

**‘DIVINE LOVE’ IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL
WORKS OF LUCE IRIGARAY: A CRITICAL QUEST
OF A KOREAN WOMAN SEEKING WOMEN’S
SPIRITUALITY**

BY

MIKYUNG LEE

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Department of Theology
School of Philosophy, Theology, and Religion
College of Arts and Law
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides an understanding of ‘divine love’ in Luce Irigaray’s philosophical works. It also attempts to draw implications from her notion of ‘divine love’ for a feminist theological perspective. In order to engage with Irigaray’s concept of ‘divine love’, a rather personal approach is being used as a methodology, which is apposite for Irigaray’s rhetorical style. In a nutshell, Irigaray embraces the idea of ‘divine love’, expressing it in her own way as a transcendental relationship between the two sexes which strongly included the physical element. Therefore, the first chapter sets the scene for understanding by presenting an account of what ‘divine love’ means. The idea of ‘divine love’ is well treated in the texts of Irigaray in conjunction with the four elements. The second chapter engages in scrutinizing critically unexamined assumptions in the concept of ‘divine love.’ This includes an important part of understanding Irigaray’s notion of ‘divine love.’ First, her methodology, ‘negativity’, is fraught with many problems that may be suspected in the underlying cause of the negative effect on women though there is a different perception which one might see ‘negativity’ has a liberating potential. Second, the rigidity of the gender division is somehow reflected upon Irigaray’s projection of the binary opposition of the two sexes onto the divine and seems to have an impact on her stance. This insistence on the binary opposition of the two sexes diverges from the mainstream feminist perspective, and weakens her theoretical position in its essentialism and hetero-sexism. Third, Irigaray’s engagement with religious discourse seems to be problematic because of her outsider position. Nevertheless,

the spiritual dimension of Luce Irigaray's philosophical works deserves serious consideration. Therefore, the third chapter seeks to the insights gained to spiritual dimension in feminist theology. In search for women's spirituality and identity, Irigaray's ideas of 'divine love' are compared with what medieval mystics believed. Finally, the synthesis of Irigaray's idea and Goddess Thealogy is considered because of certain commonality bringing into perspective women's spirituality. This could provide a scope for future research. However, it is questionable how far Irigaray could speak for a full spectrum of women. And there still remain a question if she has authority when she speaks on behalf of women. These questions should be asked alongside a methodological question that one should reflect back at the personal experience as a woman.

Key words: divine love, four elements, negativity, the binary opposition of the two sexes, feminist standpoint, religious discourse, women's spirituality, Goddess Thealogy

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Introduction

The object of this dissertation is to examine critically the philosophical works of Luce Irigaray regarding the ideas of ‘divine love.’ Her intention is elevating one of the human conditions by ‘divine love’, in particular for womankind. However, this assumption is fraught with many problems that need closer observation. While engaging with Irigaray, one may have to delve into the personal experience of this human condition and explore the relationship between this reality and the philosophical concepts involved.

Luce Irigaray¹ promises, as a post-modern philosopher, to deconstruct the meaning of becoming women and to create a new identity for women. The question is whether this promise is feasible. It may be useful to draw a parallel in order to verify the question. Therefore, this dissertation is trying to align with the notion of ‘divine love’ in Irigaray’s works at the conscious level, whilst it is necessary to stand apart when dealing with the subject as it affects the writer personally.² Many may experience an abandonment issue which produces a profound sense of shame or

¹ The reader can find relevant biographical information of Luce Irigaray in the following resources; Bridget Holland, “Luce Irigaray: A Biography”, 1998 available from www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/Irigaray.html, and <http://www.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/irigaray-luce>; Internet; accessed 16 June 2009

² I have decided to refer to myself as ‘the writer’ throughout the dissertation. This is because speaking in the third person is likely to be the best method of explaining the nature of Irigaray’s philosophical works as the language of ‘the repressed.’ This also explains my own identity as a feminist writer.

fear deep inside.³ This deep emotional effect on female beings can be lifted by the journey towards ‘divine love.’ There seem to be aspects that exist in the spiritual level which reach far beyond gender issues.

From her own experience, the writer feels well qualified to explore the issues raised by Irigaray. This position may offer an opportunity to interpret a culturally restricted situation into a much more generalized or justified context. However, the writer is acutely aware that this appeal to the personal experience might raise methodological questions. For example, one might argue that a personal experience is not the case in a different context. Hence, personal narratives will have to be read critically as evoked memory may be faulty. This also raises the position of a thinker who interprets the incident when she is becoming a woman in a way that is different from that of the past. In addition, the fundamental question is how the writer finds her own voice in the texts of Luce Irigaray when working on her own work as a writer.

The question itself may be clarified if more questions are raised. Does one put this western philosopher in the subject position on one’s behalf and erase one’s own voice as a universal narrative? Or does one succumb to the desire to be dominated as is the role of womanhood in a traditional sense? And in what way can woman’s

³ A more detailed explanation of those issues, and the writer’s own identification with them, is given in chapter three.

integrity, that comes to voice under different circumstances, be truly protected? There seem to be no obvious answers to those questions that wait to be resolved.⁴

Nonetheless, there is a thought that theology is necessarily universal and very much concerned with the understanding of the whole range of human existence. Above and beyond the secular appearance of Luce Irigaray's philosophical works, they are related to 'the theological return' (Parsons 2002: 288) in French philosophy at the early stage where she embarked upon her theoretical project. Thus, the question is where the philosophical works of Luce Irigaray are situated. It is an important question as the question itself produces an ambiguous position of the philosopher as the subject. It seems that the philosophical works make a bridge between an individual narrative and the universal discourse in a certain way. By the same token, this dissertation will be attempting to make a connection between her philosophical works and a (feminist) theological perspective in a rather limited or unusual approach.⁵ Thus, one may ask if the writer loses her necessary distance through taking on this approach. In response to the question, the writer may answer that this analogy is not entirely justified, but provides spiritual insights that deserves serious consideration. In this dissertation, there is heavy dependence on other

⁴ There is a discernible feature that Irigaray's works are applied in cross-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary. This feature has its own strength and weakness. Of the two possibilities, the former seems more likely for this dissertation.

⁵ The focus is mainly on religious aspects of Irigaray's works, especially regarding 'divine love', such as *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991a), *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (1999), *The Elemental Passions* (1992), *Everyday Prayers* (2004a), etc. Those aspects have a specific bearing on this dissertation.

writers in the field, to give wider scope for objectivity in this work.⁶ There could be the foundation building blocks that other scholars can build upon when they engage with Irigaray. It is thus worthy of note that the works of Luce Irigaray have been rejected by feminists on the grounds that they have a controversial effect, trying to find the essentials of women. Yet it is still true that they have been seized upon by feminists that have interest in their analytical power over the otherwise invisible but rival reality, that is, the symbolic.

One may ask why Luce Irigaray is so important on a journey, whether spiritual or not. This question might be valid because she does not wish to be classified as a feminist. Indeed, she identifies herself as a philosopher rather than a theologian. She also seems to have to hold onto a course of her own and to refuse even being called a feminist, but considers herself as a philosopher.⁷ If that is so, it would be proper to acknowledge what she would like to be, not what the world would like her to be. It seems that she adds a unique voice to the philosophical discourses for the very reason that her beliefs appear to push her towards the extreme pole of the spectrum of feminist perspectives. For this reason, Irigaray as a subject seems to be situated in the marginalized and ambiguous space in which she is trying to find absolutes in her approach to the subject, making her a contradictory person with character.

⁶ See Nicholson (1990) for objectivity of the knower or knowledge in the context of post-modern feminism.

⁷ For the reference where Irigaray disowns the 'feminist' identity, see Irigaray et al. (1995), 'Je-Luce Irigaray': A Meeting with Luce Irigaray, *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (spring 1995): 93-114, and also available in http://www.jacweb.org/Archived_volumes/Text_articles/V16_I3_Hirsh_Olson_Irigaray.htm; Internet, accessed 22nd June 2010

Meanwhile, feminism has a complicated history as a friend of causes. The writer has always been fascinated with the destiny of women and the whole range of their human condition, and has tried to express a common bond with those who have a common fate as womankind. This interest is the ethical basis for a feminist researcher on the writer's part. Irigaray appears to be a wandering feminine soul and is trying to express thoughts and feelings that she feels denied through her philosophical works. This is one of unique features in her philosophy; giving women their own voice in the negative.

However, the impression is received, while reading her works that she acts as an observer rather than as a participant. This position is quite different from the mainstream feminist perspective which she calls 'a feminism of equality' (Irigaray et al. 1995). Her position is defined as 'a feminism of difference' (*ibid.*), if we are to include her in the category of 'feminism.' While laying claim to the status of philosopher, Irigaray indicates that mainstream feminists who pursue a 'politics of equality' which demands 'not to be behind, not to be second', as their mottos, amounts to much complicity in women's exclusion from philosophy. This may explain her ambiguous position of the observer, that is, the distance taken from the mainstream feminist perspective.⁸

⁸ Irigaray accentuates sexual difference and is strongly influenced by Psychoanalysis. She has been famous as a representative of French feminists. Her works are recognized as a kind of post-modern feminism. One may ask why post-modern feminism such as Irigaray's works can be considered conservative. Its emphasis on sexual difference seems to reproduce old traditional trap of womanhood and then to blunt radical potential to challenge this traditional role, in response of the question.

This could be the reason that ‘the eternal feminine’ is somehow reflected upon her ‘mirror.’⁹ Irigaray plays with the image of the mirror in the religious discourse to illuminate women’s place in the world (Joy et al. 2002: 28). This ‘eternal feminine’ (Irigaray 1986) is also a prevailing theme that has been written about or spoken of in much literature, both philosophical and elsewhere.¹⁰ Therefore, the theme reveals something common to us all in speaking of the eternal feminine which informs us about one of the human conditions. It leads us to involve in searching for the very foundation of its philosophical justification.¹¹

Luce Irigaray published her doctorate thesis, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), which is mainly dedicated to the criticism of the phallo-centric structure in Western philosophical discourse.¹² The ideas expressed in her thesis were seen as challenging the established male-dominated hierarchy of the university, and led

⁹ Speculum in Latin refers to a mirror to contemplate of the world around us. Irigaray borrows this idea from *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (*Speculum simpliciarum animarum*, 1296) of Margurite Porete, into her controversial dissertation, *Speculum of the Other* (1985).

¹⁰ Here is an example in literature.

*All of the transient,
Is parable, only:
The insufficient,
Here, grows to reality:
The indescribable,
Here, is done:
Woman, eternal,
Beckons us on.*

(Goethe's Faust Part II)

<http://eternalfeminine.wikispaces.com/>; Internet; accessed 06 June 2010

¹¹ One may herein address interpretations of the myth of Antigone in the tragedy of Sophocles, which is contentious in the feminist debate. Antigone is torn between her family duty to honour and bury her brother, Polyneices, and her duty to obey the command of the King, Creon (her uncle), who has ordered Polyneices’ body to be left unburied. The question in the debate is whether Antigone is one who claims men’s right which men are not capable of keeping (Butler 2000) or who claims her own right for blood line on mother’s side (Irigaray 1985).

¹² For more understanding of the way in which phallo-centric discourse is criticized in Irigaray’s works, see Solomon and Sherman (2003: 313-6).

finally to her expulsion from her teaching position in the university. Her work excited the interests of the feminists, and she became an icon for the feminist movement. However, she showed the same attitude of remaining an observer of the feminist movement, rather than a participant, that characterized her attitude in other fields of thought. Later, in her book, *I Love To You* (1996), she discusses a new transcendental relationship between the two sexes in spite of her earlier critical approach to the masculine principles and the phallo-centric structure. Following this and other works, Irigaray embraced the idea of 'divine love', expressing it in her own way as a transcendental relationship between the two sexes which strongly included the physical element. 'Divine love' becomes the key concept for understanding her further philosophical works, and from which it is proposed that the implication of her works will be reviewed. Thus, this dissertation are to provide an understanding of 'divine love' in Luce Irigaray's philosophical works while tracing back its origin in her texts. It also attempts to draw implications from her notion of 'divine love' for a feminist theological perspective.

The first chapter in this paper, 'Divine Love in Luce Irigaray's Philosophical Works', explores the extent to which Irigaray provides a new but different perspective on the understanding of 'divine love' from the conventional meaning of love. She believes as a philosopher that the understanding of 'divine love' has something to do with the human condition which produces a lack of value in female beings in terms of relations between the two sexes. Therefore, she attempts to create the 'imaginary reality' with which women should be valued through 'divine love.' This imaginary reality, in her thought, expresses the condition in which women are

perceived as a lack of value. In this imaginary situation, women would be able to express their views, to act on their own desires, and to stand on an equal footing with men. To put it simply, she seems to focus narrowly on the relationship between sexes rather than other human relations.

Irigaray actually believes, in her paper, “Divine Women” (1986), that the notion of ‘divine love’ is intelligible ‘by positioning ourselves in relation to ourselves’ in a universe which is composed and designated by the four natural elements: water, earth, fire, and air (Irigaray 1986: 1). In this belief, she is following the view expressed by the Greek philosopher, Empedocles, who emphasized the importance of the four elements and their impact on the human condition, believing that life could be created from these primordial substances in a different context. She seems to evoke a certain memory of the ancient philosophical tradition that it would be possible to create a change both in consciousness and in reality.

This dissertation may not be effective in providing an understanding of the whole range of her philosophical works because Irigaray is a philosopher who is not easy to subsume under any framework, theological or otherwise. However, it does provide a critical exploration of her philosophy: that of ‘divine love.’ This aspect may raise the question of what kind of contribution Irigaray could make in theological discourse. The primary objective of this first chapter is to make sense of the idea of ‘divine love’ within her theoretical perspective. The idea of ‘divine love’ is well treated in three texts of Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991a), *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (1999), and *Elemental Passions* (1992) and this chapter deals with each of these significant texts.

Nonetheless, to evaluate Irigaray's definition of 'divine love' is the task of the second chapter. This is because the attempt to discern her idea of 'divine love' is fraught with unexamined assumptions that deserve closer observation. Dealing with the problem of the definition is no simple matter, especially given that many aspects of her idea are contentious. Moreover, Irigaray's critical approach to the tradition of theology or philosophy itself would leave room for some doubt, and it would be much more illuminating to find some productive connections to her claim to 'God in the feminine' in the field of (feminist) theology.

In relation to this research subject whose primary aim is to understand the nature of the symbolic beyond the conscious level, the writer often questions what makes the symbolic so meaningful.¹³ Irigaray suggests that the symbolic should be taken seriously because the symbolic in the discourse, religious or otherwise, may have the potential to transform a specific cultural context into one more relevant to the inner world of womankind. This spiritual potential may be the reason for this investigation. A journey into the inner world of a feminine soul is to represent God as the ultimate otherness that woman should have to reclaim, according to Irigaray (1986). 'Otherness' is traditionally defined as a feature of transcendence. Irigaray would like to intervene into religious discourse in relation to 'the other', which has been repressed since the early stage of modern times. Irigaray revisits the historical

¹³ Following the Freudian line of psychoanalysis, Lacan focuses on the law of the language suggesting that 'the unconscious is structured as a language.' Lacan explains how the absence of a penis is considered a lack in the linguistic structure which identifies masculinity as a superior. This is what the boy child internalizes when capable of speech and following the laws of language. On the contrary, Irigaray argues that the unconscious cannot be structured as a language, and tries to find out an alternative approach to the law of the language.

situation, in which a few women dared to express the model of women's spirituality within a realm of masculine discourse. She seems to resonate with certain historical periods, and even claims that 'woman is the most noble [*sic!*] way to address the soul' (Meister Eckhart, quoted in Irigaray 1985: 191). Thus, this soul is said to be feminine. This feminine soul helps locate a time and space with which Irigaray resonates. The writer is aware where this argument is leading, as it refers to us as a woman and there is no other identity.

