

# EROS, THE ELUSIVE? A DIALOGUE ON PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM, DIOTIMA AND WOMEN IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

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I long and seek after. (73)  
 you burn me (77)  
 their hearts grew cold, they let their wings down (85)  
 as long as you want (95)  
 Eros shook my mind like a mountain wind falling on oak trees (99)  
 I would not think to touch the sky with two arms (109)  
 Sinful (141)  
 Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter*,  
 Fragments of Sappho

ME: Let's walk. I am not barefoot like Socrates but I have things to say. I have been thinking a lot about love lately, about love as embodied in artistic creations. I also feel it deep inside me, in my flesh and bones. I have been shaken and burnt by it – that longing, that seeking.... But is our conversation bound to fail? I have become disillusioned with what philosophers have to say about love, if they do dare say anything about it. They think it is so far away from our beloved reason that they turn it into it. Is there a will to love as Nietzsche says there is a will to truth and to power? When philosophers do discuss love, they do it so as to elevate themselves through its dissection, as if it were possible to display it in full form for us. I like to court the ineffable too, but to be awed by it, not to explain it away. So I read the *Symposium* after so many years with uneasiness, with expectations of disappointment, yet, also with openness and curiosity, ready to learn from it and from you.  
*My companion seemed out of breath, sweating a bit from the heat or the pace – I did not know.*

ME: Are you okay?

HETAIRA: Yes. Yes. Keep going. I will get used to it.

*Hesitant, I continued.*

ME: I do still smile when I read Aristophanes' words and think of the round beings with four arms, legs, and two faces, running around being fast and powerful (188c–193d). Aristophanes is not afraid of myth, but I follow Barthes on this one – myths are powerful and controlling. But Aristophanes' myth offers a seductive alternative, the alternative of a third kind. I like the idea of there being a third kind of being, but not as a moment of Hegelian synthesis, but as a moment of rupture of binaries and dichotomies, as an invitation to the otherwise. I should not be surprised by this. I live in in-betweenness in so many ways. But, in the end, Aristophanes gives in to the myth of unity, a wholeness so powerful that divine punishment was separation. Is the craving and pursuit for such unification and fusion, love (191d)?

HETAIRA: While absolutely seductive, I agree with you that there is something problematic about his image. Not only does it suggest that eros is futile – the human condition is one of radical brokenness and there is no hope that we will be healed of our aloneness... sex is but a momentary reprieve – but it also makes the erotic relationship narcissistic. One's half is not really different insofar as they are just me, my other half – they are merely my mirror, my complement. This would suggest that the beloved has nothing in themselves to offer.

ME: But Aristophanes is right, though, in that we have failed to perceive the power of love (189c). Where do we find it? Certainly not in Socrates' false humility. I keep thinking of the flute-girl, so easily dismissed by Eryximachus. What was *her* name, *her* view on love? What about those "slave-boys" serving all these hung-over men who think they are so wise and Socrates who boasts of his own ignorance while seeming to know it all? To learn about this most important god, Eros, and about love itself from this group of vainglorious men who devalue women and service people, now strikes me as laughable. But whom am I kidding? I have spent so much of my life reading poets who write the most beautiful, moving words and are the vilest people; philosophers whose thought is moving but who are racist, sexist, and narcissists; feminists who call for solidarity and coalitions across differences but belittle women of color and their work or treat us as if we were that flute-girl, in the sense that we bring to them seductive theories that yield the pleasure of their being recognized as inclusive, but we can be kicked out of the room in the blink of an eye.

But Eros does shake my mind and I want to explore the subject relationally. You have spent so much of your life reading Plato. What about your love for his works?

