

## Chapter 12

# Irigaray's Nietzsche

Joanne Faulkner

Luce Irigaray is a Belgian philosopher, linguist, psychoanalyst, and feminist, best known in the Anglophone academy for her books *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977). Irigaray is a pioneer of 'difference feminism'. Critical of second-wave feminism inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949, translated 1953), Irigaray contends that this model of gender equality assumes the priority of traditionally 'masculine' values (i.e. it is an 'equality of sameness'). Irigaray's philosophical analysis takes sexual difference as its primary focus. According to Irigaray, within our tradition of thought, men's bodies (or 'morphology') are assumed to be neat and solid, whereas women's morphology is perceived as 'messy' and fluid. These evaluations, she suggests, pervade the most abstract thought of the Western tradition: *chora*, or 'place', in the writings of Plato (Irigaray, 1985a, pp. 243–64) and Aristotle (Irigaray, 1993, pp. 34–55), for instance. Through her critical engagements with philosophers from Plato to Derrida, as well as her more programmatic texts, Irigaray sets out to 'deconstruct' Western discourses through which 'the feminine' is denigrated. Her work on Nietzsche is part of that project.

Irigaray's texts are challenging to read. Indeed, it is often remarked that the book with which this chapter is concerned, *Marine Lover* (*Amante Marine de Friedrich Nietzsche*), is difficult, even opaque. For this reason it is an under-read, and underestimated, commentary on Nietzsche. As with Nietzsche's own style, Irigaray's writing is poetic, and sometimes obscure compared to most philosophical writing. Irigaray does not proceed by means of careful exegesis or explanation of either Nietzsche's or her own position. She expects her reader to have done their homework, not only on Nietzsche, but also the other philosophers to whom her discussion refers. And she does not provide footnotes or other textual bearings to orient the reader's understanding. One could say that reading *Marine Lover* is like being thrown into the sea: ambiguously pleasurable once prospects of reaching firm ground are abandoned.

Far from operating according to a mandate of transparency and clarity, then, Irigaray writes elliptically, communicating at an emotional and sensual level by sharing the 'tonality' of her relation to Nietzsche. Irigaray immerses herself within the writing of the philosopher she interprets, appropriating his or her 'voice'. To an English-language reader, raised on a diet of plainly articulated arguments, Irigaray appears to lack objectivity. Her manner of engaging with the philosophers is intimate, and this challenges readers used to a detached style of philosophical prose. For Irigaray, however, such 'intimacy' is strategic. Indeed, far from lacking critical distance, this approach provides her critical methodology.

For these reasons, Irigaray requires her reader's indulgence: that we read carefully, slowly, between the lines – much as Nietzsche had advised his own readers in *Daybreak* (Preface 5). To appreciate why she is so demanding, it helps to understand the stakes of her reading of Nietzsche: to make room within his philosophy for a feminist interpretation. As such, she attempts to engage with Nietzsche not only as she finds him, but also as he might become for an *amante marine*: an active woman-marine-lover, rather than the passive, feminine 'beloved' (*aimée*).<sup>1</sup> This strategy of writing herself into the philosopher's work is consistent throughout her oeuvre.

To render Irigaray's interpretation of Nietzsche more accessible, this chapter will first examine Irigaray's 'position' – her strategy of inserting herself 'within' philosophers' texts as the repudiated, forgotten 'feminine' – with reference to examples from *Marine Lover*. Next, 'Irigaray's methodologies' turns to a fuller examination of her style of interpretation, and will introduce some philosophical tools she draws upon to form her interpretation of Nietzsche. The section entitled 'The Deployment of Affect' considers the meaning of 'lover' in the title of Irigaray's Nietzsche book, so apparently obscure and yet critical to understanding her interpretation. Finally, 'Nietzsche's Irigaray' explores the extent to which, despite her criticisms, Irigaray is indebted to Nietzsche for her own philosophical values, style of writing, and methodology. Indeed, it is these affinities with Nietzsche that motivates Irigaray's close reading of him, ultimately enabling her to occupy the position of Nietzsche's female lover (*Amante*) convincingly.