Throughout this investigation, the objective of this dissertation is to see if what Irigaray has to say provides a way out of women's 'divine reality', which Irigaray claims to be in the negative. Here arise three major concerns about Irigaray's notion of 'divine love.' Thus, the second chapter, 'Three Major Concerns about Luce Irigaray's Idea of Divine Love', is to identify and discuss these three key problematic consequences of Irigaray's idea of 'divine love.' This includes an important part of understanding Irigaray's notion of 'divine love', seen from the other side of the coin. The analytical process is as follows;

Firstly, Irigaray's approach to defining 'divine love' is mainly to use 'negativity' in the philosophical sense. As seen in the first chapter, Irigaray discerns the notion of 'divine love' by means of what is not to be seen in the text, but by opposing herself to male philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche¹⁴ and Martin

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German philosopher whose influence remains substantial within philosophy, notably in post-modern philosophy.
See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche; Internet; accessed 06 June 2010

Heidegger¹⁵, or to an imaginary lover. Through her ‘meditative thinking’,¹⁶ she conjures up a ‘liminal’¹⁷ time and space suitable to the conversation between the two sexes, and envisions a transcendental relationship between the two sexes as the ultimate otherness. According to Irigaray (Irigaray et al. 1995), ‘the negativity between a man and a woman’ participates in the order of being as such and so constitutes a negativity which will never be reached the point of the true union. One can only visualize this space and time in the imagination but its existence affects women either adversely or beneficially. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize critically unexamined assumptions in her methodology for the ways that this assumption may be suspected to be the underlying cause of the negative effect on women. On the contrary, one might also wonder if this ‘liminal’ zone is quite so negative and if there is any potential in which it is liberating.

Secondly, Irigaray’s insistence on the binary opposition of the two sexes diverges from the mainstream feminist perspective which sees the binary opposition of the two sexes as culturally constructed. This culturally constructed nature of binary opposition of the two sexes does not easily fit into Irigaray’s approach to ‘divine love.’ As a result, some may suspect that she reproduces the old cliché of

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger was an influential German philosopher. His book, *Being and Time*, is considered to be one of the most important philosophical works in 20th century. For bibliography, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Heidegger; Internet; accessed 06 June 2010.

¹⁶ See both section one and section two in chapter one for the detailed understanding of ‘meditative thinking’ which is mainly Heidegger’s methodology. Meditative thinking is interchangeable with ‘deconstruction’ or ‘negativity’ in the post-modern philosophy.

¹⁷ The word ‘liminal’, which means ‘margin’ or ‘limen’ (‘threshold’ in Latin), comes from the work of the anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner (Stephens 1999: 32-56). It refers to a transitional period where the ritual subjects pass through a sort of social limbo or a moment in ritual where all structures are dissolved.

women's traditional role in a negative sense (Bray 2001). Meanwhile, others see a potentiality of sexual difference which 'can be extended to the many other forms of difference which have been treated as barriers rather than as spaces for the divine presence' (Jantzen in Anderson et al. 2004: 236). Considering these divergent opinions, the meaning of sexual difference in 'divine love' will be addressed. This is to see if Irigaray somehow sets out to perpetuate a gender hierarchy in describing Irigaray's notion of irreducible sexual difference.

Thirdly, Irigaray's relationship with feminist theology is problematic, because it is not clear to see her position, acting as she does as an observer rather than as a participant. Her engagement with the religious discourse stirs up provocative responses, but she still vacillates between insider and outsider positions from theological perspectives.¹⁸ Applying Irigaray's philosophy to the field of theology, the writer is not so convinced with this choice; instead, she would suggest using 'a feminist standpoint' as a point of reference in understanding women's spirituality. It would seem that Irigaray does not see some important common grounds that could be gained from engaging with a feminist theological perspective. Developing further this line of thinking, the third chapter, 'Divine Wisdom: Exploring Women's Spirituality in Relations to the Return of Goddess', deals with spiritual dimensions of Irigaray's idea of 'divine love' coupled with the personal experience of the writer.

¹⁸ The reason for these reactions seems to lie in the nature of her philosophy which is powerfully expressing the unexpected thoughts filled with emotions and feelings. For the implication of her engagement with the religious discourse which is contentious, see Jones (1993, 1995) and Grosz (1993).

The analytical process is as follows;

In the first section, the writer is going to clarify the meaning of the divine in the feminine within Irigaray's perspective. As seen in the second chapter, Irigaray puts women in the negative by asserting that women are still in inner exile. In this lowly position, we may be able to deal with women's spirituality, as they struggle to find a spiritual direction which is right for them. Irigaray is preparing a journey towards the female divinity, to lead the reader. Irigaray's approach to 'divine love' seems to have a mystical nature, so one may identify the main contours of her spiritual journey as 'spaces for the divine presence' (Jantzen 2002: 236). Through this, Irigaray seems to open otherwise invisible faces of the divine in the feminine, when she describes the negative aspects of female divinity with their connotations of abandonment, rejection, martyrdom and tragedy. Once this negativity is released, she seems to assume that the female divinity may come back with a new face or meaning. She thus creates the space for the unconscious by proposing a space in which dialogue and thought can take place and make it possible to engage with women's spirituality from Goddess Thealogy.¹⁹

In the second section, the writer attempts to contrast how Irigaray's ideas compare with what medieval mystics thought about women's spirituality. Thus the main aim of this section is to bridge the gap which is perceived in Irigaray's works. In the search for subjectivity and identity, one may have to delve into the unknown

¹⁹ Thealogy is about the talks of Goddess as a counterpart to that of God. It can be termed as 'reflection on the divine in feminine' <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thealogy>; Internet; accessed 16 June 2010

territory of the inner realm of the soul somehow to recover what medieval mystics believed.

In the third section, key themes of Goddess Theology are considered such as critiques of 'traditional' representations of the divine and certain aspects of women's spirituality and sexuality. Thus, this section deals with synthesis of her ideas and Goddess Theology. A theological perspective exploring the divine in the feminine tends to lead to Goddess Theology in terms of its commonality. Although Irigaray's relationship with Goddess Theology is ambiguous, the writer would suggest making a connection between these two approaches in bringing into perspective women's spirituality.

Overall, this dissertation consists of three chapters approaching Irigaray's notion of 'divine love' from different angles, and in conclusion, the results of this investigation are to be summed up. Although Irigaray stands on the side lines, her engagement with religious discourse seems to have left an impact on the field of theology that recalls old disputes around women's entry into the public realm and indicates possible healings through 'divine love.' However, it is questionable how far Irigaray could speak for a full spectrum of women, or even whether she would want to do so. Also there still remains a question whether she has authority when she speaks on behalf of all women when she makes her excuse for the universality of the unconscious. Finally, there is an appendix to facilitate understanding of the cultural background of the writer who has been raised and lived as a Korean woman.

CHAPTER 1
'DIVINE LOVE' IN LUCE IRIGARAY'S
PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS

Generally speaking, the notion of ‘divine love’ is based upon the love of God. Or possibly, is based on human love of the divine within a theological perspective. Compared with this general understanding, Irigaray’s idea of ‘divine love’ leans towards contemplation beyond consciousness in which she explores through the ‘meditative thinking.’²⁰ Given this methodological approach, the question of what is ‘divine love’ may be best found in Irigaray’s own works.

However, it is regrettable that there is no agreement on what Irigaray means by ‘divine love.’ In spite of this lack of concise definition, it would be more sensible if we bear in mind that Irigaray attempts to draw an attention to the unconscious beyond the consciousness, which she calls ‘a dark continent’ of the human consciousness. If this is the case, in what way is ‘divine love’ defined in this unconscious? This question may be a way of addressing the issue at hand.

Therefore, the primary objective of this chapter one is to make sense of the idea of ‘divine love’ within Luce Irigaray’s philosophical perspective. This chapter explores the extent to which Irigaray provides a new but different perspective on the understanding of ‘divine love’ from conventional love. As the writer mentioned in the introduction, she seems to evoke a certain memory of the ancient philosophical tradition that would create a change in the consciousness. While some may perceive this ancient philosophical tradition as fantasy, the early approach was a serious

²⁰ What is meditative thinking? To put it simply, meditative thinking is interchangeable with deconstruction or negativity. This is a dialectical strategy in which the truth is revealed in a way that is radically different from conventional thinking. In meditative thinking, one may be called to participate in the opening of a clearing that allows for speaking what has not been allowed. However, exploring ‘the unknown’ can be an unsettling experience. There is a similarity to the *Abgrund* [abyss] of Meister Eckhart, which has influenced the meditative thinking of Heidegger and Derrida’s deconstruction (Caputo 1996)

attempt to bring together the forces of elements into a coherent metaphysical whole. Irigaray displays some sympathy for the ancient approach, as described later in the first section of this chapter as well as in the third section.

The idea of ‘divine love’ is fairly well treated in three texts of Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, and *Elemental Passions*, and each section is dealing with a distinctive aspect of ‘divine love.’ The analysis is as follows. As seen in the title, the first is related to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. The second is closely linked with the work of Martin Heidegger. The third introduces Irigaray’s own voice, in *Elemental Passions*, without involving any male counterparts except an imaginary lover. Therefore, this chapter consists of three sections dealing with Irigaray’s notion of ‘divine love’ related to three of four elements accordingly. Each of the three sections deals with water, air, and earth respectively. The element of the fire is not mentioned in Irigaray’s analysis.²¹

Perhaps the most important point is that, if the divine transformation of the individual is the arrival of God, what kind of becoming is expected? Or what implications are found for this ‘divine love’? The return to divinity involves a return to the elements, which have been forgotten, according to Irigaray (1986). In this area, the women’s unconscious could speak, and the division between subject and

²¹ Irigaray (1986:1) suggests the intention of making a tetralogy on the four elements: air, earth, fire and water, in order to bring the feminine soul into the becoming in divine love. In the project, she initiates to dialogue with male philosophers, those who neglect one of these elements in their works. Thus follows as *Marine lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (water), *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (air), and *Elemental Passions* (earth). However, she is never explicit about the element of fire. This suggests that her project of tetralogy is incomplete. Thus, in this chapter is addressed the structure of trilogy.

object may break down in a virtual sense. Irigaray associates women with this unconscious in 'divine love.' It means that women can gain access to the truth which is closed to the opposite sex. As for the truth, Irigaray is asking of us what place is supposed to assign for women. The woman's question about her place in the world has still been an ever present one. This is because we are still unable to know if there is even one answer as based on Irigaray's assumption. Thus, the investigation begins.

Section 1

'Divine love' in *Marine lover*

Isn't it by forgetting the first waters that you achieve immersion in your abysses and the giddy flight of one who wings far away, perched at such heights that no sap rises there and no thread secures his way. ... Could it be that the unexplored reaches of the farthest ocean are now your most dangerous beyond? No doubt they promise new discoveries. But will you not need to move beyond yourself, lowering your sails even, if you are to approach an other sight? For the man who searches too hard within the compass of his sails finds only what he has already found, and lost. ... For today no God holds you up from heaven. (Irigaray, 1991a: 38, 45)

To illuminate her definition of 'divine love' in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991a) is the task, in this section. Seen from the above, Irigaray illustrates a distinctive feature of 'divine love' in the element of water, which has been forgotten by Friedrich Nietzsche. Irigaray is actively involved 'in an extended poetic conversation' (Joy et al. 2002: 49) in the text, in which she seems to take up the position of 'contiguity' (Oppel 1993: 89) with Nietzsche's works. She seems to

do so with caution so that this stance might not incur the misfortune of losing the authenticity of her own voice in this textual relationship.

Even so, 'he [Nietzsche] reveals an unwillingness to engage with or be affected by the otherness of feminine difference' (Joy et al 2002: 49). This reluctance on Nietzsche's part leaves us questioning why Irigaray is so eager to involve herself into this unrequited affection.

There are four areas in which 'contiguity' may be identified.

Firstly, Irigaray interprets Nietzsche so freely that the most distinctive idea of 'divine love' is articulated in this fictional debate with Nietzsche as the counterpart. Thus, the 'inter-textual relationship' (*ibid.* 89) between the two thinkers is brought out in the open with closer investigation. This is because Irigaray considers herself to be responsive to Nietzsche as 'a passage of another type of language'; that is to say, a poetic style of language (Irigaray 1991a: 44).

It is known that Irigaray is trying to seek experimental forms of discourse²² that attempt to practice a different mode of communication from the traditional mode. It is somehow relevant to feminist ideas that use elements of metaphor and pictorial language and which are critical of academic language. Through this poetic

²² There are some advocates of this form of experiment as showing promise. For example, Braidotti (1994:16) states, "The nomadic, polyglot writer despises mainstream communication; the traffic jam of meanings waiting for admission at the city gates creates that form of pollution that goes by the name of 'common sense'. Nomadic writing longs instead for the desert; areas of silence, in between the official cacophonies, in a flirtation with radical non-belonging and out-sideness" Burke (in Whitford et al. 1994: 47) also supports this point in the following way, "It is not surprising that fluidity of the female is deemed unworthy of attention. Because female language flows beyond the boundaries of logical discourse, it is seen as unstable, in excess of solidifiable sense, and therefore, outside the discourse of the Master. Because 'woman' speaks 'fluid,' her meaning cannot be frozen into static images or metaphors."

style of language, she is trying to articulate a new form of language that enables her to explore the women's unconscious created with time and space exclusive to two sexes.

This attempt by Irigaray to formulate experimental forms of discourse have a counterpart in Nietzsche's own work with his effort to create textual conversation leading to a degree of contiguity in the area of communication.

Secondly, one may delineate the nature of 'divine love' in terms of relations between these two thinkers because she actually secures 'a place for the feminine within sexual difference' (Whitford 1991b: 159). Without her contribution, one would be left with only the monologue of male views unleavened by the introduction of a female voice to the philosophical discourse. She seems to be filling up the empty space of femininity with the language of the imaginary in order to create the female presence or to reveal the women's unconscious mind. At the same time, this space remains uncertain because there is no obvious answer to the nature of this inter-textual relationship (*ibid.* 158). Nonetheless, Irigaray is attempting to display the differences between the approaches taken by Nietzsche and his works and that of herself.²³ However, she seems to postulate that the understanding of 'divine love' has something to do with the human conditions which produce a lack of perceived value in female beings in the relations between the two sexes.

²³ This position is reminiscent of the theology of Bonaventure, that is, the coincidence of the opposites. According to Cousins, "The coincidence of opposites has had a long history in the religious and philosophical thought ... It is found in both primitive and developed theologies in the union of the terrible and beneficent aspects of the divinity" (Cousins 1978:15)

For that reason, she may be reaching a point where it is necessary to see ‘the return of what is repressed while a woman is kept in repression’ (Irigaray 1991a: 93). When the repressed is released, the perceived reality of woman seems to come back in a different manner, as claimed by Irigaray. ‘A woman – the other - will be asked to uncover the seal of necessity upon burial. A woman, in truth: of her divine reality’ (*ibid.* 94)

At this point, other questions arise. What makes this reality that women have perceived ‘divine’ in a certain term? Is Irigaray feeding us with an absurd fantasy? What kind of story is she going to tell us? Is Irigaray doing justice to women by calling it ‘divine’ instead of injustice inflicted by men? Resolutions to these questions are proposed below.²⁴

Thirdly, both thinkers seem to share the same interest in the element of the water, according to Irigaray (1991a: 49). The water element that is considered as the mother’s womb is to what Nietzsche longed to return to eternity. She proposes one definite answer to Nietzsche’s question of ‘the eternal return’, that is, merging desire for the divine or motherly love, which she suggests as one way of reassuring the female presence back in the text.²⁵

The main theme here is that the relationship between the two sexes begins with separation from the divine nature that seems to produce an emotional tug of

²⁴ Irigaray may answer the question what sort of story we shall hear. It will be a familiar old story, yet new in a different context: that of love between the two lovers.