HETAIRA: Honestly, my identity as a philosopher has been radically informed by his conception of the erotic found in dialogues like the *Symposium*. Specifically, I find a compelling model for philosophy as that which exposes, reproduces, and heralds the enigma of what it means to exist between knowing and not-knowing, reason and madness, strength and weakness, and so on. Overall, I am drawn to Plato's portrait of the soul as that which is paradoxically broken and confused, incomplete but, contrary to Aristophanes' portrait, also capable of becoming a living testimony to the creative, erotic connections that we bear on a quotidian basis despite, and perhaps sometimes, because of our incompleteness, our struggle. Indeed, this conception of the philosophical life is perhaps why I also

gravitate toward scholars like yourself, as I see a certain kinship between it and your philosophical worldview. Perhaps, I am wrong in this but when it comes to the *Symposium* at least, I, too, always come back to the relevance of the flute-girl, a craft associated in antiquity with sex work. Her dismissal has always intuitively seemed to me like the missing puzzle piece. Lately, I have been toying with the possibility that the second flute-girl – the one who leads and supports the drunken Alcibiades (212c–d) – is the same dismissed flute-girl who has coyly found a way to flout Eryximachus' orders. Like Eros' mother, Poverty, who devised a scheme to steal from Plenty, does the flute-girl have a gift for what Lugones calls "tactical strategic intending" (2003, 219), finding a way to recoup her evening fare? If read this way, can this flute-girl highlight the power of the erotic as an ability/resource for survival? Am I mad in seeing a certain parallel between her (and other characters in the text) and what Lugones calls "streetwalker theorists"? And what of the constant references to the slaves and the sudden appearance of Diotima, an explicitly foreign priestess? Can other theories like Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness, Audre Lorde's erotic, or your own theories of the in-between, unlock these mysteries? Something in me says, yes. But I am hesitant, aware of the problems, the possible appropriations that may ensue. I wonder, then, how you might respond to reading Plato through the lenses of women of color theorizing?

ME:

Curious. Plato and Lugones together. I welcome opportunities to do philosophy in this way, as it opens the realm of interpretative possibilities that can help us not only shake up canonical interpretations but also understand the tremendous contributions that women of color stand to make to the so-called "love of wisdom," a definition of philosophy that to this day makes me laugh, as I find so much that is unwise in our discipline. It can also be another way of becoming-with, an opportunity of being with others who are different so as to understand ourselves differently and to engage in coalitional, resistant projects (Ortega 2016, 168) but in this case, an intellectual-becoming-with. But I do wish to be cautious here. It is important to be mindful of the context within which such exercises of "readings against the grain and intellectual becoming-with" take place, and the reasons for engaging in them – most importantly, we need to be very aware of the major differences between approaches, whether ethico-political, metaphysical, or existential. After all, the words of women of color continue to be placed on one side of the extremes between invisibility and appropriation. A loving, yet critical approach, to our practices of reading against the grain and reading together with women of color is thus necessary so as not to fall into "loving, knowing ignorance" (Ortega 2006).

HETAIRA: Yes – a kind of mindful world-traveling which does not slip into "historical amnesia"? (Ortega 2006, 70)

ME: Yes, what I call critical world-traveling (2016, 131). Your question of "tactical strategic intending" interests me. Lugones offers a theory of active subjectivity as the alternative to the individual agency so respected by the lover of purity. So, this active subjectivity, no longer understood as carrying out intentional acts performed by an "I," has an attenuated sense of agency. That is, its actions do not arise from individual intentions but rather from within relational experiences with others. Not only that. They take place in movement among these collectivities in particular spaces, liminal spaces that allow for the possibility of understanding from the perspective of the ground (the world of the tactician) and from above

(the world of the strategist). Think of this active subjectivity walking through the city, through alleyways and unmapped passages, meeting those with whom she will develop resistant intentions and forming hangouts, those spaces that defy the private/public split so as to defy logics of domination (Lugones 2003, 221). There we find the active-subject-street-walker, as Lugones puts it, defamiliarizing common sense, the furniture of the universe (221). It is in those hangouts where the active subject co-creates resistant plural intentions. Is Socrates a street walker theorist? Or is it Eros itself that needs to be considered as the street-walking theorist?

HETAIRA: Arguably both, but what do you think?

ME: Well, Socrates' peripatetic style is certainly one that we can consider in light of Lugones's conception of street-walking theorizing. Socrates embodies an important quality of the street-walker theorist, a critical attitude to common-sensical understanding of the world as well as to normative understandings of major notions such as love. A question arises though. Does the character Socrates street-walk in the dialogues, forging plural intentions with others? In the context of the *Symposium*, is Agathon's house a hangout?