### Irigaray's 'Position'

Irigaray situates herself always as a woman, and as a *feminist* reader and correspondent of the philosophers. She is acutely aware, however, that to occupy such a position is not without problems. What she calls 'the feminine'

(*le féminin*) is barely legible within Western philosophy. It is the obscured or 'othered' position the denial of which, for Irigaray, founds the philosophical position *per se*. The texts of the philosophers rehearse and formalize a cultural prejudice against the feminine, according to Irigaray. While 'man' is counted as 'one' – the subject of experience – 'woman' is considered nothing in herself, a mere accomplice to the affirmation of masculine subjectivity. Expressing this in terms of binary opposition, 'man' is 'A' to 'woman's' 'not-A': so that insofar as 'man' is defined as the positive value in opposition to 'woman', 'he' depends upon 'woman' to shore up 'his' identity.<sup>2</sup> 'Woman' is represented by this discourse only in (a negative) relation to 'man', and so insofar as women are neither simply 'masculine' nor 'feminine' (understood only as what masculinity rejects), conventional philosophical writing fails to represent sexual difference. Irigaray demonstrates this view at the outset of *Marine Lover*:

And you had all to lose sight of me so I could come back, toward you, with an other gaze.

And certainly, the most arduous thing has been to seal my lips, out of love. To close off this mouth that always sought to flow free.

But, had I never held back, never would you have remembered that something exists which has a language other than your own. That, from her prison, someone was calling out to return to the air. That your words reasoned all the better because within them a voice was captive. Amplifying your speech with an endless resonance. (p. 3)

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3

Irigaray's strategy involves staging a withdrawal of 'woman's' labour of supporting negation to masculine identity. She then interrogates how women might find an identity *beyond* binary opposition: a relation to 'man' of 'B' (pure difference) instead of 'not-A' (where 'A' is the primary term). She writes:

Nothing? This whole that always and at every moment was thus becoming new? Nothing? This endless coming into life at each moment? Nothing? This whole that had laid by the mantle of long sleep and was reviving all my senses? Nothing, this unfathomable well? (p. 5)

Once the philosopher's silent substratum, the 'feminine' now speaks – reanimated by Irigaray's interpretation. Irigaray introduces an interesting rhetorical device to the scene of Nietzsche scholarship: by addressing her

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3  
ebrary

text to Nietzsche directly in the form of a 'love letter' that is also a 'Dear John' letter; she occupies the roles of various figures of women that populate his texts as metaphors for 'Life', 'Truth', and 'Destiny', as well as more obviously negative clichés such as the barren feminist or crone. In this guise, She admonishes Nietzsche for neglecting to listen to a forgotten, self-affirming feminine concealed beneath his philosophy.

Irigaray accuses Nietzsche of using 'woman' to amplify for his own opinions: 'That your words reasoned all the better because within them a voice was captive', (p. 3); and as a mirror for his own likeness: 'he refused to break the mirror of the (male) same, and over and over again demanded that the other be his double' (p. 187). Despite Nietzsche's acknowledgement that women's social position reflects Western ontology<sup>3</sup> – and his critique of philosophers' ineptitude regarding 'Truth', figured as a woman (see BGE Preface) – Irigaray treats Nietzsche, in his relation to women, precisely as one of the dogmatic philosophers he ridicules. Nietzsche may be aware of philosophers' shortcomings: their blindness to different viewpoints, and reifications of social dynamics as the essential types, 'man' and 'woman'. Yet for Irigaray, Nietzsche, too, relates his philosophy through a usage of 'the feminine' that denies women their own voice because it speaks only *his* truth. In short, she argues, Nietzsche reduces 'woman' to a maternal metaphor tied to the creation of his philosophical ideas. By interpolating herself as a character within Nietzsche's philosophy, Irigaray attempts to open his work to new possibilities and new understandings of femininity: 'This is not a book *on* Nietzsche but *with* Nietzsche who is for me a partner in love' (Irigaray, 1981, p. 44).

The interim aim, then, of Irigaray's conversation with Nietzsche – and her interludes with the philosophers more generally – is to render the function of 'the feminine' visible and the philosopher accountable for ignorance of feminine subjectivity. Integral to this approach is a destabilization of the 'masculinity' that philosophical discourse presumes. This, in turn, prepares a further aim, to produce a position from which a 'woman-philosopher' might speak. Irigaray's deconstructive reading is in this way also a creative act: she renegotiates *with* the philosopher a discursive practice that refuses to subordinate one voice to the other.

Reading and understanding Irigaray's work, then, involves challenging accepted modes of philosophical writing, even subverting the manner in which philosophy is 'staged': a staging that must remain un-interrogated – even invisible – for the business of philosophy proceed as usual. This is because, as Nietzsche knew well, the way philosophy is staged organizes the kinds of relation possible between the text and its reader. Philosophical

criticism supposes that each pole of dialogue – occupied by philosopher or commentator – is ‘equal’ to the other. Reason – understood as simple, objective, and expunged of emotion – is supposed to mediate the textual relation in philosophy. Neutrality is the expected ‘stance’ for both philosopher and commentator, and affective involvement is viewed as compromising objectivity.