²⁵ Briefly, *Marine lover* investigates connotations of the perceived reality of her leaving, and of her returning back to him, baptized or purified as someone in her own right.

war. They must separate before they come together as two different wholes. The element of the water is destined to return to both sexes: to enable her to forget him and to enable him to remember her. Both are necessarily needed to journey back in order to remember their births in the eternity (*ibid.* 97). Therefore, the element of water is a metaphor that depicts a change of consciousness that will enable two sexes to deepen into their encounter. It seems to confirm that her notion of ‘divine love’ coupled with the elemental substances indicates the transformation of the consciousness which Irigaray explores through the ‘meditative thinking’, as already mentioned.

Lastly, and most importantly, Irigaray provides a critical approach to the narratives of God with ‘psychological derivations’ (Oppel 1993: 99-100), following the Freudian line of thinking.²⁶ The question of the nature of this divinity may arise out of this Freudian perspective.²⁷ According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the male (a boy) identifies totally with the mother until he recognizes her as being different, at which point he imagines her castrated and unconsciously puts ‘the other’ in the place of the mother’s absent penis. According to Irigaray (1991a), here God stands for the other, the difference against whom man can define his own sex as the opposite. Therefore, God is the other of which relations are open to recognize sexual difference.

²⁶ Generally speaking, Freud’s work on sexuality provides psychoanalytic explanation of the assignment of gender identity. According to common understanding of Freud’s work, sexuality and hence sexual difference is rooted in infant and childhood experiences and development. Although such an understanding has been discredited, from the 1960’s, especially in France, Freud regains credence through Lacan’s new interpretation of his work which contributes to the birth of psychoanalytic feminism such as Luce Irigaray’s philosophical works.

²⁷ See Grosz (1993: 199-214).

According to Goldenberg, who seems to support Irigaray's point;

She [Irigaray] suggests that the idea that a part of body might be lost forever has its origin in the severing of the umbilical cord. Since a connection to the mother is lost when the umbilicus is snipped off, the cutting of the cord at the beginning of every life is traumatic. This event might well underlie all fears about the loss of pieces of the body. Irigaray's theory implies, I think, that for men, the penis may be the only way back to mother once the umbilical cord has been cut. While women have the option of closely identifying with their mothers, men's only hope of return lies in the penis. Since patriarchal culture restricts the ways in which men may be like their mothers, the penis becomes overvalued as the sole masculine tie to femininity (Goldenberg 1990: 198).

According to Goldenberg, Irigaray seems to insist upon the sole meaning of this analysis; the importance of the penis while degrading a value of the feminine by pointing out vulnerability of the masculine body. Compared with this, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* proclaimed his deep fear of God's absence as the only truth. In a similar manner, Irigaray suggests in *Marine Lover* that God fills in the empty place that the male perceives in the female as castrated. Following this, Irigaray concludes that the entire symbolic economy demonstrates a forgetting of life, a lack of recognition of debt to the mother, of women who do the work of producing and maintaining life (Beattie 1999: 70). This may be the answer to the question why women are emotionally volatile, as she assumes.

Considering this awareness of sexual difference on Irigaray's part, the underlying difference between these two thinkers cannot be ignored despite a number of similarities in speaking of 'contiguity.' A textual analysis manifests the difference when Irigaray takes another position to criticize the legacy of one of the prominent philosophical traditions in *Marine Lover*. As a philosopher, Irigaray is searching for the explanation of this human condition. Then, the question is what is involved in this search. Four points need to be addressed.

In the first place, the major thrust of her analysis in *Marine Lover* is sharply opposed to Nietzsche's (or *Zarathustra's*) proclamation of the death of God. Interestingly enough, she restores God's place as a new horizon in the human existence. Assuming that Irigaray tends to take her ideas to the extreme, it would be somewhat strange to see if she is not even in close proximity to atheism. However, one might justly say that she has a way of understanding what God means. That does not apply only in the religious context, but also in the social context.

According to Grosz, a leading feminist interpreter of Irigaray, Irigaray believes that God refers to 'the projection or perfection of the sexed subject' (Grosz 1989: 159). It is necessary for her to situate the finite in the context of the infinite as God provides the subject (male or female) for a new horizon to become who she or he can be (*ibid.*). The writer wonders whether this interpretation of Irigaray is correct, but this particular understanding may be something to do with sociological understanding of what defines God. If that is the case, in what way does the subject of the divine have an effect on becoming woman? What does the divine have to do

with sexual difference? It seems that divine impact on women has occurred, as Grosz comments on what Irigaray says.

In the opening sections of 'When the Gods Are Born,' Irigaray re-examines the birth of male gods and sons in Greek mythology – specifically the figures Dionysus and Apollo, with whom Nietzsche was so fascinated – in order to show how the emerging male gods of patriarchy took upon the maternal function in order to erase the role of women as mother, as the source of all embodied life ... In place of this tragic sacrifice, Irigaray offers the possibility of another doctrine of incarnation, one that recognizes and affirms the significance of female maternity ... The divinized flesh of Mary represents a god who approaches humanity not with the violent eroticism of Dionysus, nor with The Christian denial of the erotic, but with a reciprocal love that leaves both partners free and separate – autonomous ... For Irigaray, finally, the Nietzschean tragedy – like the tragedy of traditional Christian thought – lies in its preference for a transcendent idea instead of an embodied, and therefore sexed, life (Joy et al. 2002: 49-50)

However, the question is how transcendence is separated from embodiment. This tragedy seems to have a connection with buried traditions of embodied reality of female divinity. Thus follows the answer to the above question, that is, in what way the subject of the divinity have an effect on becoming woman?

In the second place, contrary to the male-centred tradition of philosophy, Irigaray argues that the notion of 'divine love' should be able to present 'God in the feminine,' in which she argues for 'a god which goes to accomplish the feminine subjectivity and enable women to communicate amongst themselves' (Irigaray 1986: 4). Then, the question is how she can restore the buried tradition of the female divinity as an alternative to the tragedy that the male divinity would demand. Irigaray points out that the female divinity is hidden or veiled from the senses, while Irigaray supports the image of gods and goddesses in Greek mythology, due to the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy (Grosz 1989: 162).

In *Marine Lover*, Irigaray restores the myth of the goddesses in Greek mythology. At this point, we are witnessing the return of the goddess despite the fact that this female divinity seems to be so fragmented in the text. For instance, Ariadne, Athena, and Persephone, who represent three of the 'masques', are considered as the consequences of an already established order and are reinterpreted in the interrogation of Nietzsche. These three faces or 'masques' of goddesses are on their way to the consciousness from the unconscious.

As for Athena, firstly, Irigaray sees the divine figure as a part of the strategy of phallo-centric containment of women in men's image, a daughter begotten by the father. Veiled from head to foot, the virgin figure conceals her beauty, her corporeality and her femininity, revealing only her face. Irigaray is concerned about the Athena figure meaning that,

Femininity is part and parcel of the patriarchal order. Woman is hidden in the thought of the father. When she gives birth to herself, she is fully equipped – even with weapons. She is veiled, her beauty hidden. Only the shape appears anymore ... She would no longer touch herself. Only the face sees/is seen. And the voice clearly expresses the father's wishes, which she translates into words all men – all citizens – can hear (Irigaray 1991a: 96).

In a sense, Athena is a token man who is endowed with the ideal of masculinity without its corporeality. Therefore, she cannot even uncover her own corporeality without hiding behind the veiled image. This image of the goddess may be the first *masque* of femininity.

Second, the theme of the relationship between mother and daughter has returned at hand. The story of Demeter and Persephone seems to speak about the ways in which the mother-daughter relationship has been sacrificed to the needs of patriarchy. The daughter of Demeter, Persephone is the infernal goddess, the queen of the underworld, counter-posed to Athena. Persephone begins her journey as an object of exchange between men; she is stolen from her mother and taken to Hades. Split between her husband and her mother, she represents a divided femininity only partially captured by patriarchy, in the eyes of Irigaray (1991a: 115). We can find this comment in *Marine Lover*;

Persephone has experience of the two veils, the two blinds, the two edges, the two cracks in the invisible ... She passes beyond all boundaries. Withholding

herself from appearance, even without Hades. Whence the veils which she is supposed to cover herself with so that she may give herself out to be – what she is not (ibid. 115)

Therefore, the second *masque* of femininity comes with Persephone. As for her, love becomes living in-between the two contradictory realities.

Third, there is also a more humane face of Goddess. The Ariadne figure, who is daughter of King Minos, falls in love with Theseus the hero who comes to end human offering to the monster. On waking to find herself deserted by him after rescuing him from the maze, she is promised the immortal love of Bacchus to replace the mortal one that she lost. It seems that Irigaray rejects this ‘icy marriage’ offering to Bacchus, which would deny Ariadne’s autonomy in restoring the imaginary sexual symmetries while there is only one for the man. This would be one of the defining features in Irigaray’s philosophical stance, which is taking a stance on the female voice, which is lacking in Nietzsche’s text. Irigaray identifies how marriage could be made agreeable and mutually acceptable to women and men.²⁸

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 does not manage to espouse, as if she were his prey. In order to make marriage, there must be a harmonious passage from external to

²⁸ See Grosz (1989: 162-168) for this interpretation as she wants to take a stance on a woman’s voice.

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 at the same time, which is not to say that they are indistinguishable (Irigaray 1991a: 117).

Despite this compelling argument by Irigaray, the relationship between the two sexes is such that it cannot be harmonious due to various blockages and constrictions. By describing the opposite would not be bringing out the ideal situation, to the writer's mind.

To summarize, Irigaray still fails to construct a whole picture of women's 'divine reality', but she attempts to restore the three hidden *masques* of Goddess in lost traditions while at the same time focusing on the tragic side of this tradition.²⁹ This failure somehow indicates something symptomatic that keeps Irigaray from recognizing her inner posture of denial of alternative concept of this perceived reality. This will be investigated in the next chapter.

In the third place, the writer would rather suggest that Irigaray believes that 'divine love' should be appropriate in respect of women's experience, because it supports a value or perception of women's experience. Irigaray appears to identify

²⁹ This opposition of the nature of the divinity intensifies the difference, so one cannot easily anticipate the union between the opposites: the absolute and the relative, the infinite and the finite, the eternal and temporal. However, the coming together of the opposites produces a kind of breakthrough of the various level of human existence. This is an illuminating point. See Cousins (1978: 29).

time and space in the perceived reality as a source of the expression otherwise women are denied to express. Negative emotions and feelings might tell us that something is not quite right for women. In speaking of the negative, Irigaray seems to give an account of women's sense of 'divine love' when they engage in the relationship with the opposite sex. In this way, she may be giving an opportunity to express emotions and feelings buried deep inside.

If your only love is for eternity, why stay on this earth? If pleasures and mortifications, for you, are perpetually bound together, why don't you give up living? If birth amounts to a beginning of death, why drag out the agony? Could it be that your nostalgia lacks the strength needed for so glorious a destiny? ... Waiting is weariness and you lack the assurance to do it pleurably ... For your sermons on death are wearisome and my ears favor music other than funeral eulogies ... A woman – the other – will be asked to set the seal of necessity upon this/her burial (Irigaray 1991a: 23-4, 94).

This emotional volatility on her part would bring the reaction that is not in her favour. Therefore, the question is what brings up this negativity. In response to the question, to the writer's mind, this 'divine reality' in the negative (*ibid.* 94) seems hardly to guide women towards a spiritual and emotional growth which is right for them. This is because Irigaray's stance seems to create more turmoil in women's reality than it needs to do. Thus, we seem to need further investigation to see if there

is an alternative way to approach women's spirituality other than Irigaray's way of expressing emotional intensity which is quite unsettling.

In the final analysis, it is quite clear that Irigaray tries to re-establish certain ancient philosophical traditions in contemporary times. For example, Irigaray definitely restores Empedocles (Greek, ca. 490-430 BC)³⁰ who considered all change or becoming as the fundamental principle of being, especially in the symbolic metaphor of the four elements (Grosz 1993: 168-172). According to Irigaray, "we still live on a day to day basis in a universe which is composed and designed by the four natural elements: air, water, fire, and earth" (Irigaray 1986:1). Matter or substance is the arrangement of four types of immutable elements. The unity of things is a consequence of harmony of the four elements. The coming together through love or attraction and the breaking apart of their relation through hate or strife is an infinite process, without beginning or end. This never ending process is somehow reminiscent of 'the eternal return' or 'cosmic life cycle' in Nietzsche's conception although Irigaray does not follow up the exact line of this thought.

In *Marine Lover*, Irigaray substantially analyzes Nietzsche from the point of water among the four elements, 'not because his texts abound in water metaphors, but precisely because it seems to be the element left obscured and unrepresented in

³⁰ See Wright (1981) for some fragments of Empedocles' work which still survives today. Empedocles is generally considered the last Greek philosopher to record his ideas in verse. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empedocles>; Internet; accessed 06 June 2010

his works' (Grosz 1993:169). According to Grosz (*ibid.* 172), Irigaray's linguistic use of elements appears to have an apparent advantage of offering 'a corporeal model' of 'divine love' in order to illustrate the true nature of the exchange between the two sexes. Therefore, an important point to be made here is that the elemental language is supposed to represent corporeality in respect of the divine mode of human existence which can be accorded to each sex.

In reviewing Nietzsche, Irigaray is not denouncing his position as a thinker, but is critical of his failure to include multi-dimensional facets of the theological discourse. This engagement with Nietzsche considers the element of water as a metaphor that depicts a change of consciousness between the two sexes as 'the eternal return' to the source of life. Therefore, the unity between these two thinkers does not swallow up their differences – in a unity where they exist as opposites.³¹ The result of this encounter seems to take Irigaray even deeper into the unconscious and to prepare her for the next journey in 'divine love.'

³¹ See Cousins (1978: 224), for the nature of this unity between the two thinkers as sexual difference seems to remain in an undifferentiated textual union.

Section 2

‘Divine Love’ in *The Forgetting of Air*

There are still flowers, since after all we still feel a need to spend a little time on earth, in the sunshine, to open up to the joy of light and air, to pulse the rhythm of the seasons. There are roses, if I may evoke the flower that, despite its thorns, has so often celebrated by poets, philosophers, and divines. ... The heart of the rose opens without the need of a blueprint. In the heart of a flower there is nothing – but the heart. It opens for no reason (Irigaray 2002c: 122-3)

The next journey on ‘divine love’ is accompanied by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who was a major thinker on the human condition. Therefore, this second section gives Irigaray’s explanation of how she conceives of ‘divine love’ through her engagement with Heidegger. She is much indebted to Heidegger in thinking of meanings of the feminine. One may find coincidences between the hermeneutic nature of Heidegger’s thought and the Irigaray female version of Heidegger’s methodology in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (1999). Thus, Irigaray takes up again the position of ‘contiguity’ in order to ‘examine the

being of woman or the necessity of a feminine symbolic' (Camitile et al. 2007: 267) following the previous example of engaging with Nietzsche. One may wonder if this is an impossible unrequited love for Heidegger on Irigaray's part.