HETAIRA: Personally, I don't think so. Rather Agathon's home is the site of agency, the celebration of the autonomous and oppressive power the men lavishly enjoy over others. This is why I think Plato cleverly contrasts the main frame of Agathon's home with two scenes of walking, be it Apollodorus and Glaucon or Socrates and Aristodemus. Even Socrates' meeting with Diotima (as well as the primary frame with Apollodorus and his companions) is in a kind of "no place." I think Plato is setting the stage to highlight the differences, even problems, between the aristocratic men lounging, rather arrogantly, as they wax poetic and, so, he exposes their ridiculousness, their hideous tendency to see the others as those who merely serve their desires.

ME: Plato may be setting the stage to display the hideousness and ignorance of Agathon and his friends, using Socrates to do so, but how is the real power of those unnamed and dismissed in the dialogue being shown here? While we find normative as well as possibly resistant views within this space – it preserves tensions between meanings and people as Lugones says a hangout does to allow for "complex communication" or an exchange that captures tension, opacity, and difference among the speakers (Lugones 2006) – are the flute-girl and the servers those with whom Socrates is forging collective intentions? Yes, she and the servers are there, but she is immediately dismissed and the servers only acknowledged for their labor. Is Plato, by way of Socrates, pointing to the existence of these marginalized beings and to their unfair exclusion? Perhaps. Yet, I would think that the street-walker theorist that Lugones envisions would do more than Socrates does in the dialogue. He doesn't say anything about them! And wouldn't Plato himself do more by precisely making his beloved Socrates a character that does more as well?

Introducing Diotima, a foreign woman raises further questions for me. Am I supposed to say that it is so good that Socrates can learn from a foreigner and a woman, become a student himself, and be really convinced of his humility? As I mentioned, I doubt that the flute-girl could be seen by him as being capable of teaching him something – if so, perhaps the way *not* to be in the world. We could simply say that this is just a matter of his time and culture. But why bring the "woman question" into this context? All these Platonic dialogues display a series

of what seem to be privileged men enamored with each other or with young, beautiful boys, and especially with Socrates – going about their day getting drunk, giving eulogies to the gods – narcissism and arrogance cloaked in pretense of humility and wisdom-seeking. Could Socrates really be ready to learn from a flute-girl? So if it is not the gender questions, it is a question of class. Are we running against an interpretative limit here?

*My companion smiled rather coyly.*

**HETAIRA:** I hope so. I have always regarded limits as invitations but, to the point, I think you are right, Socrates submits to Diotima but the esteemed priestess is not the seemingly low flute-girl and that is a fact of the text that we must acknowledge. However, as priestess, her mystagogic practice appears to do the work of creating “hangouts” or spaces of “complex communication” that possibly defy the logic of purity. If her cult was anything like the Eleusinian mysteries (Evans 2006), she would have initiated women from all classes both citizen and foreign. Her speech itself plays with images mixed with sensuality, corporeality, torturous activity of giving birth, describing Eros as kind of magician and pharmacist (203d–e) clever in speech while Diotima, herself, embodies said numinous virtue, purifying the Athenians, initiating men like Socrates into a new myth of Eros, born of Poverty rather than the illustrious Aphrodite. So I guess I am wondering if there is a parallel between Anzaldúa’s poet-shaman who possesses a certain sight, recognizes the illnesses of a culture, and offers rites of passage or realities by advancing new mythologies, new images arising from the play of the unconscious, a play that isn’t an attempt to resurrect the old gods but to see them anew? For me, Diotima’s activities and presence seem to invoke a power that is akin to Anzaldúa’s shaman.

**ME:** It is interesting to consider Diotima’s practice as shamanic. In Anzaldúa the writer is a type of shaman that provides a connection between different realities. Since she considers ideas as images that run like animals in her imagination, Anzaldúa, the shaman-poet-writer, is able to transform herself, to shift, and to let herself be guided by them so as to discover new approaches to problems (Anzaldúa 2015, 38). Through the creative act, the writer or artist becomes aware of these image-animals, gets in touch with the unconscious as well as with the spirit of those who have come before her, and rereads and rewrites reality. Such a practice is spiritual – it constitutes art as a spiritual discipline, writing as “making soul,” as Anzaldúa says (41). This is a vision of a material-spiritual that connects us to all that exists, human and non-human. So I can see how the “magic” of Diotima can be understood in terms of a recognition of this material spirituality and the power of Eros as an intermediary between different realities.