These ‘rules of engagement’ assume a uniform perspective, and uniform material and social circumstances that influence one’s viewpoint. To this extent, Irigaray suggests, they effectively exclude a feminist reading. First, the notion that the philosopher is ‘neuter’ – that philosophy can represent a neutral perspective – is mistaken and deceptive. For Irigaray, philosophy is always political, especially where it claims not to be. ‘Neutrality’ is a cloak worn by politics that fails to recognize itself as such. And by universalizing its perspective by means of the misnomer of neutrality, philosophy does violence to alternative perspectives it excludes. As we will see in the final section of this chapter, Irigaray draws in part from Nietzsche’s insights for this ‘diagnosis’ of philosophy.

Second, philosophy’s antagonism towards emotion and partial interest doubly excludes women, frequently equated with the particular and the emotional. Because women often have different, sometimes competing interests to male philosophers, there is a suspicion that their interpretations might import social concerns into the ‘purified’ arena of reason. The feminist may be too ‘involved’, too focussed on women’s issues to take account of the ‘real’ stakes of philosophy: a universal ‘Truth’, determined from ‘no-man’s’ perspective.

Importantly for Irigaray, philosophy’s supposed ‘neutrality’ refers to a set of (actually very partial) qualities and attitudes taken for granted within philosophical discourse. These attributes understood to be ‘neutral’ designate, Irigaray suggests, a *masculine* point of view, serving masculine interests (see 1985a, p. 133). While objectivity and distance is routinely equated with masculinity, the ‘feminine’ has come to stand for the material that masculine philosophers reject, rework, and value-add: ‘matter’ to his ‘form’; ‘emotion’ to his ‘reason’; ‘body’ to his ‘mind’; and ‘object’ to his ‘subject’.<sup>4</sup> ‘Femininity’, then, designates precisely the proximity to emotion and the body over which the philosopher must prevail in order to philosophize. For Irigaray, it will be impossible to philosophize *as a woman* before first correcting philosophy’s othering of the ‘feminine’.

Significantly, in spite of Derrida’s claim that Nietzsche ‘writes with the hand of woman’ (1973, p. 299) – and Nietzsche’s own claim to be a ‘psychologist of the eternal feminine’ (EH ‘Books’ 5) – Nietzsche’s ‘position’ is



also typically masculine. Irigaray argues that Nietzsche's is a philosophy of overcoming *par excellence*, and that his rhetoric reflects a desire to skirt over rather than absorb or be absorbed by the materiality of life. This signals a sexual division of labour within Nietzsche's work consistent with more traditional works of philosophy: In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for instance, 'Life' is represented by a woman with whom Nietzsche's protagonist flirts and lightly converses. And, as Irigaray points out in *Marine Lover*, for Nietzsche, women and the material elements are always kept 'at a distance':

It is always hot, dry, and hard in your world. And to excel for you always requires a bridge. Are you truly afraid of falling back into man? Or into the sea? (p. 13)

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3  
ebrary

We will discuss Nietzsche's relation to materiality and embodiment in the sections on methodology and 'Nietzsche's Irigaray'.

As a feminist reader, Irigaray seeks to establish through an engagement with Nietzsche a position from which to speak, without which the 'critical distance' demanded by philosophy is unattainable. In so doing, she complicates the very notion of 'critical distance' by emphasizing the importance of (the sexual) 'relation' to the establishment of identity. That humans 'exist' in the context of relationships that support them is a critical element of the enunciation of 'who one is' for Irigaray. 'Masculine' identity is unstable, she suggests, because it disavows its relations of dependence, valuing instead self-actualization through separation from others. Irigaray, conversely, situates her reading in the context of her relationships – to those whose philosophy she interrogates, and a feminine 'genealogy' (actual and symbolic mothers, such as Simone de Beauvoir, and prospective 'daughters' or readers). These relations are elaborated affectively in terms of love, disappointment, fear, and anger, thereby emphasizing the 'situation' of subjectivity, which is embodied and emotional as well as rational.

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3  
ebrary

Irigaray's manner of establishing her position from which to speak, then, is to insinuate herself within the philosopher's writing. By appropriating his language, his metaphors and figures, his mode of address, she enacts a resonance within his 'voice', which produces a disturbing effect. Irigaray's 'position' is this uneasy *proximity*, which touches but does not coincide with the place of the philosopher. Irigaray establishes her voice by mimicking the words of the philosopher, but with minor, telling, differences. These differences produced through repetition disturb the philosopher's seeming authority and neutrality, and reveal 'the feminine' – the elision of which had given him voice.