In this second section, the writer moves on to another element of 'divine love' in respect of the element of the air in *The Forgetting of Air*. There are four aspects to consider when she turns to Heidegger;

Firstly, one clear reason to turn to Heidegger is that Irigaray is able to articulate her position as a thinker through Heidegger's line of thought in the same manner that she engages with Nietzsche. She seems to provide another distinctive meditative reflection on 'divine love' following Heidegger's line of thinking.³² This 'meditative thinking' (Huntington 2001: 9) also goes deeper to a point of differentiation between these two thinkers. This divergent point is discussed later.

Secondly, Irigaray is reading Heidegger's work as a counterpart to her own view. She suggests deconstructing the discourse of Heidegger in order to discover non-metaphysical premises of the female beings in the discourse, that is, the being in the feminine. She asks questions of questions, just following Heidegger's line of thinking.

³² See Holland and Huntington (2001: 8). Huntington gives an explanation of Irigaray's work on Heidegger chronologically in the introduction.

‘Of what’ is a being can be posed as a question ... And the question: ‘of what’ is thought made, being left un-thought ... Would Being and thinking be made of the same matter Of the same element? – which would explain their mutual attraction? Their love unto inseparability, in any case when they give themselves to each other ‘without withdrawing’? Would the ‘there is’ be the same for Being and for thinking? At least before their decline into specific aspects of their destinies: being(s) and metaphysics. There remains the question: isn’t thinking already a destiny of Being? ... Of what (is) this is? Of Air. The meaning of this word? In the sphere already by the forgetting of air, it will include: appearance, expression, mime, to appear, to seem, to resemble ... And even: a piece of music written for solo voice, accompanying lyrics; a tune (Irigaray 1999: 3-5).

Unfortunately, Irigaray seems to find out non-beings in the feminine when she appears to be disturbed by this implication of this thought. Perhaps, her questions in the above are only asked to confirm this vital aspect of the human existence. This is a revelation that can be unsettling because it might make it difficult for her to recognize and accept her own value as a woman.

Thirdly, it seems somehow that ‘the same breath circulates’ (Irigaray 2001: 309) between these two thinkers in relation to the element of the air. The question is whether it is not-breathing with the same air while still bringing about a new context for the two sexes? To put it simply, whether they are compatible or not? The answer

seems to be clear. Irigaray uses Heidegger's methodology while still maintaining her own identity and view in opposition to the masculine approach adopted by Heidegger.³³

According to Irigaray,

Throughout the history of philosophy, these possible 'senses' of air have always been understood and have always been the object of appraisals, of valuations, of analysis of values ... Their relation to the 'truth' and to Being has always in question. They are even, these senses of air, today the most examined stakes, or theme, or motif in philosophy. Wouldn't appearance, the appearing, the seeming, and the resembling be that toward which Being today be destined? ... But would one and all have 'forgotten Being'? More precisely, they would think they could be done with Being, while forgetting of what it is ... The Vacuum that they create by using up air for telling without ever telling of air itself: chasm at the origin of their thought's appropriation? (Irigaray 1999: 5-8)

From the above, she seems to find herself remained as a forgotten being, and deprived of the air to breathe for her own existence. It may be uncanny

³³ One might say that what is important in the thought of Heidegger is not so much the ideology itself but his methodology. In fact, Heidegger asks questions of questions, and heads in the direction of a linguistic liberation from constraints of metaphysics. However, one of the drawbacks of this meditative thinking lies in the self-appropriative nature of the thinking, of which Irigaray should be conscious.

(*unheimlich*).³⁴ This evaluation of women's position in the history of the philosophy as a forgotten being tends to lead to the conclusion that something needs to be done for women's sake. From this deprived position, a rather different interaction begins between the two sexes.

Finally, as a result, both Heidegger and Irigaray can meet in the airy breathing space that she opens up despite the fragmented language scattered in the text. Irigaray seems to suggest a new meeting point between the two sexes once the air has been cleared.

In words of Irigaray again,

Is not air the whole of our habitation as mortals? Is there a dwelling more vast, more spacious, or even more generally peaceful than that of air? Can man live elsewhere than in air? Neither in earth, nor in fire, nor in water is any habitation possible for him. No other element can for him take the place of place. No other element carries with it – or lets itself be passed through by – light and shadow, voice or silence. No other element is to this extent opening itself – to one who would not have forgotten its nature there is no need for it to open or re-open. No other element is as light, as free, and as much in the 'foundational' mode of a permanent, available, 'there is' ... The

³⁴ Uncanny (*unheimlich*) is used as a Freudian concept of an instance where something can be familiar, yet foreign at the same time, resulting a feeling of it being uncomfortably strange. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncanny>; Internet; accessed 21 June 2010

clearing of air is a clearing of appearing and disappearing, for presence and absence (Irigaray 1999: 8-9).

However, how could it be possible to measure this meeting point given that Irigaray seems to offer a hostile position to this male counterpart? Without ending or sacrificing this negativity, how can there possibly be a meeting place between these two thinkers? How can Irigaray be in service of this meeting, irrespective of this hostility? For answering to these questions, the writer focuses on the underlying difference between the two thinkers. There seem to be four aspects to be considered.

In the first place, it is clear that Irigaray challenges Heidegger in aspect of the theological thinking. That is because he flatly refused to think of *Dasein* (refers to Being here and then) in eternity whilst he began with the certainty of the death. His key concept of *Dasein* does not include the acceptance of the divine being, given a simple yes or no. Irigaray seems to be well aware of this fact when she says,

Here the whole is at the same time culled from nature to be collected in a single and definitive world of appropriation-dis-appropriation: where whole takes its place and is kept, arranged within its dwelling. Nothing else can happen there without passing through the assimilation of a mourning. No (female) living thing can reach it without first being 'inclined before', 'collected', and 'sheltered' in a place of noble commemoration. Whether male or female, none are given simple yes, and in the suspense between these, each one is set out in its place. Yes – for man must exempt from his

wait/expectations nothing of what is destined for him; no – for no thing can subsist, or even come about unexpectedly, outside of this space-time that is already determined by and for the Being of man. Is this to say already determined for death? (Irigaray 1999: 24-5)

The writer believes that this is one of the less rational parts of Irigaray's work. She seems to reject his key concept, *Dasein*, without explaining what it is in his concept which she finds unacceptable, and she fails to give any context for the rejection. Perhaps the rejection is due to his not offering any place for the feminine in his concept. Despite the fact that there is 'contiguity' between these two thinkers in terms of methodology, she seems to use it against his views.

In the second place, Irigaray's engagement with Heidegger, in which she adopts his methodology only to enable her to challenge his views, leads to a difference of views that cannot easily be reconciled. What she is trying to make clear is to symbolize and bring into consciousness Heidegger's unconscious dependence on the maternal body and its consequences for women publically. In the process, Irigaray deconstructs the established relations between the two sexes, and enables women to recreate their position in consciousness. It is still unknown even to her.

According to Irigaray,

The possibility to breath-live, the possibility to call-name, the possibility to appear-enter into presence. Heidegger does not recall this passage. He forgets the difference of air(s) ... She gives - first- air, and does so irrecoverably, with the exception of the unfolding, from and within her, of whoever takes air from her. While this air is – first - fluid matter carried by the blood she gives, it can also be understood as voice and phenomenon. This issue from it and the possibility – ever material- of naming-denominating, of appearing in presence (Irigaray 1999: 28)

Exploring into the unknown territory of women's unconscious, she reminds Heidegger of the possibility to breathe together. Only then does he recall that woman gives him first air to breathe and then 'whoever takes air from her' (*ibid.*). Only then is 'this passage' possible to open for the two sexes, seen from the above. However, how is this possible?

In the third place, Irigaray suggests that Heidegger has forgotten air by which he is nourished and supported, throughout her work in *The Forgetting of Air*. One may point out that Irigaray sees his time and being suffocating and pre-occupied without air to breathe.³⁵ By forgetting air, Heidegger imagines that he is thrown into an empty abyss where he confronts only nothingness.

As Irigaray questions,

³⁵ See Oliver (2007: 121-135).

Does this amount to recalling that his living body left the abyss by assimilating-appropriating to itself a female other who gave herself to him, first, in silence, first, in a non-solid form? It is the contrary, he will say: it is because his language is what it is that this could not have occurred otherwise. Given such a non-argument, how can one make oneself understood by him? He now occupies his language more than he does his living body. He wants this language he uses to ensure him a solid foundation. And if he is the one who lays this foundation no risk of losing it too suddenly. Which can always occur if it proceeds from a female other: should she absent herself, he is plunged back into abyss (ibid. 37-8).

From the above, women seem to be assimilated as the other. However, it does not have to be that way. Even though he thinks that he is the one, who lays foundation for the textual reality, there is a possibility to take another pathway for the two sexes, rather than pathway to abyss or nothingness on one part or another.

Irigaray's comments continue,

He no longer turns back towards her except from a point of ek-stasis. This ek-stasis deprives him of his relation: life at the beginning. This ek-stasis derives, first of all, from what he has taken from her, from what he has appropriated beginning with her, too little and too much, and which he now returns to her as a triumphant gift. He triumphantly gives himself back to her within him, to

him within her ... He touched only by the expectation, the forgetting, and the return of she who will never come back. He is touched only by memory and expectation: he neither touches her nor is touched in an immediate fashion. The ek-stasis of the present is this, their impossible 'meeting'. Deprived of his return to himself by returning to her: she, at present, the absent one. He is rendered ek-static in absence. Ek-stasis is the exit-entry out of her. But, at the same time out of himself ... Which is impossible without her: that female other that subsists outside. His ek-stasis must insist in her: she who remains ever outside. It is necessary that she participates in this. 'There', which/who is forgotten-erased in the 'there', she must continue to participate in his ek-stasis: always being available for Being's entry into presence (ibid. 64-5)

Irigaray concludes from the above that the position taken by Heidegger makes it impossible for her to reach a common breathing ground of agreement. Heidegger now 'occupies his languages more than his living body' (*ibid.*). Women are still absent in Heidegger's thinking, and Irigaray finds it unacceptable to and incompatible with her own views. For she insists upon her position as one 'who remains ever outside' (*ibid.*). However, this position does not seem to give her any merit of recognizing and accepting her own value, to the writer's mind.

In the fourth place, one may formulate a question of what would happen if the space that time and being reside in is full of air and not empty, following Irigaray's line of thought. Based on this question, Irigaray responds to Heidegger,

Air could be this nothing of Being: Being of Being. It could be this secret that Being keeps, could be that in which earth and sky, mortals and divinities, belong together. But he has forgotten this simple constituent of physis. He no longer hears it except through the voices of the logos: the paths he has already laid out within and on physis. It is from the path – which would not be had he not opened it – that what has already given him air now come back to him. The elementality of physis – air, water, earth, fire - is always already reduced to nothingness in and by his own element: his language. An ecstasis relative to his natural environment that keeps him exiled from his first homeland (ibid. 74)

In a post-modern way, Irigaray randomly chooses the bits and pieces of her reading on Heidegger to respond to him and builds on them to indicate the importance of air as a central tenet in her above text. From the above, Heidegger replaces the four elements into ‘his language’, so he is also in exile from ‘his first homeland’ like women who are trapped in inner exile. They are different, but there is a connection between the two sexes.

In Irigaray’s words again,

Da-sein’s transparency, in which beings manifest themselves, is an envelope of air that isolates the whole with a follicle of projection. What is heralded in the future will never bring into being the female because what man owes to the other – that phuein from which he assumes the

basis for temporality, without ever being able to assimilate it – remains captive within this future, in an oblivion of death ... If Da-sein's project of constituting the world reveals its secret, doesn't the totality come undone like a new dream from beyond? Like the appropriation-disappropriation of man, and of the world, in an ek-stasis where man's power to be covers the entirety of beings in a casting of immobility from which he will draw again what he needs to ensure his becoming as an immortal? Would the world amount to the erection of a transparent but icy grave of all beings and their relations? ... The confinement to which man subjects the world and himself ends this cry: 'Only a god can save us now.' Is this an echo of the 'God is dead' that was issued not long before this (ibid. 100-101).

Through this encounter with Heidegger, Irigaray appears to reach a point at which she rejects the proposed death of the female other which Heidegger seemed to endorse to the female other 'where one remains forever inaccessible to the other' (*ibid.* 106). There seems to be a reason for this rejection, as she believes that woman is ever present, and cannot therefore be ignored and rejected in the creation of a philosophical concept or textual reality. Through this awareness, the female other seems to be awakening, and then awakening men in the position of the other.

She, the living one, immediate omnipresence, embraces/emblazes all: the day and the night. But those who are distinct – men or gods - have already separated themselves from her ... She, she-of-ever, older and newer than

every history, stays within beginning's awakening. Unborn infancy. A passage never completed between inside and outside, night and day, midnight and midday, permanent dawn, she joins these in the portal chink of her awakening. Leaving them to their tender union. She is never closed, never open. With neither the defined contours of a completed development nor gaping openness of a chaos from which everything can issue. Ever being born: the living female one ... she touches him, awakens him to the air of his birthplace, though the secret of this allotment cannot be appropriated (ibid. 107-8)

As Irigaray pursues her own thought, she proposes that remembering air provides a further thought on 'divine love.' The thought on 'divine love' is no longer to follow Heidegger's trails, which are instead completely replaced by Irigaray's poetic imagery in the feminine. She may be tired of following the path of Heidegger in the quest for her own voices and female presence in the text. Without making any change on men's part, she seems to develop her own perspective that 'cannot be appropriated' by men.

As Irigaray goes on to say,

The gods arrive when the poet leaves his lips open for their speech to come. It is entrusted to him as his calling to watch over this primordial openness that the holy opens and covers over with its said. Poem, prior to all saying, that bids men and gods to the festivities ... The poet is

illuminated by the flash of divine light. His look remains open on that which does not disclose itself to him. The flash of divine light opens the opening of the look. But he no longer catches sights of that which can appear in this look. The sight of familiar things, things which shows themselves to him, is masked by the brilliance of the god and the nostalgia for the origin in which men cover them. The Flesh sources indefinitely, never moving away from the setting that gives rise to it. The flesh opens, petal after petal, in efflorescence that does not come about for the look, without for all that avoiding the look. These blossoms are not seen (ibid. 114-6).

This may be expressing evolving consciousness on her part at the moment of the arrival of God in the feminine. This might be a defining moment even though ‘these blossoms are not seen’ (*ibid.*). To summarize, the element of the air cannot be appropriated only to serve as ‘the divine breath’ (*ibid.* 179) to inspire the becoming of the female other, which allows her to express all forms of expressions that she is denied to express. Thus, the two sexes remain in opposition; there is no possibility of union in ‘divine love.’ The difference persists to such an extent that they achieve no real union.³⁶ The assumption that there is no union is itself also the starting point for the next journey. Irigaray comes to reject corporeality itself, preferring an imaginary lover who seems to be more real to her than any corporeal being in her embrace of ‘divine love.’

³⁶ See Cousins (1978: 224). In this model of the unity, there is radical dualism, in which sexual difference persist to such an extent that both reject each other.

Section 3

‘Divine Love’ in *Elemental Passions*

To construct and live in our aerie space is necessary for us. It is that of corporal autonomy through respiration, speech and song, of appearing in the world. It is that of our human birth. We are not yet women (Irigaray 1986: 7)

The primary purpose of this section is to make sense of the meaning of becoming the female other in *Elemental Passions* (1992). The text is simply considered as ‘fragments from a woman’s voyage in search for her identity in love’, according to Irigaray (1992: 4). However, in this section, the definition of ‘divine love’ becomes even more elusive because there are no male counterparts other than an imaginary lover, who can be either God or a human presence. This imaginary lover in the text seems to be more real to Irigaray than any corporeal being in the embrace of ‘divine love.’

