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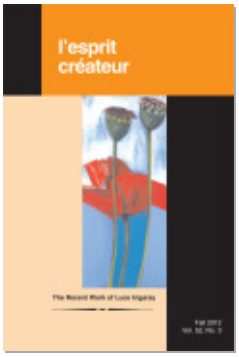

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IN THE SONG OF SOLOMON, we witness a tender encounter between the prince and his bride, the Shulamite woman. He calls to her, "Arise my love, my beautiful one, and come away with me" (Song of Sol. 2:10). These are intimate words shared by lovers, words that offer a faint and hopeful glimpse into love's bodily wisdom. The lover in this passage is not yet near her prince, who is waiting for her, calling for her. Much work, and even struggle, happens between these lovers before love can be "awakened" (Song of Sol. 2:7b, 3:5b, 8:4b).[1] His eyes and his body are directed, oriented in her direction. He declares the truth of his love for her, and he makes himself ready for her coming. In the Song of Solomon we observe a love shared between two.

In another well-known story of love, recounted by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, we find Eros abiding in the space between divinity and bestiality. We learn that love's accomplishment is found in the middle, as ever-present mediator, calling attention to that which is lacking in the would-be lover. Love comes as a bi-way, a bridge between, reveling in the hope of traversing a path somewhere in the middle. What is most thought-provoking about Socrates' love is the space between where wisdom pursues the beloved. This middle ground, the in-between, is a place of beautiful struggle. Socrates' Eros works and waits in the fragile middle ground, fellowshipping alongside the lover in search of wisdom. Love in this instance looks much like the all-night struggle between Jacob and the angel as recorded in Genesis (Gen. 32). As morning dawns, Jacob, having spent the evening in the desert, never able to hold on tight enough, finds himself forever changed physically and spiritually. For Socrates, as well as Jacob, love is between man and god, or the beast and the divine; for Solomon and his bride, however, love's event happens between two people, man and woman.

Of course these are not the only tales of love. Others came before, and many have followed after. The recent works of French philosophers Luce Irigaray and Alain Badiou, when thought together, provide a lens through which the truthful event of love might be conceived.

Both Irigaray and Badiou consider love as a militant project in the service of truth. For both of them, militancy is a loving struggle. However, beyond militant vigilance, there seems, at least at first glance, to be little congruence between their versions of love. For Badiou, truth and love are universal and as

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such would seem to pay little heed to differences among subjects. By contrast, Irigaray maintains the particularity of the loving project to the degree that gendered subjects not only are different but ultimately inhabit entirely different worlds. To this end, she writes, "To recognize the existence of another subjectivity implies recognizing that it belongs to, and constitutes, a world of its own, which cannot be substituted for mine; that the subjectivity of the other is irreducible to my subjectivity."[2] In the following passage, in which Badiou turns to the Apostle Paul's discussion of difference, we begin to perceive the unexpected convergence with Irigaray: "With regard to the world in which truth proceeds, universality must expose itself to all differences and show, through the ordeal of their division that they are capable of welcoming the truth that traverses them. What matters, man or woman, Jew or Greek, slave or free man, is that differences carry the universal that happens to them like a grace."[3] Sexual difference is one of Paul's most important distinctions and the most fundamental difference to which the universality of love must expose itself.

Join me in imagining comradery between these thinkers, in which love is not so much the answer to the myriad problems of human existence, but rather the bodily comportment of wisdom, a universal event that marks as sacred the ground shared between two. Love as wisdom's manifestation leads us to recognize others of difference, brings us to the hard realization that we do not yet share the same world and language with another, and demands humility as we are made aware of the awesome responsibility of encountering the other.