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3  
ebrary

## Irigaray's Methodologies

The philosophical tools with which Irigaray constructs her argument are eclectic, varying according to whom she critiques. This is due to the importance of relation to the articulation of a position, discussed above. But her eclecticism is also connected to what she sees as a more empowering position for women readers: 'infidelity' to any particular philosopher. First, each particular approach taken to 'truth' excludes another, thus concealing the multiplicity of viewpoints that could comprise a philosophical conversation. By shifting from approach to approach, Irigaray optimizes textual openness, producing a poly-vocal writing that resists reduction to one particular stance.

Second, Irigaray finds strategic 'infidelity' empowering as it permits a distance between the woman-reader and the philosopher all too easily closed where fidelity is upheld. In their intellectual relationships with men, women are often seen as complementary rather than owning a place of their own: the woman-partner as advocate, affirming *his* truths, *his* desire. 'Infidelity' enables the assertion of difference within the relation between the philosopher and his woman-interlocutor, reminding us of her difference. With this strategic 'infidelity' in mind, the following approaches feature in Irigaray's critical toolbox:

### Psychoanalysis

Despite her troubled relation to psychoanalysis,<sup>5</sup> its influence pervades Irigaray's interrogations of the philosophers. Yet her 'use' of psychoanalysis is provisional, pragmatic, and self-reflexive. Her method of reading philosophy against itself is like psychoanalytic therapy, where the analyst interprets the analysand's (patient's) words to reveal hidden meanings. Irigaray's frequent tactic of repeating (by quotation or paraphrase) and then interrogating the philosopher's text can be understood as a manner of analysing the 'unconscious' of the philosophical work.

What she finds in this unconscious is a repressed femininity: a mode of expression, and variety of experience, that must remain concealed for the philosophy to cohere. In the course of articulating the philosophy, 'femininity' – as matter, emotion, or softness for instance – is repudiated. This repudiated material reappears in another guise, however, like a 'slip of the tongue' or symptom in the clinic. By catching the philosopher in the midst of repudiation, Irigaray disturbs the consistency the disavowal fabricates.

Her voice 'identifies' with the repudiated femininity that returns to haunt the philosopher. Thus her writing is, like the psychoanalytic treatment, *dialogical*: actualizing an encounter between the (conscious) philosopher and the (unconscious) female interlocutor his writing excludes. As we will see in the later section, 'The Deployment of Affect', Irigaray exploits this tactic to great effect in *Marine Lover*.

### **Destruction/Deconstruction**

Two other significant influences for Irigaray are Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. From Heidegger, Irigaray makes use of the motifs of 'forgetting' and 'ontological difference'. Irigaray frames *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* in terms of Heidegger's claim that philosophy neglects its most fundamental question: what is Being? For Heidegger philosophers tend to quibble over questions concerning the nature of this or that being and call it 'ontology', while forgetting to interrogate the conditions of Being itself, and its integral relation to thought and humanity (*Dasein*). Irigaray responds by suggesting that the oblivion that organizes Western thought is *sexual* rather than ontological difference. Sexual difference is obscured by the presumption that what distinguishes types of human being is the presence or absence of a penis. For Irigaray, conversely, this binary arrangement of sexual difference recognizes only one model of being human. 'Difference' is understood as sameness, or a relation of privation to masculinity.<sup>6</sup>

Irigaray's use of Derridian 'deconstruction' also concerns the conception of difference. Derrida famously targets binary oppositions and slippages of meaning through which philosophy is crafted and conventional values maintained. Deconstruction reveals that when philosophers employ binary oppositions – where a higher priority is given to one term over another apparently derivative term – difference is understood in terms of an underlying sameness. For Derrida the paradigmatic opposition of Western philosophy that reinforces the value of sameness is the privilege given to speech over writing, or 'phonocentrism'. In 'Plato's Pharmacy' Derrida reads Plato's *Phaedrus*, where writing is characterized as a 'pharmakon' – both poison and medicine – that '... will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it' (Plato, 1995, p. 79 (275A)). For Plato speech is essential, immediate, and alive, while writing imperils oral discourse and memory. Derrida notes the ambivalence of the key term, 'pharmakon': it is both good and bad; an aid to and corrosive of memory; and this 'undecidability' generates binary difference. The ambiguity of the 'lesser' term of the pair



*supports* the privileged term. 'Speech' is understood by virtue of writing: when pressed to explain what speech is, Plato characterizes it as a living, interior *writing*, engraved upon the soul (see Derrida, 1981, p. 154).

