization (two underlying tendencies within gender theory initially critiqued by postmodern feminism, women of color and lesbian feminists).

One common approach within the different understandings of gender is the attempt to denaturalize the notion, that is, to disrupt the view that considers the male/female binary opposition as natural and believes in two fixed genders, which are marked by external genitalia as biological foundation. Every attempt to undermine this view (which is often reiterated in the subversive attempts themselves) includes problematizing gender in its historicity and context-specificity.

Joan Scott's insight into the possible uses of gender as an analytic tool incorporates many of the above described ideas. Scott understands gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes." As a constitutive element, gender incorporates:

- cultural symbols,
- the "normative statements" that aim at controlling the possible meanings of cultural symbols via the techniques of containment and limitation,
- "social institutions and organizations" (e.g. kinship systems, education, economy, politics) and

- “subjective identity” (the gendered enculturation of individuals).<sup>4</sup>

These four levels are interrelated and create a subtle network that serves as “a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.”<sup>5</sup> This field, as stated above is closely linked with other forms and systems of oppression. Gender analyses have to keep in mind the multiplicity of experiences within each setting as well as the diversity of modes and networks of oppression in different socio-cultural environments.

Two more issues regarding gender will gain significance within the thesis, which need to be clarified. One is the role of the subject within gender as a process and the other is the sex/gender distinction. Following Cavarero’s observations, the thesis emphasizes that the *Symposium* is a key text in the separation of body and soul – a cornerstone of Western metaphysics. As opposed to this dualism, Diotima’s *eros* is opened up for interpretation as a possible bridge between the separated lives of the soul (our thinking part) and the body. In accord with this approach, the notion of gender is used with caution throughout the thesis: I do not draw the sex/gender distinction because it resonates with a body/mind distinction and also suggests a dualistic relation, both of which I avoid reiterating.

Moira Gatens’ work shows that falling back on this distinction can be escaped precisely through a recognition of the active role of both the mind and the body within the process of (en)gender(ing). She emphasizes that focusing on the subject, instead of consciousness, when analyzing gender, draws our attention to “the active processes

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<sup>4</sup> Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986, Winter): 1053-75, 1067.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

involved in becoming a signifying subject.”<sup>6</sup> Gatens uses the notion of the imaginary body to frame an analytical matrix for this endeavor. The imaginary body, or body-phantom, is the physical image of our body, as we conceive of it. This image is essential “in order for us to have motility in the world, without which we could not be intentional subjects.”<sup>7</sup> The imaginary body is gradually acquired in its relation to the image of other subjects. It is characterized by its specific socio-cultural framework, as well as the physical and psychological history of the individual.

An analysis of the imaginary body will show it to be the site of the historical and cultural specificity of masculinity and femininity. It is to the imaginary body that we must look to find the key or the code to the deciphering of the social and personal significance of male and female biologies as lived in culture, that is masculinity and femininity.<sup>8</sup>

Besides showing the active role of the mind and the body within gendered enculturation, Gatens provides new directions for unraveling the complex network of the different layers in which gender operates. Reading the imaginary body will turn it into a map through which the social, the historical, the cultural and the economic spheres can be explored with regard to their gender implications. This approach also helps us gain a subtler understanding of the relationship between the biological and the cultural.

Based on Gatens’ conceptualization of the terms, I use the notions of masculinity and femininity “as forms of sex-appropriate behaviours,” which are “manifestations of a historically based culturally shared phantasy about male and

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<sup>6</sup> Moira Gatens, “A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction,” in *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3-21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

female biologies,”<sup>9</sup> while the terms ‘male’ and ‘female’ generally designate biological difference. In accordance with this, the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’ refer to animate male and female subjectivities – in their sexed bodies and above described complexities. On the grounds of these considerations, I understand gender as the body in its situatedness, or “biology-as-lived in a social and historical context.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 14.

## Chapter 1

### *1.1 Re-reading the canon, re-reading Plato*

The Western philosophical tradition is not gender-neutral. The general perspective of the thinking subject is that of the educated white male in the philosophical canon. In the past two and a half decades re-reading and re-forming that canon has been an important element of feminist writing. This development can also be detected in the realm of literature and history. The two most significant issues concerning the re-reading of the philosophical canon are: historical exclusion and the tradition's connecting the female to matter, to the irrational, as opposed to the male norms of reason and objectivity. These norms, overtly in words or covertly in symbols and metaphors, have excluded the feminine from the philosophical discourse throughout the centuries. What had been claimed to be universal for more than two millennia, proved to be biased with the emergence of gender-sensitivity.

Applying the category of gender to the philosophical tradition has showed how the canon is intertwined with misogyny and how the supposedly universal ideas are gender biased. Such partialities may not only appear explicitly or implicitly (in the form of words or symbols/metaphors), but may also be generic to the theory itself. Charlotte Witt introduces the concepts of intrinsically and extrinsically gendered notions. According to her, an intrinsically gendered notion is a concept "that necessarily carries implications regarding gender," while "an extrinsically gendered



notion typically does carry implication about gender, but not necessarily so.”<sup>11</sup> A gender-oriented interpretation of philosophical concepts may show whether the concepts are inherently sexist and gendered. If gendered notions (ideas implicitly or explicitly connected to gender and sexual difference) can be removed without altering the theory, then gender associations are not an inherent part of the given theory, which, then, is not necessarily biased against women.

What if a notion is gender biased? What should be the next step for the gender conscious re-reader of the canon? Nancy Tuana, in her preface to the book *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* points out that re-reading the canon may be a fruitful method to revise our philosophical tradition from “the margins of philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> She advocates critical awareness about the tendency of the canonized philosophical notions to offer a universal perspective and points out the importance of exploring the gender ideologies inscribed in those notions. She also states that, while re-reading a text of the canon, one has to investigate the extent to which “socially inherited prejudices,” i.e. biases, are part of the philosopher’s “larger philosophical framework,” and “the ways in which the definitions of central philosophical concepts implicitly include or exclude gendered traits.”<sup>13</sup>

Tuana’s approach is similar to the attitude proposed in Gregory Vlastos’ article “Was Plato a Feminist?”<sup>14</sup> Vlastos points out that Plato’s strength in the way of

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<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Witt, “Feminist History of Philosophy,” in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2000 Edition), accessed: 26 November 2005, URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2000/entries/feminism-femhist/>>, section 1.3, “Synoptic Interpretations of the Philosophical Canon.”

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Tuana (ed.), “Preface,” to Nancy Tuana (ed.), *Re-Reading the Canon: Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), i-xi, x.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, xi.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory Vlastos, “Was Plato a Feminist?” in Nancy Tuana (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (see above), 11-23.

treating women within his philosophical framework is that he could separate his era's and his own prejudices about women from "the dictates of moral theory,"<sup>15</sup> an achievement rarely found in philosophers' works. I find it important to keep Vlastos' differentiation of moral theory and social prejudices in mind when analyzing Diotima's speech. This basic attitude may help us to navigate among the different ways and levels in interpreting Plato's oeuvre and Diotima's teaching.

"Synoptic interpretations of the canon" argue that the basic pillars of the philosophical canon, such as the notions reason and objectivity, are gendered as male.<sup>16</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, in her classic analysis entitled *The Man of Reason*,<sup>17</sup> shows how reason has been implicitly associated with maleness through the history of Western philosophical thought. Lloyd claims that, from the Pythagoreans on,

[r]ational knowledge has been construed as a transcending, transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind.<sup>18</sup>

According to Lloyd, our ideals of reason carry an "implicit maleness" and also the exclusion of the feminine. She postulates that femininity itself has been "partly constituted through such processes of exclusion."<sup>19</sup>

While one might draw the conclusion that, owing to their being gendered male, reason and objectivity should be rejected as such, this thesis follows the approach that these notions should be critically analyzed instead, for the very same reason. In my view, a gender-conscious investigation of the canon should enable a productive

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Witt, section 1.3, "Synoptic Interpretations of the Philosophical Canon."

<sup>17</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 2.

problematization of the philosophical tradition through the re-thinking of its notions. Such a problematization may reveal whether and to what extent those notions are applicable or acceptable from a gender-informed point of view.

The two feminist theorists whose notions and concepts are of crucial importance for the following investigations are Luce Irigaray and Adriana Cavarero. Both Irigaray and Cavarero have been engaged in re-reading the canon. Irigaray's work proceeds alongside the approach that our philosophical tradition is gendered as male. She employs psychoanalytic theory and deconstructs philosophical texts based on their inner contradictions. She traces how the feminine gets repressed within those texts and how patriarchal thinking fails to recognize sexual difference. Her article will be the starting point of my investigations about Diotima's speech in Chapter Two.

Adriana Cavarero's conceptual framework is based on Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference and Hannah Arendt's notion of natality. The concept of birth, as the locus of female power, plays a central role in Cavarero's work. She dismantles the patriarchal symbolic order, which she interprets to be based on the symbolic debasement of motherhood, and delineates an alternative symbolic representation through the figure of the mother. Her technique entails the re-appropriation of female mythic figures for a feminine symbolic order, which is not based on the *phallus* and recognizes sexual difference. I will strongly rely on her analysis of Diotima's figure while investigating Diotima's speech in the light of sexual difference in Chapter Four.

Both Irigaray's and Cavarero's works concentrate on the cultural-psychological axis of the workings of gender-biases within the framework of philosophy and more specifically, Diotima's *Symposium*-speech. As I stated earlier, I will open up my topic

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, xix.

through introducing two different approaches to the Diotima-speech within the *Symposium* – those of Irigaray and Nye. The divergence between the two articles illuminates many interesting aspects about the possibilities of interpreting Diotima’s speech, as well as about interpretation as such. Before perusing these two pieces of writing, let us start with a brief introduction to the *Symposium* and its historical context, as well as a summary of the speeches contained in the dialogue.

## **1.2 *The Symposium***

### **1.2.1 An introduction to the dialogue**

The *Symposium* is one of Plato’s best-known dialogues – or at least, one that is supposed to be well-known because of two concepts related to it. One comes from Aristophanes’ speech: the concept of the *androgyn*. The cosmogony provided by the comedy writer occasionally has been treated as the core of the dialogue, while at other times it is qualified as a “parody of a cosmogony” or “simply humorous and dramatic.”<sup>20</sup> The other concept, platonic love, has become a household expression, although it is not completely clear how this concept became so common, given that its common sense meaning is so “un-Platonic.”<sup>21</sup> While platonic love is generally used to explain a relationship without the sexual element, according to Diotima’s teaching, the path to absolute Beauty starts from physical affection.

As the placing of the dialogue within the Platonic oeuvre shows gender implications in itself, a brief introduction is called for here. On the basis of Karl

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<sup>20</sup> A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen, 1960), 209; 219.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

Friedrich Hermann's periodization, Plato scholars differentiate between early, middle and later dialogues. Plato's dialogues are usually referred to as belonging to one of these three periods. The *Symposium* belongs to the middle dialogues and was probably written between 388 and 367 BC.

There has been a long-standing debate among scholars about the placing of the *Symposium* within the Platonic corpus. This debate is outside the focus of this thesis, so I will introduce only one version, that of J. E. Raven. Raven places the *Symposium* between the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. His argument is that in Socrates' version of love in the *Symposium*, one can look upon absolute Beauty with the help of *eros*. This absolute Beauty reappears in the *Republic* as the Idea of the Good. This concept is not concrete in the *Phaedo* yet, and there is no logical reason to think that Plato would have withheld the concept, when "its introduction could have done nothing but strengthen his case for the immortality of the soul."<sup>22</sup>

As has been shown above, Raven's argument for placing the *Symposium* into the Platonic corpus is built on the assumption that Diotima's teaching, presented by Socrates, fits coherently into Plato's philosophy. Indeed, one of the difficulties of interpreting Plato's dialogues lies in distinguishing between Plato's logos, Socrates' logos, and the simple opinion of a character within the work. In the case of Diotima's speech, it is arguable whether the teaching about *eros* belongs to Plato, to Socrates, or to Diotima. Some feminist interpretations of the dialogue take the speech to be Diotima's teaching and to be separate from the Platonic logos,<sup>23</sup> while traditional scholars, like J. E. Raven and A. E. Taylor, insert the speech into the Platonic logos

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<sup>22</sup> J. E. Raven, *Plato's Thought in the Making* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 107.

<sup>23</sup> Both Luce Irigaray and Andrea Nye share this view.

and also, almost automatically, take away Diotima's voice. This problem will be further elaborated on in Chapter Three, which will focus specifically on Diotima's speech and different opinions around it.

The *Symposium* has a complex structure of embedded narratives. In narratology, this structure is called *mise en abime*.<sup>24</sup> It is like a Chinese box, for one narration contains the other in the following way: Apollodorus narrates the events of a dinner party to a (unnamed) friend. As he was not present at this party, what he relates is Aristodemus' account of the speeches that were delivered during the feast. His narration includes Socrates' speech, in which Socrates recalled what he had learned from Diotima, the priestess of Mantinea. The structure is even more complicated because Apollodorus says that he told the same story a couple of days earlier to Glaucon. This structure suggests, on the one hand, that Plato wants his narrator and himself to be distanced from the actual event. On the other hand, he seemingly intends to emphasize how Apollodorus' memory about the story was refreshed by telling it just a few days before. In my opinion, any kind of answer to this question is conjectural. The only thing that seems certain is that Plato has some specific reason for structuring the dialogue this way, as this complicated structure of narration would otherwise seem redundant.

The dialogue takes place at a dinner party the day after Agathon wins a prize at the tragedy-contest for the first time, which means that the date of the event is January 416 BC.<sup>25</sup> The time of the narration is more questionable. Martha Nussbaum accepts R. G. Bury's argument that since Apollodorus states in the introduction that Agathon

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<sup>24</sup> Slomith Rimmon-Keenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London – New York: Routledge, 1983), 93.

<sup>25</sup> January was the month when the Dionysus festivals took place.

left the town many years earlier (he left Athens in 408 or 407 BC), and that he is Socrates' disciple at the moment (Socrates died in 399 BC), the time of the narration must be within this range, and probably in the last years of this period, i.e., between 408 and 399 BC. Nussbaum points out that this argument does not discuss politics or Alcibiades.<sup>26</sup> Alcibiades was so much the center of attention in Athenian society that the dialogue could not have possibly ignored the fact of his death, which took place in 404. Therefore, Nussbaum argues that the narration must take place at the latest in 404. The Athenians' "frenzy over Alcibiades"<sup>27</sup> could also be an explanation for the eagerness of Apollodorus' friend to hear the events of a dinner party that took place more than ten years earlier, and where both Socrates and Alcibiades were present. Politics and Alcibiades' brilliant, but ambivalent career may be another reason for the distancing that Plato applies in the structuring of the dialogue.

### 1.2.2 The content of the *Symposium*

The dinner takes place at the prizewinner Agathon's house. Since everyone seems to have a bad hangover, those present agree that there will be neither hard drinking,<sup>28</sup> nor flute playing that evening, but that they will spend time discussing different topics. They send the flute girl out and Eryximachus, a famous physician of the time, brings forward Phaedrus' remark that a eulogy of Eros has not yet been written.<sup>29</sup> They all

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<sup>26</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades," in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 165-199, see pp.168-69.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>28</sup> During a symposium, usually a wine king was elected, who represented Dionysus, and prescribed for the others the amount they had to drink.

<sup>29</sup> Eryximachus actually uses the word 'encomium' (177B). "Formal eulogy in prose or verse glorifying people, objects, ideas or events. Originally it was a Greek choral song in celebration of a hero sung at

agree that everyone will come up with a tribute one after the other. Thus the dialogue contains six eulogies of Eros. However, there is a seventh speech in the dialogue, that of Alcibiades. When Socrates finishes speaking, the drunken Alcibiades walks in with the assistance of the flute girl. When ordered to come up with a eulogy of Eros, he comes up with one of Socrates. I will briefly summarize the speeches to make the discussion in the following chapters easier to follow.

a, The speech of Phaedrus

Phaedrus, quoting Hesiod, considers Eros to be one of the most ancient gods. According to Hesiod, Eros had no parents, came to life right after Chaos, and is the first universal principle. Eros is the most ancient god and “the cause of all our highest blessings” (178B). Phaedrus claims that he cannot mention a greater blessing that “a man can have in earliest youth than an honourable lover or a lover than an honourable favourite” (178C).

Phaedrus’ definition of Eros is the least spiritual. In his understanding Eros is a sexual desire. He idealizes Eros between two males as the main drive for ambition: The “lover” will do anything to attract the attention of his “beloved”, and will avoid any disgrace in front of his eyes. Another thing showing the greatness of Eros is that only lovers are ready to die for each other. Phaedrus mentions the example of Alcestis, the only female person mentioned in the dialogue until Socrates’ speech, who died instead of her husband and her deed “was judged so noble by the gods as well as men”

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the *komos*, or triumphal procession at the end of the Olympic games.” From: J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 277.



(179C) that her soul was sent back from Hades. Phaedrus asserts that this shows that even the gods “give special honour to zeal and courage in concerns of love” (179C).

#### b, The speech of Pausanias

Pausanias' speech is based more on moral ground than that of Phaedrus. He distinguishes two kinds of Eros. Eros is Aphrodite's companion, and since there are two Aphrodites: "heavenly" and "earthly" or "popular"<sup>30</sup> (180E), we can differentiate between two types of Eros as well. The earthly form of Eros may be directed towards either of the sexes, and is concerned with the body rather than the soul. "Heavenly" Eros is love between males. This love is directed towards young males, just at the threshold of manhood. The lover gains the attention of the beloved through the former's qualities of the soul. This relationship, then, lasts throughout their lifetime. Pausanias also explains how the town encourages the lover, while the young beloved is inspired to reject him until he proves that his love is of the heavenly sort.

Pausanias propagates the favors the lover and the loved do for each other for the sake of virtue and he claims that the goal of their relationship is to achieve virtue through their love. "This is the Love that belongs to the Heavenly Goddess," he claims, "heavenly itself and precious to both public and private life: for this compels lover and beloved alike to feel a zealous concern for their own virtue" (185B-C).