**HETAIRA:** Eros is explicitly a daimon (202e) – that power which connects the material and immaterial, a spirit, perhaps, like Anzaldúa’s principle of interconnectedness, that incandescent something which “transcends the categories and concepts that govern our perception of material reality” (2002, 504).

**ME:** Ahh... Eros, the daimon. Not as elusive as we might have thought. I welcome this way of thinking about love, as a type of intermediary between worlds, between ways of being-in-worlds. I am also interested in the possibility of everyone being able to partake of love in the sense of it being a practice that moves us to feel and to think otherwise – not to take the world for granted. Is this what Socrates was ultimately getting to?

- HETAIRA: My knee-jerk reaction is – absolutely! But also, and despite my arguments, I do not pretend to think I can know this definitively. If I did, I would be falling into the trap of attempting to arrest a dialogue, a creative work of art, so as to suffocate it, murder its power to inspire readers to see themselves (as well as not to see themselves) in the text. Don't get me wrong, I do think there are better and worse interpretations of Plato, i.e. dualistic approaches fail to see nuance while most analytic theorists pass over the importance of the spiritual, otherworldly Plato, etc. Yet, Plato desired to write in such a way that unlike most philosophical works that resemble a tombstone, gesturing to something dead, his work resembled a "living organism" (*Phdr.* 246b). For me, this means that like most living entities the dialogues will frustrate attempts to reify them – even my own arguments. I know this runs counter to the needs of academic philosophers to get Plato "right," to fix his work into a neat dualistic framework but both the dogmatizing hermeneutic and the hermeneutics of suspicion where Plato is obviously problematic, neglect the lived nature of the text which must put up with, even love, the contradictory and complementary spirit existing within the dialogues.
- ME: Interesting. When Anzaldúa talks about writing, she says that the work manifests the same needs as a person, that it needs to be bathed and fed (1987, 67). She also reminds us that the work is alive, and, in her case, this work represents her very self – her Coatlicue blocks or moments of dread and inability to move forward, her sustos, arrebatos, woundedness as well as transformations – she thus needs to treat it tenderly and with intimacy. She is discussing the sensuousness of the act of writing, but I can see that we, as readers, also have to bathe, feed, and dress the work. I see you taking care of Plato's dialogues in this way. Reading them against the grain, as María Lugones would say.
- HETAIRA: Well, that's humbling but, yes, like Anzaldúa's understanding of mestiza consciousness, I believe Plato invites us to shift to and from different and competing points of view, to hold contradictory opinions alongside one another, seeing the value and import of both as well as the need to undercut what seemed obvious from another vantage point. (Anzaldúa 2002, 569) Put differently, alongside offering rationalizing arguments for a world of Form, Plato also, and perhaps, paradoxically concedes to the Nietzschean demand to say "yes" to Becoming and the mad tragic comedy of being human, to the life of the soul which moves between – to being the kind of being like Socrates or Plato or Diotima, or anyone for that matter, who is and can be seen in their multiplicity, their contradiction, their struggle for or against the identities imposed upon them by others.
- ME: Nietzsche does say that Socrates is so close to him that he is constantly fighting him (1979, 127). So through the figure of Socrates, Plato may be revealing a more complex, ambiguous, and multiplicitous notion of love, a love that is not merely one and that can be definitely known. Here, I can think of Diotima's speech itself and consider whether what we learn from Diotima can help us think of eros itself as street-walking. I am thinking of eros as a practice and a way of being-in-worlds. This practice indeed allows for that openness that you mention – and the risk one takes of falling into the abyss when falling in love. What I mean is that there is risk because there is no fixed notion of what love is and there is no possibility of completely possessing the beloved. The one that loves, then, always walks near the abyss. As Diotima says, we need to see the lover. And, yes, her view allows for the acknowledgement of the beauty of those bodies that Anzaldúa calls



los atravesados, those who are marginalized, forgotten, oppressed, unwanted, invisibilized. Diotima also reminds us that love is always in want, and neither wise nor ignorant but in-between these (204a). In a sense, there are possibilities of conceiving of love as a practice sharing characteristics with street-walking theorizing. I can see the possibility of forging tactical-strategic intentions here. Yet, does Diotima (or Socrates or Plato), think that these atravesados can reproduce not just biologically but intellectually so as to be closer to immortality? That is, can they create works teaching virtue that stand the test of time? If Diotima is teaching us that they can, that they can engage not only in philosophical discourses such as Socrates' but also in a poetics embodying and calling for love, then I would be tempted to say that Eros is like street-walking theorizing. Yet, the emphasis on the ever-existent and immortal (208b) and essential beauty (211e) makes me take a step back.