Irigaray argues in a similar vein against what she sees as the prevalence of 'phallocentrism' in Western philosophy: whereby sexual difference is misconstrued as sameness according to the privilege awarded to the 'phallus' (a symbolic value organized according to a masculine morphology). One of Irigaray's approaches is to demonstrate the instability of masculinity as a measure of cultural value, as it repudiates femininity while also drawing upon 'feminine' metaphors to elucidate its value. In *Marine Lover*, for instance, she challenges Nietzsche's representation of his doctrine of eternal recurrence (in Z 'The Seven Seals') as an attempt to ground his creativity in 'woman' figured as Eternity:

And you ask a woman to help you in this operation. To redouble your affirmation. To give yourself back as a unit—subjects and objects of all your ecstasy. To fold all your becoming back into your being. To give you back, in the here and now, everything you have believed, loved, produced, planned, been. (pp. 34–5)

Nietzsche conceives of his own creativity in terms of maternal metaphors, but denies women's creative potential by characterizing it as merely reproductive. The reduction of 'womanhood' to 'motherhood' in this way serves, Irigaray suggests, a phallocentric sexual economy that values masculinity by obscuring feminine difference.

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3

ebruary

### Elemental Philosophy

Finally, Irigaray's methodology references Gaston Bachelard: a thinker whose influence on French philosophy is barely registered in anglophone countries. In *Marine Lover*, Irigaray draws out elemental metaphors in Nietzsche's writing, diagnostically analysing the values, commitments, and fears expressed therein. Her elemental lexicon is derived in part from Bachelard's reading of Nietzsche in *L'Air et les songes* (Bachelard, 1988).<sup>7</sup> It would be unfair to reduce her reading to a variety of Bachlardian interpretation (as does Farrell Krell, 1994), however: Irigaray's elemental analysis expresses her own feminist concerns, developed through a relation of affect to Nietzsche (see below).

For Bachelard, we only comprehend a philosopher's work after considering the imaginative aspect of their writing. This is reflected in the variety of

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3

ebruary

metaphors they employ – considered not as simple *vehicles* for meaning, but as intrinsic to it. Bachelard interprets how Nietzsche feels about each element according to the adjectives and values he ascribes to it, and whether such images make good use of that element's potential. According to this analysis, Nietzsche – the self-described 'prophet of the meaning of the earth' (Z Prologue 3) – does not in fact love the earth:

*Soft earth* disgusts him. How he scorns things that are 'spongy, cavernous, compressed' . . . It is one of the most reliable touchstones; only an impassioned lover of the earth, only a terrestrial who is also somewhat under the influence of water, can avoid the *automatically pejorative* nature of metaphorical *sponginess*. (128)

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3  
ebruary

Nietzsche does not celebrate the earth within the terms of the element itself. He favours, rather, aerial metaphors: affirming only eroded earth, impoverished of its own uniqueness – an earth that has become subject to the air (desert earth, and the rocks of the mountain peaks). Nietzsche's preference for 'pure air', for Bachelard, expresses a *dynamic* rather than material imagination: a preference for action (movement, dance), overcoming, and freedom over matter.

Irigaray's 'elemental' approach to reading Nietzsche – through an exploration of his relation to the properties of water – is clearly influenced by Bachelard's diagnosis of Nietzsche's elemental affinities, and what they reveal about his philosophical values. Irigaray does not analyse his work in terms of the element in which he is most comfortable, however. Irigaray focuses instead on the element Nietzsche most fears. In an interview Irigaray states:

I chose to interrogate Nietzsche from the perspective of water because it's the strongest point from which to interpret, it is the element of which he is most afraid. In *Zarathustra*, you detect his fear of the Deluge. Water is also what obscures frozen forms: ice/glass, mirrors. It is a pole, I wouldn't say opposed to, but a pole in a relation of otherness to the sun. (1981, p. 43)

This fear of water, she suggests, is symptomatic of a general disposition of his philosophy: first, a preference for lightness and Apollonian facade that (Dionysian) fluidity obscures; second, an envy of women's procreative power, represented by amniotic fluid; and, third, a fear of the sexual relation and an ambiguous, engulfing proximity suggested by fluidity.

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3  
ebruary

For Irigaray, then, Nietzsche's fear of water rejects both the maternal and sexual relation. Distance, masks, and surfaces mediate Nietzsche's relationships with others in his writing. More surprisingly, she suggests that Nietzsche's fear of water indicates a fear of 'becoming': thereby revealing an inconsistency between Nietzsche's avowed values and the metaphorical register of his writing. Irigaray sets her relation to him in *Marine Lover* to water in order to remove Nietzsche from a complacency that stifles his becoming. The 'marine lover' returns by virtue of a great thaw, the end of an age of ice: '... no sails, no skiff, no bridge remain in the breaking up and thawing of ice' (p. 36). Irigaray, as the 'marine lover', figuratively casts Nietzsche into the sea, returning him to a materiality that resembles that intra-uterine place of first movement, the place of his first becoming.