#### c, The speech of Eryximachus

Eryximachus agrees with the distinction of the two kinds of Eros, but also stresses the universal importance of Eros. He argues that we should not restrict the effect of Eros to human passions. In his view, both kinds of Eros are universal necessities, and we have to take their importance into account, whatever our job or activity is. The job of the

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<sup>30</sup> The "heavenly" Aphrodite is the daughter of Uranus, while the "earthly" is the daughter of Zeus and Dione.

physician, for example, is to create harmony between the desires to replete and excrete. Eryximachus goes on giving examples like music, the harmony of the seasons and how everything in the world is made up of opposites. Eros' job is like that of the physician, he achieves harmony between these opposites. Things unite and harmonize in Eros. Also it is Eros who harmonizes the relationship between gods and humans:

Love [Eros], conceived as a single whole, exerts a wide, strong, nay, in short, a complete power: but that which is consummated for a good purpose, temperately and justly, both here on earth and in heaven above, wields the mightiest power of all and provides us with a perfect bliss; so that we are able to consort with one another and have friendship with the gods who are above us. (188D)

d, The speech of Aristophanes

Aristophanes comes up with a cosmogony in his speech, which has been a center of debate ever since: there were three human sexes in the beginning, male, female, and *androgyn* (male-female). The male was the descendant of the Sun, the female of the Earth, and the *androgyn* of the moon. These human beings were round, had four arms, four legs, and two faces on a single head, looking in opposite directions. These creatures did not fertilize each other, but used the earth for procreation. As a punishment for their *hubris*,<sup>31</sup> Zeus had them cut into halves by Apollo. Humans suffered so much from this punishment that they embraced their other halves, longing for reunion, and they eventually died of starvation and idleness, since they did not want to do anything without the other. Zeus took pity on them and ordered Apollo to move their sexual organs to the front. After this, humans turned to each other for

procreation, instead of the earth. If a male and a female embrace each other, they will procreate and if two males do, they will find satisfaction and may turn to other activities after that. This desire for our other half is Eros.

Those who were once *androgyns*, desire the other sex, those who were female are the “lesbian lovers” (191E), and males attract those who were male. Aristophanes considers this last type of person to be the greatest, since they are the most masculine in nature. They chose males because they are attracted by what is closest to them in nature. Whoever finds their original other half, will never want to be separated from her or him, and they will stay together till the end of their lives in friendship and love.

#### e, The speech of Agathon

Agathon calls the others’ attention to the fact that the previous speakers did not make a eulogy, but praised what people get from Eros. He undertakes to describe Eros in his true nature: Eros is not old, but the youngest of all gods. He is loose-limbed, that is why he can enter every soul. He spends his time among flowers, since pleasant colors and scents attract him. He does not commit and cannot stand injustice. He is abstemious, since he is stronger than pleasures. He is brave, and he keeps even Ares in control, on account of his love for Aphrodite. Whoever gets touched by Eros becomes a poet. There is no Eros in ugliness, concludes Agathon.

#### f, The speech of Socrates/ Diotima’s Speech

Socrates declares that all he knows about Eros he learned from Diotima, a priestess from Mantinea. He says that he is simply recounting their conversation, which took

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<sup>31</sup> A complex concept, meaning unruliness, violence, arrogance, greed, and pride.

place several years before. Socrates fits Diotima's speech into the discussion by posing the same questions to Agathon as Diotima asked him during their recounted conversation. He implies that before listening to Diotima, he was at the same level as Agathon is at the time of the symposium.

Diotima starts with challenging the way of Socrates' thinking in binary oppositions. Just as there is something standing between beautiful and ugly, or good and evil, Eros is neither a great god, nor a mortal, but a demon – an intermediary between gods and mortals. He is like the true philosopher, who does not possess wisdom, but has a desire for it. Still, because he is aware of this deficiency, he is not totally ignorant.

According to Diotima, Eros is the son of Penia and Poros. While Penia was a beggar (the word "penia" means poverty), Poros is the personification of ingenuity. Eros is always lacking; whatever he obtains, he loses too. He is the desire for eternal beauty, for eternal happiness. Eros is also the desire for immortality. The way to immortality leads through him, by begetting an offspring, who can be a real child, or a spiritual product:

Now those who are teeming in body betake them rather to women, and are amorous on this wise: by begetting children they acquire an immortality, a memorial, and a state of bliss, which in their imagining they "for all succeeding time procure." But pregnancy of soul – for there are persons, [...] who in their souls still more than in their bodies conceive those things which are proper for soul to conceive and bring forth; and what are those things? Prudence and virtue in general; and of these the begetters are all the poets and those craftsmen who are styled inventors. (208E-209A)

If a man, who is fertile in his soul, is in the company of a young boy with a beautiful body and a noble soul, he fertilizes the boy in his soul. Thus they beget immortal

children, like Homer, Hesiod, or Solon did. Still, this is not yet the highest form of Eros. The path to the highest form of Eros leads through male-to-male love. First, the man loves one body, and fertilizes it with noble thoughts. Then he discovers the beauty of all bodies, and becomes the lover of all beautiful bodies. After this, he turns towards the soul, realizing its superiority from the body. As a next step, he seeks and creates thoughts that make young citizens better. This leads him to recognize the beauty of deeds and laws. He turns his attention towards the beauty of sciences after this. When he sees beauty in all these things, he will not love one thing like a slave any longer. Contemplating this ocean of beauty engenders many beautiful philosophical conversations and thoughts in the lover, who gains strength and knowledge by this.

When a man has been this far tutored in the lore of love, passing from view to view of beautiful things, in the right and regular ascent, suddenly he will have revealed to him, as he draws to the close of his dealings in love, a wondrous vision, beautiful in its nature; and this, Socrates, is the final object of all those previous toils. First of all, it is ever-existent and neither comes to be nor perishes, neither waxes nor wanes; next, it is not beautiful in part and in part ugly, nor is it such at such a time and other at another, nor in one respect beautiful and in another ugly, nor so affected by position as to seem beautiful to some and ugly to others. Nor again will our initiate find the beautiful presented to him in the guise of a face or of hands or any other portion of the body, nor as a particular description or piece of knowledge, nor as existing somewhere in another substance, such as an animal of the earth or sky or any other thing; but existing ever in singularity of form independent by itself, while all the multitude of beautiful things partake of it in such wise that, though all of them are coming to be and perishing, it grows neither greater nor less, and is affected by nothing. (210E-211B)

Only the one who can see this absolute Beauty<sup>32</sup> leads a noble life. The best companion in the quest for this treasure is Eros, concludes Diotima.

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Hawthorne, Luce Irigaray, and Andrea Nye use the term *beauty-in-itself*, while other scholars, including Martha Nussbaum, use *absolute Beauty*. When dealing with the above-mentioned three scholars' works, I will use *beauty-in-itself*, otherwise I will use *absolute Beauty* throughout the thesis.

g. Alcibiades' speech

When asked to come up with a eulogy of Eros, Alcibiades replies that he cannot praise anyone else in Socrates' presence, but only Socrates himself. He starts with his appearance. He compares Socrates to the statuettes of Silenus, which hold a flute or a pipe in their hands, and when they are opened, the figure of a god appears inside. Alcibiades also compares him to Marsyas, the pipe player, stating that the only difference between them is that Socrates does not need any instrument to achieve the same effect on people, since whoever hears Socrates speaking, falls under his spell. He goes on to explain to his audience the state of trance he gets into when he hears Socrates speak. It is this enchantment that urges him to escape from Socrates, so that he will not sit by him and listen to him as long as he lives. He claims that Socrates' speeches also fill him with shame because of the lifestyle he leads and because of the worthlessness of those things he holds as valuable.

Alcibiades also talks about Socrates' power. He claims that though Socrates appears as the lover of young boys, this is only appearance. In reality, Socrates has the strongest self-control of all the people of Athens. Once, continues Alcibiades, he saw the inner beauty of Socrates, which was of the most magnificent kind. He thought that Socrates desired his beauty and Alcibiades decided to give him all that he wanted in order to hear all that Socrates knew. He tried to get Socrates into situations where they were alone, but Socrates never approached him. Then, Alcibiades decided to invite Socrates to dinner. On the first such occasion, Socrates left immediately after dinner, but the second time Alcibiades persuaded him to stay for the night. Still nothing happened, so Alcibiades offered Socrates his love and explained to Socrates that he

found him to be the only person who deserved his love and that he was the one who could help improve him. Socrates answered that if he possessed some power that would, indeed, help Alcibiades become better, he, Alcibiades, was offering the appearance of beauty for real beauty. Later, when they went to sleep, Alcibiades lay next to Socrates, embraced him, and they slept all night like brothers, or father and son, because in the morning Alcibiades woke untouched.

Alcibiades goes on to explain Socrates' remarkable behavior at war, how brave and self-disciplined he was. He also saved Alcibiades' life, when he did not leave him behind wounded. Alcibiades closes the speech by summing up in what ways Socrates is like Marsyas and the statuettes of Silenus in his speeches, his personality and behavior. Alcibiades claims at the very end of his speech that Socrates is rather like the beloved young boy, and not the lover, and warns Agathon not to fall into the same trap that he and many others have.



## Chapter 2

### 2.1 *The Nye – Irigaray debate*

#### 2.1.1 Irigaray's "Sorcerer Love"

Irigaray begins her article entitled "Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima's Speech"<sup>33</sup> by explaining and praising the strength of Diotima's dialectic method. She claims that this method works in a different way from what we are accustomed to calling dialectical. While Hegel's dialectic works "by opposition to transform the first term into a second, in order to arrive at a synthesis of the two," Diotima's dialectic shows the intermediary between two opposing concepts, which already exists and only needs to be unveiled. Her model is not based on the "*destruction and deconstruction* of two terms in order to establish a synthesis, which is neither one or the other," rather, she illuminates a bridge, the third element, which is the possibility for, as well as the motor of, "progression: from poverty and wealth, ignorance and wisdom, from mortality to immortality."<sup>34</sup>

This already existing bridge, or the intermediary, that comes between the two concepts is *eros*. Progress of any kind is rooted in *eros* and leads through *eros*, in Diotima's view. *Eros* leads us to knowledge, both in the practical and the metaphysical sense. It is *eros* that is "both the guide and the way, above all a mediator."<sup>35</sup> Irigaray

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<sup>33</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima's Speech," translated by Eleanor H. Kuykendall, in Nancy Tuana (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, (see above), 181-195.

<sup>34</sup> Irigaray, "Sorcerer Love," 181.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

elaborates further on how *eros* as a mediator becomes both the guide and the way to knowledge:

If we did not, at each moment, have something to learn in the encounter with reality, between reality and already established knowledge, we would not perfect ourselves in wisdom. [...] Therefore, between knowledge and reality, there is an intermediary which permits the meeting and transmutation or transvaluation between the two.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, Diotima's dialectic has four elements: the *here*, the *two poles of meeting*, and the *beyond*, which is a beyond that never wipes out the *here*. As Irigaray explains, "[t]he mediator is never abolished in an infallible knowledge. Everything is always in movement, in becoming. And the mediator of everything is, among other things, or exemplarily, love. Never completed, always evolving,"<sup>37</sup> and – one may also add – always desiring.

*Eros* is the lover, not the beloved. This is why he always seeks beautiful and good things. He does not possess, but lacks these things. If *eros* possessed the objects of his desires, he would not desire them any more. He is in perpetual lack. However, he is not ignorant of the beautiful and the good. His desire for them is the proof of this. His position between opposites is exactly in accordance with *eros*' daimonic character. He is a daimon, neither immortal, nor mortal, an interpreter between human beings and the gods. "Love is complementary to gods and to men in such a way as to join everything with itself."<sup>38</sup>

Being the child of Plenty and Poverty, *eros* is like the philosopher who is between lack and possession, ignorance and wisdom. *Eros*, this way, is the true

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

philosopher, while also philosophy itself. This philosophy is not a stabilized, fixed form of knowledge, and is not separated from feelings. This is how *eros* becomes both the guide and the way – to immortality within mortality. Diotima explains this aspect of *eros* the following way:

The union of a man and a woman is, in fact, a generation; this is a thing divine; in a living creature that is mortal, it is an element of immortality, this fecundity and generation. (206)<sup>39</sup>

Irigaray claims this teaching of Diotima never to have been understood. She asserts that Diotima, here, points out “the character of *divine generation in every union between man and woman*,” in which case “[a]ll love would be creation, potentially divine, a path between the condition of the mortal and that of the immortal.” *Eros*, this way, is fertile before all procreation and its fertility is mediumlike, daimonic, offering to male and female alike the “immortal becoming of the living.”<sup>40</sup> The procreation of a divine nature is only possible in harmony with the divine, which is unachievable for the ugly and only possible for the beautiful. This way, love between man and woman is shown to be beautiful, harmonious, and divine. Up to this point, Irigaray seems to agree with Diotima’s *erotic* teaching.

The aim of love is to realize the immortality in the mortality between lovers. Procreation and generation in beauty – these are the aim of love, because it is thus that the eternity and imperishability of a mortal being manifest themselves. Fecundity of love between lovers, regeneration of one by the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus, Ion, Gorgias, and Symposium with Passages from the Republic and Laws*, translated by Lane Cooper (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938). As it appears in the English translation of Irigaray’s article. See more on the issue of translation: pp. 33-35, footnotes 48, 61 and 62.

<sup>40</sup> Irigaray, “Sorcerer Love,” 187.

other, passage to immortality in one another, through one another – these seem to become the condition, not the cause of procreation.<sup>41</sup>

But Diotima here begins to refer to cause in a way that Irigaray finds surprising. Diotima explains to Socrates “that the creation of beauty, of a work of art is insufficient, that it is necessary to give birth together to a child, that this wisdom is inscribed in the animal world itself”. Instead of “allowing the child to germinate or develop in the milieu of love and fecundity between man and woman, she seeks a cause of love in the animal world: procreation.”<sup>42</sup>

Irigaray detects a shift in Diotima’s speech after this point. At the moment of giving birth to an offspring, the child takes the place of *eros* as an intermediary. This would mean no problem in itself, but the child assumes the position of the beloved instead of the lover and is unable to carry out the role formerly played by *eros*. Hence, *eros* will be reduced to a means of attaining a certain goal – the child. Irigaray understands this step in Diotima’s argumentation as placing the object of love outside the subject (a word she uses carefully in this context), which results in love losing the intermediary character that had given the strength of Diotima’s method up to this point. In being stripped of this property, *eros* fails to be a daimon; he is no longer the translator, or bridge, between mortal and immortal.

Irigaray argues that in the second part of Diotima’s speech, *eros* is reduced to a means that helps us in the direction of a certain *telos* (goal), and the emphasis is put on the goods for the society rather than on the regeneration of the individual. She finds that *eros* becomes a political wisdom, gets socialized, and becomes a collective good

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

instead of individual becoming, a principle engendering creativity. At the same time, with the introduction of the child, there appears a differentiation and the hierarchization between those who are fecund in body and those who are fecund in soul. In Irigaray's interpretation, this differentiation excludes women from the path to beauty-in-itself. Also, within this path, beauty and the forms of love become gradually hierarchized.

### 2.1.2 Nye's response

Andrea Nye responded to Irigaray's essay with the article "Irigaray and Diotima at Plato's Symposium."<sup>43</sup> She criticizes Irigaray's argument on three grounds. First, she argues that Irigaray accepts the Platonic interpretation of Diotima's speech, while Diotima's beauty-in-itself clearly differs both from the form of beauty in the *Phaedrus* and from the concept of beauty that appears in the *Republic*:

Far from suggesting that the body is a degraded prison, Diotima sees bodily love as the metaphor and concrete training ground for all creative activities. [...] The beauty-in-itself that the initiate in Diotima's philosophy may experience as the culmination of her training is not a transcendent Platonic form. The initiate glimpses no universal, abstracted from imperfect particulars, but an in-dwelling immortal divine beauty, an attracting center that foments fruitful creation in all areas of existence.<sup>44</sup>

Irigaray, observes Nye, accepts the assimilation of Diotima's beauty-in-itself into the Platonic logos. This interpretation solidifies the concept of beauty-in-itself and places it in the position of a Platonic Form. But Diotima, Nye argues, never talks about

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<sup>43</sup> Andrea Nye, "Irigaray and Diotima at Plato's *Symposium*," in Nancy Tuana (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (see above), 197-215.

beauty as a higher form excluding other forms. Diotima, in her view, does not talk about The Good, rather, about *goods*. In Nye's opinion, Diotima's path towards beauty does not lead through ascending while leaving the earthly behind, but through developing a more inclusive world-view and widening of one's scope towards all the beautiful things in life. Beauty-in-itself is never rigid, but is an ever-changing "inner generation impulse at the heart of life."<sup>45</sup> This view is supported by Diotima's statement (211B) that all the beautiful things partake of beauty-in-itself. Gaining knowledge of the essence of beauty enables the lover to love that (unconditioned) beauty in all its (conditioned) instances.

Nye maintains that scholars for many centuries have been trying to cancel the differences between the Platonic understanding of *eros* and Diotima's version: they did not want to accept the fact that Socrates learned from a woman.<sup>46</sup> (This view implies that the traditional interpretations of the *Symposium* were, indeed, gendered. From this perspective, the traditional interpretations are not gender-blind, but rather anti-gender.)

Nye's second problem with Irigaray's essay is the translation she used. It shapes Diotima's speech to "make it compatible with Platonic dogma,"<sup>47</sup> claims Nye, i.e. it promotes to the aforementioned interpretation of beauty-in-itself as an earlier articulation of the form of beauty. According to the version Irigaray used, the lovers desire to possess the beautiful and the good, while the lovers of Nye's version want it to come into being for them.<sup>48</sup> The lovers' longing for a partner with whom they can

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 198-99.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>48</sup> Irigaray uses the following edition of the *Symposium*: Platon, *Oeuvres Complètes*, translated by Léon Robin (Paris: Gallimard, 1950). In the English translation of Irigaray's article, the English quotations are from: Plato, *Phaedrus, Ion, Gorgias, and Symposium with Passages from the Republic and Laws*,

“generate new ways of thinking and living” is a key element of Nye’s interpretation. For them “love is the fruitfulness of interaction, the fecundity of dialogue,”<sup>49</sup> as opposed to possession.