Love's response-ability

Love is not a matter of covering over differences in a homogeneous One, but of revealing that differences are capable of abiding and welcoming the truth that traverses them. This welcoming, according to Irigaray, "requires an availability for that which has not yet occurred, an ability and a wanting to open ourselves to the unknown, to that which is still unfamiliar to us and, in a sense, will always remain unfamiliar" (*Sharing* 18). That which has not occurred, love's universal event between two, is the truth that abides difference. At the core of Irigaray's work is the notion of *two*, the idea that the world is made of two distinctly separate subjectivities: male and female. In other words sex is the primary difference between people. However, though there are two, the world actually operates as if there were one, singular, male subjectivity in which we all dwell, think, and speak. Irigaray writes, "We flee dialogue with a *you* irreducible to us, with the man or woman who will never be *I,* nor *me,* nor *mine.*"[4] Thus we succumb to the pressure of a male-dominated world and can speak only within a male-constructed language.[5] These con-

straints subjugate both female and male within a world that is not our own and in which we do not have the means to live, or, as Irigaray puts it, to "become." While we still "lack a culture of relation with the other,"[6] the admission that there are two allows for hopeful possibilities of encountering the other. Difference is the catalyst for love's truth shared between two. In a similar vein, Badiou writes, "Passing from one to two, and experimenting with the Two to infinity (since every element of the world is capable of being treated by a body of love), love is the first degree of the individual's passage to an immediate beyond her- or himself."[7] In the space between two, when difference is allowed and even revered, Irigaray writes that "meaning quivers" (*Way* 28). Silence, breath, joy, hospitality, wonder, and love can be manifest.

These moments between, these ways of attending to others, offer something more and better than the recognition of sexed worlds alone. During a 1993 interview, when questioned about sexual difference, Badiou responded, "Love is the place in which the difference of the sexes, or sexuation, not only is experienced, suffered or spoken, but also given to thought [...]. It is in love that thought is freed from the powers of the One and operates according to the law of the Two, to what breaks into the One."[8] What is key to Badiou's response is the place of love as the "break," rupture or event. For Badiou, the event is the place where truth happens, a moment characterized by reflexivity, intensity, and power (Badiou, *Second Manifesto* 80). The event allows us to consider a love not constrained by the particularities of difference but flourishing, as the universal of love is exposed through difference, at the site of difference. Again the picture of Paul's Jew/Greek, master/slave, woman/man distinction is useful, and Badiou citing 1 Corinthians 14:7 writes, "only by recognizing in differences their capacity for carrying the universal that comes upon them can the universal itself verify its own reality [...]. Differences, like instrumental tones, provide us with the recognizable univocity that makes up the melody of the True" (Badiou, *Saint Paul* 106).[9] This universal truth event of love happens like a melody whose sound resonates amid difference, the middle ground shared between two. In the middle where Eros dwells we come face to face with the immense responsibility and absolute difference of another. We see, we hear, we speak, we are silent. In other words we respond.

Response begins with and demands more than simple attention to the presence or even the difference of another. Response implies intention and action. For Badiou, again calling on the work of Paul, this response is nothing other than the faithful and militant proclamation of love's truth where declaration extends beyond intimate relations and into the larger community (Badiou, *Saint Paul* 90–92). Badiou imagines these communities to be like the ancient

ekklēsia or church communities founded by Paul. The term *ekklēsia* can be defined as a "gathering of those summoned."[10] The ancient church groups founded by Paul had been summoned to proclaim the truth event of the resurrection and to love others with and toward that truth. They were militant groups whose members were collectively engaged in the loving struggle and faithful declaration of truth. As we respond to the other in whose company we find ourselves, while we navigate and struggle in love's evental space between, we are summoned to a gathering of difference. For Irigaray, response involves the work of preparing oneself to meet and to welcome the other, and thereby to open the possibility of sharing the world. Calling these spaces of preparation *thresholds* Irigaray writes, "On the borders of our own dwelling, thresholds will prepare a meeting with the other: thresholds on the horizon of a world allowing us to leave it and to welcome the other, thresholds also on the border of oneself […]. To build such openings requires an active undertaking but also a letting be" (*Sharing* 9). Irigaray contends that we do not yet have the language or the means to ready ourselves for beholding the threshold of another's world. However, she maintains that as we mindfully prepare ourselves for the presence of another, little by little the way will be opened for meaningful encounters with others of difference. Sharing the world must begin somewhere and with someone. Both Irigaray and Badiou push love beyond the romantic and toward a notion of sharing in community where love is the practice and truth is the purpose. This idea is similar to the compelling drive of Paul's address to the *ekklēsia* in Ephesus to whom he wrote, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:14-19). Welcomed into a gathering of lovers whose militant cry rings truth, we work, wait, and ready ourselves to heed to the call and respond to another.

