

# Farewell as sign of love: Irigaray with(out) Nietzsche in *Marine Lover*

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“More light and light: more dark and dark our woes!”  
— Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.5.36

## 1. *Un homme et une femme / a child and a mermaid*<sup>1</sup>

“We need a commitment not only to narrative and counternarrative, but also to the rendering (im)possible of (another) narrative”.<sup>2</sup>

Luce Irigaray's *Marine Lover* is part of her “tetralogy” on natural elements (water, air, fire and earth) and male philosophers. The aim of this project is to show how the primal elements are the natural fabrics of passions, feelings and emotions, both in everyday life and philosophical interrogations.<sup>3</sup> As we can guess, *Marine Lover* is about water and the philosopher in question is Friedrich Nietzsche, a great thinker whose encounters with feminism are “interesting and productive, but never easy”,<sup>4</sup> whose reading is “worthwhile for feminist theorists”,<sup>5</sup> as well as “his critique of the liberal subject and the ethics of self-creation that this critique entails”.<sup>6</sup> The way in which Irigaray meets Nietzsche is simple and direct: she addresses the philosopher using only the second person, without even using his name (she starts mentioning him only in the last section), working in an endless face to face with the main concepts that Nietzsche introduces in his famous masterpiece *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For instance, concepts such as eternal recurrence, the *Übermensch*, self-overcoming, latest thought and the death of God, among others, are all rethought by Irigaray using both the sexual difference and the role of the woman as key features. This gesture is an instance of the well-known textual strategy that Irigaray calls *mimétisme* or “mimicry”, that is the act of reading by which the woman's “foreclosure”<sup>7</sup> is pushed to its own

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<sup>2</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1999): 6.

<sup>3</sup> On these topics see “Introduction”, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. M. Whitford (Oxford-Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> See Joanne Faulkner, “Voices from the Depths: Reading “Love” in Luce Irigaray's *Marine Lover*”, *Diacritics* 33, 1 (2003): 80-94, [81].

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Kaufman, “Knowledge as Masculine Heroism or Embodied Perception: Knowledge, Will, and Desire in Nietzsche”, *Hypatia* 13, 4 (1998): 63-87, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Rosalyn Diprose, “Nietzsche, Ethics and Sexual Difference”, in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*, ed. P. R. Sedgwick (New York: Blackwell, 1995): 70.

<sup>7</sup> As in G. C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1999): 4-5.

extreme consequences in order to show how the patriarchal mechanisms cannot work if they do not have a woman to exploit.<sup>8</sup> How can Nietzsche create his own *logoi* only with a conception of woman (at his best) “as virgins or repentant sinners?”<sup>9</sup> *Marine Lover* is thus a dialogical genealogy on the role of women in Nietzsche’s unconscious; an interested performance conducted by a mermaid who wants to discover if there is still a chance for a mutual exchange with him. ‘Is Nietzsche, or his Zarathustra, still a child in his mirror stage?’ seems to be the silent question that we experience from the first page to the last. As Irigaray writes in the opening page, “How should I love you if to speak to you were possible?”<sup>10</sup>

In this sense, showing the main elements by which *Marine Lover* gives us a picture of Nietzsche, we will know not only all his mistakes but also, *ex contrario*, all those attributes that Irigaray would like to *meet* in a man no longer subjected to phallogocentrism: Will the philosophers of the future be men and women outside any sexist representation? Therefore, one of the possible senses for a man who reads Irigaray’s text is learning how even his deepest thoughts and desires about women reflect the long history of patriarchy. Consequently, love between the sexes will be possible only if a *selective act of forgetting* precedes it. But this operation does not even have a starting father figure in men’s field of thought.

## 2. For a limited alterity society? On Zarathustra’s metaphors of sterility

“And since life is on the line, the trait that relates the logical to graphical must also be working between the biological and biographical, the thanatological and thanatographical”.

— Derrida, *Otobiographies*, 4-5

Irigaray’s feminist encounter with Nietzsche is grounded in several aspects of his philosophy. Here I identify the most important groups as time, space, and life/death (the divine). These are the main metaphors through which I read Irigaray’s *Marine Lover* critiques about Nietzsche.

a) *Time*. Under this label it is possible to gather all Irigaray’s patient readings of the temporal metaphors in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The main objection on the temporal becoming is a conception of the time which always

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<sup>8</sup> Ping Xu, “Irigaray’s Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism,” *Hypatia* 10, 4 (1995): 76-89, [78-79].