This reading serves Nye’s aim to separate Diotima’s teaching from Platonic philosophy: it shows that “Diotima’s lover is not the heaven-crazed lover of the *Phaedrus* who glimpses in his idol the dim reflection of an otherworldly vision *he* would like to reclaim,” i.e. to possess.<sup>50</sup> Nye’s line of argument is that if the lovers aim at possessing something that already exists, the object of desire will get externalized into a rigid, already existing form, while if they create that very thing by their communi(cati)on, Diotima’s beauty-in-itself emerges from within the *erotic* process. The latter version clearly differentiates beauty-in-itself from Plato’s teaching of forms. Keeping the two separate is Nye’s technique for avoiding a relapse into the assimilating, and thus male-centric, traditional analyses of Diotima’s *eros*, which strip Diotima from her voice and authority.<sup>51</sup>

The questions of possessive love will be analyzed in detail in parts 3.2.1 and 4.2 of the thesis in relation to Alcibiades’ *eros* concept and possessive love as a stereotypically male way of loving, respectively. At this point, I will restrict my inquiries to addressing the issue on the basis of Nye’s argument. The Greek expression in dispute appears in section 204D, where Diotima asks Socrates: “What is the love of

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translated by Lane Cooper (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938). Nye refers to the original French version of Irigaray’s article. The translations from the *Symposium* in Nye’s article are her own. She uses the following edition of the text: Plato, *The Symposium*, edited by R. G. Bury (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1932).

<sup>49</sup> Nye, 200.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See more on this issue in section 3.1 of the thesis.

the lover of beautiful things?” His answer, is: “*genesthai hautō*,” which can be translated either as ‘to become his’ (Irigaray) or ‘to come into being for him’ (Nye).

Nye’s version is correct, but in no way exclusive. Her interpretation may be right as well, but her critique of Irigaray’s article fails on these grounds. The verb *genesthai* is an infinitive in aorist form. It means: 1, come to being; 2, become.<sup>52</sup> The two translations actually differ as to the case of the reflexive pronoun ‘*hautō*,’ whether it is Dative of the Possessor or Dative of Advantage/Disadvantage. In the former case, the beautiful things become his (or someone’s); in the latter, they come into being for him (or someone). Both versions are equally accurate from a linguistic point of view.<sup>53</sup> Nye strategically uses the translation that serves her interpretation, which is acceptable, while her critique of the other version is flawed.

Nye’s third criticism of Irigaray’s essay problematizes the methods Irigaray uses to dismantle Diotima’s speech. These methods come from Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. Since Irigaray accepts Lacan’s view on language, Nye argues, she can only interpret Diotima based on that model. Irigaray expects Diotima to achieve an instance of *écriture féminine*.<sup>54</sup> In Nye’s view, Irigaray does not realize that Diotima is not in the subordinate position that the Lacan-based Derridian theory would expect her to take. She is a priest, a prophet, and a master. She does not enter into a “fixed system of meanings,”<sup>55</sup> the Symbolic, when she speaks. For Diotima, there are no such things as subject, split or other. There are only selves in constant dissolution and renewal as

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<sup>52</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 349. The aorist emphasizes the action or occurrence itself and does not express the dimension of time or the mode of the action.

<sup>53</sup> Herbert Weir Smyth illustrates the use of Dative of the Possessor with the exact same verb (*gignomai*). See: Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), 341-342. The translation I use in the thesis (W. R. M. Lamb) employs the Dative of the Possessor.



they relate to each other.”<sup>56</sup> Irigaray, claims Nye, does not recognize this and evaluates Diotima’s speech on the basis of whether she achieves a piece of *écriture féminine*, which, as Irigaray explains in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, “resists and explodes every firmly established form, figure, idea, or concept.”<sup>57</sup>

Nye claims that Irigaray’s argument goes astray probably because of following the Derridian method of interpreting, without taking the dialogue’s historical, social, and cultural background into consideration. If we want to understand Diotima’s speech, asserts Nye, we have to understand that women played important sacerdotal roles within ancient Greek society. Diotima is a teacher, a priest, a prophetess, so it is not surprising that she speaks with authority. For her, divinity and masculinity are not in one-to-one relation. “She speaks out of a tradition of female power and female thought still alive in Greek culture.”<sup>58</sup>

Nye describes how the arrival of Greek-speaking invaders from ca. 2000 B.C. brought about a social transformation to the Aegean and Mediterranean areas. Through this change, the Minoan culture that worshipped a female deity was gradually replaced by a nomadic, male-dominated society with a male thunder god. Although women were more and more segregated and confined to the domestic sphere by classical times, they kept their power in several religious cults and rituals.

This tradition of female power makes it impossible to apply the Lacanian system of language and its Derridian subversion in interpreting Diotima’s speech, according to Nye. Though she admits that Irigaray successfully “disrupted sacred

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<sup>54</sup> Nye, 204.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>57</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 79.

Aristotelian, Platonic, and Kantian categories”<sup>59</sup> with deconstructive strategies, she argues that Diotima does not take the role the Lacanian model and deconstruction would expect her to take, so this is not a fruitful method for understanding and evaluating her teaching.

Nye’s reconstructive method, as opposed to Irigaray’s interpretive technique, endeavors to comprehend Diotima’s figure and teaching in their “particular material historical context.” She attempts to reconstruct the socio-cultural background of the text and also consider the “identity of its author”<sup>60</sup> in order to understand the teaching on its own grounds.

The two articles map numerous points of departure, which problematize different aspects of the speech and the possibilities of interpreting it. One of the raised issues – Nye’s second point of criticism – is the use of an adequate translation. While this is a really important point, it is too broad a problem for the scope of this thesis, so I will not elaborate on this topic. I accept that interpretation is translation and in the same way translation is already an interpretation.<sup>61</sup> While Nye’s critique of Irigaray proved to be incorrect on this point, the whole issue highlights the extreme importance of using a correct translation of the *Symposium*, since several translations are

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<sup>58</sup> Nye, 207.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>61</sup> As we will see in the following sub-chapters, both Gadamer and Iser conceptualize interpretation as translation. According to Gadamer, interpretation, i.e. dialogue with a text, creates a common language with it through the *fusion of horizons*. The act of translation is not qualitatively different from interpretation. The translator has to understand (*Verständigung*) the text in order to be able to mediate its meaning into the context of an other language. Coming to an understanding with the text is achieved through interpreting, which includes taking sides in several questions. A comparative analysis of different translations of Diotima’s speech would probably show many interesting aspects of the *horizons* of the translators themselves and their interactions with the Platonic text.

interwoven with androcentric ideology and give space only to distorted interpretations of the dialogue.<sup>62</sup>

However, let us now turn our attention to other important aspects which the two articles point out with regard to interpreting the speech. There are four main points to be marked out. These are (1) Diotima's voice, (2) the female in the speech, (3) hierarchization, and (4) methods of interpretation. As finding possible method(s) of interpreting the speech may give way to points (1), (2) and (3), I will start with the question of interpretation, and then turn to the questions of voice in 3.1.1, the female in the speech in 3.1.2, and hierarchization in 3.1.3.

The wider implications of the Nye – Irigaray methodological discordance lead into the field of hermeneutics. Irigaray's deconstructionist approach to Diotima's speech and Nye's reconstructionist intentions mark out two positions, which may seem irreconcilable at first. However, Gadamer's view on the interpreter's relation to and influence on the text to be analyzed, as well as his way of handling tradition, may be a bridge between these two points-of-view. Gadamer's model of interpretation strongly relies on the Socratic method<sup>63</sup> and on the way Platonic dialogue works. Gadamer's method is highly *erotic* – which is all the more reason to serve here as an intermediary. In the following part of this chapter, first, I will introduce Gadamer's view on how one can enter into real dialogue with a text through questioning. I then will analyze

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<sup>62</sup> I consulted many translations focusing on those parts of the dialogue that are considered problematic in this respect by Andrea Nye and Susanne Hawthorne ("Diotima Speaks through the Body," see footnote 97 for details) and chose to use W. R. M. Lamb's bilingual edition. Lamb's language is somewhat archaic, but his translation is the closest to the original text among all the translations I have had access to.

<sup>63</sup> For a description of the Socratic method, see 2.2.1.

Wolfgang Iser's concept of liminal space and how it shapes, and, in turn, is shaped by, the register<sup>64</sup> of interpretation, while evoking the need for further interpretation.

## **2.2 *The question***

This part of the thesis is an endeavor to delineate a theoretical background for interpreting Diotima's speech. My aim here is not to reiterate the debate between Irigaray and Nye, but rather to achieve dialogue between the two articles. Nye does not question, but simply negates, Irigaray's approach with regard to Diotima's speech. She does not measure the merits of Irigaray's text in successfully opening up Diotima's speech for interpretation, for making it a relevant, real, and living question.

What follows here, is a detailed summary of Gadamer's theory on the art of questioning. This has a double relevance for us: it is a theory of interpretation through the model of dialogue and an analysis of the mechanism of Platonic dialogue. I will follow a dialogue-format while I review Gadamer's theory by introducing his notions and summarize his ideas. I will also give my own response to his views as they relate to the topics opened up by the Nye – Irigaray debate with regard to the possibilities of interpreting Diotima's speech.

### **2.2.1 Unfolding the question**

Gadamer asserts in *Truth and Method* that all experiences contain in themselves the structure of the question. No one can gain experience without questioning, he claims.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Register is the interpreter's set of choices and selections for dealing with the subject matter, according to Iser (for more on register, see 2.3.2.).

A question whether something is 'yes' or 'no' is presupposed in the recognition of something being different from what we thought it was. The openness that lies in the essence of experience is the openness of this 'yes' or 'no'. This is the way the structure of the question is inherent in every experience. The logical form of the question and its inherent negativity peaks in a radical negativity, which is knowing that we do not know: the essence of the Socratic *docta ignorantia*, "the consciousness of not knowing."<sup>66</sup> The *docta ignorantia* appears in the Symposium as well, however, unlike in Plato's other dialogues, the unfolding of the *docta ignorantia* gets narrated by Socrates as he recounts what an innocent he was in erotic matters at the time of his intercourse with Diotima.

Gadamer points out the importance of Plato's finding that it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them. He also explains how Plato's differentiation between authentic versus inauthentic dialogue shows that one is only able to ask a question if s/he wants to know and thereby admits that, in a sense, one does not know. Those who enter into dialogue only to prove themselves to be right will find asking to be easier than answering. But their questions are not true questions.

For a question to become a true question, it is essential to have a sense that lies in the question. This he refers to as a sense of direction (*Richtungssinn*), which puts the questioned thing into a certain perspective. The emergence of a question "breaks open the being of the object, as it were."<sup>67</sup> The 'object' to be brought into the open is the *Sache* or subject matter, which becomes revealed through dialogue. The *logos* that

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<sup>65</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1993), 362.

<sup>66</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, translated by Michael Chase, (Oxford, UK – Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 159.

<sup>67</sup> Gadamer, 362.

exposes the object that has been opened up is, itself, the answer – which is only intelligible through the sense of the question.

Plato's recognition of "the priority of the question in all knowledge and discourse that really reveals something of an object" is of primary importance, claims Gadamer. A question is needed to break open the subject matter in order for us to be able to gain new knowledge about it. This way, we may say that "to question means to bring into the open."<sup>68</sup> The openness of the subject matter means that there is no settled answer to the question. It is not decided or determined yet. It is precisely the question that brings the subject matter into a position of indeterminacy, enabling the pro and con to be in equilibrium. The question only becomes a true question if it is open, having reached its openness through the state of undecidedness or equilibrium.

Without this openness, a question becomes apparent, Gadamer points out. An example for an apparent question is the pedagogical question, as it has no real questioner, or the rhetorical question, which has neither questioner, nor object. However, we have to see that there is a limit to the openness a question may take. This limit is seen as the horizon of the question. Limitation is just as important to the question as openness. We need to explicitly demarcate our presuppositions, which will map what it is that is still open. This shows that not only can questions and answers be true and untrue, but that the putting of a question itself can be right or wrong as well: a question is wrongly-put if it fails to reach the openness of its subject matter. This openness can be reached only if the questioning is clearly separated from the surely held presuppositions. Gadamer shows this through the example of the slanted question, which is not the same as its wrongly-put counterpart, as it includes a question, but the

openness it means to reach is not in the direction that the question aims at. It has no real sense of direction, so it is not possible to answer it, unless its slantedness is corrected – as the sense of the question lies in its sense of direction.

The characteristics of apparent and wrongly-put questions illuminate the reason for the lack of dialogue between Irigaray's and Nye's articles. Nye poses a question to Irigaray's article regarding her method of analyzing Diotima's speech, but her question is not a true question, as she does not open up its object, but rejects it instead with already settled answers. Her question becomes apparent, trying to show how Irigaray's original question to Diotima's speech had been wrongly-put. Before providing a more detailed analysis of this issue, I will first discuss the art of questioning in greater depth.

Gadamer claims that the basic relation between question and knowledge lies in the question's openness in including both pro and con. For him, bringing the question to a decision is the way to knowledge. However, we do not reach full knowledge by choosing between 'this' or 'that' on the basis of the dominance of reasons pro or con 'this' or 'that'. We can arrive to full knowledge only through proving every counterargument to be wrong. As "[k]nowledge always means, precisely, considering opposites,"<sup>69</sup> it is dialectical in its essence. Only the one who questions may gain knowledge, and the true question always includes the 'this' and the 'that', the 'yes' and the 'no'.

First, however, the condition for the question has to be created and that is exactly what Socratic dialectic achieves. There is a certain lack of knowledge behind every instance of the urge to know. A "particular lack of knowledge leads to a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 363.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 365.

particular question.”<sup>70</sup> However, it is not easy to find out what it is exactly that one does not know. In order for the questioner to be able to pinpoint her or his particular lack of knowledge, s/he has to fight opinion, which through its tendency of self-propagation strives to become general opinion, i.e.: *doxa*. The way the admittance of ignorance and the arising of the question takes place has certain characteristics:

- 1, The art of questioning presupposes the freedom of the capacity to withstand the power of opinion;
- 2, The way a question occurs to us is similar to how ideas *occur* to us. We usually talk about occurrence of ideas and not questions; however, ideas never manifest themselves in a completely unexpected way. There is a presupposed directedness in every idea. This directedness aims towards a certain openness, that is, a question.
- 3, These occurring ideas have the structure of the question. The springing up of the question is itself already an attempt to break open the subject matter, or rather the general opinion about what the question is directed to.

The secret of the art of questioning lies in questioning even further, which Gadamer calls the ‘art of thinking.’ This he sees as the way to entering into and conducting a real dialogue. However, this latter activity necessitates certain conditions. The participants, for example, should not “talk at cross purposes.”<sup>71</sup> The partners have to progress in the same direction and at the same pace. One should not try to argue the other down, but the opinions of both partners should be considered carefully. This cautious deliberation is the ‘art of testing.’

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 366.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 367.



If to question is to make the subject matter open, or to put it into the open against the fixed *doxa*, what the questioner may achieve is to turn “the object and all its possibilities fluid.”<sup>72</sup> This fluidity enables one to rid the object (subject matter) of its frozen state caused by the suppression of dominant opinion, which also tries to limit the validity of what is being said about the object. Bringing out the strength of what is said by either of the partners in the dialogue strengthens this fluidity and enables those conversing to question things in their complexity of possibilities. This is exactly where Gadamer finds the productivity of the *maieutic* method: the partners of the dialogue bring to light “the immanent logic of the subject matter that is unfolded in the dialogue.”<sup>73</sup> This logic is revealed in, and also through, the dialogue, which means that the emerging *logos* is something that is possessed by neither of the partners in the conversation.

The other important condition for real dialogue is being able to “perform the communication of meaning” through elaborating a common meaning by “seeing things in the unity of one aspect.”<sup>74</sup> Gadamer refers to this facet of real dialogue as the ‘art of forming concepts.’ He considers this art to be the original task of hermeneutics: “entering into dialogue with the text”, which is also the “restoration of the original communication of meaning.” Through being interpreted, written tradition is brought back into life. This process takes place through entering into conversation with the text, and this conversation is “always fundamentally realized in question and answer.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 368.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Gadamer points out how Plato himself shows an example of keeping the subject matter and the dialogue about it alive by writing in the form of literary dialogue. This way, Plato keeps up the original dynamics of real dialogue, so the problematization of the subject matter does not solidify it in its written form, but keeps the “original movement of conversation.”<sup>76</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Nye – Irigaray debate(?) – revisited

Based on the model outlined above, I propose that no real dialogue exists between the two articles. This way, we cannot call it a debate either. As it was Nye who answered to Irigaray’s article, let us see now, to what extent she achieved dialogue with Irigaray’s way of questioning. Nye’s analysis has two aims: (1) to show why Irigaray’s method of analyzing Diotima’s speech goes astray and (2) analyzing Diotima’s speech. For the moment I will focus on the dialogue between the two interpretations – if there is any, I will turn to the latter in the next sub-chapter “The logic of question and answer.”

As stated above, I assume that Nye’s question towards Irigaray’s article is not a true question. Nye’s article is a wholesale refutation of the Lacan-based Derridian methods Irigaray uses. Nye does not open up the object of her question, i.e. Irigaray’s analysis, to bring it into the position of indeterminacy. Her article in this regard is an apparent question, its purpose is to show that Irigaray posed a wrongly-put question to Diotima’s speech, namely, whether it is an instance of *écriture féminine*. However, Irigaray does not address the speech this way. She claims that Diotima’s teaching has

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 369.

certain characteristics which satisfy the criteria of *écriture féminine*, but it loses its strength in keeping the position of eros as the mediator and reduces it to be a means toward a certain *telos*. This statement of Irigaray is not considered, but argued down, by Nye. Instead of debating the statement itself, she only disputes the method that led to it. Irigaray's idea is not opened up for testing, not turned fluid; it becomes frozen, suppressed.