Henceforth you would be separated from her only by a single membrane. And even so . . . Through that membrane, might you not, with some horror, discover the back that corresponds to your front? Your silence is brushing the bottom of something it had thought never to touch again. You are now immersed and reenveloped in something that erases all boundaries. Carried away by the waves. Drowning in the flood. Tragic castaway in unrestrained turmoil. (ibid.)

By subjecting Nietzsche's philosophy to fluidity, then, Irigaray attempts to test his commitment to becoming. And his avowed preference for becoming over being – of movement, internal difference, and change over static ideals – suggests he should be amenable to Irigaray's treatment. She suggests that Nietzsche's becoming, explicated in terms of eternal return, is a 'simulacrum of becoming' (p. 32), safely mediated by the stylized image of woman as Eternity. Her own engagement with Nietzsche in *Marine Lover*, conversely, is posed as an invitation to a becoming that can only take place once he embraces fluidity and a relation to sexual difference.

## The Deployment of Affect

Male commentators have engaged with Nietzsche without first having to establish the authority to do so. The 'relation' between them is easily imagined in terms of fraternity or friendship, and is supported by caricatures of women (as 'nymph', 'dominatrix', 'mother', and 'barren feminist'), which serve as objects of exchange between Nietzsche and the men he envisions will read his philosophy. Nietzsche's readers are invited to converse with

him about women, even if they're *actually* talking about philosophy. This relation to woman secures philosophers' social privilege, while apparently destabilizing 'Truth' and subjectivity. Indeed, for Derrida, 'woman' provides the very materiality for his relation with Nietzsche, as the script through which 'man' writes himself: 'if style were a man . . . then writing would be a woman' (1979, p. 57).

For women readers, conversely, 'friendship' with Nietzsche is complicated by this material use of 'woman'. In 'Of the Friend' (Z) Nietzsche even explicitly excludes women from that relation, stating that woman 'knows only love'. Prohibited friendship with Nietzsche, Irigaray consents to a relation he invited, but perhaps did not anticipate: love. Irigaray issues the relation as a challenge to adapt to a woman who is not a mere prop for his philosophy. Instead of using woman as an object of exchange between his text and its reader, Irigaray offers *Marine Lover* to Nietzsche as a bridge between them. This also challenges Nietzsche's impoverished conception of love as a degraded form of friendship rather than as having its own radical potentialities. For Irigaray, Nietzsche's conception of love, limited to selfless care or destruction, reflects fantasies about his own mother. 'Woman' for Nietzsche always has maternal contours:

And because you don't distinguish yourself from the other, you are now sinking down as in a current, so you can barely come up for air. And as soon as that brief moment of alertness is over, you [*tu*] dive back into her who bears you, and never do you break completely free of her. For that is not your fortune. (p. 30)

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3

*Marine Lover* demonstrates to Nietzsche what a woman 'lover' rather than a 'mother' might be to him – and more crucially, how *Nietzsche* would need to develop to accommodate such a woman. Irigarayan love is then a transformative rather than palliative relation. Love that recognizes the other's difference enables a becoming impeded by a reification of that other: as Eternity, for instance. Love is, Irigaray suggests, a relation that enables a shared existence, and need not sacrifice one of the pair to the other: 'Why are we not, the one for the other, a resource of life and air?' (p. 31). Love can be a 'resource', however, only insofar as one is mindful of the other's need to be who they are. Irigarayan love, then, breaks down the binary (master/slave) arrangement of forces between Nietzsche and his 'woman', who only reflects what he hopes to be/come. Through this intermediate entity – love, figured as the book itself (written *with*, not *on* Nietzsche) – Irigaray hopes that she and Nietzsche will be able to 'unlimit their spaces'

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3  
ebrary

(p. 5): to open a becoming Nietzsche had desired, but hadn't the resources to achieve alone.

## Nietzsche's Irigaray

Irigaray is critical of Nietzsche, and takes him to represent a philosophical tradition that excludes women as readers. Her philosophy is sympathetic to his, however, and even acknowledges a debt to him. From her encounters with Nietzsche Irigaray takes not only the rhetorical landscape and mode of address assumed in order to stage their conversation. They also share important critical insights, values, and commitments, consideration of which will aid an understanding of her critique.

First is Nietzsche's value for feminism generally. Although he penned many ambiguous statements about 'woman' and feminism, feminist philosophers have been attracted to Nietzsche's writings in recent decades for good reason. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for instance, Nietzsche vigorously condemns philosophers who believe their philosophies to represent one universal point of view. With his concept of 'perspectivism', Nietzsche diagnoses personal undercurrents within philosophical writing passed off as universal truth. He calls Spinoza's love of an apparently neutral system in the *Ethics*, for instance, 'the masquerade of a sick hermit' that betrays his 'personal timidity and vulnerability' (BGE 'Prejudices' 5). Nietzsche's critique of the philosophical myth of objectivity allies him to a feminist critical program that seeks to reveal the personal stakes of philosophers pretending to speak in the name of all rational subjects, and thus marginalizing those with a different viewpoint.