<sup>9</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 195.

<sup>10</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 3.

fails to remember its own origin: the feminine womb. Irigaray shows how the genuine figure of Zarathustra's becoming is a conception of time as self-cloning — the eternal recurrence of the same — a dynamic in which Zarathustra perpetually repeats the same actions and denies the intersubjectivity of being, particularly with women. As we can argue, the real crime that Nietzsche commits, according to Irigaray, is simply trying to eternally give birth to himself or, in other words, he tries to be the substitute of his own mother through a "murderous triumph".<sup>11</sup> The ring, the sun with its lights, the noon and, above all, the eternal recurrence as circle, are all symptoms of Nietzsche's willingness to leave in the darkness the other (side) of his own project, the woman as source of (his) life.<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche fails to recognise that his conception of time reflects a decision that is the same every time.<sup>13</sup> A decision made in loneliness which always looks for the same isolation to be affirmed again and again. Irigaray asks "What are you using as a pivot for everything so that you can tie up the two ends? But if I take leave of your universe, what becomes of it?"<sup>14</sup> The woman, hidden from the very beginning of Nietzsche's time, will always be a ghostly presence in this (vicious) circle of the same. The most important moment, in this particular kinetics of time, is the beginning, the first step: if the woman is forgotten at the very establishment of the circle, she will be nothing but a way to reaffirm this oblivion.<sup>15</sup> It is clear now why Irigaray repeatedly states that "the evil begins at birth".<sup>16</sup> In this sense, the temporal dimension in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* leads to a maturation in which a subject, the Übermensch, endlessly reaffirms his own lack of shared feelings. Therefore eternal recurrence, one of the most powerful of Zarathustra's desires, becomes an eternal night, a permanent exile, in which the confrontation with the woman is always deferred. Such a temporal hallucination affects from the inside every consideration of what is natural, given and received in Nietzsche's Zarathustra: time turns into a politics of space.

b) *Space*. In Irigaray if a man negates his natural birth, *a fortiori* he must have an unconscious hatred for that particular element that has sustained him as fetus, i.e. the amniotic fluid. The liquid element, on the contrary, is the emblem of the woman, of the marine lover in this case. Several commentators have already stressed how accurately Irigaray works on the censorship in the *Zarathustra* about liquid forces and how these acts reflect Nietzsche's special consideration for mountains and vertical elevations/erectations.<sup>17</sup> But in

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<sup>11</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Or she might receive only three fixed forms as in J. Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979): 97-101.

<sup>16</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to Faulkner, see Lynda Haas, "Of Waters and Women: The Philosophy of Luce Irigaray", *Hypatia* 8, 4 (1993): 150-159.

*Marine Lover* we want to read space not only as solid place and background setting, but also as body, inner space and emotive distance. When the earth is only a sequence of cliffs from which one starts a solitary flying, both the reason and the effect are to leave the other at the bottom. And this external topography has consequences for the way Nietzsche exposes Zarathustra's relation with his body and its inner geography — or “economy” in Irigaray's terms,<sup>18</sup> a neologism used to stress the *spatial monolingism* of Zarathustra's bodily interior. The masculine space, in order to be a safe place for its creations, redefines what is natural. As soon as the woman, the mother, and the feminine are cut off from the very beginning, there is only a figure which plays all the roles, the Father. The secret, moreover, of this sleight of hand is safe as long as every possible menace is kept away or *at a distance*. Here patriarchal order means power (over women) as multiple layers and simulacra between this institutional moment and the ways in which women can feel their most inner feelings, desire and identities. The production of an inner space using only patriarchal language is a direct result of the master's fear of losing his power. Patriarchal law establishes a particular version of women's bodily experience which comes to be naturalised and legitimated by authoritarian mythology. Therefore, the more a woman feels the patriarchal construction of her body/holes/borders as natural, the more she will feel distant an original (re)productive capacity. As a result women have not created their language, word and style and they do not feel this lack.<sup>19</sup> In particular, Nietzsche's rhetoric on the tempting abyss between Zarathustra, himself and women, speaks of this patriarchal birthing of the inner space. Irigaray states that

“The distance does not come from her, even if, for him, it is at a distance that her seductive charm works. Even if, in the present, he lends her that element of authority. Because he does not wish to see the effect of his operation: the abyss enters. Which holds him and fascinates him like the attraction of a knife thrust into the other. The other's belly. The other that he no longer approaches simply, except at the risk of his life: some horrendous retaliation for his own act. The removal of one's own self, the decisive incision between the lips that leaves (the other) mute and alluring like a tomb”.<sup>20</sup>

As such, the second aspect of the space we want to underline is its mirroring effect, or the transformation of the other in a shiny mirror. When the other/woman is formed only according to men's desires, the

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<sup>18</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 88.