What is most striking about Nye's method is that she rejects Irigaray's main point not only without considering its plausibility, but, without considering its legitimacy. She shows how she finds deconstruction to be a cul-de-sac when interpreting Diotima's speech and gives a paternalistic slap on Irigaray's shoulder for having fallen into that trap. This move, however, takes place only after Nye's arrogant gesture whereby the classical philologist rules out the non-classical philologists from the game of interpreting ancient Greek texts. The least one can say is that there is no real communication between the two articles. However, I consider both Irigaray and Nye to enter into real dialogue with Diotima's speech itself and regard their methods as not mutually exclusive.

Gadamer's ideas about the logic of question and answer may be a useful frame for finding a bridge between the two articles and their methods, thereby enabling them to be on speaking terms with each other. My reason for establishing such a link lies in my presupposition that the methods used in the two articles for analyzing Diotima's speech may achieve a fruitful dialogue that can move the conversation on and help us learn more about the speech.

### 2.2.3 The logic of question and answer

Entering into dialogue with a text raises the issue of the logic of question and answer. Gadamer maintains that a historical text becomes the object of interpretation through posing a question to the interpreter. This original question put to the interpreter by the text and her/his relation to this question are essential ingredients of interpretation. The understanding of the text lies in understanding this question. This is the horizon of the question, which determines the sense of the text, and thus, of its interpretation. The interpreter has to understand the meaning behind what is expressed through the text, the question that the text is an answer to. Only with grasping this beyond can the interpreter have a first grasp of the text itself.

Nye and Irigaray, needless to say, already differ with regard to the questions the speech asks them. Based on this, they also do not agree on what they think to be the beyond, to which the speech is an answer. Irigaray seeks to determine whether Diotima's speech successfully creates a new conception of eros, i.e. an intermediary between "immanence and transcendence," an inner drive for self-generation. She does not question Diotima's fictionality or whether her speech should be taken as a teaching that is completely different from those of Plato and Socrates. Even if the speech were an instance of *écriture féminine*, it would not mean that it was not the product of Plato's imagination and did not serve his philosophical purpose(s). Nye investigates the speech in its social and historical background, showing how Diotima speaks "out of a tradition of female power" and how her teaching is different from those of Plato's or Socrates' both in content and form. Irigaray considers the speech as a self-enclosed entity, and opens up the text for interpretation from the inside through unfolding its

texture. Nye investigates the social and cultural background in and against which Diotima's teaching stands.

In my view, Nye makes a mistake when not keeping in mind that the Diotima of the *Symposium* is a female image (and also an image of the female) created by Plato; she speaks through metaphors of female experience – as seen by Plato. One may ask “why is Diotima a woman?” but one also has to keep in mind that Diotima is not actually a woman. I will deal with this question in Chapter Four, at the moment let me point out that I consider Nye's argument to be flawed when she immediately rejects Irigaray's view that *eros*, when directed towards politics and the flourishing of the city, may be used as a tool to found masculine order. A psychoanalysis-based semiotic approach to Diotima's speech does not rule out the consideration of the socio-cultural background, on the contrary, it can fruitfully investigate the traces of matriarchy and female power as represented in the text (as will be shown in Chapter Four). As for how careful one should be with making an attempt to reconstruct the social and historical background in which the text was produced, let us turn our attention to Gadamer's treatment of the problem.

#### **2.2.4 Intention and meaning**

With the question of reconstructive interpretation, one comes face to face with the issues of intention and meaning. In order to be able to find the beyond of a text, the original question to which the text is an answer, we have to presuppose that the text is an appropriate reply to that question. This ‘fore-conception of completeness,’ according to which the interpreted object must adequately express an idea (in the case

of a work of art, for instance, an artistic idea) is an axiom of all interpretation in Gadamer's view. Gadamer refers to R. G. Collingwood when he writes about the logic of this relationship between question and answer. Collingwood analyzes this issue through interpreting historical events, which he claims to become understandable only through the reconstruction of the question to which the event is an answer.

However, we are facing two questions here: 'what does the historical event mean?' and 'did the event take place the way it was planned?' In the same way, the interpreter can never presume that the meaning s/he finds in a text is in accordance with the author's intention. Interpretation, according to Gadamer should focus on the meaning, rather than the author's intention, as the processes in the author's mind are impossible to reconstruct – unlike the question that the text is an answer to, in the light of which it gains its meaning. The point where Gadamer departs from Collingwood is exactly where Collingwood considers it unreliable to make a differentiation between the question the text was meant to be an answer to, on the one hand, and the question to which the text IS an answer, on the other.

It is precisely by separating these two questions that Gadamer takes his position against historicism. Historicism reduces the two questions to one and considers it scientific to attempt to reproduce the actual process of the text's coming into existence. This approach, whereby a process can be understood fully only after it is artificially reproduced, is the scientific method known and used in natural sciences. Gadamer strongly opposes this attitude within the field of interpretation:

I have asserted, on the contrary, that every historian and philologist must reckon with the fundamental non-definitiveness of the horizon in which his understanding moves. Historical tradition can be understood only as

something always in the process of being defined by the course of events. Similarly, the philologist dealing with poetic or philosophical texts knows that they are inexhaustible. In both cases it is the course of events that brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material. By being re-actualized in understanding, texts are drawn into a genuine course of events in exactly the same way as are events themselves. This is what we described as the history of effect as an element in hermeneutical experience.<sup>77</sup>

The text that is brought into the realm of dialogue through interpretation remains the same work, yet each of its re-actualizations shows its richness of meaning in the light of the ever-changing process of how texts are understood. Gadamer maintains that the reduction of interpretation to the author's intention or meaning is just as inappropriate as that of a historical event's interpretation to the intentions of those taking part in the event.

As we have seen, in the very first step of interpretation, the text poses a question to the interpreter. According to Gadamer, it is tradition that puts this question to us, we get puzzled by it and our understanding will include the task of mediating between present and tradition. This way, the original relation between question and answer gets turned around. The entity to be interpreted (text, work of art, etc.) poses a question to the interpreter, this way opening the interpreter before s/he actually opens the object to be interpreted by posing her/his question(s) to and about it. The only way to answer this original question leads through posing new questions. Only through this questioning, which seeks an answer to the original question, may the interpreter get to the reconstruction of the question to which the object of interpretation is supposedly the answer.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 372.

What is outlined above is, basically, what Gadamer calls the 'fusion of horizons.' The historical horizon of the question the interpreter attempts to reconstruct is included within the horizon that connects her/him to the tradition that posed that question. Therefore, Gadamer asserts, it is a hermeneutical necessity that the interpreter goes beyond mere reconstruction and considers certain aspects or things that the author accepted without questioning. The interpreter also has to bring these things into the realm of the openness of her/his question(s) put to the interpreted object. Through the process of understanding concepts of the past, the interpreter includes her/his own interpretation of those concepts. This way there are at least three worlds colliding here, that of the question to be reconstructed, of the interpreter's present, and of the tradition of interpreting the object since its origins.

Gadamer claims that the hermeneutical experience gains its true dimension through the connection between questioning and understanding. He argues that the person who wants to understand may seek the object's deeper significance instead of its immediate meaning and rather than considering the deeper significance as true, it should be seen as meaningful, thus opening the possibility for the uncertainty of its truth. "[T]his is the real and fundamental nature of a question: namely to make things indeterminate."<sup>78</sup> Hence it is questions that bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing, thereby opening it for questionableness. The understanding of something as questionable is, itself, questioning. As Gadamer points out, the *modus operandi* of Platonic dialogue shows how a thinking person must ask her/himself questions. The meaningful possibilities out of all the possibilities that are opened up by questioning, then, will pass into the thinker's own reasoning on the given matter.



As already stated in the Introduction, the aim of this thesis is not to judge which interpretation of Diotima's speech is more plausible. I consider both ways of entering into dialogue with the text as relevant. I claim that an interplay, a joint use of them would help the interpreter open up the subject matter for questionableness with a more complex understanding of deeper meanings. As a first step to this, a dialogue between the two ways of interpretation should be achieved. Gadamer maintains that just as each person who enters into a dialogue strives to reach an agreement with the partner, so does the interpreter try to grasp the meaning of the text.

Language is the form in which understanding occurs. When entering into dialogue with either a text or another person, understanding is the process through which the interpreted subject matter's coming-into-language takes place. Each real dialogue, or true conversation, creates a common language that is shared by its participants. The sharing of the ideas takes place with regard to that common language. The conversation is successful if both of the interlocutors come under the influence of the truth of the subject matter, and if through this influence they do not remain the same persons they had been before. It is dialogue that creates a common language between the interlocutors through which the condition of the translatability of their ideas is facilitated.

How to make the two approaches communicate then? Based on Gadamer's model, the answer is: under the aegis of Diotima's speech. As I stated above, I consider both Irigaray's and Nye's analyses successful in reaching an openness of the subject matter. The fact that they make the subject matter speak (come into language) in different ways does not necessarily mean that the two interpretive methods are

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid; 375.

mutually exclusive. On the contrary, if the two articles are read together via Gadamer's dialogical approach, they may become complimentary to one another, enabling a more complex interpretation of Diotima's speech and bringing new aspects of it into questionableness.

My goal is to open the subject matter for questionableness and also to keep it open, without allowing any of the interpretive modes to appropriate it. Iser's model of interpretation as a performative act (which makes the subject matter function) may help us keep the different interpretive modes in dialogue, while also gaining fuel for further interpretation from their mutual interplay. Let us turn to Iser's theory now in more detail to lay the foundations for a common language between Irigaray and Nye.

## **2.3 *Interpretation***

### **2.3.1 Interpretation as translation**

Iser theorizes interpretation as an act of translation. The way this translation takes place depends on both the subject matter that is to be interpreted and on the context of the interpretation. As an act of translation, interpretation opens up a space between the subject matter and what it is translated into. Iser calls this space the 'liminal space,' which is somewhat independent of both the subject matter and what it is converted into, the register of interpretation. This register is characterized by many choices and selections, both conscious and subconscious. These selections will determine how the translation is realized and also, how the subject matter gets channeled into comprehensive structure. These selections are crucial in the way liminal space is dealt with.

Translating the subject matter means, to a certain extent, a superimposition of some control upon it in terms of cognitive methods. However, the space that is opened up by the process of interpretation between the subject matter and the register will remain there, and in this way, the liminal space itself will be responsible for a certain extent of untranslatability that always endures. However, this residual untranslatability will also become the power that urges further interpretation.

Iser claims that the register of interpretation may utilize different operational modes, which depend on the subject matter and deal in different ways with the liminal space. While these operational modes are intended to implement control, their success depends on the degree to which they can be combined through a 'mutual interplay.' This (inter)play is both set off and shaped by the interpreter's selections, and becomes the meeting point and melting pot for the operational modes which confer the approach for dealing with the liminal space. Each mode that the interpreter's selection throws into this melting pot is tested against the subject matter and struggles to gain dominance over the other modes. As a result of this interplay-struggle of the operational modes, the liminal space, while empty up to this point, becomes filled with a dynamics of its own. This dynamics, with its unpredictable moves, is responsible for turning the liminal space into what Iser refers to as a vortex, which "draws both information and energy from what the subject matter is like and from what the register meant to achieve."<sup>79</sup>

This way, the liminal space, which separates, but also links, the subject matter and the register, has its own dynamics that needs to be processed somehow in order to release its inner pressure. However, this processing should not happen from the

outside. Through superimposing the register on the subject matter (either its presuppositions or its concepts) the liminal space gets colonized, which, in turn, rigidifies the subject matter and freezes interpretation. How is it possible then to process the dynamics of the liminal space? Iser maintains that if the liminal space is dealt with as a *nonlinear-organization*, it will generate itself to be the “fuel for the dynamics that make the liminal space into a self-organizing system through which the complex structure of the liminal space is able to organize itself.”<sup>80</sup> Through the interplay of the operational modes, their fine-tuning, and the process of the interpreter’s selections, the liminal space becomes a nonlinear-organization, which organizes itself and unravels, making interpretation into a creative act, a production. The phenomena that emerge – or referring back to Gadamer, *occur* – through this act are not identical either with the subject matter or with the register.

As it has been discussed, the register has two functions: on the one hand, it provides a path to the subject matter and, on the other hand, it provides the frame into which that subject matter is translated. There is a ‘structural coupling’ between the subject matter and the register whenever the latter intervenes with the former. These structural couplings bring about disturbances, or “noise,”<sup>81</sup> which is to be processed, and the emergent phenomena will be different from either of those coupled. However, besides these emerging phenomena, the structural coupling also brings about a “continually emerging self-specification of the register.”<sup>82</sup> This is basically a version of what Gadamer calls the art of testing, an important condition of the art of

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<sup>79</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 148.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>81</sup> The term comes from Heinz von Foerster and Henry Atlan. Quoted by Iser, 150.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

questioning – in this case, testing interpretative methods. Testing, or self-specification, of the register brings about further interpretation.

### **2.3.2 Interpretation as catalyst for further interpretation**

Iser goes on to explain how the register has to readjust itself, to fine-tune itself because of the untranslatability produced by interpretation itself. While the liminal space as nonlinear-organization enables interpretation to become a creative act, it always stays between the subject matter and the register, thus, making the translation incomplete. This incompleteness provides further energies towards urging the readjustment of the operational modes. Iser calls this “self-produced residual untranslatability” *autopoietic* as “it is (a) the source of the growing complexity of register, (b) the change of register, and (c) the emergence of differently organized registers.”<sup>83</sup> Iser concludes from these that interpretation has a performative character:

It makes something happen, and what arises out of this performance are emergent phenomena. The performative nature of interpretation brought out by the fact that it generates its own power, that is, the ineliminable residual untranslatability drives the performance.<sup>84</sup>

This way, interpretation is a never-ending process. It is an activity, which human beings are ceaselessly occupied with and it is marked by emergence. The incessant process of translating brings about the continual widening of modes and attempts of translation, which are modes and attempts to understand, to map, reality. Reality, of course, cannot be completely interpreted, so “we map it out into a plurality of worlds,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

for which the interpretation as emergence is a central activity.”<sup>85</sup> Interpretation as translatability – interpretation as emergence – is the process of making the subject matter function. By translating something, we render it functional.

This reality- or world-mapping is performative, reversing the relationship of map and territory, according to Iser. The map does not denote, but “enables the contours of a territory to emerge, which will coincide with the map because it has no existence outside this designation.”<sup>86</sup> The map, i.e.: interpretation, enables human beings to reach a comprehension of things that were nonexistent prior to interpretation, but brought to life and functionality through it.

The fact that reality is not accessible to human beings in its entirety is responsible for our eternal urge for ‘worldmaking.’ As interpretation is always incomplete (reality can never be interpreted in its whole), it is a necessity for us to go on mapping – further interpreting – which is the aim of this thesis as well. As a first step, I will give an analysis of the three problematic aspects of the speech mentioned above, i.e. Diotima’s voice, the female in the speech and hierarchization – based on the already existing gender-oriented analyses. After this, I will go on with a psychoanalysis-based semiotic analysis of the speech, mostly based on the work of Cavarero. My approach will be informed by the socio-cultural background of the speech, as suggested by Nye. However, I will endeavor to open towards social and cultural aspects as they are coded in the text, while avoiding their superimposition on the speech. Based on the methods outlined above with the help of Gadamer and Iser, I will seek an interpretation through letting the liminal space construct itself with all the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 156.

inputs from the speech and the combined set of tools I am to apply throughout the analysis that is to follow.

## Chapter 3

### 3.1 *Diotima's speech*

And now I shall let you alone, and proceed with the discourse upon Love which I heard one day from a Mantinean woman named Diotima: in this subject she was skilled, and in many others too; for once, by bidding the Athenians offer sacrifices ten years before the plague, she procured them so much delay in the advent of the sickness. Well, I also had my lesson from her in love matters; so now I will try and follow up the points on which Agathon and I just agreed by narrating to you all on my own account, as well as I am able, the speech she delivered to me. (201D)

#### 3.1.1 Diotima's voice

It is telling to see how traditional analyses of the *Symposium* do not problematize the question of Diotima's voice. Raven, for instance, interprets Diotima's speech as Plato's teaching, which Plato, through Socrates, "puts into the mouth" of Diotima, "an otherwise unknown and probably imaginary priestess."<sup>87</sup> He does not enter the question whether Diotima's speech is different from that of Socrates' or Plato's teaching. He takes it for granted that if the speech is written by Plato and it is told by Socrates, it is Platonic logos. Raven's attitude towards Diotima's speech in this respect is not unique, but is in accordance with a tendency of traditional scholars in taking away the speech from Diotima. Taylor does the same, though with a different technique.

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<sup>87</sup> Raven, 108.



Taylor argues that Diotima is probably a real person, but that Socrates uses her only for rhetorical reasons and that the speech, and its teaching, really belong to Socrates, not to her.<sup>88</sup> The reason for Socrates to hide behind Diotima's person, claims Taylor, is to avoid offending Agathon, whom he wants to court, by calling attention to his ignorance directly.

W. C. K. Guthrie, in his analysis of the *Symposium* does not enter the question "[w]hether or not anyone of the name [Diotima] existed"<sup>89</sup> and considers Diotima simply as a double of Socrates, who is used by Plato for two reasons. First, the "fiction" of Diotima allows Socrates to keep his *docta ignorantia* through taking the part of the disciple in his recounting Diotima's speech. Second, recounting the speech allows Socrates to use the form of dialogue within the framework of the *Symposium*, where everyone makes a speech, an encomium.