Irigaray, then, shares with Nietzsche a critique of philosophy's conceit to speak a 'big-T-Truth', unmediated by social and material situation. She also shares with him a positive evaluation of *the body* philosophers attempt to overcome and undervalue, again in the name of objectivity. In relation to 'will to power' – a conception of life as a self-organizing diversity of drives – Nietzsche argues that philosophy is contingent upon the particularities of the philosopher's body. This resonates with Irigaray's notion of sexual difference, and her attempts to sketch a language consonant with feminine morphology, namely, those bodily qualities that philosophical writing repudiates, rather than the 'phallic', masculine body it takes for granted.

Nietzsche's own claim to understand feminine psychology, while no doubt overstated, can be taken to mean that he frequently spoke on behalf of



those dimensions of human experience most associated by the philosophical tradition with femininity. Nietzsche affirms that there are as many truths as there are concrete circumstances, or bodies that live and think. This emphasis upon the plurality of perspectives works in concert with a feminist epistemology that stresses the *standpoint* of the one who makes knowledge claims. Nietzsche also affirms the primacy of the body as an interpreting, intelligent organism, over consciousness – the body's abbreviated, abstracted tool (see Z 'Of the Despisers of the Body'). As the body is often associated with femininity, the effect of a *male* philosopher speaking for embodiment disturbs this assumption.

Irigaray also shares with Nietzsche a poetic style of writing that, again, is conventionally aligned to femininity. Nietzsche emphasized the materiality of language – contrasting, the rhythm, timbre, and tempo of German against French and Italian – and its relation to 'metabolism' (BGE 28, 247). Accordingly, Nietzsche associates poetic style with a corporeal sensitivity to milieu, or life's material, sense-giving context. Nietzsche saw this relation between materiality and language as reciprocal, holding that the attempt to write in a different tempo/metabolism may open a different perspective. Likewise, Irigaray presses for an experimental writing she calls *l'écriture féminine*: a mode of writing that produces new perspectives, with reference to 'sexual difference'. Charged with producing new expressions of feminine embodiment and desire, *l'écriture féminine* privileges modes of communication conventionally denigrated by philosophy. Non-linear, proximate, expansive, plural, open-ended, cyclical – and, indeed, more poetic – language is opposed to linear, rigid, closed, and contained 'phallic' writing. Nietzsche, similarly, favoured an 'aphoristic', fragmentary, non-linear writing practice, and encouraged his readers to interpret his books in novel and unexpected ways. (Irigaray obliged Nietzsche at least in this respect.)

Finally, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche held that philosophy's pretension to 'disembodied' discourse is symptomatic of a pathological hatred of life and the body. In a related vein, Irigaray argues that the bloodlessness of philosophy indicates a disavowal specifically of the 'feminine' body, which has come in Western thought to represent the body insofar as it is beyond the subject's control. Irigaray can thereby be seen to work with Nietzsche as well as against him, extending and sharpening his critique of dogmatic philosophers' troubled relation to their bodies.

With *Marine Lover*, then, Irigaray attempts to harness Nietzsche's critical insights to her feminist revaluation of philosophy, while also challenging the vestiges of phallogentrism within his writing. Irigaray resists

simply falling into line with Nietzsche, instead using his best insights to open a critical perspective on his work. Her strongly motivated interpretation is compelling for the same reason that it sometimes repels readers: because, as with Nietzsche, her writing is dense with affect, unabashedly partial, poetic, and sometimes hyperbolic. *Marine Lover* documents a turbulent love affair, grounded in Irigaray's ambivalence for Nietzsche. It is a productive ambivalence, however, that establishes a new mode of engagement with Nietzsche's philosophy, and serves to caution other of his feminist readers against complacency about their authority as such.

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3

## Notes

ebruary

- <sup>1</sup> The French '*amant*', for lover, is gendered masculine. Irigaray thereby draws a connection between women's possibilities in love and grammatical gender: by adding the 'e' to feminize '*amant*', she allows us to imagine that women might be active 'lovers' rather than passive 'beloveds'.
- <sup>2</sup> Penelope Deutscher explains this relation with reference to Irigaray in *Yielding Gender* (1997), p. 79.
- <sup>3</sup> Nietzsche at times demonstrated a delicate sensitivity to the cultural parameters of femininity, and their connection to the construction of masculinity. See TI 'Maxims' 13; BGE 237a.
- <sup>4</sup> For an account of the meaning of woman throughout the history of philosophy, see also Lloyd (1993).
- <sup>5</sup> Irigaray wrote her PhD dissertation (later published as *Speculum of the Other Woman*) in response to the teachings of Jacques Lacan at the *École Freudienne de Paris*, which led to her expulsion. Her chief criticism of psychoanalysis is that it is a 'phallogocentric' discourse blind to specifically feminine possibilities and interpretations.
- <sup>6</sup> For in-depth accounts of Irigaray's relation to Heidegger, see Mortensen (1994); Chanter (1995); and Faulkner (2001).
- <sup>7</sup> Margaret Whitford (1991, pp. 55–6) acknowledges Gaston Bachelard's influence upon Irigaray's critical methodology.