*My companion seems to be overly enthusiastic, excitedly putting her hands to her mouth.*

ME: Something wrong again?

HETAIRA: Oh...oh... sorry, keep going. I am just eager to talk about that, but I can wait.  
*I smile and continue.*

ME: See, before we turn in that direction, let me contextualize. I am reminded of Anzaldúa's "The Cannibal's *Canción*," a poem in which she says that "It is our custom to consume the person we love... heart and liver taste best" (1987, 143). These men in the *Symposium* want to consume young, intelligent boys. Socrates sees himself above that kind of consumption. Are we supposed to pretend he did not think of touching those young bodies with his two arms? No. We are supposed to understand that he touched them through the arms of the mind, holding them in the path to virtue. And that he himself became the student, the good listener, the one ready to give up his faulty reasoning the moment that a sage more knowledgeable than him could show him the way – a woman at that? Not the flute-girl, of course. But, really, I just wanted to bring in cannibal love so as to invite us to think of the multiplicity and finitude of love, of different loves. Is Diotima seeing the multiplicity of love too, but ultimately yielding to that one immortal love, Love, from which all other loves flow? Tell me, how is it supposed to work? What is this one eternal, unchanging Love that she mentions in her discussion of what one reaches at the top of the ladder? I understand and sense love as embodied differently, in different directions and movements – impure loves. I thus welcome how you bring in the power of multiplicity in a text that has become canonized and is thus sedimented in firm layers that not even strong winds and erosion could change. If you are right, you are offering seismic interpretations.

HETAIRA: Interpretations that could be wrong (impure), I have no doubt. Yet, I like to remind myself of what you call Socrates' false humility. Is it false? He admits in the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue devoted to the importance of erotic madness, that he does not know whether he is a monster or a simpler, more divine creature (229e.). Is it possible that Socrates realizes the tensions, divisions, and incommensurabilities existing within himself, ourselves? Is he sincerely aware of his own deficiency? Diotima argues that it is only when one recognizes deficiency, one's need where desire is born (204a); a desire (compared to the anxiety, suffering, and pains of labor) that is never satisfied with any one birth (creative intellectual endeavor), any one erotic relation but is always expanding from particular bodies, to poetic

works of art, to laws, and finally to the mystagogic vision of the Beautiful. Yet, for the mortal creature, even this final vision is incomplete. As Diotima says, we must care for our erotic offspring because like the body which undergoes ceaseless change (207e–a), we are tasked to “leave behind a new life in place of the old [...],” replacing what is “antiquated with something fresh.” For Diotima this constant reproduction is “how mortal things partake of the immortal” (207c–208b) and, so, Eros is everlasting and immortal not because it is a Form, but because it is the ever-present transformative *power* of the soul. Of course, there is a real threat existing from within the text to narrow the power of the erotic so that it is identical to the singular pursuit of “objective reason,” but it is a threat that sacrifices the mystagogic vision of the Beautiful for something more digestible and less bewildering.

ME: If not a threat, a desire—perhaps the desire of the lover of purity. It is important to understand that these are carnal desires too, although they are explained away by philosophers as instances of pure rationality. That is, the idea of an unchanging, untethered form of Love may be seductive. Lugones would say that the lover of purity would indeed fall in love with Love. What purer entity than a Platonic form? Lugones, though, discloses the lover of purity that sees himself as pure in so far as he is a privileged, disembodied, vantage point, that doesn’t need to participate in history or even recognize his own racialization (2003, 128); he is the ideal observer. What is fascinating is that this lover follows a logic of purity that hides both his own embodiment and the construction of unity he must effect to give sense to the world. Could we think, instead, of loving impurity? I don’t mean giving up on virtues or excellences as a life of happiness calls for, but a life that calls for what Lugones calls a “loving perception” (2003, 77). Love, then, is not disembodied but fleshly, thoroughly embodied, hence the emphasis on perception. There is no ultimate goal in which Love as such or the essence of beauty is found. The sense of multiplicity that Anzaldúa and Lugones highlight is radical. Diotima’s speech embodies multiplicity. That is, I can see the text opening itself up to different interpretations, to calling for an unchanging immortality in the traditional sense that Platonic forms have been understood, to highlighting the multiplicity and finitude of mortals in their attempt to reach something beyond, to the tense yet creative co-existence of the one and the many. Reading this text, then, itself becomes an exercise in creative multiplicity, the same way that, as Anzaldúa says, writing is an assemblage (1987, 66), a constant bone-carving, pulling of flesh that transforms one’s soul (75).