<sup>19</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, trans. Gail Schwab (London-New York: Continuum, 2002): 4.

<sup>20</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 105.

other/woman is just a reproduction of the same. A mirror with a twofold goal: first, it must transform, silently, the other's difference into a secure self-image and, secondly, this mirroring enforces men's stability in erasing every possible menace to his established order. A mirror placed at the doorstep of the self to ensure a *discriminatory hospitality*, if we can rephrase what Derrida says about the same function in Heidegger.<sup>21</sup> Thus this kind of hospitality is haunted by the (impossible) dream of a limited alterity society — the patriarchy. Irigaray classifies this love as "strange", since it is a "love for a looking glass eternally set opposite you".<sup>22</sup> A love for a "superficial existence", gained from "a faithful mirror", to freeze the separation from the starting whole of the birth.<sup>23</sup> The mirror marks here the process by which the other is forgotten and transformed as foreign, according to the mirroring "economy of the sameness".<sup>24</sup> A different conception of the sexual difference would simply break this mirror that reflects only a death image of the woman where her depths are continuously concealed, if not erased.

c) *Life/Death (The Divine)*. With this binary metaphoric comes what I argue is the most important magnetic relation in Irigaray's text, the man-woman relation. The couple man-woman is, by the end, the most important *encounter* in *Marine Lover*. Femininity for Irigaray is the other face of the patriarchal coin, a kind of order founded on a criminal murder. The life of Zarathustra, his striving to overcome himself, brings about the death of women in his life. The identity of the man is made of murderous crimes (the exiles and the deaths of women) which enact the love for 'the woman,' "[a]n exemplary echo chamber".<sup>25</sup> In this sense, man is driven by a death desire. Yet, to a divine life, to a life in the birthing whole, Zarathustra incessantly reaffirms in its place the death of god as direct consequence, on the one hand, of his inability to talk about a divine whole and, on the other, of his incapacity to enjoy both the sexual difference and a time without the eternal recurrence of the same. The life of the man in Irigaray means the death of the woman or, more specifically, the eternal life of 'the woman' that has become an ideal. Being an actor on a stage full of lifeless women negates the possibility of a life whose new beginning, whose genuine beginning, starts only when both the man and woman open themselves to a risky relationship:

"And is not a thirst to be full with child nor needful of being delivered! But that you should sometimes remember her and embrace her without wanting to fill her to the brim, overwhelm her with your gifts. Let her return to the rhythm of her blood. To that happiness in living that remains a mystery to you. And that you do

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<sup>21</sup> J. Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 1989): 29.

<sup>22</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 32-33.

<sup>23</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 66-67.

<sup>24</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 109.

not want to receive from her".<sup>26</sup>

This new kind of relationship between man and woman introduces us to the *par costruens* of Irigaray's text. As Spivak clearly states, the sexual difference in Irigaray does not close access to the other. Irigaray does not support a politics of separation in order to achieve women's liberation. Instead, sexual difference is the limit of ethical relations grounded on mutual recognition, a recognition beyond any secure decision.<sup>27</sup> This (im)possible act in *Marine Lover* is called "harmonious encounter" and its traces run as an underground river through Irigaray's text. Such an encounter, first of all, can only occur between two wills of equal strength and by which the other can lose him/herself as in a "labyrinth". It is clear that without mirrors the other's difference becomes a risky journey. The will is a keyword here, because a woman with a free will refuses all man's old simulacra that created femininity and 'the woman:' "she will give back to you as things neither she nor you want, and in which you do not recognize your will. Beyond the horizon you have opened up, she will offer you that in which she still lives and that your day has not even imagined".<sup>28</sup> Irigaray is referring here to a woman whose identity no longer rests on her role of wife, prostitute, mother, madonna, servant and so on, or by a fulfilment of any operation created by the masculine standpoint. An affirmation of the other (partner) without possessive categories (subject-object), essences or spatial borders (inside-outside). The harmony of this encounter needs that