Above all, Irigaray (1986: 4) believes that the becoming of the female other is meant to serve in the making of women’s identity in the symbolic. This symbolism

may serve well in women's interest in seeking out their identity. Irigaray appears to find out her own reason for this unverified assumption when she says, "Without God, woman is only used or served as a reflection or mirror to mediate the relationship among men" (Irigaray 1985: 123). Irigaray always prefers to express her inner thought and feeling in a poetic way, rather than in the language of logic and convention.

Following Irigaray's line of thinking, Canters (1999: 53) connects *Elemental Passions* with Empedocles, given her reference to the passions: Love and Strife are the operative forces between the four elements.³⁷ Her text also refers to the most elemental, understood as the most basic, of passions which determine how we act. As above-mentioned, Empedocles' representation of the four elements provides a metaphor of the meeting of different elemental substances, which can bring creation through Love, and can break down current unity through Strife. Love and Strife are to be viewed as powers with expanding and contracting areas of application in the movement of elements. At one time the elements are completely separate under Strife, and Love lies inactive at the circumference; then love rises to power, which is initiated by her rush to the centre. Gradually Love consolidates her position, and Strife is slowly pushed back. The interchange between them causes a conflict, and towards the circumference there are some parts of elements that are still unmixed, held by strife. Finally Love wins the battle, bringing all the elements into one, in which Strife has no part (Wright 1981: 22-56).

³⁷ The title itself reflects the emphasis on Empedocles (Grosz 1993:53).

Canters (1999) also suggests that *Elemental Passions* is considered an example written in a female language and in the exploration of its imagery in order to come into being divine in the feminine. The exchanging narratives of two lovers in the text are not only a manifestation of the ‘imagery reality’ in the feminine but also a revelation of a feminine way of perceiving, thinking, and expressing proper to her sex. The love song is one manifestation of the importance of the feminine, for Irigaray (2004a).³⁸

Thus, one can clearly see a full-fledged form of the poetic imagery in this text. The essential quality of this poetic writing is that the union of two lovers is anticipated at a certain point even though the fulfillment of the affection seems to be always delayed. Irigaray believes that poetic writing is a revelation of the feminine way of perceiving and thinking proper to her own gender (Irigaray 2004a: 31).

In Irigaray’s own words,

Love can be the becoming which appropriates the other for itself by consuming it, introjecting it into itself, to the point where the other disappears. Or love can be the motor of becoming, allowing both the one and the other to grow. For such a love, each must keep their body autonomous. The one should not be the source of the other nor the other

³⁸ *Everyday Prayers* (Irigaray 2004a) may culminate in this poetic development of her writing.

of the one. Two lives should embrace and fertilise each other, without either being a fixed goal for the other (Irigaray 1992: 27)

Therefore, love is a way of describing every attribute of God in the feminine, for Irigaray. Through this mirror image, Irigaray speaks of the reunification of women's sense and nature which can be becoming. In her conception of love, we are able to find special relevance of Irigaray's idea to theological thinking.³⁹

Meanwhile, the poetic writing is closely related to the tradition known as 'negative theology', a theology of minimalism or negatives as opposed to one which sets up God with many attributes. By definition, negative theology is a style of 'apophatic' theology, whose meaning goes hand in hand with that of 'cataphatic' (affirmative) theology. When the discourse is characterized as an 'apophatic' style, language must break down at a moment of dialectic where the soul reaches the understanding of what God is like. Thus, the language employed by Irigaray comes closer to negative or apophatic style.⁴⁰

However, there is differentiation between Irigaray's poetic style and negative theology though both of them equally cherish the rich symbolism of the imaginary

³⁹ Irigaray seems to remind us of the lovers of *The Song of Songs*, a reference from which reads, 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.' However, there seems to be a radical break from 'divine love' in Irigaray's thinking on 'carnal union,' based on physicality. This is because the virgin was the most beloved of all the saints, the essence of purity, the celestial image of perfect womanhood. For example, for Shakers, a communitarian sect of Quakers, celibacy is a certain way of expressing spiritual union between man and woman in virgin purity gained in a jointly body, which is contrary to the union of the flesh (Deignan 1992: 73).

⁴⁰ By definition, negative theology is a style of 'apophatic' theology. If theology means something like speech about God, it means that speech about God will be the failure of speech. Negative theology's controversial aspect might link with its rejection of the body-spirit dualism that is fundamental to modern philosophical thinking. For more understanding of negative theology, see Richardson and Bowden, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London; SCM, 1983).

world. This differentiation occurs because the language of Irigaray is best understood in relation to woman's question of her place in the symbolic. Irigaray's understanding of the divine is known in a sense that it requires 'certain representations' unlike negative theology (Martin 2000: 132). Following Irigaray's line of thinking, there are two divines accorded to each sex (Irigaray 1986: 9). The narratives between two lovers may take place as an inner struggle rather than outside interventions. The figure of the imaginary lover thus becomes the allegorical character who poses the questions within an inner world of the feminine soul who is struggling to reach at 'divine love.' Therefore, her work seems to be presented as a kind of play with allegorical characters. Her work is fundamentally based on an inner dialogue of the soul, which is much closer to the philosophical tradition (King 2004: 104, quoted in Raphael 1996).

As Irigaray says,

You want to make me into a flower? I also have roots and from them I could flower. Earth, water, air, and fire are my birthright too. Why abandon them to let you appropriate them and give them back to me. Why seek ecstasy in your world when I already live elsewhere. Why spread my wings only in your sunlight, your sky, only as your air and your light permit? Before I knew you, already I was a flower. Must I forget that, to become your flower? The one which is your destiny for me. Which you draw in me or around me. The one which you would produce, keeping it within your horizon? (Irigaray 1992: 34)

Nevertheless, there are other possible questions regarding the nature of 'divine love' in the text because Irigaray does not seem to offer us any positive motives for recollecting her elemental languages. She might offer women a place to hold on to their negativity. We may be taught from this how it is possible to take women's lives and needs seriously.

In the first place, when Irigaray asserts that one sex is not entirely consumable by the other, there seems to be always space left in the discourse reserved for woman. At the same time, she argues that if we go back through the male imaginary and look at woman as she has been defined by and for men, we will find that no metaphor completes her. If that is so, what is this empty space? For Irigaray, there is no way of articulating women's desire apart from the words as the wrapping with which the subject of women's desire modestly clothes the female in no other than a traditional role.

As Irigaray convincingly says,

While man has a spiritual and natural reference as he becomes a man, woman no longer belongs except biologically, and the world of man has made that biology its own. Men exchange virgin daughters in order to establish tribes or families or states, they marry women to found their dynasties, they impregnate them to become fathers and have posterity. Such traditions as these do not encourage love between women and men. Lovers fall back into a mother-son relationship, and the man secretly continues to feed off the woman

who is still fertile earth for him. And so she never accedes to her identity as a woman. She remains at the disposal of man – the lover, the citizen, the father – having already been a currency of exchange between fathers, uncles or brothers of her family and those of her future husband’s line. Because of this dependency, woman is submitted to all kinds of trials: she undergoes multiple and contradictory identifications, she suffers transformations of which she is not aware, since she has no identity, especially no divine identity, which could be perfected in love. Quite apart from any explicit violence on the part of men (incest, rape, prostitution, assault, enslavement) woman is subjected to a loss of identity which turns love into a duty, a pathology, an alienation for her (ibid. 2)

From the above, she seems to seek for absolutes in an ambiguous reality, in which she finds herself having no identity. However, she seems to offer women a place to harbor a grudge rather than to take responsibility for their own destiny. It seems that she will not be able to let men off the hook and may be seeking for a simple answer with blame. However, blaming others for their own problem will not be an appropriate attitude, to the writer’s mind.

In the second place, one more question is whether Irigaray is offering ‘a corporeal model’ (Grosz 1989: 172) of ‘divine love’ to describe the exchange between the two sexes in *Elemental Passions*. It is interpreted that the elemental language in the two lovers’ narrative of *Elemental Passions* is to represent corporeality in respect to the divine mode of the human existence which can be

accorded to each sex. Irigaray also believes that ‘God can be a becoming that is particular to each sex’ (Irigaray 1986: 9). However, there seems to be an apparent contradiction. That is because the feminine soul becomes a mirror caught up in the same subject that she is mirroring, following Irigaray’s line of thought. At the same breath, another question follows; whether this empty space is once again becoming the same as before?

Irigaray appears to give an answer to the question when she says,

It is the same when you turn God into difference extrapolated to infinity. God – the infinitely different, but in the sense of being infinitely more, whose auto-affection depends on the reduction of us to the same. Of everyone to the same. Distinguished only as more or less, with that qualitative leap, which is infinity, vested in Him. Difference located in a transcendence which is inaccessible to us? (ibid. 28)

The writer asks the question if Irigaray was offering a corporeal model of ‘divine love.’ Perhaps one should recognize that the position displayed is one with which we are familiar from elsewhere in literature. She seems to offer little new in the enlightenment of the meaning of ‘divine love.’ This answer to the quest of spirituality is rather simple and repetitive, to the writer’s mind.

In the third place, the writer will have to ask what element distinctively dwells in the text. It is apparent that Irigaray no longer hides behind the veiled voices of the

male thinkers, for example, Nietzsche and Heidegger, where her ‘meditative thinking’ (Huntington 2001: 9) goes even deeper into women’s unconscious.

According to Irigaray (1986: 1), the return to the divine in the feminine involves a return to the elements which have been forgotten. If that is the case, she seems to be dealing with the element of earth in *Elemental Passions*. The earthly element, that is, the maternal *substratum*, can be returned in the feminine.

The most difficult thing for them is establishing a relation between I and she. Sometimes they can do it empirically when they stay amongst women. This does not resolve the question between I and she. It does not solve the problem of a feminine transcendency, which is necessary to construct a valid female identity and non-hierarchical loving relationship between the sexes. The paradigms of masculine transcendency, which is sometimes considered neutral or bisexual, must be modified in order to establish a feminine transcendency (Irigaray 1992: 3-4).

However, it is not so clear whether Irigaray’s view of this becoming of woman is really describing what women would wish to be. This is because the view expressed by Irigaray does not seem to resolve problems of women’s spirituality.

In the final analysis, the difference between two sexes continues to exist as one that does not obliterate differences; rather it is precisely the union that

intensifies the difference.⁴¹ It seems contradictory, but the two sexes genuinely coincide while continuing to exist as opposites in this union. Following this, one can finally anticipate a glimpse of her notion of ‘divine love’ in the relationship between the two sexes. That is mutual respect of sexual difference in the opposition. However, the important point to question here is whether the theological reading on Irigaray is appropriate. This is because the theological aspect of her work has been somehow ignored or repressed. This way, Irigaray’s terminology may be turned around to indicate what is really meant in the theological text. This will be a task for the next chapter.

This present chapter has been framed by the question of what ‘divine love’ is like in Irigaray’s works. In speaking of ‘divine love’, Irigaray suggests the centrality of an intermediary role of four elements between the two sexes in relationship with ‘divine love.’ Retrospectively, one might wonder about the trilogy structure when we are dealing with the four elements. If there is the missing element of the fire, then where is it? The missing element itself may indicate something symptomatically.⁴²

The feminine soul on fire wanders unconsciously in the darkness, in which the soul is deprived of its own attributes, and with the soul supposedly situated outside

⁴¹ One may find an analogy in Cousins (1978: 18-22) understanding this aspect of the union. In this union, there is both difference and unity. This is a union of affirming sexual difference as mutual complementarities.

⁴² Perhaps, Irigaray’s engagement with religious discourse indicates the element of fire. Given the historical reference of medieval mystics, the soul that burns in the fire ‘sees clearly in all things that she consumes things according to the way one ought to consume things’ (Porete 1993 (1296): 127). The soul is so enflamed in the furnace of love that she becomes properly fire, which is why she feels no fire, for she herself fire, as the power of love transforms her into the fire of love (Robinson 2001: 86-8).

the symbolic order. Nevertheless, the soul never stops searching for its own attributes for which the soul embarks on a journey. At a time when we receive the service of the four elements, only then will the development of a feminine soul be possible. Thus, the new identity is introduced in the fire of the 'divine love.' If the female divine is the horizon for women's becoming, God reveals herself in the orderly harmony of what exists according to being in itself. Therefore, the 'divine love' refers to the union of the attributes the feminine soul derives in the process of mirroring the opposite masculine soul on its journey back to the symbolic (Irigaray 1985: 191-202).

Although Irigaray's philosophy is elusive in defining the notion of 'divine love' and can be expressed in a number of different ways, genuine feminine identity may lie in the repressed unconscious beyond the realm of consciousness in Irigaray's thinking (Graham 1996). It may be stated that Irigaray's ideas on 'divine love', both theological and poetic in her approach, express an extreme position when compared with traditional alternative views of philosophical and theological thinking.

Nevertheless, the writer believes that the Irigaray's ideas of 'divine love', based on the understanding of four elements, marginal as these ideas seem to be, may have a significant implication in broadening theological perspective on spirituality. A wider approach may be needed to verify the true nature of Irigaray's ideas of 'divine love.' The next chapter sets out to identify three major concerns about Luce Irigaray's idea of 'divine love' and considers whether other implications may be found, especially in the field of (feminist) theology.

CHAPTER 2
THREE MAJOR CONCERNS ABOUT LUCE IRIGARAY'S
IDEA OF 'DIVINE LOVE'

The objective of this chapter is to identify three key concerns about Luce Irigaray's idea of 'divine love.' Through this investigation, we can consider if there is an alternative way of approaching women's spirituality.

In the first section, "Methodology: 'Negativity'", the writer explores the nature of Irigaray's methodology. Irigaray's approach to defining 'divine love' is mainly to use 'negativity' in the philosophical sense. It is necessary to scrutinize critically the methodology for the ways that this methodology may be instrumental in being the underlying cause of the negative effect on women.

In the second section, 'The Binary Opposition of the Two Sexes', the meaning of sexual difference in 'divine love' is explored. The culturally constructed nature of binary opposition of the two sexes does not easily fit into Irigaray's approach to 'divine love.' Generally, with regard to sexual difference, what do we find problematic about Irigaray's idea of 'divine love'?

In the third section, 'The Relationship with the Feminist Theological Perspectives', the writer explores the nature of Irigaray's engagement with this religious discourse. This engagement stirs up provocative responses, but Irigaray's position still vacillates between insider and outsider within theological perspectives. This causes her engagement to be less effective. It is probable that Irigaray does not consider some important common grounds that could be reached by involving a feminist theological perspective. Irigaray's critical approach to the tradition of theology leaves room for some doubt, and it would be much more illuminating if it

were possible to find some productive connections to her claim to ‘God in the feminine’ in the field of feminist theology. Examining her approach to theology may also raise the question of what kind of contribution she could make in the theological discourse.⁴³

⁴³ There are two texts, *Speculum* (1985) and “Equal to Whom?” (1989), in Luce Irigaray’s works that are explicitly considered as theological.

Section 1

Methodology: 'Negativity'

As seen in the previous chapter, Irigaray discerns the notion of 'divine love' by means of what is not to be seen in the text, by opposing herself to male philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, or to an imaginary lover. Through 'meditative thinking', Irigaray conjures up 'liminal' time and space suitable to women. Nevertheless, Irigaray's approach is 'directed not at these thinkers' conscious intentions but at what inscribes their thinking about and through woman; why does their work take, repeatedly, certain directions as opposed to others?' (Armour 1999: 111-2)⁴⁴ By positioning herself in this way, Irigaray situates herself in the 'whole culture of exclusion,' which would seem to have 'liminal' qualities.⁴⁵ She seems to say that there is no one else but her in front of God. This could be termed as 'negativity' or otherness in the philosophical sense.