HETAIRA: I love that idea. Arguably, Diotima’s Eros is a way of perceiving, a transformative vision whereby we are invited to see the beautiful before us, beckoning us to assist one another in giving birth to our own inimitable and, to some, impure take on the Beautiful, knowing that it is imperfect but perfect for the moment – but, yes, Anzaldúa and Lugones are doing something new and profound, something from their own cultures and for their own survival. Yet, something compels me to see them together precisely because of the transformative multiplicity demanded of the erotic philosophical life. See, I am in basic agreement with theorists like Sandoval, Lorde, and hooks who argue for new methodologies or as you describe in your own work, a philosophy which defines itself not by what we exclude but by what we include. (2016, 21; see also Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 3) As hooks desires, we need theory that empowers rather than arrests change, a form of engaged



erotic pedagogy that constitutes the possibility of healing, of igniting a lived and revolutionary practice (1994). This form of pedagogy, or methodology, I believe, requires as Lugones demands “an openness to being a fool,” which flouts demands that we get things “right,” that eases into the joy of making and sustaining wonderment, curiosity – delighting in the ambiguity and the necessary tensions that are part of the beauty of the ones who stand before us – their erotic power to infinitely and ceaselessly create and play, to come into contact with each other's worlds. (1987, 17)

ME: You are touched by her work! Yet, we should be careful not to think of Lugones's world-traveling just in terms of its playfulness. Yes, it is playful – it is good to be willing to be a fool, to be wrong, to try new things, not to take things too seriously, to welcome surprise – but it is also quite painful. Doing philosophy against the grain is, for me, a matter of survival in the midst of the severity, whiteness, and practices of invisibilizing and undermining the work of people of color. It is a way of putting myself on a map in which I am not supposed to be a destination. As I have said before, it is my hometactic (2016, 201–210). I do welcome playfulness, though, and can see how it would enhance our philosophical practices. After all we are mostly an overly serious, arrogant, self-possessed, dogmatic bunch. But I do think that the level of playfulness we bring into philosophy, the level in which playfulness trickles into our teaching to transgress varies depending on our situatedness and privilege.

HETAIRA: Like the difference between the flute-girl and Diotima, world-traveling requires us to acknowledge differing and competing oppressions. For me, this is why we must find ways to recognize the lived nature of philosophy, the need to bathe, as you say of Anzaldúa or, to use Platonic language, care for the texts. To my mind, we need methodologies that allow both an acknowledgement of difference, privileges, violence, etc., alongside pathways that invite us *not* to “know” with certainty what Plato (or any other author) intended, as if such a complete retrieval (consumption) of the past/personage were possible. Rather, we need methodologies that inspire our students to play with the past, not for the static and dead knowledge lying dormant waiting to be retrieved, but for the *life* that can inspire them to turn toward the ever constructive and destructive fire of their own erotic soul. Such methodologies would foster oddity, multiplicity, metamorphosis, heeding the divine, spiritual resource from within so that in their future endeavors they refuse, as Audre Lorde demands, “to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe [...]” (1984, 57).

ME: I agree that we are in need of these methodologies, although some writings lend themselves more to this type of work than others. Seeing with many eyes, we find the need to reorient important works and to create something that ultimately goes beyond them, a type of transfiguration, a calling in which the word needs to be connected to our present needs and desire for justice. One of the most interesting, exciting, and important practices that we can do as thinkers is transforming the work—giving it a new life, bathing it, and dressing it anew. Your reading of Plato is very Anzaldúan in this way, which is so surprising given traditional readings of his work. Not simply because you are discussing liminality and this notion is key in her work, but because you talk about being in that state in which matter gives in to spirit, listens to it, gets carried away by it.