"the passage between has to open, not just to crash into barriers, even if the barriers are interchangeable. Not just to meet appearances closed in, at every moment, upon themselves. That move across their borders only to take possession of some 'thing' of the other's, or even to take (back) all she has. Wedding ring that closes around the other he doesn't manage to espouse, as if she were his prey. In order to take marriage, there must be a harmonious passage from external to internal, from the interior to the exterior of bodies. One arrives at the other without violently breaking down barriers, without jumping over the river, without being carried brutally into the abyss below or on high. Let the two be here and there at the same time, which is not to say that they are indistinguishable".<sup>29</sup>

It is only through this relationship that men and women can create and share the divine, another *topos* of Irigaray's *par costruens*, which is the exact opposite of Nietzsche's death of god. A divine bond as direct consequence of a

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<sup>26</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> G. C. Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 185-186.

<sup>28</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 116-117.

new ethics of closeness located into the uncertain proximity between flesh, skin and faces, not masks. In this encounter there will be no space and time for overcoming the other, one of Nietzsche's obsessions. The divine between men and women seems to recall in Irigaray the whole forgotten by the patriarchal order but redescribed in a more mature way. It is as if the sexual difference must translate the initial whole between mother and child in order to achieve its final dimension. If this is the case, the woman is already installed in this element, due to her role of mother. Is Irigaray suggesting the man has to start a process of emancipation by which he produces his active part of the divine? As such, women's liberation is only part of the creation of Irigaray's notion of the divine, for the rest is up to a (new) man beyond masculinity and patriarchy whose features are exactly the opposite of Nietzsche's Zarathustra in *Marine Lover*. From *l'autre femme* to the other man? The divine dimension, in order to be a complete new whole, needs not only a full, new feminine order but also a new masculine one. In this reinvention of the male-female nexus and their subjectivities, the power of imagination has the immediate task of subverting both traditional knowledge and hegemonic discourses of the phallic law.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Kinetics of separations (on forgetting as selective assimilation)

"It created a sensation and even fascinated by means of its mistakes".<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen, the woman, in Irigaray, must give back to men all those projections that have inhabit her from thousands years. In doing so, she will free herself from man's images and patriarchal order. In fact, she will gain a new sense in which there is no seed of the phallic law. The "harmonious encounter" offers a new horizon in which (most) men are lost because things happen far beyond their imagination. This (sexual) difference is now what sustains women's life. In addition, what makes possible a real marriage (the final aim of Irigaray's reading of Nietzsche) is the transformation of men, from being patriarchal oppressors to partners of the new whole. In *Le corps-a-corps avec la mere*, Irigaray writes of her reading of Nietzsche in *Marine Lover* "Ce n'est pas un livre *sur* Nietzsche mais *avec* Nietzsche qui est pour moi un partenaire amoureux [It is not a book *about* Nietzsche but *with* Nietzsche, who is for me a partner in love]".<sup>32</sup> Is this the case? Has Irigaray truly met Nietzsche in a "harmonious encounter" in her *Marine Lover*?

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<sup>30</sup> Ofelia Schutte, "Irigaray on the Problem of Subjectivity Source," *Hypatia* 6, 2 (1991): 64-76 [74-75].

<sup>31</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (Edinburgh-London: Foulis, 1911): 68.

<sup>32</sup> Faulkner, *Diacritics*, 89.