These scholars, like most of the scholars within the philosophical tradition, do not hesitate much before taking Diotima's voice away. If the speech is called 'Diotima's speech,' Diotima immediately becomes an imaginary priestess (Raven) and if Diotima is considered real, the speech immediately becomes Socrates' speech (Taylor). Guthrie considers the figure of Diotima simply as a tool for Plato to construct his text.

Although several feminist interpretations of the *Symposium* (e.g. both Irigaray and Nye) consider the speech to belong to Diotima, this does not mean that all feminist scholars who write about the *Symposium* take the teaching to be separate from the

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<sup>88</sup> Taylor, 224-25.

<sup>89</sup> W. C. K. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy. Vol. 4. Plato – The Man and His Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge-London-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 385.

Platonic logos.<sup>90</sup> What makes feminist scholars (as well as gender-conscious scholars) different is that they all problematize the implications of Diotima being a woman. It is Socrates who brings the female into the male discourse of the *Symposium* by reciting what he learned from Diotima of Mantinea and it is through his speech that the issue of the presence and absence of the female emerges.

### 3.1.2 The Female in the speech

Socrates has a specific connection to the female. Danielle Trudeau points out that the Socrates-figure that is created by Plato in his dialogues has ambivalent character traits.<sup>91</sup> Socrates is both the Perfect Citizen and an outsider that the state wants to get rid of. Trudeau calls this outsider or “homeless” feature of Socrates his *atopos* (strange, different) character trait, which is exactly what makes Socrates himself an *eros*-figure. Trudeau argues that one of the aspects contributing to this attribute is Socrates’ “feminine posture.”<sup>92</sup> Trudeau does not only refer to what one might call a Socrates’ “drag” show<sup>93</sup> (i.e., his playing Diotima’s part besides his own while reporting their former conversation in the *Symposium*), but to Socrates’ claim that he inherited his mother’s, Phaenarete’s, profession, who was a midwife. Socrates compares his activity on his companions’ mind to *maieutique*, midwifery, asserting

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<sup>90</sup> See Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 486-500.

<sup>91</sup> Danielle Trudeau, “Socrates’ Women,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 98 (1999): 83-93, 83-84.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>93</sup> Barbara Freeman, “(Re)writing Patriarchal Texts: The *Symposium*,” in Hugh Silverman (ed.), *Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 165-77, 167.

that he helps his interlocutors give birth to the thoughts their minds are already pregnant with.<sup>94</sup>

We can see that Diotima's way of questioning Socrates in the beginning of their reported conversation is similar to that process (from 201D to 207C), while later Diotima's speech ends up more as a monologue from 207C on, after having clearly defined what it is that Socrates does not know.

The link between Socrates and *eros* has been already shown. This new link between Socrates and Diotima suggests that Diotima, Socrates and *eros* stand for each other in the dialogue. Socrates acts out the role of Diotima, who, in turn, acts out the role of Socrates, while opening up the subject matter of their conversation through questioning Socrates, defining his "particular lack of knowledge"<sup>95</sup> through his maieutic method. Diotima also serves as an *eros* figure by being an intermediary to erotic knowledge.

Irigaray's article poses the question whether the woman can enter the path to reaching absolute Beauty, the path that Nussbaum calls the "contemplative ascent,"<sup>96</sup> or if she is denied the capacity of "pregnancy of the soul" (209D) and can attain immortality only through giving birth to real, not to spiritual, children. The use of the pronoun 'he' by Diotima and Plato in describing the ascent is due to the fact that the philosophical discourse of Plato's era was a male discourse, just as modern Western thought was until recently. However, Diotima's statement that the route leads through "orthōs paiderastein" (211B), the right way of pederasty, i.e. male-to-male love, makes

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<sup>94</sup> See the *Theaetetus* (148-52).

<sup>95</sup> Gadamer, 366.

<sup>96</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 482.

it more problematic to interpret the path to absolute Beauty as being open for the female.

Yet, the speech only makes sense if Diotima speaks from her own experience. Why else should she say to Socrates, just before starting to speak to him about the ascent, the following:

Into these love-matters even you, Socrates might haply be initiated; but I doubt if you could approach the rites and revelations to which these, for the properly instructed, are merely the avenue. (209E-210)

Susan Hawthorne claims that these “rites and revelations” probably refer to the Eleusian mysteries, which were secret doctrines, open only to the priestesses of Dionysus.<sup>97</sup> As also shown by Karl Kerényi, Diotima’s use of the words “myesis” and “epopteia”(209E) clearly refers to the Eleusian mysteries, *myesis* standing for the lesser mysteries, the physical rites in preparation for the highest form of spiritual initiation, the *epopteia*.<sup>98</sup> Hawthorne, however, is wrong about the priests being exclusively female, as the main priest, for instance, was male.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, as it is actually Diotima who widens the path for the male, for Socrates, from her being a master in these matters, we may suppose that she has already ascended the path. Diotima’s only doubt is whether Socrates himself is capable of reaching the goal of the ascent. Nussbaum takes the inclusion of women to be so self-evident that when

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<sup>97</sup> Susan Hawthorne, “Diotima Speaks through the Body,” in Bat-Ami Bar On (ed.), *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 83-96, 94, note 22.

<sup>98</sup> Karl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, translated by Ralph Manheim, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 45.

<sup>99</sup> See Kerényi, 110.

analyzing Diotima's contemplative ascent, she simply puts a female person in the position of the lover, who is to ascend the path.

The vertical direction that the word 'ascent' implies carries a sense of hierarchization in itself. We saw that one of Irigaray's problem with Diotima's speech is that Diotima starts hierarchizing after introducing the difference between those fertile in body and those who are that in their souls. Only the latter can embark on the contemplative ascent.

The inclusion of women can be assumed through the figure of Diotima, but can the teaching escape hierarchization between the ones who are pregnant in the body and those who are that in the soul? And what of the different levels of the ascent? What happens to who/what is left behind at a certain stage? These questions lead us to the following topic: hierarchization and individuality.

### **3.1.3 Hierarchization and individuality**

Before going any further in the analysis of the contemplative path, let us recall the specific steps one has to take to be able to glance at absolute Beauty:

1. The lover must be in love with one particular body and "engender beautiful converse therein" (210B).
2. The lover realizes that all beautiful bodies have a common quality so s/he turns into "a lover of all beautiful bodies" (210B) and slackens her/his feelings for the one particular body.
3. The lover realizes that the beauty of the soul is of higher value than that of the body. S/he dedicates her/himself to the "betterment of the young" (210C).

4. The lover contemplates “the beautiful as appearing” in customs and laws (210C) and understands that these and the formerly contemplated beauties are all alike.
5. The lover turns towards the beauty in the sciences. S/he now contemplates a sea of beauty and is already free from the “slavery of a single instance” (210D) of beauty.
6. Contemplating the wide sea of beauty engenders in the lover many beautiful conversations and thoughts in philosophy.
7. With the strength and knowledge the lover acquired in philosophy, “suddenly”<sup>100</sup> s/he will be able to observe absolute Beauty, “a wondrous vision, beautiful in its nature”(210E).

The first question I will elaborate on is that of hierarchy within the contemplative ascent and whether there is a way to avoid hierarchization while ascending the path. Julius Moravcsik differentiates between an ‘inclusive’ and an ‘exclusive’ interpretation of the contemplative ascent. According to the inclusive interpretation,

our eros widens as we make progress from stage to stage; we do not abandon physical and aesthetic love for the love of spiritual beauty, nor do we jettison the latter in favor of love of the sciences. We enrich our appreciations according to this view by keeping the former interests and adding to these newer ones.<sup>101</sup>

As we have seen, Nye uses the inclusive interpretation when writing about a more inclusive worldview one can gain from following Diotima’s teaching. Though this understanding of Diotima’s speech is more optimistic than the exclusive interpretation,

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<sup>100</sup> Many scholars pointed out the importance of this adverb, in Greek: *exaiphnēs* (212C), because it recurs when suddenly Alcibiades, appears in the door as another “wondrous vision.” For a detailed analysis, see: Justina Gregory and Susan B. Levin, “Philosophia Aphthonos (Plato, *Symposium* 210d),” *Classical Quarterly* 48 (1998): 404-410.

the reader has to consider the way the lover looks back onto previous stages “estimate[ing] the body’s beauty as a slight affair” (210C) and breaking free of the “slavery of a single instance” (210D) of beauty. The first two steps of the contemplative path as a “slight affair” and the need of getting out of the “slavery of a single instance” of the appearance of beauty (i.e. the beauty of the young boy), definitely imply a certain hierarchization.

On the bottom of the hierarchy stands the first “single instance” of beauty, the first beloved. What will happen to the loved one throughout the ascent of the lover? This question gives way to further questions such as: Does the ascent leave space for loving an individual person? If not, what does this love have to do with human beings at all? What will the loved one gain from the whole affair?

A. W. Price, analyzing the same problem, points out that there are two processes “at work in the ascent, generalization and ascension, displaying two directions of displacement of interest, horizontal and vertical.”<sup>102</sup> Vertically, there are three main levels of the ascent: (1) love for bodies in steps one and two, (2) love for mental values in steps three and four, and (3) love of the sciences in steps five to seven. Within each step, there is a generalizing process, when the lover widens her/his scope, realizing that (level 1) the beauty of one beautiful body is “cognate to” (210B) that of other beautiful bodies, that (level 2) bodies, souls, customs, and laws share the same beauty, and that (level 3) all instances of beauty should be contemplated as one drop in the sea of beauty.

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<sup>101</sup> Julius M. E. Moravcsik, “Reason and Eros in the ‘Ascent’ Passage of the Symposium,” in John P. Anton and G. L. Kustas (eds), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy, Vol. 1*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), 285-302, 293. Quoted by Gregory and Levin, 410.

<sup>102</sup> A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 39.

Nussbaum argues that the beloved “is nowhere to be seen”<sup>103</sup> by the time the lover reaches this third level of generalization. Her main critique of the speech is that the lover will lose her/his capacity to love the particular. The generalization process makes the loved one invisible. Socrates explains to Alcibiades that “the intellectual sight begins to be keen when the visual is entering on its wane” (219). This is a sentence from someone who has ascended the path and perceived absolute Beauty. According to Nussbaum, by the time the lover is able to contemplate absolute Beauty, s/he will be blind to seeing the individual beloved, or will conceive of her/him as “mortal trash” (211E).

Nussbaum asserts that the lover realizes at this level that all along the way s/he wanted to achieve the goal that has now been reached and that her/his love for the beloved was actually in itself “an attempt to get beyond” that actual love to reach “this divine good.”<sup>104</sup> There are three important notions that are missing from the program of love Diotima offers, according to Nussbaum, namely: compassion, reciprocity, and individuality. She observes that what Diotima wants from the lover is an extreme level of disposition. When the lover is contemplating absolute Beauty, s/he is not disturbed by the problems of “mortal trash” any longer. Nussbaum claims that even if the lover turns her/his knowledge towards the city and fellow citizens, s/he will not be able to see other people’s needs and suffering because her/his perceptions are already too wane to see those things. Also, the lover is so close to immortality at this level that s/he cannot internalize mortals’ problems, and is not able to show compassion towards her/his mortal fellows anymore.

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<sup>103</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 495.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.



The next thing one loses during the contemplative ascent, according to Nussbaum, is reciprocity. The lover shows no respect for the agency of the loved. While the lover uses the loved as a source to improve her/his creativity, s/he makes “no difference between loving a person and loving a scientific system, or the beauty of the entire world.”<sup>105</sup> Nussbaum claims that this attitude is not too promising either towards the one person, or towards the other citizens. (I will argue against this point of hers in the sub-chapter about Alcibiades’ *eros* in 3.2.1.)

The third thing one has to give up while ascending the path is love for individuality. The lover is not attached to any “single instance” of beauty any longer, that is, the difference of one person from another is non-existent from the contemplative point-of-view. The lover loves only those characteristics of the loved that share something with absolute Beauty. From this follows that this love is not unconditional, thus it is precisely the human aspect that is erased from this type of love.

Price, however, does not agree with the assertion that the “interest in another person fades out”<sup>106</sup> as we follow the path. Finding this suggestion arbitrary, he opposes this way of interpretation on the basis that the goal of the ascent is not the “joys of self creation”<sup>107</sup> but immortality. Price argues that the love for an individual is retained with each step of the ascent and each new step is tested on the lover’s already existing relationship. This way, the ascent becomes a full circle, or actually, as Hawthorne also pointed out in another aspect of the speech, a series of circles.<sup>108</sup> The cyclic structure is present within the speech and the dialogue on many levels. I will

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 498.

<sup>106</sup> Price, 53.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

return to this issue at the end of this chapter and to Hawthorne's analysis in Chapter Four.

I accept Price's argument on this point and will elaborate on the problem in the next part of this chapter, while analyzing Alcibiades' speech. I will use Nussbaum's observation that we face two different ways to knowledge in Diotima's and Alcibiades' speeches. Nussbaum also points out that one can interpret the dialogue only through looking at all of its parts, which build up the whole text. I also accept this point, and will use these two observations by Nussbaum to oppose her third claim; her view that Diotima's followers will necessarily lose contact with the particularities of human beings when ascending the contemplative path. I will argue that the dialogue suggests on the symbolic level that Socrates is the intermediary between the two kinds of cognition we are introduced to in the *Symposium*. The reader needs Alcibiades' speech, a Socrates portrait, to see this point clearly.

### **3.2 Alcibiades' speech**

Alcibiades' speech was neglected by philosophical interpretations of the *Symposium* until recently. During the last couple of decades, however, more and more attention has been given to the speech. The reasons for both the former negligence of and the present emphasis on the speech are understandable if we look at the speech and the dialogue itself. Alcibiades' words are anti-philosophical; he is actually telling a love story, the story of his love for Socrates. As a story of a particular love, not the search for the Truth about Love, the speech, until recently, has been considered to be poetic

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<sup>108</sup> Hawthorne, 88.

rather than philosophical. For this reason Alcibiades' discourse has been driven into exile from the philosophical discourse. However, even if the speech is a love story, it is a love story within the *Symposium* and a love story about Socrates – two reasons to consider its implications.

Alcibiades' description of Socrates may help us to understand Socrates and the way to practice what he teaches through delivering Diotima's speech. Also, it shows us how Diotima's teaching can be misinterpreted, as it does, in my opinion, by Alcibiades. However, I consider Alcibiades' speech to reveal more than this. My presupposition is that Alcibiades' speech serves as a prism through which Diotima's speech can be understood. Alcibiades holds a mirror to Diotima's teaching to show its Dionysiac side. I assume that this Dionysiac side has an important role in understanding Diotima's *eros* and its gender implications.

The night of the narrated symposium is embedded between two historical events, both of which are referred to within the dialogue. One is Agathon's triumph in the drama competition in 416BC and the other is the Greek expedition to Sicily led by Alcibiades – a venture that turned out to be disastrous for both Alcibiades and Athens.

One of the greatest scandals from the chaotic history of Athens' Sicilian expedition was that on the night prior to setting off, the *hermas*, the statues of Hermes placed at the crossroads, were systematically damaged. In Alcibiades' absence, he and other members of the expedition were found guilty of the crime and were sentenced to the forfeiture of their property and to losing their citizenship.<sup>109</sup>

Since Alcibiades' speech is full of references to statues (statuettes), it is highly probable that there is a reference to the historical event of the desecration of the

hermas. Also, Socrates' question to Alcibiades, "What are you about [to do]?" (214E), as Nussbaum observes, "reverberates ominously for us in view of our greater knowledge of what this man will soon be up to."<sup>110</sup> Alcibiades' conceptualization of *eros* shows parallels with the political situation of Athens. A correlation can be seen also between the fate of Alcibiades and that of Athens, which is symbolically strengthened by Alcibiades' wearing a wreath of violet and ivy, the former being the symbol of Athens. I will elaborate on this issue within the next sub-chapter that deals with Alcibiades' *eros* concept.

### 3.2.1 Alcibiades' *eros*

How does Alcibiades conceptualize *eros* within his speech? Why did Socrates rebuke his love? What is the relation and what are the differences between Diotima's *eros* and that of Alcibiades? What are the political implications Plato inserted into Alcibiades' speech? These are the main questions around which I will focus on in the following part of this chapter. Then, I will turn to examining how Alcibiades brings back the female into the *Symposium* and illuminates two separate ways of thinking with his speech.

As already mentioned, Alcibiades conceptualizes *eros* through his particular experience with it. He recounts how he fell in love with Socrates and was rebuked by him. After following Diotima's teaching about the *eros* that is of help to us in having a glance at absolute Beauty through the process of ascension, Alcibiades pulls us back to the ground and makes us aware that our body is made of flesh and blood. He sets out

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<sup>109</sup> Hegyi Dolores et al., *Görög történelem* (Greek History), (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999), 195-98.

to “speak the truth” (214E). Alcibiades does not speak about *eros* or even about his own soul as if they were abstract concepts. He claims that his heart, or his soul, “or whatever one is to call it” gets “stricken and stung” (218) by Socrates’ philosophic discourses. To him *eros* is like being bitten by a snake.

Many scholars point out that the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades is breaking the rules of the roles within the traditional *erastes/eromenos* (older lover and younger beloved) relationships of ancient Greece.<sup>111</sup> In the homosexual custom of ancient Greece the older lover, who desired the young and beautiful boy, offered him his “friendship, advice, assistance”, and in exchange could touch him affectionately, could satisfy his desires with him, though penetrative intercourse was forbidden. The younger beloved took these approaches passively, he even had to take care “not to allow the arousal of his own desire.”<sup>112</sup> Alcibiades claims in his speech that he behaved as if he was the *erastes* and Socrates the young boy. He tells the others how he invited Socrates to dinner, “like a lover [erastes] scheming to ensnare his favourite” (217D). The reason for changing the roles can be twofold: it can reflect both Alcibiades’ understanding of *eros* and Socrates’ promotion of freedom. The freedom Socrates encourages is also embedded in the views he, himself, presents about *eros*.