For Anzaldúa, it is about being open to register the calls of her unconscious, the spirits of her ancestors, spirit itself, the images, which lovingly she describes as

animals, animals that let her forge the skeletons of her powerful cuentos and autohistoria-teorías, which also allow her to, as she says, carve her own face. What a way to state the power of art. I imagine her slowly chiseling her skull, slowly, methodically, sometimes frantically, carving pieces of bone that will let her form the structure that will take her muscles, sinews, and skin, leaving the opening for the eyes and for that mouth, through which she says pass el viento, el fuego, los mares y la Tierra (1987, 74). In the process of writing she contends with the Coatlicue states, those moments of terror and fear that leave her paralyzed, afraid to cross over to the other side of the border, meaning to other ways of being and sensing. So she sees her writings as “blood sacrifices,” her tongue and ear lobes pierced with cactus needles (75). These blood sacrifices are part of the path to what she calls “conocimiento,” a creative journey that leads her to feel and understand things otherwise and to commute with all things existing, human and non-human. It is an arduous path of both pain and joy, guided by what she calls the Coyouxauhqui imperative, the call to arrange those fragments of herself that have been scattered by colonization, sexism, heteropatriarchy, racism, and ableism. While she says she needs to make herself whole again and to find a center (almost as a giving in to purity), she knows that, ultimately, the process of self-making, of living-with, is never finished, thus holding the longing for wholeness together with her fragmentation and woundedness. Seeing the resonances between her view and Plato’s work, or interpretations of his work, despite differences in their methodologies, aims, and philosophical reception, is itself part of our own carving philosophical bones.

HETAIRA: I am reminded of Plotinus, a late imperial Platonist, who believed that the project of our lives is to sculpt our inner statues, statues which – and I don’t know if Plotinus would agree – are carved by a kind of Daedalus, so that they are animated, living works of art. But this is my odd vision of Plato and the tradition. I get that it is not the norm and that your experience with Plato has run counter to this. Nevertheless, I am happy that there can be moments of contact, moments of carving bones.

ME: See, I first read Plato’s *Republic* in high school and while I fell for it to some extent, I was absolutely gripped by Camus. Somehow my heart grew cold, as Sappho would say. I needed to keep my wings up and keep flying, looking toward that which I could not understand or even imagine. It was such an interesting, although not unusual, experience of being torn between the calmer, more methodical analysis of the *Republic* and the existential woundedness and fire that seeps out of Camus’s texts. It seems to be the story of my life. A certain need for clarity and control came from it in the midst of being seized by shattering questions raised by the absurd. But this was a different Plato than I was taught, very different from the one you have opened the doors for me.

HETAIRA: Well, my Plato is only possible or recognizable because of philosophers like yourself. So, thanks for opening those doors and for taking the time to, dare I say, play with all of this. It has been a real honor. Can I ask you one more question – perhaps, a selfish one?

ME: Yes.

HETAIRA: To preface, when I – a stranger to you before this project – wrote with the mad desire to work together on the *Symposium* so as to examine it through women of color theorizing, works which seek to unearth and transform our present-day

social conditions, I was afraid. Why? Well, because of something you mentioned at the beginning of our walk together – the historical background of women in my position using and appropriating women of color for their own ends. The fear of reproducing that problem dogged me. Yet, for good or for ill, my daimon urged forward with the curious hope that such powerful worldviews could disrupt “business as usual” in my own field, challenge practitioners “to carve philosophical bone,” or “to reanimate statues” – therein offering individuals from all backgrounds the opportunity to envision the worlds of the past as ready and willing to dialogue with the present. So, walking away from this collaboration, what has resonated with you?

ME: I was surprised by your invitation to collaborate, but I saw it as an opening for complex communication. When discussing complex communication, Lugones calls for a type of coalitional conversation that is manifold, multi-voiced, and creative, that recognizes opacity and tension, disrupts oppressor logics, and, as she says, “cements relational identities” (2006, 84). There is no longing for resolution. I feel the pull and push of such communication in our conversation, especially in terms of what Lugones takes as its key characteristic, the difficult but invaluable disposition to understand the “peculiarities of each other's resistant ways of living” (84). And so, through different paths, desires, and loves, we still walk together in resistance.

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