The theme of a negative dialectic methodology is contentious. Irigaray's methodology may have the effect of placing women in the 'liminal' zone that reinforces the negative self image that they may have of themselves. She may offer women a place to hold onto this negativity. Some may wonder why such negativity

⁴⁴ Armour (1999) poses this question in regards to Irigaray's engagement with Derrida. The same undercurrent pulls in her other engagements with male philosophers in general, although this engagement with Derrida is not considered in this dissertation.

⁴⁵ The representation of the unconscious can be traumatic because it does not exist within the boundary of language or reason.

should exist and be accepted. Others might claim that as a concept its value lies in its spiritual potential. The latter possibility may be the reason why one ought to consider this negativity. Accepting this argument, the methodology which she adopts may be considered viable.

First and foremost, the inherently negative nature of her methodology is addressed; second, despite this, there is a positive side in the use of her methodology; third, regardless of the methodology, there is a further problem which is fundamental, that is, the underlying cause of negativity. These are closely related and interwoven issues.

The writer proposes to consider features of the methodology in some depth. In the previous chapter, it was noted that Irigaray's methodology is closely related to the poetic style of writing in her texts. Accordingly, the language employed by Irigaray comes closer to appropriate poetic language, presumably spurred on by a mystic guidance, whether the reader likes it or not.⁴⁶ Irigaray says, "The way of negative theology should be followed today by all philosophers, men and women"

⁴⁶ The question remains which of the two is essential in her methodology, because Irigaray employs two kinds: the poetic writing and the logical analysis of discourse (Irigaray 2004: 29). She claims that the poetic mode of discourse is an essential part of her work. However, it is likely that one might hold an attitude which dismisses the poetic mode of thinking, given one may focus on the logical side of the discourse. Whitford (in Whitford et al. 1994: 389-390) also points out that Irigaray is attempting to formulate the different economy to resurrect woman's flesh and blood in language. To the writer's mind, there is potential in the poetic style of writing in respect of speaking the truth of women.

(Irigaray 2002b: 100). Therefore, the starting point is to reformulate what ‘negative theology’ or ‘apophatic theology’ is like.⁴⁷

This suggests that the unconscious is to be explored with her methodology; this methodology of deconstruction is considered ‘the boldest navigator of the unconscious’, according to Irigaray (1991a: 44). She seems to promise delivering unconsciousness to consciousness. As if Irigaray is emerging from the unconscious, she associates woman with the unconscious. Irigaray feels that she can speak of the unconscious in order to express the wholeness or completeness of the womanhood, which remains unconscious without knowing where consciousness and unconsciousness meet. Being in the negative is ‘the domain of the feminine’; in this domain the unconscious speaks (Joy et al. 2002: 29). There seems to be a sheer insanity in speaking of the unconscious. Irigaray seems to want this negativity to be healed by exposing its very nature, but to fear for being responsible for this negativity. Thus, we may look for a way out of this negativity that seems to be repetitive and overwhelming, even for her.

Nevertheless, we can distinguish between Irigaray’s poetic style and negative theology, as noted in the previous chapter. This is because the language of Irigaray is best understood in relation to women’s question of what place is bestowed upon them in the symbolic. Irigaray’s understanding of the divine is well known, in a sense that it requires ‘certain representations’ (Martin 2000: 132) accorded to each

⁴⁷ See Rorem (1993) as an example of ‘negative theology’

sex, which shows in the case of the two lovers' narrative in *Elemental Passions*, as explored in the previous chapter. In this narrative, Irigaray opens up the possibility of collective narrative as womankind, the results of which are unpredictable. This narrative seems to suggest that Irigaray refuses to give up speaking in the name of women.⁴⁸ Irigaray says, "Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through" (1993: 7). Therefore, the first question to be asked is whether speaking of woman is a misconception.⁴⁹ There is no simple answer to this question. That is because there does not happen to exist the fullness of femininity in reality. Furthermore, one may question if humankind would benefit from this thought and should the ramifications of this thought be recognized.

While there is a problem among feminists in agreeing upon an affirmative statement of sexual difference, the question of sexual difference becomes the ontological question about the human conditions, for Irigaray (1985: 7). She seems to be so content with this sort of fantasy without asking any foundation of it.

In the same general path of thinking, Jantzen questions the meaning of sexual difference in the following way.

The woman who represents sexual difference is absent. The only women who may be present are women defined as mothers, daughters, wives, and flower-arrangers. They must be dutiful believers in the dogmas and

⁴⁸ There is a possibility that Irigaray's line of thinking is able to be more easily adapted to a gender-oriented society such as Korea. As for the gender-oriented nature of the Korean society, see Kim Kyung-Ai (1995).

⁴⁹ One may ask what would happen if women possessed values and ways of doing things which were more traditionally associated with men.

rites which mark the boundaries of presence and absence constructed by the men in the name of the Father (Jantzen 2002: 234).

Jantzen would agree with Irigaray in that women are absent in sexual difference other than the traditional kind. Nevertheless, Irigaray's underlying assumption of the absence of woman in sexual difference seems to create a vicious circle. This is so because it is not possible to imagine what is absent in the symbolic. There is also an underlying cause of negativity to which Irigaray is returning back again and again in spite of her postulating the female becoming. Thus, one can rightly pose the question;

If woman's presence is endlessly deferred within a hall of mirrors that has no real centre, has Irigaray not effectively killed off woman and brought feminism to an end? (Armour 1999: 116)

This question seems to lead to a conclusion which is fundamental. The nature of sexual difference may be innately insisting upon what should be preserved in the femininity. As a result, more questions may arise out of Irigaray's perspective. How can she be so sure of the contents of the unconscious if that is supposed to be in silence? It is possible to ask this question because the unconscious is not able to be defined by its very nature. How can this unconscious be a way of finding women's own voice in speaking for her gender?

The answers seem to lie in Irigaray's line of speculation. In a mystical (or compulsive) way, Irigaray suggests woman surrendering to her own vulnerability as she suggests that woman is voiceless, helpless, disempowered, and constrained by the circumstances in which she finds herself. This directly contradicts the writer's own experience since woman does not necessarily experience powerlessness or helplessness all of the time. Focusing on this one-sidedness of negativity itself appears to create its own havoc to the point of starting to rewrite the same old story of the repressed themselves. This negativity is somehow pervasive in whatever shape or style or form it seems to exist. However, remembering an old story can be a starting point to make a change for the better. In this regard, Irigaray may need to end her negativity in respect of her relationship with the divine, that is, spirituality. Considering aspects of women's position across the world, it is apparent that there is a wide divergence between countries and religions in their treatment of womankind. While in the West women have perhaps claimed some of the freedoms that they should enjoy, the Middle East and the Oriental countries including Korea, with their particular cultures, remain patriarchal societies that routinely repress women, dominating them sometimes to an extreme degree. One may perceive, in particular with the Middle East countries, the physical manifestation of the problems of womankind. The restrictions placed upon them in terms of movement and education effectively prevents them from having developed the ability to pursue philosophical thinking and the exploration of their position. Such thinking could lead perhaps to greater understanding and freedom.

Irigaray indicates that women have co-dependency with this negativity, despite the fact that ‘women are complicit in their subordination’ (Joy et al. 2002: 29). However, this recognition seems hardly to guide women towards a spiritual growth but only to create more turmoil in their perceived reality. This is the problem which Irigaray may have created at the expense of women, though it carries with it some good, as we see below.

Secondly, the writer now proposes to argue the positive side to her methodology. This may be less than woman had hoped for, but is nonetheless promising if it is the only way to perceive the situation.

It should be noted here again that Irigaray’s ‘psychoanalytical reading’ (Jantzen 1998: 98) of God’s talk opens a gap and allows a reconstructing of the symbolic as she calls for a ‘deliberate projection of the divine’ (*ibid.* 77), according to each sex. This relationship with the divine in her perception of ‘divine love’ seems to provide women their own voices.

In the words of Irigaray again,

In the scene of presence, the voice is the most subtle means of auto-affection, or of auto-affection for the subject in his or her interiority. The voice, in the analytical setting, runs through an additional circuit. Auto-affection imposes itself from the very beginning as relayed through hetero-affection. The illusion of simplicity in the return to self, in identity

to self, is blurred by this doubling of circulation. I return to itself thanks only to detour through the other. I think itself only after having passed through the other. The I think that accompanies all representation is already the other's thought. The voice returns to the subject only through the voice of the other, including the voice of her or her internal speech and thought” (Irigaray 2002a: 199).

However, this passage to women's own voices seems to come back 'through the voice of the other' (*ibid.*) which is not inaccessible to each other. Irigaray points out that the dominant discourses place women in this negative place where there is no access to an authentic 'I' voice for women except 'through the passage of the other sex' (*ibid.*). This aspect is the unseen foresight of the negativity, through which can be possible to open to an alternative interpretation of 'divine love.' However, the question remains whether she is holding up a mirror to find a way out of this negativity. The writer has formed an impression that once Irigaray is thrown into this negativity, she seems to thrive on its survival.

One may tell the positive side of her methodology, which is geared to bringing insights on the possible reversal of the symbolic order by claiming a feminine voice. However, one cannot easily expect to answer the question of 'what is this unconscious?'

There are two quotations which may shed light on the above question. Jantzen's explanation may show promise. She supports the view of Irigaray in the absence of a suitable transcendental for women.

Women lack the horizon and the foundation needed to progress between past and future ... there is no transcendental made to their measure ... they have to make it for themselves. A transcendental which leaves them free to embrace the maternal while giving them back their childhood at the same time (Jantzen 1998: 254)

A further quotation from Joy supports the view.

Irigaray does not ascribe any specific 'feminine' qualities to her divine. Instead, she focuses on a new mode of relationship – to oneself and to other women. This provides the opportunity for women to appreciate that their route to autonomy, their becoming divine, is not subject to transcendental norms, but it is rather an incarnate process that affirms their experiences as women (Joy et al. 2002: 41).

When evaluating two quotations, Joy's thinking is more clearly aligned with that of Irigaray in that Joy supports Irigaray's view of becoming divine through 'a new mode of relationship.' Perhaps, Joy's interpretation is the more affirmative way of interrelating the meaning of 'divine love' with women because 'certain commonalities exist among women' (Nicholson 1990: 90). Joy's interpretation is

understandable when one asks the question, as raised so pertinently by Flax (1990: 49), “why such complex human social meanings and structures ought to be based on or justified by a relatively narrow range of anatomical differences?” Nonetheless, the writer may come to a conclusion that Irigaray’s methodology ought to be viewed only as an approach to the human condition of female beings since her methodology is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of all aspects of the human condition.

Thirdly, there is a problem which is fundamental, regardless of her methodology. What the writer is more concerned about is that one should identify the underlying cause of this negativity. The writer has formed the impression that the methodology is based on a negative approach to all aspects of the subject. This is not merely unusual, but in fact extreme. This negativity seems to pervade all areas of her works leading to one-sided approach to the subject under question. Furthermore, another approach taken by Mack, in which the writer suggests that ‘the pervasiveness of the feminine imaginary’ does not automatically imply that ‘all women are perceived as such’ (Mack 1992: 23).⁵⁰

Thus, we seem to need further investigation to see if there is an alternative way to approach women’s spirituality other than Irigaray’s way of expressing emotional intensity in the negative. As was discussed in the introduction and in chapter one, Irigaray purports to use ‘meditative thinking’ in her approach. However, if Irigaray’s approach had been truly based on ‘meditative thinking’, she

⁵⁰ The regular use of symbolism is based on bride, wife and mother image of traditional symbolism.

should have known that emotional maturity should come when she progresses in meditation.

Seen from the above, Irigaray seems to be deeply affected by the restrictions imposed by traditional gender relations. It seems that she does not address the beliefs of some gender theorists that there are many gender identities, as she perceives only two.

One should be aware of the fact that

The very search for a root or cause of gender relations (more narrowly, male domination) may partially reflect a mode of thinking that is itself grounded in particular form of gender (and/or other) relations in which domination is present (Flax 1990: 49).

Thinkers in pursuit of the understanding of these gender relations are thus handicapped in their view by their position in the structure. Irigaray's position in such a structure of male dominated society may equally have caused difficulties and distortions in her thinking.

To conclude, the writer has argued in this section that three problematic areas arise when evaluating Irigaray's methodology of focusing on negativity. Insisting upon such negativity may reflect on the reality which women in general have experienced, as well as that experienced by Irigaray herself. If that is the case, there

must be some principles that one may be anxious to hear, whatever they are, in order not to succumb to this negativity. These principles are not provided by Irigaray. It seems that they are not so intelligible to her. She may promise women's desires bringing from the unconscious, but seems to deliver nothing but negativity. Thus, the question whether there is any spiritual potential in this negativity still remains intact.

Meanwhile, there is another context which the writer could examine; the culturally constructed nature of the binary opposition of male and female. This subject is debated in the following section two.

Section 2

The Binary Opposition of the Two Sexes

In this section, the writer explores how sexual difference is reinforced in Irigaray's notion of 'divine love.' This seems to raise a controversial issue again. Joy (2002: 15) expresses her concerns in the following way: 'Irigaray's emphasis on sexual difference at the expense of other crucial differences (of race, class, sexual orientation, etc) continues to be extremely problematic.' This is because Irigaray advocates a unique idea of 'divine love' in which she includes a commitment to sexual difference.

First and foremost, Irigaray's insistence on the binary opposition of the two sexes diverges from the mainstream feminist point of view which sees the binary opposition of the two sexes as culturally constructed.⁵¹ The rejection of the binary opposition seems to create free space for a new gender identity at the expense of traditional womankind. Nonetheless, the culturally constructed nature of the binary

⁵¹ For example, Gatens indicates the constructed nature of binary opposition by saying, "masculinity and femininity as forms of sex appropriate behaviours are manifestations of a historically based, culturally shared fantasy about male and female biologies, and as such sex and gender are not arbitrarily connected" (Gatens 1995: 130). Women therefore have to accommodate to this formula and will therefore remain peripheral, rather than central, to this structure. It is also useful to refer to the fact that there are some feminists who emphasise the culturally constructed nature of gender even among 'strong' feminists, not just the mainstream feminists (Evans 1996: 76-8). Thus, while there is strong emphasis within contemporary feminism on the culturally constructed nature of gender, there is the strand of sexual difference that remains.

opposition of the two sexes does not fit easily into Irigaray's approach to 'divine love.' There are two diverging points.

On the one hand, some may see the potentiality of sexual difference which "can be extended to the many other forms of difference which have been treated as barriers rather than as spaces for the 'divine presence'" (Jantzen in Anderson et al. 2004: 236). Furthermore, one may see Irigaray's way of relating with the divine as 'the divine horizon for our gender' which can be attributed to womanhood in many ways (Jantzen 1987: xiv).

As one may comment,

In much of her writing Luce Irigaray has also suggested that woman/mother is the silent support for man's representation of himself as manly ... His sense of himself is built on the sacrifice of the other, an other that always belongs to him. The maternal body, his first home, is first to go ... He creates myths and fantasies in which he gives birth to himself, so that he can pretend to control the forces of life and death. His love is always a self-love that is possible only because he sees himself reflected in her. He is Narcissus; she is the water upon which he is reflected (Oliver 1997: 127-8).

Seen from this quotation, 'holiness is often presented to women as being a relation to the other gender through self-abnegation' (Irigaray 2004b: 154).

Admittedly, for the very reason, there is little hope that the divine in the feminine may be able to release both man and woman equally from the unequal burden of mirroring their own identity in a traditional way.