What Alcibiades wants is an exchange. He wants Socrates’ wisdom, a beauty he has already glimpsed in Socrates, in return for his own bodily beauty. But he is possessed by what Socrates has. He wants to ascend Diotima’s path through the body.

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<sup>110</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “The Speech of Alcibiades,” 185.

<sup>111</sup> Gary Alan Scott and William A. Welton, “An Overlooked Motive in Alcibiades’ *Symposium* Speech” *Interpretation* 24 (1996): 67-84, 14-15; Nussbaum, “The speech of Alcibiades,” 188. On the institution of pederasty in classical Athens, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978) and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. Two: The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

<sup>112</sup> Nussbaum, “The Speech of Alcibiades,” 188.

But the two kinds of love we face here are two kinds of knowledge, two ways of cognition, which are, to borrow Nussbaum's phrasing, "mutually exclusive varieties of vision."<sup>113</sup> She claims that to go one way, one has to give up the other. As we saw it earlier, Nussbaum points out that to follow Diotima's teaching one has to leave behind the particular, the personal and ascend with and through *eros* to Beauty. This means that, for Alcibiades, the object of desire should not be Socrates, but his desire towards Socrates should be an intermediary towards absolute Beauty. If one chooses the other way, love for the particular person, reason will evaporate and the lover will get lost on the way to Beauty or Good. Nussbaum argues that whichever way one chooses, s/he has to sacrifice either a beauty or Beauty. She argues that following Diotima's teaching, Socrates is unable to love a particular person, in this case, Alcibiades.<sup>114</sup>

Gary Alan Scott and William A. Welton raise objections to this claim in their article "An Overlooked Motive in Alcibiades' *Symposium* Speech."<sup>115</sup> They argue that Socrates does not reject Alcibiades because of being unable to love one particular person, but because Alcibiades' understanding of *eros*. Alcibiades' *eros* does not leave space for freedom. He is thinking in terms of domination and subjugation when talking about love. Alcibiades' *eros* "desires to assimilate or possess its object."<sup>116</sup> Scott and Welton claim, on the basis of Thucydides' *History*, that this "imperialistic quality" of Alcibiades' *eros* comes from Alcibiades' character. Alcibiades tells his audience about an "Eros in which desire to possess the good, ignorant of the true good and its

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>114</sup> Vlastos, on the contrary, argues that Socrates does love Alcibiades and the young Athenians around him, but he does so in accordance with his own *eros*-concept: "their physical beauty gives special relish to his affectionate encounters with their mind. So there is no pretence and no deceit in saying to others that he is Alcibiades' lover." See: Gregory Vlastos, "Socratic Irony," in *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge – New York, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1991.), 21-44, 41.

<sup>115</sup> Scott and Welton, 67-68.

principle of limit, takes the form of an unlimited, insatiable desire to possess.”<sup>117</sup> Thucydides observes that this “daring ambition” carries in itself its own destruction. This “imperialistic quality” stands for both Athens and Alcibiades. The view of *eros* that Plato gives into the mouth of Alcibiades this way becomes a diagnosis of the decay of Athenian democracy and of the fall of Athens in the Peloponnesian war.

As opposed to Alcibiades’ *eros*, Socratic *eros* is not possessive, or not “acquisitive,” as Scott and Welton perceive it.<sup>118</sup> They claim that Nussbaum is mistaken to think that Socrates cannot love a particular person; the possibility of that is never denied in Diotima’s speech. It is simply the type of love that Alcibiades proposes to Socrates that is unacceptable for him. The argument goes that Socrates does not only promote freedom, but he also gives the possibility and the directions to his companions to free themselves. He wants to keep out of economic exchanges, that is why he does not accept money for teaching, this way talking only to those whom he wants to, and that is why he does not take the role of *erastes* either.

His kind of *eros* consists solely in neither lack nor possession, maintaining itself in the middle ground between lack (simple ignorance), on the one hand, and full possession or attainment of the desired good (knowledge) on the other.<sup>119</sup>

By keeping its daimonic position between ignorance and knowledge, *eros* gains its own dynamics. *Eros*, generating its own power, provides perpetual desire for further knowledge. This means that loving Socratically is a creative act, or in Iser’s term, an act of worldmaking. Not only *eros* is “the best helper that our human nature can hope

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 77.

to find” (212B) in the quest for absolute Beauty, but there is no absolute Beauty without *eros*; no knowledge without hermeneutic desire.

Socrates, whom I already pointed out to be an *eros*-figure himself, is shown by Alcibiades to keep the intermediary, or daimonic feature of Diotima’s *eros*. Alcibiades’ love story is replete with the characteristics that Nussbaum points out to be absent from the contemplative ascent: compassion, reciprocity, and individuality. The speech serves as a counterpoint to Diotima’s speech and, as I stated earlier, also shows the Dionysiac side of Diotima’s *eros*. I argue that Socrates fuses two kinds of love by using the daimonic characteristic of *eros*, this way actually melding the two ways of cognition. The symbolic level of the dialogue also confirms this through the figure of Dionysus.

### 3.2.2 The Apollonian and the Dionysiac

As Nussbaum points out, Alcibiades is represented bearing the markers of mythological characters who are either female or have strong connections to the feminine. The flute girl helps him and “some others of his people” (212E) enter the room. He stands in the door “crowned with a bushy wreath of ivy and violets” (212E). Violets are the flowers of Aphrodite, the female divinity of love. Besides Aphrodite, violets are the markers of the Muses. It is interesting to see how Alcibiades tells the others the story of how he failed to be the Muse of Socrates. The third thing the violet is the symbol of, is Athens. As already mentioned, this is one of the reasons why we

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 72.



should take into account Alcibiades' political career and the fall of Athenian democracy when interpreting his speech.<sup>120</sup>

The other component of Alcibiades' wreath besides violets is ivy. Ivy is the marker of Dionysus. Dionysus is the god of the earth's fertility, vegetation, wine, sensuality, ecstasy, and also of drama (both comedy and tragedy).<sup>121</sup> Being close to earth, which is a female principle in Greek mythology, Dionysus is related to femininity. He is also transgendered and bisexual.<sup>122</sup> Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, argues that Dionysus represents a way of cognition that is connected to sensuality and to the state of being possessed. Nietzsche differentiates between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac way of understanding the world, and between Apollonian and Dionysiac art.

Apollo is the god of light and harmony, but also the deity of oracle. He rules over the illusion of "our inner fantasy-world."<sup>123</sup> One of his most significant characteristics is *sōphrosunē*: wisdom tempered with moderation, avoiding excessive passions. *Sōphrosunē* is one of the most important characteristics Alcibiades attributes to Socrates. On the contrary, Dionysus' cult is sensual, ecstatic, where the instincts are let loose. The followers of Dionysus relive the god's passion in the state of *mania*, a possessed state of mind, while getting close to nature. Alcibiades, a Dionysiac figure himself, is in a state of mania when he is in the company of Socrates. One possible

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<sup>120</sup> Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades," 185.

<sup>121</sup> Pierre Brunel (ed.), *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes, and Archetypes*, translated by W. Allatson, J. Hayward, and T. Selous, (London - New York: Routledge, 1996), entry: Dionysus.

<sup>122</sup> He was raised dressed as a girl; also he had many male lovers. See: R. P. Conner, D. H. Sparks, and M. Sparks (eds), *Cassel's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit* (London: Cassel, 1997), entry: Dionysus.

<sup>123</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Tragédia Születése* (The Birth of Tragedy), translated by Imre Kertész (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1986), 27.

interpretation of Alcibiades' understanding of *eros* is that he tries to apprehend the world through the Dionysiac way.

Nietzsche argues that the two poles, the Apollonian and the Dionysiac can be traced throughout the history of Greek culture and the meeting point of the two principles is tragedy. The Apollonian manifests in the dialogue of the drama, while the Dionysiac in the music and in the dance of the chorus. Alcibiades appears to be a Dionysiac figure in the *Symposium*. Besides wearing the wreath of ivy, he takes the role of the wine king (213E), who represented Dionysus during symposiums. However, Socrates is not his Apollonian counterpart. He does not appear in Alcibiades' speech as a purely Apollonian figure. The power of Socrates' speeches is compared to music, a typically Dionysiac phenomenon.

Alcibiades starts his speech by stating that he will praise Socrates "by similitudes" (215A). He uses basically three similes: (1) Socrates "is likest to the Silenus-figures that sit in the statuaries' shops"; (2) "he resembles the satyr Marsyas" (215B); and (3) his speeches have the strength and the effect of the Sirens' music. The Silenus-figures Alcibiades is talking about are statuettes made of wood. From the outside they are not really remarkable, but they can be opened in the middle, revealing an elaborately carved god statue. Silenus was the guardian and the teacher of Dionysus, just as Socrates was the teacher of Alcibiades.

Alcibiades' second simile compares Socrates to Marsyas. Marsyas was a satyr who happened to find the pipe of Athene, which he played so exquisitely that his audience claimed he was more skilled with it than Apollo was with his lute. When Apollo heard this, he ordered Marsyas to enter into competition with him. After

winning the contest Apollo skinned him alive.<sup>124</sup> Oscar Wilde, in *De Profundis*, comes up with a similar idea to that of Nietzsche about two kinds of art. He argues that Apollo, with his cruel deed against Marsyas, deleted the natural from art. In his theory, it is Marsyas who stands in opposition with Apollo, representing the instinctual and natural in art.<sup>125</sup> Standing in opposition to Apollonian art and being closely related to music, the Dionysiac domain, I argue that it is legitimate to interpret Marsyas as a Dionysiac epithet.

The third simile compares the power of Socrates' speeches to those of the music of the Sirens. The music of the Sirens is an irresistible and deadly force. Anyone who hears is unable to resist it and gets enchanted by it. S/he will want to sail closer to their island only to have her/his ship get destroyed by the surrounding reefs – yet another way of losing one's rationality in connection to music.

All three similes Alcibiades uses are related to Dionysus, music or to Dionysus through music. I would say that the role of Alcibiades' speech is not to counterpoint Diotima's speech, but to show that Socrates follows Diotima's teaching in a way that includes both the abstract and the concrete, both the general and the particular, as well as the spiritual and the material. His conceptualizing of *eros* is rooted precisely in taking apart these binaries through mediating between them. Calling these two ways Apollonian and Dionysiac is one possible analogy. Calling them male and female is another. Arlene Saxonhouse argues that Socrates has a hermaphroditic character.<sup>126</sup> Hermaphrodite, that is *androgyn*, i.e. someone taking apart the binary opposition of

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<sup>124</sup> Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths, Vol. 1* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1957), 77.

<sup>125</sup> Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (London: Methuen, 1945), 127.

<sup>126</sup> Arlene Saxonhouse, "Eros and the Female in Greek Political Thought: An Interpretation of Plato's Symposium," *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 5-17, 13.

male and female. We need Alcibiades' speech to understand Socrates' androgynous character traits. Socrates breaks with dichotomies, the same way as *eros* does.

As I already pointed out earlier in this chapter, Diotima's teaching has a cyclic structure. This can also be detected on the level of the circle of the speeches delivered at the dinner party, which start from bodily love (Phaedrus) and end up in abstract love (Diotima) and then again bring back the bodily element (Alcibiades). This cyclic organization can also be shown with regard to the presence of the female, both the woman and the feminine. The flute girl is sent away at the beginning and only returns with Alcibiades. Furthermore while the feminine is neglected by the first three speakers, it, at least, gets taken into consideration by Aristophanes, and then acquires real significance in the speeches of Socrates/Diotima and Alcibiades.

## Chapter 4

### 4.1 *Diotima speaks through the body*

Susan Hawthorne in her “Diotima Speaks through the Body” observes that Diotima’s speech does not only differ from Plato’s teaching in its content, but also in its structure and in its use of language. Diotima uses metaphors, which relate to female experience. These experiences are becoming, pregnancy, giving birth, and nurturing. Another metaphor is death, but according to the logic of the speech, “death and birth are the two transformative processes that ensure the continuity of life”<sup>127</sup> and also the cyclical structure of the speech.

Hawthorne observes that the metaphors used in the speech are integrated in a way that the whole speech gains the form of a series of cycles. This form makes the speech work as a continuum, thus doing away with binary oppositions, both through its content and structure. Hawthorne uses the same argumentation to show how Diotima breaks with Socrates’ dialectic method. As to the structure, Hawthorne points out that Diotima returns to the same questions many times, always from a different level. These levels are identical to those outlined by Nussbaum. By the time the third circle is completed, Diotima’s teaching becomes a unity, in which *eros* is the *metaxu*, the ‘between,’ building the three circles of the speech up to one unity, the cycle of Diotima’s teaching.

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<sup>127</sup> Hawthorne, 88.

Based on her teaching, Hawthorne regards Diotima as “the earliest named woman philosopher to ‘think through the body’, or to ‘write through the body.’”<sup>128</sup> She considers Diotima’s speech to be an early instance of *écriture féminine*. It is interesting that Hawthorne closes her article with a quotation from Luce Irigaray’s “Sorcerer Love,” but while Irigaray claims that Diotima’s speech fails to be *écriture féminine*, Hawthorne quotes Irigaray’s work to prove exactly the opposite. This is, however, only seemingly paradoxical because Hawthorne’s article concentrates on the texture of the speech, using Irigaray’s philosophical considerations of sexual difference, while according to Irigaray the speech fails to be an instance of *écriture féminine* on the philosophical grounds of sexual difference. It is exactly the notion of sexual difference that the interpretations of the previous chapter, as well as Nye’s article failed to problematize.

As we have seen, the feminine is present in the speech, but there is the important question: how? Even if we interpret Diotima’s speech as an instance of *écriture féminine*, which, as Helen Cixous points out in “The Laugh of the Medusa,”<sup>129</sup> can be the text of a male writer; even if we prove that the speech connects two ways of seeing, understanding or creating the world, we have not yet problematized the notion of femininity that appears through the text.

The interpretation on the level that my investigations have reached up to now, does not question whether Diotima is a woman. Well, her gender is – linguistically at least. However, we have to see that (s)he is an image created by a male author (Plato), based on a clearly male point of view. If we consider this, we will understand that

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 91. The quoted terms come from Adrienne Rich and Luce Irigaray.

<sup>129</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976): 875-893, 878, footnote 3.

where we arrived with our investigations above is not our destination, but the point of departure. This point is a position that enables us to begin unraveling the implications the text carries by Diotima's seemingly being a woman. As David Halperin points out in his thorough investigation,<sup>130</sup> one has to explore the text through the philosophy of sexual difference in order to give a positive answer to this question. It seems that unless doing so, we fall into the trap which most interpretations cannot avoid; explaining Diotima's being a woman through her not being a man, i.e. through actually silencing her – as we saw in the examples of Taylor, Raven and Guthrie.

## 4.2 *Sexual difference*

Sexual difference is not easy to bring to light – it is difficult to find the woman in Diotima's speech. What is more, it is hard to find a *woman* in Plato's Athens, where – as Thomas Laqueur's *one-sex model* illuminates it – one sex was rendered to the two genders, male and female. Laqueur shows through texts by Galen, Aristotle and Hippocrates, among others, that women were imagined as men – only inverted (the male genitalia turned in) and less perfect. The specifically female organs and their reproductive function were erased, giving the obliteration of sexual difference, which already was at work within the symbolic order, a scientific underpinning. According to this model, sexuality can be schematized on an imaginary axis, on top of which there is man, below him comes woman with less biological capacities (not producing sperm), and even lower there are other living creatures, animals and plants. My addition to this

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<sup>130</sup> David Halperin, "Why is Diotima a Woman?," in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York : Routledge, 1990), 113-151, 117.

model is that between woman and animals there probably were slaves, but their sex did not matter (the Greeks called them *podia* (feet), which was used in the neuter gender).

However, based on the contradictory descriptions of anatomical findings and on the conclusions drawn from them, Laqueur assumes that anatomy was only another representation of the higher truth: woman is an inferior, impotent version of man, both politically and biologically:

In a public world that was overwhelmingly male, the one-sex model displayed what was already evident in culture more generally: *man* is the measure of all things, and woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category.<sup>131</sup>

Halperin claims that the two most commonsense answers that are given to the query ‘why is Diotima a woman?’ are that (1) Plato, because of his own views upon pederasty (and probably also because of contemporary Athen’s view on it), does not want to draw a Socrates figure who learns through pederasty, and, in connection with this, (2) Diotima, not being a man, has no personal involvement in male-to-male love relations. As she is not directly influenced by these affairs, she stands above such bodily issues in a transcendent position, in “true mastery.”<sup>132</sup>

Both answers are supportable but they are, on the one hand, blind to the notion of sexual difference and, on the other hand, do not problematize Diotima’s being a woman – they only deal with her not being a man. Only with an understanding of sexual difference can we realize that we cannot even pose the question ‘why is Diotima a woman?’ – as without that understanding we cannot see that she is not a woman, but a male construct of a female image, as intelligible to males through and



within a male symbolic order, in which the female is understood as the lack of male, i.e. the lack of the phallus.

Why is Diotima not a woman, then? As it has been pointed out by several scholars,<sup>133</sup> all the speakers in the *Symposium* project their own characteristics on the *eros* they praise, while actually ending up in delivering a eulogy of themselves rather than of *eros*. Socrates-Diotima practically does the same, as we saw in Chapter Three when I pointed out the parallels between *eros*, Socrates and Diotima – which also emphasize both Socrates' and *eros*' being connected to the female. One can only but notice the metaphors of female experience while reading Diotima's speech. The overwhelming abundance of these metaphors makes it clear that the speech wants to be read as a woman's speech. It is emphasized all through the text that Diotima's *eros* comes from a feminine perspective. However, there are telling signs which show that it is not a feminine standpoint from which Diotima speaks to us. It is quite likely that her point of view is that of the image of the woman as created and understood by men.

Halperin provides an in-depth analysis of this issue. He points out that there are two stereotypical presuppositions about women, which were popular and common in Plato's Athens and from which Plato clearly deviates when constructing the speech in order to underpin his philosophical doctrine, which in many respects has feminine features. Examining these stereotypes may bring us closer to the question of sexual (in)difference within Athenian society as well as to some implications of Plato's use of Diotima's figure.