## Bibliography and Guide to Further Study

## Irigaray's Nietzsche Interpretation

- Irigaray, Luce (1991), *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press. Irigaray's major text on Nietzsche.
- (1994), 'Ecce Mulier? Fragments', in Peter J. Burgard (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Feminine*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia. A parody of Nietzsche's (already quite parodic) 'autobiography', *Ecce Homo*, arguably less successful than *Marine Lover*.

acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3

ebruary

### Irigaray on Methodology

- Irigaray, L. (1981), *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère*. Montréal: Plein Lune. This (French language) interview with Irigaray addresses her writing style, and how she envisages her relationship with philosophers (including Nietzsche).
- (1985a), *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G. C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Originally Irigaray's doctoral thesis, this work contains sustained engagements with Plato and Freud, with briefer interludes on Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Aristotle, and science more generally.
  - (1985b), *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. A compilation of essays dealing with psychoanalytic theory, women as objects of exchange, discourse, pornography, sexuality, women's morphology, and *l'écriture féminine*.
  - (1992), *Elemental Passions*, trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still. London: Athlone. Explores relations between the sexes in terms of the elements, and is instructive regarding the elemental dimension of her reading of Nietzsche.
  - (1993), *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and G. C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Irigaray's account of the forgetting of the feminine that founds philosophy.

### Works on Irigaray's Nietzsche

- Burke, Carolyn (1989), 'Romancing the Philosophers: Luce Irigaray', in Dianne Hunter (ed.), *Seduction and Theory: Readings of Gender, Representation, and Rhetoric*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. An important essay on Irigaray's strategy of 'flirting' with the philosophers.
- Butler, Judith (1993), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York and London: Routledge. Contains a clear account of Irigaray's notion of the repressed feminine.
- Chanter, Tina (1995), *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers*. New York and London: Routledge. A comprehensive study of Irigaray's philosophical criticism and ethics of reading.
- Deutscher, Penelope (2002), *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Farrell Krell, David (1994), 'To the Orange Grove at the Edge of the Sea: Remarks on Luce Irigaray's *Amante Marine*', in Peter J. Burgard (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Feminine*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia. Addresses *Marine Lover* specifically, but is quite an unsympathetic reading.
- Faulkner, Joanne (2003), 'Voices from the Depths: Reading 'Love' in Luce Irigaray's *Marine Lover*'. *Diacritics* 33, (1), 81–94.
- Mortensen, Ellen (1994), 'Woman's Untruth and *le féminin*: Reading Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger', in C. Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (eds), *Engaging with Irigaray*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Oliver, Kelly (2006), 'Vision, Recognition, and a Passion for the Elements', in Maria C. Cimitile, and Elaine P. Miller (eds), *Returning to Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy, Politics, and the Question of Unity*. Albany: SUNY Press. A useful account of Irigaray's attention to materiality and her elemental philosophy.

- Oppel, Frances (1993), '“Speaking of Immemorial Waters”: Irigaray with Nietzsche', in Paul Patton (ed.), *Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory*. London: Routledge. Addresses Irigaray's interpretation of Nietzsche specifically.
- Whitford, Margaret (1991), *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*. London and New York: Routledge. The first book-length consideration in English of Irigaray as a philosopher, and very influential upon the anglophone reception of Irigaray.

### Other Works Cited

- Bachelard, Gaston (1988), *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, trans. Edith Farrell and Frederick Farrell. Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture. acc67c2ebe504fc2836ada9727b663a3
- Derrida, Jacques (1973), 'Discussion', in Maurice de Gandillac and Bernard Pautrat (eds) *Nietzsche Aujourd'hui?: 1. Intensités*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions. ebrary
- (1979), *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- (1981), *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone.
- Deutscher, Penelope (1997), *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Faulkner, Joanne (2001), 'Amnesia at the Beginning of Time: Irigaray's reading of Heidegger in *The Forgetting of Air*'. *Contretemps*, 2, 124–41.
- Lloyd, Genevieve (1993), *Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Plato (1995), *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.