On the other hand, others may suspect that Irigaray reproduces the old cliché of women's traditional role in a negative sense (Bray 2001). Hence, one cannot help noticing that the so-called 'desirable' characteristics of spirituality are currently related to self-effacing womanhood of a traditional kind. This is because there are critical readers who see women as essentially different from men in the relationship which is 'divine love' for them. One may ask whether this duality always exists and whether we can transcend it, not by striving to become the same as each other and equal to each other, not driving us into either.

This is part of a long-standing debate of essentialism versus anti-essentialism.⁵² It is a well-known fact that there are 'charges of essentialism against sexual difference' (Alsop et al. 2002: 192), which seems to require an essentialist conception of 'women' (197). Hence, some claims that Irigaray's deployment of sexual difference is registered as 'biological essentialism' (Armour 1999: 107), while other argues that Irigaray's insistence upon sexual difference is an exemplar of 'negative essentialism' (Schor 1994: xiv).

⁵² It is noted that the works of Luce Irigaray have been rejected by feminists on the grounds that they have a controversial effect, trying to find the essentials of women. There is also the debate around the difficulty of translating Irigaray's works. Whitford (1991b) suggests that a lack of understanding of the continental philosophical background caused essentialist reading of Irigaray among Anglophone readers. She also argues that Irigaray's 'so-called essentialism is primarily a strategy for bringing to light the concealed essentialism of philosophy' (Whitford 1991b: 94).

According to these criticisms,

*Essentialism threatens the vitality of the newly born women of feminism
... Feminist anti-essentialism shares with deconstruction the conviction
that essentialism inheres in binary opposition (Schor 1994: 62).*

Despite various labeling of essentialism, the criticisms seem to indicate that Irigaray does not share anti-essentialism with deconstruction and feminists' fundamental belief. Butler, one of the famous feminist representatives, also says, "The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms ... representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject" (Butler 1999: 145-6).⁵³ Butler demonstrates that our notion of sex and gender has been destabilized in recent decades and that raises questions about Irigaray's assumptions of sexual difference though Butler's remarks are not aimed at her.

Therefore, as one may say,

*To attempt to 'write' the repressed side of these dualisms is not,
necessarily, to be working for the reversal of the traditional values
associated with each but rather to unbalance or disarrange the*

⁵³ For Butler, there is no real authentic gender; instead the performance constitutes the real. There is therefore no necessary link between masculinity and femininity and 'male' and 'female' bodies (Alsop et al 2002: 9).

discourses in which these dualisms operate. It is to create new conditions for the articulation of difference (Barrett and Phillips 1993: 135)

Interestingly enough, both feminists and Irigaray share the same commitment to construct female subjectivity in a new way. However, the Irigaray way of articulating sexual difference in binary opposition seems to put women in the old trap that women could not easily escape.

For instance,

Irigaray is attempting an account of women which is not simply that which is defined in relation to norms of the male ... [however] the imaginaries which she is trying to transform are social imaginaries and have an interdependent relation to social practices. Social practices are informed by social imaginaries. Moreover the transformation of those imaginaries requires changes to the social and material conditions within which women are working (Alsop et al. 2002: 188, 190).

Therefore, Irigaray's articulation of sexual difference is reflected on a world in which she seems to have a blind spot. There is no space and time for the new identity of women other than in imagination. There seems to be always perpetuating gender hierarchy in a way or another. Herein lies the flaw in Irigaray's perspective based on the philosophical discourse. Thus, Irigaray seems to be in a trap of her own thinking.

There follow two examples.

Firstly, for the reason that Irigaray assumes that all women experience attraction to the other who is always the opposite sex, there seems to exist a hetero-centric ideology in her understanding of sexual difference. It would be hard to shake this assumption that 'women [are] only valued in relation to men' (Whelehan 1995: 91) in her understanding of 'divine love'.

Secondly, one may be highly critical of sexual difference, in which one sees 'the dangers of Western feminist thought reinventing itself as the universal women' (Alsop et al. 2002: 195).

This is so because;

It [that is, sexual difference] ignores differences among groups of women, or is unable to address them adequately. It faces the danger that female virtue can be used against women, and has been. It may merely echo woman as described by patriarchy, may simply invert the dualisms we know (Evans 1995: 78)

Given the above, it is unrealistic to expect that there is an easy compromise between these two diverging perspectives. It is quite possible that 'her work poses the feminist dilemma' (Whitford 1991b: 13). Herein lies the significance of maintaining the balance between these two perspectives because there seems to be

no consensus view easily achieved. By Irigaray's own account, however, there seems to be a meeting point, regardless of discrepancy.

According to Jones;

In recent years, it has been fairly commonplace for feminist theologians to turn to a variety of different contemporary philosophies in search of a conceptual framework that avoids the pitfalls of the old versions of phallo-centrism and that subsequently offers an economy of Divine-human relating wherein difference is honoured and tyrannical conceptions of powers are subverted (Jones 1995: 49).

If sexual difference is honoured, it would not be so difficult to find a common ground, as Jones says. This may be an unrealistic hope, but this is where to begin for a greater consensus.

To conclude, the writer has examined the controversies over the meaning of sexual difference in 'divine love.' They are broadly related to controversial issues of essentialism and hetero-sexism. In considering different approaches taken by ideological camps, the writer sees the merit in each approach. While some may wish to condemn Irigaray's position as too dependent on hetero-sexism, others may find considerable sympathy with her view. Post-colonialism generally held by non-Westerners remains entrenched in its thought. There is no easy solution to these unbending circumstances. These ideologies are mutually incompatible. To the

writer, the power of the argument that recognizes the fundamental physical characteristics of the human being must be accepted, and outweighs the neutered approach taken by the anti-essentialists. Thus, the writer leans towards the approach taken by Irigaray, as to reject the physical aspects of relationships is denying the reality of the nature itself. Despite this, there is strong merit in recognizing that being of the female sex does not dictate the feminine, nor does being of the male sex dictate only masculine characteristics. In the next section, the writer looks for ways of reconciling unresolved issues within a feminist theological perspective.

Section 3

The Relationship with Feminist Theological Perspectives

In this section, the writer examines Irigaray's relationship with feminist theological perspectives. Although Irigaray is not generally seen as a theologian, she can be considered as speaking as one when she engages with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her* (1983). Irigaray welcomed this book as a new outlook on Christianity.

Irigaray summarizes Fiorenza's book in the following way (1989: 70),

The history of the distancing of women from the announcement and sharing of the word and from the practices of the sacraments is patiently and informatively described by Schüssler Fiorenza's in In Memory of Her ... She relates how women founded house churches and explains how women and men became the children of God through baptism, while circumcision separated the sexes as far as religion is concerned ... Schüssler Fiorenza distinguishes the theological rights and duties of Christ's male and female disciples from their evolution and transformation following the patriarchalization of the Church.

Apart from Fiorenza's compelling argument, the key point in her review of Fiorenza is that she is disappointed not to find divine women in the work. For the reason, Irigaray goes even further to raise a question of women's divine identity. 'I think it's something else that interests me in part, namely the fact that a theology of women's liberation establishes as its priority not equal access to the priesthood, but rather an equal share in the divine' (*ibid.* 74). Irigaray seeks the equal share in the divine rather than Fiorenza's view of seeking access for women to the priesthood.

Despite this difference, one can clearly see that Fiorenza employs a hermeneutics of suspicion (Fiorenza 1984: 16-7), which is reminiscent of Irigaray's methodology of 'negativity.' Fiorenza does not simply accept the biblical texts as divine revelation, but they are seen to have functioned according to and have been shaped by patriarchal interests, which have either made women invisible or have depicted them according to patriarchally determined stereotypes. With her hermeneutics of suspicion, she claims a feminist analysis which reads the history of the Bible as participating in or being used as a tool of oppression of women. Thus authority cannot simply be accorded to the Bible the ways it has in the past and largely continues to be today (Pears 2004: 106-7).

Seen from the above, they both express doubts in the traditional form of theology. Apart from this engagement, Irigaray appears to be seen taking up 'theological issues and themes' in her philosophical works.⁵⁴ Compared with this,

⁵⁴ Armour (1999: 5) points out that 'Feminists have good reason for being wary of invocations of God; after all, as feminists and womanist theologians have repeatedly argued, women have certainly suffered at religion's hand, and also that Irigaray seems to forget her own warning that changing the

there are plenty of attempts to incorporate social theory into religious discourse. These attempts reinforce the view and concerns expressed by Fiorenza, that religious discourse becomes a tool of oppression if it is permeated and distorted by social theory often dictated by men.

However, it seems that no other discipline would question the positioning of the subject as an insider or outsider other than in theology and religion. Moreover, women often traditionally suffer from being marginalized in the subject, which makes it difficult to claim to be a subject and thus to give a perspective on the subject.

For this reason, it is generally acknowledged by various feminist authors that the traditional discourse does not provide women with the symbolic resources for creating subjectivity or collective identity for the female other (Beattie 1999; Chanter 1995; Grosz 1989; Franklin 1985; Hampson 1990, 2002; Huntington 1998, Jantzen 1998; Kerr 1997; Kim et al. 1997; Martin 2000; Whitford 1991b, Whitford et al. 1994). All these authors seem to agree with the statement that, ‘God is being used by men to oppress women and that; therefore God must be questioned and not simply neutered in the current pseudo-liberal way’ (Irigaray 1993: v). The writer feels sympathy with these feminist authors.

Irigaray’s engagement with religious discourse stirs up provocative responses from feminist thinkers of various backgrounds, but she still vacillates between

standard from masculine to feminine can still recapitulate phallogocritism if a single standard remains in place’ (Armour 1999: 131-2).

insider and outsider within theological perspectives. Due to this vacillation, Irigaray's position becomes ambiguous, and thus makes her engagement less effective. Irigaray's position is similar to Fiorenza's when she speaks of her own subject position 'as being resident aliens' (Fiorenza 1998: 44).

The notion of resident alien positions one as both insider and outsider: insider by virtue of residence or family affiliation to a citizen or institution; outsider in terms of language, experience, culture, and history (Fiorenza in Pears 2004: 128)

Moreover, Irigaray's notion of sexual difference has been heavily overburdened by her critic's charges of essentialism or hetero-sexism, whilst her criticism of western philosophical discourse with its implicit assumption of the male-centeredness is celebrated in feminist discourse. This disjuncture may allude to the logic of the same, that is, the nature of dominant discourse, as Irigaray says in her work (1985).

Nonetheless, taking Irigaray's works seriously has its own risks. Her notion of sexual difference removes the unique identity of women, inflected with the difference of race and class, and reduces all differences to a uniform whole. It should be worth taking these risks only so long as her approach offers adequate opportunity for recognizing its merit through reflection. However, one must be careful of her tendency to vacillate between insider and outsider. This may call into question of the validity of her theological position.

It is well-known that Irigaray investigates extensively the need for a feminine conception of divinity that would help to restore what she sees as the repressed genealogy. Irigaray argues that women must reclaim their own space and time and imagine the divine as within themselves. However, this space and time seem to become a place to hold onto women's negativity. This problem may produce a response dismissive of women's spirituality. When considering the feminine identity in the divine form, one could consider the alternative of collective identity. Such identity would not be associated with the ideas that impose restraint upon women. Rather it would be an essence of all women, empowering them and freeing them from all the restraints imposed by current thought and attitude. Such a collective identity would raise women to the plateau as men now occupy, and hopefully open the way to the harmonious relationship between the two sexes in a newly emerging context.

As Jantzen says, 'the subject of religious belief is destabilized by the unconscious' (Jantzen 2004: 38). However, this does not necessarily dismiss the divine or religion. Meanwhile, Hollywood criticizes Irigaray's idea of 'divine love' as a projection of the feminine onto the divine, rejecting the concept which would result in the dissolution of belief in God whom Hollywood feels to be an immutable element (Hollywood 1998: 158-85). In the light of the above diverging opinions, the writer recognizes the impossibility of reaching a unified view across the differing approaches. Each has its own merits and supporters, but the writer inclines more to the approach by Irigaray than to the others.

Irigaray's assumption on the absence of a divine image of women in the symbolic seems to be led a vicious circle because one cannot imagine what is absent or void where she puts sexual difference. Therefore, it is not easy to move on towards more enlightened understanding on the relationship with the divine in her understanding of women's perceived reality.⁵⁵

Speaking generally, as Parsons says,

We are so profoundly before the question of God today, yet so utterly shaped by the fact that each attempt to gain access to the divine and hand it on to others is already at a loss for words. So the question for dogmatic [feminist] theology is perhaps less of how I come to know God, than it is of how God knows me, and to follow the path of this question is to led into the divine economy by another way (Parsons 2002: 129).

Parsons' thought suggests that the approach to the divine economy can follow another path to that suggested by Irigaray. She postulates that 'how God knows me' is more important in reaching the divine economy than is 'how I come to know God', but to follow this thinking does not help in pursuing of the goal. Rather one should perhaps follow thoughts of relationships between mankind and God, in an effort to comprehend 'divine love.'

⁵⁵ Coleman (2003) interprets the work of Irigaray as an attempt to create a new symbolic order for the Goddess religion as making an opening for the possibility of the possession of the other. According to Coleman, the concept of Goddess may cause a rupture of the current symbolic order and propose an alternative feminine imaginary.

Nonetheless, with increasing awareness of spirituality, the link with Irigaray's idea of 'divine love' seems to become less important. There seems to be another way of approaching women's spirituality other than Irigaray's.

Parsons explains this approach in the following way,

The aim would not merely be to modify rules or to produce a checklist of beliefs. Standard questions about God need not be addressed if the intention is not to justify theistic beliefs. Instead, the focus could be placed upon the process of uncovering and reconfiguring beliefs as embedded and variously configured in myth. Shaping this process is the cognitive, ethical, and political sensibility of yearning (Parsons 2002: 55).⁵⁶

This position seems to suggest that Irigaray's approach is also included in a more unified way. In a similar manner, Pamela Sue Anderson asks the question in relationship to Irigaray's idea of 'divine love'; 'To what extent, if any, can one say that the female or feminine divine exists?' (Anderson et al. 2004: 118). This question challenges the nature of 'divine love' in respect of the relationship with the divine, in which one may attempt to provide 'a place for the other as feminine' (Irigaray 1985: 135). However, one cannot expect any easy solution within Irigaray's perspective, as seen before. Therefore, it is appropriate that the writer

⁵⁶ This is a 'feminist proposal for the reform of philosophy of religion.'

comes to close this analysis by referring to a clearer interpretation of Irigaray's notion of 'divine love', from a feminist standpoint.

According to Irigaray, women served as a pretext and an excuse for male experiences of the divine. For example, it is through women's bodies that men meditate their experience of the divine. Irigaray contends that a woman's body is eaten at the Eucharist, since it is through the body of a woman that God becomes a man. Yet this vehicle of woman's body is suppressed in its sexual difference. For another example, women under patriarchy serve male desire as desire for the self-same. Irigaray contends that, in love-making, women's desire is repressed for the advances of patriarchy when the sole aim of love (eros) is procreation. According to Irigaray, sexual identity is male sameness, while the social construct of the masculine is divinized in the ideal attributes of a God who reigns supreme as father. Thus together male sameness and masculine divinity repress sexual difference, while the female other bolsters (male) identity and (masculine) divinity. In the end, the woman (-mother) remains only 'the other of the same', as the mirror which makes possible male sameness (Anderson 1998: 115).