For woman must say goodbye to herself as man's creation in the same way she has to say goodbye to man as he has treated her until now. And this operation is a *sign of love* to herself as well as to himself. But I want to emphasize two aspects of this double act. Firstly, if Irigaray works for a new dimension of the woman, for a new feminism, there is still space for loving men, but only for men who have changed their perennial beliefs on sexual difference. The problem is that such philosophy for this kind of man has not been written yet. This philosophy is yet to be written. Who will write this? How can a man write a philosophy whose name is already suspect? A manism, again? And above all, is that a solitary task? Do men need a new kind of brotherhood? The fact is that, without this new man, the Irigaray's "love encounter" is far to be completed. Secondly, maybe Irigaray fails to encounter Nietzsche for the very reason that, in *Marine Lover*, there is no such thing as a "harmonious encounter", as we know it according to Irigaray. There are, of course, banal reasons for this failure: since Nietzsche is dead, he cannot answer to Irigaray's objections and change himself consequently, but this is not the case. If Irigaray declares that Nietzsche is her "partner in love", what does she *share* of his philosophy if every single page of *Marine Lover* is a fair, strong critique of Nietzsche's misogyny and sexism? How could a "harmonious encounter" happen between two persons who do not share anything, who do have opposite thoughts on the very concepts of harmony and (love) encounter? The price of this meeting would be the refusal of the authenticity of their mutual beings and thus they would fail to recognize the other as legitimate difference. In this sense, there would be no "harmonious encounter" between Nietzsche and Irigaray. In fact, Nietzsche is the philosopher he is exactly because *ab initio* he has forgotten-assimilated "the woman". There is space for a woman, in Nietzsche's work, only as a *sparring partner*. The very conditions of possibility for a transformation of "the woman" in Nietzsche's philosophy are bound to the transformative processes of a young classical philologist at the University of Basel to a wandering philosopher of the future:

"Every animal — therefore la bête philosophe, too — instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power; every animal abhors, just as instinctively and with a subtlety of discernment that is "higher than all reason", every kind of intrusion or hindrance that obstructs or could obstruct this path to that optimum... Thus the philosopher abhors marriage, together with that might persuade him to it — marriage being a hindrance and calamity on his path to the optimum".<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967): 107.



“Aristotle says that in order to live alone, a man must be either an animal or god. The third alternative is lacking: a man must be both — a philosopher. ...One can recognise the hearts that are capable of noble hospitality, by their wealth of screened windows and closed shutters: they keep their best rooms empty”.<sup>34</sup>

“A man who strives after great things, looks upon every one whom he encounters on his way either as a means of advance, or a delay and hindrance — or as a temporary resting-place”.<sup>35</sup>

“For I love thee, Eternity! ...I am not man, I am dynamite. ...If nothing was caught, it was not I who was at fault. There were no fish to come and bite”.<sup>36</sup>

I am not trying to write a defence of Nietzsche, his statements about women are simply inexcusable. However, I question Irigaray’s love: Is that a love for an impossibility? Of an impossible encounter with Nietzsche, since that in *Marine Lover* the author meets Nietzsche only as unaware source of his own unforgivable mistakes. Each pr text is right and strong criticism of Nietzsche’s phallic philosophy. And for Irigaray, the only way in which Nietzsche could be rehabilitated is to rethink, reverse and rewrite all his concepts. Only in this case, a “harmonious encounter” would take place. Which kind of love does Irigaray feel for a “love partner” who, in order to be such, has to say goodbye to all of his peculiarity? A forgetting as active assimilation? But this time forgetting is an active force in shaping Irigaray’s act of loving. On this regard, Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals* argues that

“Forgetting is no mere a *vis inertiae* as the superficial image; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression, that is responsible for the fact that what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it (one might call the process ‘inpsychation’) as does the thousandfold process, involved in physical nourishment — so-called ‘incorporation.’”<sup>37</sup>

The limit of Irigaray’s reading is the fact that, in order to be a ‘love encounter’ with Nietzsche, this union should at least have had a double-bind

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<sup>34</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophise with the Hammer*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (Edinburgh-London: Foulis, 1911): 1, 81.

<sup>35</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Helen Zimmern, (Edinburgh-London: Foulis, 1909): §273, 249.

<sup>36</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (Edinburgh-London: Foulis, 1911): 189, 131, 115.

<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 57.

form: from Irigaray to Nietzsche and *vice versa*. For this limit is her blind spot, in *Marine Lover* her philosophy of sexual difference suffers this lack. The Irigarayan reading of Nietzsche rightly shows us the philosopher both as sterile sexist and impotent misogynist. But without another Nietzsche, a Nietzsche beyond himself, such reading can produce only a deep critique, not a *love encounter*. In this sense, Irigaray is at the same time faithful and unfaithful to herself. On one hand, she does not pretend to create a brand new Nietzsche using her voice and language (as the patriarchal order does with woman). On the other, her love reading can only be a frustrated one due to its impossibility to encounter a Nietzsche that does not (yet) exist. Which Nietzsche does Irigaray love?