Contemporary society is replete with churches of different doctrine and denomination, and the world is not without organized community projects. Thus it is important to address Irigaray's claim that we are not there yet, that we are not ready to meet the other. Additionally, it is necessary to discuss, at least in brief, how the "militant communities of love" are different from many modern religious congregations. Though these institutions and organized groups often share a similar language of love and hope, what they lack is the practiced and active love that pursues and welcomes the difference of another. For these groups it is often the case that words of love are only empty words. The fact that we are two has been lost in the mimicry of doctrine. According to Irigaray, our speaking with one another is foreclosed by a language that "is

thought to always already exist and impose its norms on whoever speaks. It thus informs, programs the speaker without them having any possibility of questioning it from an outside" (*Way* 34). We are limited by "the screen of a language foreign to dialogue—that is to say, a language that remains in a tautological logic of the same. [...] The words are already dictated, substituting themselves for the one who tries to speak" (*Sharing* 14–15). Understanding and wisdom have been reduced to the accrual of facts. Persons of difference are described and categorized. Others can only be the same and fit within the community, or they must be different in a pejorative sense and are thus not welcome. As difference is eliminated and decried, reverence for and cultivation of the loving struggle wanes, eventually disappearing from the practice of the community. What is particularly hopeful, however, is that people long for community. We desire to share our lives with others. As we learn to dwell in communities fraught with human ills, dissention, and strife, we find the faint glimmer of what a community taken up by love through difference might be.

If we are not yet there, what might these militant love communities look like? Active participation in *ekklēsia* recognizes the materiality of love; it must be practiced. In a very basic sense because difference is foundational to the event, love must not and cannot be limited to those for whom we already care, to those who are already "in," because being faithful to the declaration of love's truth means accepting the universality of the event. This community, the faithful *ekklēsia* proclaim truth for all, not just some, and not just those who have already heard. Here Badiou offers assistance, writing, "Truth is diagonal relative to every communitarian subset; it neither claims authority from, nor constitutes, any identity. It is offered to all, or addressed to everyone, without a condition of belonging being able to limit this offer or this address" (Badiou, *Saint Paul* 14). Love's truth works within and beyond community and, in its post-evental declaration, invites all. This is a love that can be effective in the world. Paul describes what is outwardly manifest by the work of such a group as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). It is a love that is more than fond feelings and the warm regard of good intention. This love is bodily comportment, purposeful movement toward another, an orientation. "Orientation" connotes the idea of "gathering one's bearings," or knowing where one is headed, a particular direction, the direction of another.

Translation as the way of love

As we turn toward the other, we find that though we may be near in spatial proximity we are really worlds apart. Most of the time the distance that

separates us from the other is not felt because we seem to be speaking the same language. For Irigaray this language is the remnant of a world of one, rather than two. It is a language that constrains both men and women, a language that prohibits our becoming human, a language where "[d]ialogue is limited to a complicity in the same saying, the same world, and not considered as a novel production of speech determined by the context of an exchange in difference" (*Way* 35). As we attend to the distance that separates us from the world of another, we become aware that this shared language is not our own language. We inhabit different worlds and we speak different languages. If love is a universal truth event that happens in the space between two, and love's truth must be proclaimed among people who do not share language, then we who dwell in worlds of difference must translate in order to declare. The work of translation has to do with "bearing, bringing, or carrying over," and love's translation is the notion that as love makes way between people of difference, we bear, we carry, we bring ourselves to the crossroads of another and wait, often in silence, for the words and the wisdom to speak truth and love. Translation attests to the fragility of understanding and the possibility of error. Speaking love thus demands humility; we must admit that we do not know and cannot fully comprehend the language of another. Though we may be entrenched in a language not our own, Irigaray makes room for the hopeful advent of another language, writing, "That there is some language in which man is always already situated should, through reflecting upon it, allow the subject to invent, at least partially, a speaking of their own" (*Way* 35). The wisdom of love in translation welcomes the work of bearing with another toward understanding, and relishes the possibility of language renewed.