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body, Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 62.

<sup>132</sup> Halperin, 116.

<sup>133</sup> Charles Salman, "The Wisdom of Plato's Aristophanes," *Interpretation* 18 (1991): 233-250, see: 234-36. Also, see: Halperin, 117.

According to the first stereotype, once initiated into the erotic realms, women are unable to control their desires and also become insatiable. As we noted earlier about the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, no reciprocity was included within the traditional male-to-male *erastes/eromenos* relationships of ancient Greece. The young beloved passively let the older lover satisfy his desires on him, while not letting his own desire be aroused. No reciprocity was included in the sexual intercourse, which, this way, working only in one direction, cannot even be called that. In contrast, women were considered and allowed (or rather expected?) to take pleasure in their passive role, which the future leaders of the society, the young beloved males, were not expected to do. Thus, only women were supposed to show reciprocity in their sexuality – and were, of course, also labeled ‘insatiable’ because of it. In light of this, the counter-love that is awoken in the young partner breaks the rules of the accepted or tolerated idea of pederasty.<sup>134</sup> In Diotima’s teaching, both partners are active, the relationship is reciprocal – something not allowed in traditional male-to-male relations. Halperin claims that this reciprocity is actually one of the cornerstones of Platonic philosophical discourse, the Platonic dialogue:

Erotic reciprocity animates what Plato considers the best sort of conversations, those in which each interlocutor is motivated to search within himself and to say what he truly believes in the confidence that it will not be misunderstood; mutual desire makes possible the ungrudging exchange of questions and answers which constitutes the soul of philosophical practice. Reciprocity finds its ultimate expression in dialogue.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Halperin, 132. Also, see: Chapter Three above.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

Plato thus makes use of the stereotypically feminine characteristic of *mutuality* in his teaching of *eros* (the motor of dialogue). However, this leads us to the second stereotypically feminine erotic trait Platonic teaching incorporates: *eros* aims towards generation, in Diotima's words, towards "birth in beauty both by means of body and soul" (tokos en kalō kai kata to sōma kai kata tē psychēn 206B).

In ancient Athens, male sexual desire was conventionally looked upon as hunger, desire for possession, acquisition (this is still detectable in the contemporary cultural texture). This way, Alcibiades' acquisitive *eros* represents a stereotypically possessive male or masculine sexual desire. Female sexuality, on the contrary, was connected to procreation, just as Platonic *eros* is.<sup>136</sup> Plato introduces the motive of a characteristically female experience through Diotima's erotic teaching when she introduces the *eros* as aiming at procreation instead of possession. Halperin points out that it is an interesting double twist in Plato's use of the female experience: while it is women's sexuality that was conventionally considered as purely functional, i.e. aiming at procreation, it is actually males for whom sexual and procreative function cannot be separated, i.e. pleasure and begetting are inseparable. Halperin's observation corresponds to Laqueur's point on how biological facts failed to contribute to formulate knowledge, but rather were used to underlie 'higher' truths about the sexes. In the *Symposium*, first, we have 'woman' as an ideologically loaded imaginary creation, as created by and comprehensible to men, then we have that image, femininity, appropriated by Plato to achieve his philosophical aims.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> "birth in beauty both by means of body and soul" (*Symposium*, 206B).

<sup>137</sup> Halperin, 142.

### 4.3 *Snatch*

Cavarero's work on Plato goes to the roots of the patriarchal symbolic order to investigate the workings of the appropriation of femininity and of maternal power. Her work is based on Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference. In her book, Cavarero sets out to delineate a female symbolic order through the re-appropriation of four female figures from and against the Platonic corpus. These are Penelope, Demeter, a maidservant from Thrace and Diotima, who are taken up as representatives of a female subjectivity with the capability of shaping an own, female symbolic order. Their re-appropriation is necessary in order to free the female subject from its position as being the other within the patriarchal symbolic order, in which female representation and/or the representation of the female is possible only through the male subject that is positioned in the center of signification. Within this male-centered signifying process, even female figures gain their meaning through, and only through, the symbolic codes constructed by patriarchy.

Cavarero carries out her dismantling of the workings of the patriarchal symbolic order through the re-appropriation of female mythic figures that appear within it. One of her presuppositions is that though Western culture is abundant in female mythic figures, these figures, as well as the symbolic order through which they emerge, are unable to express sexual difference. The reason for Cavarero's choice of mythic figures in her attempt to unfold the patriarchal symbolic order and to start weaving a female representational system lies in the mythic figure's capacity to "express in a concentrated way the symbolic order that shapes it," to activate "a sense of self-recognition" and to conform to the development of the symbolic order in which

it appears, thus opening space for the appearance of different perspectives towards themselves over time.<sup>138</sup>

The patriarchal symbolic order takes for granted that the male subject is a universal subject, while the female subject can only recognize herself “in the imaginary of the other, already as a reconfigured essential figure of otherness.”<sup>139</sup> Within this essentializing process, sexual difference – or even being sexed – does not matter: the female subject can be accessed exclusively through the representations of “figures of hyper-masculine men” and through “figures of women constructed by men.”<sup>140</sup> It is the latter that Cavarero sets out to grasp and steal from their context, and weave them into a feminine symbolic order, which is not based on the power of the phallus, recognizes our *sexedness* and enables the interplay of multiple perspectives, out of which a new, feminine perspective becomes emphasized.

The technique Cavarero uses to sketch this symbolic order is to ‘snatch’ these four mythic figures from their Platonic (con)texts and from the symbolic order that is based on the matricidal shift from the culture of the Great Mother to the patriarchal symbolic order – as Cavarero interprets the process of replacing mythos by logos and the expropriation and containment of maternal power within the patriarchal order. These mythic figures, then, with a radical change in perspective, are relocated and reactivated in their new context as the mythic figures of a feminine symbolic order.

Cavarero’s hermeneutical project, or “enterprise of theft” – as she calls it,<sup>141</sup> is to explore how the patriarchal symbolic order is based on, and constructed through, the

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<sup>138</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, translated by Serena Anderlini D’Onofrio and Ánie O’Healy, (Cambridge-Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

original act of symbolic matricide. She considers the “classical moment” a relevant point of departure, as it is still a transitional phase, where the traces and memories of the representational shift, later lost to “patriarchal domination,” are still recognizable. The Platonic text provides especially suitable ground for snatching mythic figures, as “it is in Plato that the founding rite of matricide achieves its philosophical completion, even though not yet hardened into a systematic form.”<sup>142</sup> The operation’s two axes are the philosophy of sexual difference and Hannah Arendt’s category of natality. Cavarero makes birth the central concept of her work, as the locus of female power. This is a breakup with patriarchal Western thought, which has, from its beginnings, traditionally measured life by death and directed itself towards death, through separating the soul from the body. It is in opposition to this tradition that Arendt introduces the notion of natality, which can actually be regarded as the rehabilitation of birth.

Western metaphysics, as pointed out by Arendt in *The Human Condition*,<sup>143</sup> is based on the separation of the soul (the thinking part of the human being) from the body and the capacity for reaching the eternal realm of ideas through pure thinking. To achieve this pure thinking, the soul needs to untie itself from the body and its temporality. This is a death-like state, as the complete disconnection of soul and body occurs in death. This aspect of philosophy as ‘living for death’ can be shown all through the history of Western thought. On the other hand, this perspective results in the differentiation of two lives, the eternal and ‘true’ life of the soul and the finite, ‘mere’ life of the body. Human beings live both of these lives at the same time while

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 178.

being in the state between birth and death. This, however, makes birth a negative event: the soul's imprisonment into the body. Birth, this way, gets interpreted as a descent, a fall.

Arendt breaks with this way of thinking and formulates the notion of natality, through which birth is conceptualized as the capacity for new beginning, new possibility and the ability to act. “[T]he new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.” Every new arrival has the possibility to “perform what is infinitely improbable”; from each newcomer “the unexpected can be expected.”<sup>144</sup> Cavarero, who also gives birth a central role in her thinking, makes an attempt to interweave those two lives separated by male thinking. She sketches a symbolic framework that enables human individuals to live and think within their life positioned between birth and death, in their (sexed) bodies, in their wholeness.

#### ***4.4 Diotima's speech – revisited***

The following problem areas can be delineated in the light of Cavarero's theoretical framework and Halperin's investigations when analyzing Diotima's figure and speech: (1) mimetic male desire for female experience, (2) immortality and (3) the emblematic figure of the birth giving-male. As we saw, finding access to these problems is in itself problematic, as they only penetrate the analyst's radar if the pulses sent out onto the text are sensitive to sexual difference and are freed from ideologically loaded preconceptions.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.4.1 Mimesis

As we have seen, Diotima's speech exuberates in metaphors related to the female experiences of becoming, pregnancy, giving birth, and nurturing. Plato clearly wants it to be noticed that the teaching is from a female point of view. We already investigated the hermaphrodite figure of Socrates and his mastery of the maieutic method. The feminine is an important part of Plato's erotic teaching and it is essential that it is Socrates who first receives and then delivers Diotima's doctrines. It is his reported speech that is important at this stage of our investigations, as the female voice and the Platonic teaching becomes tactically mixed in it. Cavarero emphasizes how "the device of reported speech creates the mimetic effect of confusing or commingling the male and female voice."<sup>145</sup> Socrates' speech contains Diotima's teaching the same way the Silenus-figures hold the statue of a god.

The "commingling" of male and female voices works in two directions: instead of hearing Socrates speaking about *eros*, we are made to think we hear a woman speaking, and vice versa, while we think we hear a woman speaking, we actually hear Plato's ideas. The mimesis of the female experience becomes a flux, happening on many levels in two directions, becoming "a subtle and ambiguous strategy requiring that a female voice expound the philosophical discourse of a patriarchal order that excludes women, ultimately reinforcing the original matricide that disinvests them."<sup>146</sup> This is achieved through the exquisite construction of the texture of the speech,

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<sup>145</sup> Cavarero, 93.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 94.



through the mimesis of female experience. This texture gets woven with such subtlety that it has even passed for an instance of *écriture féminine*.

The double twist in the speech is that while women's maternal power is being mimed, love is separated from procreation, which, in turn, is reduced to sexual reproduction. Although giving birth serves as the framework of male-to-male love, this refers only to giving birth by means of the soul. Giving birth through the body, i.e. through heterosexual love, gets debased, it becomes the terrain of women. While being the basis for the erotic ascent through *eros*, birth becomes the key metaphor of women's ties to their bodily existence.

As we saw earlier, *eros* aims at "birth in beauty both by means of body and soul."<sup>147</sup> I consider this line to be the key to unveiling the workings of Plato's technique of expropriating maternal power for use in his own philosophy. All the expropriating mechanisms at work within the speech are condensed along this line, which serves as the key point from which our analysis can unfold.

The expropriation of maternal power, the exclusion of women from the philosophical discourse and the separation of body and soul, i.e. the inauguration of the two lives of body and soul are all proposed here. The life of the soul is what the philosopher cherishes and it is achieved through male-to-male love. The cradle of this doctrine is the dinner party at Agathon's household; the teaching itself is to live on for millennia and become further purified by Christianity.

Cavarero points out that "the distinction between body and soul will enable philosophy to be defined as a birthing of the male soul and is linked to love between

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<sup>147</sup> Plato uses here the technical term 'tokos,' which means birth, but was often translated as 'engender' and 'beget', producing a male-centered interpretation.

men.”<sup>148</sup> This birthing takes place out of the body and is directed towards the eternal, aiming at “the good to be one’s own for ever” (206A). The goal of giving birth in beauty through the soul is to reach the realm of immortality and to possess beauty, the good (*agathos*), forever. It is through this type of birth that the soul can untie itself from its temporality in the body and reach the realm of eternal ideas, of immortality – our following topic.

#### 4.4.2 Immortality

The immortality in which human beings can take part is necessarily symbolic. We may achieve union with absolute Beauty, which is eternal, never changing. However, only the immortality of the human race can be achieved, as all human beings have to die, and they cannot get out of this circle.

The erotic route towards symbolic immortality leads through *eros*, i.e. through giving birth in beauty: in body, by heterosexual lovers – providing the immortality of the species; and in soul, through male-to-male love. However, after Diotima’s teaching arrives at this point, the lovers immediately step forward, the bodies are left below, and only those pregnant in soul are heading towards the immortal through *eros*. The Arendtian view on Western thought seems immensely relevant here: the measure of the process is death, men aim towards immortality. They want to untie themselves from the body, from temporality, and reach the death-like-state of pure thinking. Man would even die to conquer death if he gained eternal fame through it. The *Symposium*

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<sup>148</sup> Cavarero, 98.

is one of the earliest instances of the separation of the soul from the body – a conceptualization, which later developed into our philosophical tradition.

Birth that results from heterosexual relation is degraded in Diotima's teaching, but the mimers of maternal power also immediately claim themselves to be better in giving birth, than mothers are. The male philosopher uses the maternal experience as a stepping stone and, as soon as he has appropriated birth, he thinks himself to be better at giving birth than a female mother, whose experience and capacity was just an entry, but who is now connected to death, as her name will not live on eternally. Immortality is the prerequisite for the men engaged in giving birth to the children of the soul. As Cavarero points out, the womb envy of the male is turned against the bearers of the original power; the mothers are inflicted with penis envy. The original desire for maternal power, and maternal power as such, is eliminated. Simultaneously with this process the differentiation of two lives takes place: the eternal life of the soul, as the exclusive propriety of the male philosopher and the finite, 'mere' life of the body: the mothers' allowance.

This corresponds to Cavarero's point that Plato's texts stand in a very interesting position within the process of the development of the matricidal, patriarchal symbolic order, as the traces of the transition are clearly visible in them:

The symbolic force of the repressed pole is taken up through a mimetic disguise, so that maternal power, having been torn away from its roots in the context of birth, cloaks the matricidal cultivators of death with its symbolic power; and in this way birth, as the original locus of maternal power, is ultimately negated.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 104.

What opens up before us is the expropriation of maternal power, the consequent negation and debasement of birth, the advent of Western logocentrism and the celebration of the emblem of the birth-giving male. It is ironic that all this takes place with the guidance of a 'female' master.

Page duBois also emphasizes the important position of the Platonic oeuvre within the development of our phallogocentric philosophical tradition. She understands the Platonic text as the "threshold of a new description of sexual difference"<sup>150</sup> and points out that the expropriation of maternal power via the systematic use of metaphors related to female experience, especially within the *Theaetetus* and the *Symposium*, "reinscribes the female by locating her powers within the male." The Platonic expropriation, claims duBois, opens space for the subsequent "'metonymizing' of the female body," through which the female is represented as an imperfect male and defined as lack.<sup>151</sup>

#### **4.4.3 Male birth**

The debasement of birth was a long process, which began well before Plato's time. It is clearly detectable in the development of the stories within Greek mythology. The myth of the very first woman, Pandora, is a good example for showing the direction of change in positioning the female. The name 'Pandora' (all+gift) originally meant 'all giving' as the name referred to Rhea, the Earth-goddess. The form all+gift, however, can also be taken to mean 'all gifts,' and it is this position Hesiod takes in coming up

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<sup>150</sup> Page duBois, *Sowing the Body. Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 173.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

with the Pandora myth in the form familiar to us today: The first woman, Pandora, was sent as an evil gift, as punishment by Zeus to mankind. She was created from clay by Hephaistus, was dressed with gifts from many gods. Athene dressed her, the Charites and Peitho provided her with jewelry, she received her beauty from Aphrodite and her deceitful nature from Hermes.<sup>152</sup>

Pandora herself as a 'gift' brings about mortality, sexuality, and all man's ills to a mankind that had previously consisted only of males. She releases all bad things from a jar, which later got referred to as Pandora's box.<sup>153</sup> The jar is a symbolic womb, conceptualizing woman as a necessary evil to the survival of humankind. With the advancement of male domination in culture, birth gets a negative value, as it represents the weakest point of patriarchy: its reliance on mothers for procreation. The division of the body from the soul in Plato's philosophical thought can be considered a further step in the attempt of men to culturally procreate themselves without relying on the murky mystery of women.

Let us stop the train of thought here to explain what I mean by writing "the murky mystery of women." As already pointed out in chapter three, the female is generally connected to the earthly, the sensual in Greek thinking, which is often shown to work in a system of hierarchized binary oppositions. The female, who was positioned on the subordinate side of these oppositions, was generally connected to the bodily, to the dark and the bad. While I do not mean to create yet another set of essentializing stereotypes about the Greek mind, I find it useful to show Aristotle's

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<sup>152</sup> H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Classical Mythology*, (London: Methuen, 1958), 55.

<sup>153</sup> Graves, 145.

diagram of the Pythagorean Table,<sup>154</sup> which is his outline of the ten pairs of principles accepted by many Pythagorean thinkers:

Limit	Unlimited
Odd	Even
One	Many
Right	Left
Male	Female
Resting	Moving
Straight	Curved
Light	Darkness
Good	Bad
Square	Oblong

The table is a telling illustration of how the cultural representation of gender rendered a negative sign to the female. The negativization of femininity in patriarchy correlates with the desire for male asexual reproduction, with the birth-giving male as one of its emblems.

The notion of men giving birth to themselves has its mythological predecessors and Plato is not the first to invent the emblem of the birth-giving male either. Both Athena and Dionysus are born from Zeus, through a mimetic appropriation of maternal power. It is Dionysus who I will focus on in the rest of this chapter. On the one hand,

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<sup>154</sup> As it appears in Sabina Lovibund's essay "An Ancient Theory of Gender: Plato and the Pythagorean Table," in Léonie J. Archer (ed.), *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1994), 88-101, 89.

the myth of his birth is an interesting melting pot of our problematized topics and, on the other hand, my thesis is that we can ‘snatch’ back Diotima’s speech through interpreting it in its relation to the Dionysiac.