This possibility of language renewed is also at issue in the truth event of love for Badiou. Following Paul's declaration that the power of the gospel is not found in eloquent words of human wisdom, Badiou writes of the event, "The announcement of the gospel is made without the wisdom of language […]. [T]his event is of such a character as to render the philosophical logos incapable of declaring it. The underlying thesis is that one of the phenomena by which one recognizes an event is that the former is like a point of the real *that puts language in a deadlock*" (Badiou, *Saint Paul* 46). Existing language is incapable of declaring the unnamable, unforeseen event; to resolve this "deadlock" Badiou invokes the realms of discourse through which Paul sought to proclaim the resurrection. The epistles of Paul indicate three discursive ways of being in the world: the Jewish, the Greek, and the Christian. The Jewish discourse is representative of the prophet, or the one who speaks and hears in signs and symbols deciphering the obscurity of the divine. The

Greek discourse finds resonance with the image of the philosopher where wisdom "consists in appropriating the fixed order of the world, in the matching of the logos to being" (Badiou, *Saint Paul* 41). The Christian discourse is new, the language in which witnessing to the resurrection is articulated in speech and action. It is the discourse of the apostle that in faithfulness to the event alone cannot and does not possess knowledge. It is a discourse marked and declared by those who "are not." Against the image of the prophet and the philosopher, Paul describes ancient believers as those who "are not," writing, "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are" (1 Cor. 1:17, 20, 26, 28). This third discourse attests to the precarious "having-taken-place" that we, as witnesses to love, declare. Wisdom cannot proclaim this love event nor can the sign foretell its coming. The third discourse is one of folly, scandal, and weakness rather than reason, order, and power. As we faithfully abide the space between two, we rely on our weakness to carry us to the threshold of another where love, even if only for a moment, can be glimpsed. Love in translation is a bridge, a construct that is built in humility, that demands faithfulness, because we must walk that way again and again, in the purposeful and loving direction of another with whom we might not be able to utter one syllable.

Love struggles for and within community, recognizing and respecting difference. Love chooses an orientation in the direction of another. Love admits frailty and does not presume to know, let alone speak, the language of another. Love dwells in the space between, translating and traversing a path of nearness to the threshold of the world of another.

Return with me for a moment to love as told by Socrates and as experienced by Solomon and his bride. For Socrates' Eros, who dwells between god and beast guiding the lover toward the beautiful, we see wisdom as the beloved who lingers and lives with the divine. It is a wisdom that lies always beyond the reach of love. For Solomon and his bride, love is witnessed on earth between man and woman. Irigaray speaks to this love, or indwelling, as the presence of the celestial within the other that demands humility and reverence (*Way* 147). Badiou with Paul attests to the gift, or grace, that is the universal love event carried and declared by difference. In the struggle with and for one another, wisdom, or the indwelling of the divine, appears in the presence of another. We do not possess wisdom, and the rupture of love's event is

just beyond our grasp. It is not ours to have. As we consider love's event as the space of beauty and struggle shared between two, we find ourselves somewhere along the way of love. We find ourselves working and waiting, drawing ever near to the wisdom whose divinity can be seen ever so dimly in the middle.

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Notes

1. The passage reads "do not awaken love until it pleases."
2. Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 1.
3. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1997), 106.
4. Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, Stephen Pluháček, trans. (New York: Columbia U P, 2002), 125.
5. Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, Alison Martin, trans. (New York: Routledge, 1996).
6. Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček, trans. (New York: Continuum, 2002), ix.
7. Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 100.
8. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Norman Madarasz, trans. (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 18.
9. See 1 Cor 14:7: "If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?"
10. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/177746/Ecclesia (consulted 9/15/2011).