#### 4.4.4 Dionysus

My presupposition is that the Dionysiac side of Diotima’s teaching enables us to find a space for lifting Diotima’s speech out of its male symbolic surroundings into a realm that allows the female to interpret herself on her own terms – where her difference is not contained within the male symbolic order. This means a kind of counter-reappropriation, the route of which is marked by Cavarero.

Cavarero, as we will see, reads the myth of Dionysus through the maenads in order to show the maternal continuum, which connects the life of the individual to infinity. While I accept her interpretation of the Dionysus myth, my thesis is that through the notion of birth and through Alcibiades’ speech (which illuminates the Dionysiac side of Diotima’s teaching) we can open space for an interpretation of the speech that recognizes sexual difference within it. Cavarero does not recognize the direct link between Diotima’s speech and Dionysus that I showed in the previous chapter. She connects the two through the ambiguity in the representation of both the feminine and the masculine as self-sufficient entities in Greek mythology, in accordance with how they appear in Hesiod’s *Theogonia*. I propose a re-embedding of Diotima’s speech into its textual context, in order to re-appropriate it from its male-dominated symbolic context.

As I pointed out earlier, the myth of Dionysus' birth includes both the elements of matricide and male birth. Apollodorus' version<sup>155</sup> of the story goes as follows:

Zeus fell in love with Semele and slept with her, promising her anything she wanted, and keeping it all from Hera. But Semele was deceived by Hera into asking Zeus to come to her as he came to Hera during their courtship. So Zeus, unable to refuse, arrived in her bridal chamber on a chariot with lightning flashes and thunder, and sent a thunderbolt at her. Semele died of fright, and Zeus grabbed from the fire her six-month aborted baby, which he sewed into his thigh. [...] At the proper time Zeus loosened the stitches and gave birth to Dionysus, whom he entrusted to Hermes. (3.26-29)

Hermes takes the child to Ino and Athamas who are to raise him up as a girl. After Hera drives Nysa and Athamas into madness, Hermes confides the child to the nymphs of Nysa. Already as a child, Dionysus has a close connection with women, which becomes a characteristic of his cult. His followers, the maenads, are a daemonic group of women in a state of frenzy, of the divine madness, *mania*. Their *mania* and their closeness to wild animals are their main characteristics. The maenads' frenzy often turns into violence as the *mania* releases repressed primal and instinctual energies.

Thus, the cult of Dionysus directs us towards the primal, towards animality, the connection to which is established through women. Dionysus' cult strongly relies on the imagery of birth and motherhood. The maenads, who are often depicted as mothers abandoning their babies and suckling infant animals, lead us from cultured birth-giving to our primal origin. There even exists a story where bewildered women tear their children limb from limb and subsequently eat them – an action that is typical of wild animals.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Apollodorus, *The Library*, translated by Sir. J. G. Fraser, (London – New York: Loeb Classical Library, 1921), 3.26-29.

<sup>156</sup> Apollodorus, 2.37.



Getting closer to our repressed primal instincts, to animality, is closely connected to the feminine within the cult. The way to access this side of the human psyche leads through mothers, through maternal power and its revelation in birth.

Dionysus' cult on the one hand shows how the conventional hierarchy of god – man – animal becomes, in practice, further divided into god – man – woman – animal. However, the cult of Dionysus, as Cavarero rightly points out, also illustrates an important shift, bringing together 'god' and 'animal.' The animal element clearly comes to the surface as divine in the cult. The passage to this divine animal realm leads "through innumerable sequence of births from female bodies", the process that Cavarero calls the "maternal continuum."<sup>157</sup>

The maternal continuum, this "infinite chain of mothers"<sup>158</sup> directs our attention to where we come from. Focusing on our origin, the notion of the maternal continuum breaks with the fixation on death in Western thought: birth becomes the entry towards an infinite continuum, linking the individual to an eternal, primal flow of life. In this flow of life, death and birth become "two transformative processes that ensure the continuity."<sup>159</sup> This statement that Hawthorne originally makes about Diotima's speech (already quoted in the beginning of this chapter) opens up in its full significance with the recognition of maternal power and sexual difference.

Informed by the notion of sexual difference, we can interpret Diotima's speech on a more complex level, keeping my presupposition that Diotima's erotic teaching can be interpreted as the bridge between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, where the pair 'Apollonian and Dionysiac,' besides the analogies outlined in Chapter Three, also

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<sup>157</sup> Cavarero, 111.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 118. Cavarero turns around the Lacanian notion of *infinite chain of signifiers*.

<sup>159</sup> Hawthorne, 88.

stand for 'Western metaphysics vs. a new way of thinking.' This new way of thinking is the route to human logos via the feminine, the route of "painless conciliation between individuality and infinite life,"<sup>160</sup> i.e. life itself.

This is exactly the essence of Dionysus' cult. The Greeks had two different words for life: *bios* and *zoē*, both of which, according to Kerényi, developed from the same root. *Zoē* "'resounds' with the life of all living creatures" (*zoōn*), referring to "life in general, without further characterization." *Bios*, on the other hand, refers to a specific, a "characterized life," marking "the outlines that distinguish one living thing from another" (hence the word 'biography').<sup>161</sup> Kerényi explains *zoē* as "the thread upon which every individual *bios* is strung like a bead, and which, in contrast to *bios*, can be conceived of only as endless."<sup>162</sup> It follows from *zoē*'s lack of characterization or attributes, as Kerényi points out, that it, "our simplest, most intimate and self-evident experience," is indescribable.<sup>163</sup> Through the cult of Dionysus, the Greeks had access to experiencing *zoē*, i.e. infinite life.

Our counter-reappropriation is symbolic. The symbol through which it is achieved is the body of a male god, Dionysus, torn limb from limb by the maenads. Iser points out that a "symbol looks in two directions at once, comprising regression and progression, and thereby revealing a buried past and an intended future."<sup>164</sup> This duality of direction makes the symbol "an epitome of double meaning that, owing to its indivisibility, allows the archaic to be read through the teleological and vice versa,"

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<sup>160</sup> Cavarero, 119.

<sup>161</sup> Karl Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), xxxii.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, xxxv.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, xxxvi.

<sup>164</sup> Iser, 78.

creating the meeting point of *archē* and *telos*.<sup>165</sup> The concentric circles of the interpretation of Diotima's *eros* are drawn in both of these directions: The guests of the *Symposium* are feasting on Diotima's body, which serves as a host<sup>166</sup> to the mimetic appropriation of maternal power and the founding of the philosophy of death. Through the maenads who tear apart Dionysus' body (later in the form of the sacrificial bull and the goat), however, we may enter the territory of the Great Goddess and a philosophy of birth.

Women were the bearers of Dionysus' cult in Athens. The sacred ceremonies of the Lenaion, the temple of Dionysus, and his fourteen altars throughout the city were performed by the *Geraiai*, a group of fourteen Athenian women and the queen (later the *archon*'s wife).<sup>167</sup> Kerényi argues that the Dionysian mysteries clearly have their origin in Minoan Crete, in the cult of the Great Goddess. The key female figures in the different variants of the myth of Dionysus – namely Rhea and Persephone, Semele and Ariadne – are versions of each other, and, most significantly, of the Great Goddess.<sup>168</sup> The duality of their roles as mother and daughter emphasizes that it is always the same birth repeated in giving birth to their mystic child, Dionysus, who represents “the indestructibility of life in what was, in a manner of speaking, its lowest form:” *zoē*.<sup>169</sup> Each conception of life stood for the bestowal of soul on this lowest form and thus, each birth meant the “genesis of souls”<sup>170</sup> through the infinite chain of mothers.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Diotima as host is Nye's metaphor. See: Nye, 197.

<sup>167</sup> Kerényi, 307-9.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 114-6.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 125.

I contend that Diotima's speech connects the here and now to the possibility of a female symbolic order through its Dionysiac side as shown by Alcibiades. The entry to the realm of this interpretation is birth and the route to it leads through *eros*, which, in this case, gains an additional meaning of *desire for our origin through birth*. One has to make sure though to have made careful rounds around the speech, as we did in this thesis, before adding this new layer to the meanings of *eros*. Diotima's *eros* first needs to be re-rooted in the soil of sexual difference and in the sexed body. This ensures that instead of reiterating the containment of the female by a male symbolic order, the speech is opened up and allowed to unfold for interpretation within a paradigm where self and other make no sense from a male-centric perspective; where the importance of the female and the significance of sexual difference are not overlooked.

## Conclusion

A gender-oriented interpretation of Diotima's speech is, in its essence, an interdisciplinary enterprise. The multifaceted functions of Platonic dialogues and the various aspects of the speech make it impossible to clearly separate philosophy, classical philology, literature, and gender studies (in itself an interdisciplinary field within social and cultural studies) while carrying out such a project. This thesis pursued a gender-oriented textual investigation of Diotima's speech with a philosophical perspective. The purpose of this *erotic* enterprise was to formulate my own interpretation, which is an intermediary between Irigaray's and Nye's analyses, and which also re-roots Diotima's *eros*, 'snatching' it from its phallogocentric context and interpretations.

Subjectivity is always detectable in interpretation, in its choice of subject and in the direction the analysis takes through the interpreter's conscious and unconscious selections. Nye, at one point, overtly criticizes Irigaray for projecting the problems of a "twentieth-century Parisian *intellectuelle*"<sup>171</sup> onto Diotima. I do not think this projection to be a problem in itself, as long as the interpreter develops a self-awareness in order to be able to map the interplay of three realities: the fictional reality of the text, the social reality of the author (if I may use such an archaic term), and the social reality of the reader. In addition to these horizons, each re-actualization of a text includes the horizon of the analyst's position within, and in relation to, the interpreting tradition, which also has to be taken into account.

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<sup>171</sup> Nye, 205.

The original question that the *Symposium* posed to me, as it had done to many before me in the infinite chain of its interpreters – why is Diotima a woman? – has not been and cannot be fully answered. It can be clearly inferred from the investigations above that Plato uses the figure of Diotima for his philosophical purposes. My analysis showed that the techniques through which Plato achieves this aim include the male mimesis of birth, the separation of body and soul, and metonymizing the female body. It is precisely the unreconstructability of the authorial intention, however, which makes it impossible to give a definitive answer to the question above, while, at the same time, also providing Diotima's speech with possible ways of getting out of the grip of that very authorial intention.

Unraveling the subtle workings of Socrates/Diotima's speech showed how Diotima and her *eros*, as Plato's creations, get contained in a phallogocentric network. However, a strategic switch from intention to meaning, as propagated by Gadamer, enables the reader to open up the speech for a successful re-rooting of *eros*. I consider Cavarero as well as Irigaray (whose article I will return to shortly) to have achieved this.

Gadamer asserts that the intention of the author cannot be understood, only the possible meanings of the text. So the 'why' of our original question does not refer to what Plato's intention might have been, but rather to what the possible implications of Diotima's being a woman are for the reader of her speech. This means that one should not look for an answer to why Diotima is a woman, but aim at understanding that question in order to pose more questions that may, in turn, lead to further understanding of the text, thus making the original question meaningful.

Gadamer emphasizes the priority of the question within the process of interpretation. Interpreting a text is understanding the question it poses to us in the complexity of its possibilities, thus making it indeterminate, open. The art of questioning lies in always questioning further. The point is in opening the original question itself for questionableness. Only the realization that Diotima is not a woman can enable the interpreter to open up the possibilities for her to be a woman – and not a ‘woman’: an effect of negation or a fantasy of the male subject.

The shift from intention to meaning in my analysis in an attempt to deconstruct Diotima’s ‘womanhood’ necessitated the recognition of sexual difference and also a shift of focus from linearity to circularity within the interpretative process. Let us evoke Iser’s theory of interpretation once more to highlight some important connections uncovered by the thesis. This will lead us, first, to Irigaray’s re-rooting of Diotima’s *eros* and then, finally, to my own.

Iser emphasizes recursive looping within interpretation. He applies the notion of recursive loop as a continual feedback mechanism that informs the register how to cope with the subject matter, based on past experience. Recursive loops are fed by the vortex created by the liminal space and their courses are shaped by the interplay of input and output of the interpretative process itself, bringing about a growing complexity of the register.

Interpretation conceptualized this way is poetic (*poietic*) in two ways: on the one hand, it makes the subject matter function, creating emergent phenomena (new territories), which are identical neither with the subject matter, nor with the register of interpretation; while on the other hand, it serves as the motor of, or desire for, further

interpretation. The recursive loop is the reaction to the doubly poetic nature of interpretation.

Recursive looping answers the dual nature of interpretation by weaving together its linear and cyclical dimensions. The model comprises a series of circles forming a spiral on the linear temporality, that is, the axis of time. If time is imagined to flow horizontally in this model, the hierarchization of the consecutive cycles can be avoided. Each specific instance of interpretation will only be one (set of) input(s) within the 'recursive history' of the subject matter, increasing the complexity of its interpretation, but never excluding other interpretations. Iser's model illustrates with its concentric circles following each other through time that while interpretation can be full it always remains open-ended. What is achieved is not only openness, and fluidity, but also the impossibility of closure.

The spiral that is drawn up by this model makes a suitable analogy to show how Diotima's *eros*, which she calls the "friend of wisdom" (*philosophos*) (204B), is a hermeneutic *eros* aiming at beauty and knowledge. The model also provides the ground for the de-hierarchization of the levels of the contemplative ascent. We have seen the significance of circularity within the *Symposium*, in Diotima's speech and also within the path to absolute Beauty. After each cycle of the path, the hermeneutic or erotic quest is re-fuelled with a new desire for understanding the unknown. *Eros* reaches beyond itself, creating new meanings, while evoking further *poiesis*: "Never completed, always evolving."<sup>172</sup> The same way as reality does not pre-exist interpretation in Iser's model, Diotima's absolute Beauty does not pre-exist desire. The

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<sup>172</sup> Irigaray, "Sorcerer Love," 182.



relationship between reality and knowledge becomes relativized: *eros* creates beauty – both in body and soul.

Looking back at Irigaray’s article in the light of our circular model shows how she achieves a successful re-rooting of *eros* in her analysis. Though we come to the same result through separate methods, she also re-roots *eros* in the body. Irigaray opens up the text not in its linearity, but in its circularity. This move enables any point of opening in the texture of the speech to serve as an entry through which *eros* may be re-rooted.

Although Irigaray claims that the second part of Diotima’s speech fails to keep *eros*’ intermediary character, she praises Diotima’s speech where its *eros* offers a medium-like fertility, the “immortal becoming of the living.”<sup>173</sup> This immortality is not to be confused with the one separating the body and the soul, as shown to be characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition. The aim of *eros* is immortality within mortality, between birth and death, embodied:

The aim of love is to realize the immortality in the mortality between lovers. Procreation and generation in beauty – these are the aim of love, because it is thus that the eternity and imperishability of a mortal being manifest themselves.<sup>174</sup>

While she finds the second part of Diotima’s speech problematic, Irigaray realizes the subversive potential of Diotima’s *eros* when it bears its medium-like character. Diotima’s speech does not have to be subversive in its linearity: Irigaray’s way of reading does not work that way. The speech can be dismantled through its *eros* when it

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

is daimonic, carrying the potential of divinity, immortality within mortality, in every union between the lovers – through generation in harmony.

This re-conceptualization of *eros* is in accord with my own interpretation: Establishing the relation between the Dionysiac and Diotima's *eros*, or that of Alcibiades' *eros* concept and the stereotypically constructed male and female ways of loving – fuelled my analysis towards the notion of sexual difference, generating a series of recursive loops to re-visit Diotima's speech. The notion of sexual difference is pivotal in recognizing how Diotima (a female image created by Plato) and her teaching become contained within Plato's male-centric philosophical framework. First, we see the creation of a female image representing female power, then the subsequent appropriation of that power for Plato's philosophical goals. I borrowed Cavarero's technique of re-appropriation to elaborate an interpretation of Diotima (both her figure and teaching) and the notion of maternal power on their own grounds.

My analysis revealed how the mimetic male desire for female experience, the notion of immortality and the emblem of the birth-giving male become constituents of the expropriation of maternal power. This expropriation led to the later exclusion of women from philosophical discourse and to the separation of two lives, that of the body and that of the soul. I claimed that it is possible to 'snatch' back Diotima's figure and teaching from the patriarchal symbolic order through the concept of birth (understood via the Arendtian notion of natality) with the help of the figure and cult of Dionysus. Based on the direct link previously established between Diotima's speech and the Dionysiac, I provided an interpretation of Diotima's *eros* as an intermediary between individuality and infinite life, as well as between body and soul; as the

possibility of immortality within mortality; as a desire for our origin through birth. This was achieved through re-rooting *eros* in the body.

As for the other aim of the thesis, namely to mediate between Irigaray and Nye, I believe the goal has been achieved, at least in opening a dialogue between their methods. Following Iser's model of interpretation enabled me to use a combined set of tools throughout my interpretation of Diotima's speech, which took into consideration the achievements of post-structuralism, but also looked 'around' the work to see what possible socio-cultural (including historical) aspects played a part in the construction of the text. I already stated that I consider Irigaray's article to be successful in re-rooting *eros*. As for Nye, I accept several points of her interpretation of Diotima's speech, but not her critique of Irigaray's article, which I do not think she opens up for interpretation.

Interpretation is never complete and so my thesis marks several directions for subsequent analyses and further dialogues with Diotima's speech. An in-depth exploration of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac within Diotima's *eros* is one of these possible directions. Reading together Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Symposium* would reveal some aspects not yet problematized. Another direction emerges at the point where my investigations intersect with the broader issue of translation. A historical analysis of 'translation as interpretation' through the case study of Diotima's speech would show how (if at all) certain gendered aspects of Diotima's speech have been addressed by scholarship throughout the centuries and would also reveal important aspects of the interaction between ideology and scholarship. Also, it would be interesting to explore how the image of the womb, as an analogue for dialogical space, a differential, carries implications for a feminine

hermeneutics based on the hermeneutic *eros* outlined above. These are only examples of the several possible openings of the speech and, having pointed out these directions, I let the conversation go on.

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