The work of feminist philosopher of religion Pamela Sue Anderson offers a good example of the feminist standpoint theory approach to religion and gender, unadulterated by any loyalty to Christianity. In the first book-length study to be entitled *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1998), Anderson set out to revise and

reform philosophy of religion by using feminist standpoint epistemology as developed by Sandra Harding in philosophy of science. A feminist standpoint is not the same as a woman's experiences, situation, or perspective but is rather an achievement of an epistemically informed perspective resulting from struggle by or on behalf of women and men who have been dominated, exploited, or oppressed. Applied to philosophy of religion, feminist standpoint epistemology involves thinking from the perspective of women who have been oppressed by specific monotheistic religious beliefs. Anderson challenges both the privileged model of God as a disembodied person and the related model of reason as neutral, objective, and free of bias and desire. Spinning new myths or devising new conceptions of a divine reality are not part of this agenda. There is only the double imperative: 'to think from the lives of others' and 'to reinvent ourselves as other.'⁵⁷ Anderson's account of a feminist standpoint is very much one that reaches out to others; to practice a standpoint is to be in solidarity, working with others towards a stronger objectivity (Anderson et al. 2004:77).

To conclude, if a feminist standpoint begins with 'taking the privileged readings of images of women in the texts' (Anderson 1998: 234), Irigaray's reading on 'divine love' is also based on this standpoint. However, it is not so clear to see Irigaray's standing, whilst her engagement with the religious discourse stirs up provocative responses. This is partly because of 'the complexity and variety within her work' (Hawkins 2000: 136), which makes Irigaray still stand as an outsider from

⁵⁷ The source is available <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-religion/>; Internet; accessed 22 Sep 2010.

theological perspectives. The writer is not so convinced with this choice; instead, she would suggest using 'a feminist standpoint' as a point of reference in order to read Irigaray's standing symptomatically from a feminist theological perspective.

The writer has covered in the previous chapter three narratives of two lovers in order to shed light into the symbolic which exists in a traditional way. The writer traces a process of the allocation of the 'lesser or lower functions' to women in 'divine love' through Irigaray's 'elemental' poetic language. In so doing, she may be able to offer women an either-or choice: accepting or dismissing Irigaray's approach. How does this unsymmetrical relationship between the two sexes impact upon women's choices on a spiritual journey? Following this question, the primary purpose of this chapter was to identify three key problematic consequences of Irigaray's idea of 'divine love.'

First, the methodology is problematic because of certain negative effects on women. Second, there are issues of essentialism and hetero-sexism questioning Irigaray's commitment to sexual difference in 'divine love.' Third, Irigaray's relationship with feminist theological perspectives should be oriented towards 'a feminist standpoint', rather than remaining ambivalent. This third point seems to be a reversed development from post-modernism to an old version of 'standpoint feminism.' However, this point assumes a distinctive understanding of a feminist standpoint within philosophy of religion. This concept is promising because this is an 'attempt to account philosophically for those aspects of human existence broadly characterized as religious' (Hollywood 2004: 229).

In conclusion, Irigaray's reading on 'divine love' appears to share an important point with the feminist standpoint that is, 'taking the privileged readings of images of women in the texts' (Anderson 1998; 234). However, it is not easy to

see Irigaray's position within a theological perspective because of 'the complexity and variety within her work' (Hawkins 2000: 136). The writer would suggest using 'a feminist standpoint' as a point of reference in evaluating Irigaray's perspective. It has been shown that she misses out some important common grounds that could be gained from a feminist theological perspective.

CHAPTER 3

DIVINE WISDOM: EXPLORING WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY IN RELATIONS TO THE RETURN OF GODDESS

This chapter deals with spiritual dimensions of Irigaray's idea of 'divine love.' The analytical process is as follows;

In the first section, the writer is going to clarify the meaning of the divine in the feminine within Irigaray's perspective coupled with the writer's personal experience. As seen in the previous chapters, Irigaray puts women in the negative by asserting that women are still in inner exile. In this lowly position, we may be able to deal with women's spirituality, as women struggle for the spiritual direction which is right for them. Irigaray's approach to 'divine love' seems to have a mystical nature, so one may identify the main contours of her spiritual journey as 'spaces for the divine presence' (Janzten 2002: 236). Through this, Irigaray seems to open a pathway to the female divinity, that is, negative aspects of the goddesses when she makes the case for it. It is noteworthy that she brings about the unconscious, which she claims to have the divine nature in order to engage with women's spirituality on the basis of Goddess Theology.

In the second section, the writer attempts to clarify how Irigaray's ideas compare with what medieval mystics were saying about women's spirituality. Thus the main aim of this section is to consider the work of medieval mystics against contemporary post-modern philosophy which is perceived in Irigaray's work.

The third section deals with synthesis of Irigaray's ideas and Goddess Theology. A theological perspective exploring the divine in the feminine tends to lead to Goddess Theology. Although Irigaray's relationship with Goddess Theology

is ambiguous, the writer would suggest that common ground exists in the two fields of thought, bringing into perspective women's spirituality.

Section 1

Divine Wisdom: the Return of Goddess

Our Lord showed me a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is to us everything that is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, for he is that wraps and enfolds us, embraces and guides us. Surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. And so in this sight, I saw truly that he is everything which is good, as I understand (Julian of Norwich 1343: 130)

From the writer's own experience, the sense of rejection by the mother is the source of all the negativity that is found in the 'feminine way of writing' (*L'écriture féminine*) in Luce Irigaray's philosophical works.⁵⁸ The yearning for 'divine love' may be an undercurrent of it. Therefore, in Irigaray's poetic writing style, there is a theme that pervades her work to a deep spiritual level. For this reason, the story begins with a quotation from Julian of Norwich. This quotation shows her definition

⁵⁸ The nature of her writing style, which is defined as a 'feminine way of writing (*L'écriture féminine*),' has contributed to applied works in Literature as well as Women's Studies. For an example of applying Irigaray's work in literature, see Peebles, 'Women before Love: Ethics and Sexual Difference in French Women's Writing', State University of New York at Binghamton, 2002. She explores how to face up to the difference between two sexes which is always asymmetrical and to imagine an ethical relationship between two sexes through the review of the text in the eyes of Luce Irigaray.

of 'divine love' in Father God. There are many stories to tell about this fatherly love with first-hand experience. In this section, the writer introduces the nature of this project through a story which is quite individual, as she experienced the issue of the abandonment in childhood. The writer's own experience is thus illustrative.

She was born the third daughter of a family in which the mother desperately wanted to have a male heir that could consolidate her status.⁵⁹ The mother did not welcome as a baby the third daughter. Not long after the child's birth, she was choked almost to death with cotton bedding, and cried out for life. The devoted father heard the sharp cries and rescued her. From that time, the father became a mother for the child despite his gender.

This is the image of the salvation which has been carried since then and has become traumatic on life's journey.⁶⁰ The feminine attributes of nurturing and caring vanished from the scene, and the mother and the baby were alienated. This situation became a life-long quest to answer why a woman would have to lose her own identity and become alienated from her true self. Following this line of thought, another question raises; what would happen when a woman reclaims her own identity.

⁵⁹ An interesting book might explain a similar cultural background in China to that in Korea, when it comes to deal with cultural differences compared with Western society. See, Lisa See, *Snow Flower and the Sweet Fan* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005).

⁶⁰ Hollywood (1998: 245) points out that the fact of women's ability to accede to the symbolic may explain the nature of many women's dogmatic adherence to the father's religion and God the father.

Following Irigaray's line of thinking, there is the other side of the story that is interpreted differently. That is to say that father seems to take over the place of the mother as soon as mother gave up her role of motherhood. This is also a way of depriving mother, as a woman, of her own identity. Therefore, the true face of woman seems to have been blurred and lost its definition. This deconstruction behind the scenes reveals so much of what is otherwise hidden. Revealing otherwise opens to consideration another possible awareness of woman's spiritual potential. To some extent, this account bears some resonance to the stories that are told about the goddesses Demeter and Persephone.

Herein we are witnessing the return of Goddess in a tragic way, when Irigaray turns to the myth of Goddess. The story of Demeter and Persephone concerns about the ways in which the mother-daughter relationship has been sacrificed to the needs of patriarchy. According to the myth, the primordial blissful union of the mother and the daughter interferes with the father, who prepared an arranged marriage for his own convenience. The daughter was abducted by the forceful suitor without the mother's knowledge. The mother tried to find the daughter, wandering without hope since none wanted to go against the father's will, who forbade anyone from informing the mother of the daughter's whereabouts. As a result, the mother tried to console herself with a boy child instead of her missing daughter.

Meanwhile, the daughter of Goddess Demeter becomes the infernal goddess, Persephone, the queen of the underworld. Split between her husband and her mother, she represents a divided femininity only partially captured by patriarchy, according to Irigaray (1991a: 115).

As Joy comments,

The story of Korê/Persephone shows that the daughter is not responsible. The mother is a little responsible; she begins to console herself for the disappearance of her daughter by nursing a boy-child. But her acceptance of this substitute is also a form of revenge. A god has stolen her daughter, so she renounces life among immortals and tries to force a mortal upon them as a god. When this solution fails, she refuses any proposition from the God of gods, unless he gives her back her daughter. Zeus understands that there is no other way to save the mortals and the immortals. He sends Hermes to Erbes [Hades] to fetch Persephone. Hades must obey, but he is still plotting to keep his mastery: he induces Persephone to eat a pomegranate seed, which, unknown to her, make her a hostage of the Underworld. Mother and daughter are happily reunited. Demeter asks Persephone to tell her everything that has happened to her. She does so, beginning at the end. In a way, she goes back in time, as must any woman today who is trying to find the traces of her estrangement from her mother. That is what the psychoanalytical process should do: find the thread of her entry into the Underworld, and if possible, of her way out (Joy et al. 2002: 72).

This alienated relationship between mother and daughter is far from that what should be wished because it provides the story which seems to distort woman's sense of value, offering only rejection one way or abandonment another. Perhaps

there is no turning back, but women's entry to the underworld finds a way back to unite with their own identity on the condition that the path is carefully followed.

The comment continues,

She [Irigaray] retells the myth of Demeter and Persephone in order to illustrate how the bond between mothers and daughters has been subverted by masculine desire. This desire, according to Irigaray, tricks daughters into betraying their love for their mothers and thus reduces daughters – and, by extension, all women – to mere trophies of patriarchal power. She goes on to argue that the Freudian theorisation of the Oedipal triangle perpetuates this seduction by mandating that daughters cease their identification with their mother and, in its place, experience desire for their fathers, in order to attain full psycho-sexual development as women (Joy et al. 2002: 68-9).

It is clear that Irigaray is placing women in this Dark Continent not yet fully discovered. This condition is not a self-engendered drama of life but allied to the relationship to others. Here the questions can be put whether she is really holding up a mirror to reflect a way out, or whether Irigaray is really charting a map for women's spiritual growth by evaluating the darkness of her existence in a different way.

There seems to be a possibility, as Beattie comments.

Freud sees the mother-daughter relationship as being transformed from one of love and dependence to one of hatred and rivalry in a girl's oedipal development, leading him to suggest an 'Electra complex' as the feminine equivalent of the Oedipus complex, although he never develops this idea. Elsewhere, he claims that 'girls hold their mothers responsible for their lack of a penis' and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage. It is in the light of such theories that Irigaray explores the possible reclamation of the love between mother and daughter, so that she sees the restoration of the symbolic significance of the mother as having particular relevance for the symbolization of the mother-daughter relationship (Beattie 1999: 107).⁶¹

However, there may be another possibility. In one sense, not only is it the story of the celestial family in the myth, but also that of the terrestrial family in reality. Here many will have to struggle with humble self-effacing womanhood/motherhood simply because of having been born of a woman. Humility can be a virtue and no one would deny it, but the problem clearly begins with woman since this disposition takes her far from herself. Nevertheless, it carries with

⁶¹ Beattie (1999) deals with Irigaray's works in the context of Roman Catholic Church. She proposes a method of feminist theological analysis in which the female body has been excluded from the symbols of redemption through the idealization of the Virgin Mary based on a disembodied ideal of maternal-femininity, and the denigration of the Virgin Mary as symbol of the fallen female flesh. Her research is based on the psycho-linguistic theory of Luce Irigaray in order to develop an approach to texts which is capable of seeing beyond the configured narratives of male-dominated ideology.

it a positive aspect; this negativity appears to create a path to power for those who claim to be repressed or helpless. From this vantage point, women may have had a right to define the divine reflecting on their own 'mirror.'

Given the concern of the study, the writer has to grasp women's spirituality through Irigaray's idea of 'divine love.' Where is it standing now? In a manner of speaking, the critical point does not lie in what she says, but in what she does not say. It is often said that unsaying tells much more than saying in a mystical teaching. For this reason, Irigaray's approach to 'divine love' seems to have a mystical nature, so one may identify the main contours of her spiritual journey as 'spaces for the divine presence' (Jantzen 2002: 236). In this section, the writer illustrates how Irigaray thinks of the divine in the feminine when she makes the case for it.

One might claim that Irigaray's major theoretical contribution is the idea that sexual difference exists only in nature - not in culture. Thus, 'man' does not mean the same thing as 'male'; 'woman' is distinct from 'female.' Inevitably, women will remain faithful to their biological sex, but should question those gender identities that exist in society, for these constructions originate with men. Accordingly, women's cultural loyalty should gravitate solely to those new definitions created by women themselves for women's 'biological' destiny (Showalter 1990: 208). Therefore, the female body functions as a referent inscribed a social meaning that puts women into a marginal position both in public and in private.

However, it would be controversial to take this course of interpretation for women's sake, as it confirms the suspicion of essentialism. Nonetheless, Irigaray

has said, “Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through” (Irigaray 1993: 7). Irigaray sees the question of sexual difference as the ontological question about the human condition including all areas of human existence. According to Irigaray, “Sexual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any known to date and without reducing fecundity to the reproduction of bodies and flesh” (*ibid.* 7). This vision may lead Irigaray to believe in or assert the importance of sexual difference.

Through this perseverance of sexual difference, Irigaray is preparing a journey towards the female divinity. She reveals otherwise invisible faces of the female divinity in terms of a ‘sensible transcendental’ (Irigaray 1984: 124), which is one of famous concepts in Irigaray’s works. It is timely to consider whether the divine in the feminine is a transcendent being, just an idea or a metaphor. Irigaray’s notion of a sensible transcendental emphasizes the primacy of the female body, and a relation with the natural world through its own senses, as seen in her poetic style. Therefore, a ‘sensible transcendental’ locates divinity and the female body together in exchanges among themselves and with the other with elemental languages that should possibly transform the essence of the very existence itself.⁶² As Irigaray says: “A transcendence which now remains alive, sensible and even carnal” (Irigaray 2004a: 148), she seems to find a place for women in a ‘sensible transcendental.’ This transcendental in the feminine seems to be far reaching beyond current wisdom. This can be attractive as it is supposed to be for changing and

⁶² <http://www.chloe.uwa.edu.au/outskirts/archive/volume22/bosanquet>; Internet; accessed 03 Mar 2009

growing of the feminine soul. However, the writer wonders whether there can be constricting or limiting, as seen in the section one of chapter two. Perhaps, the writer has difficulty in recognizing where this analysis is leading.

For Irigaray, 'a sensible transcendental' facilitates the measure of individuality of women and provides an objective through which women can begin to communicate among themselves and with the others. Therefore, love between two sexes is the primary locus for realization of women's spiritual potential.

As Martin says,

Irigaray is not engaged in an exercise of transcendental idealism ... she is not claiming to represent woman or women, nor play the role of prophet, mediating between divine will and the popular mass. She is less concerned with stating what the divine is (or should be) than with setting out the structural possibility or necessity of the divine; she is more concerned to elaborate the ontological possibility of the divine as an existential-hermeneutic condition, than to list its features as if it were a being, optically conceived. That said, as this divine is not mystical, she does on occasion offer ways of interpreting, appropriating and creating it, at least for the female divine ... In any case, Irigaray seeks to locate the source of the divine in the passionate, maternal existence of the two sexes (Martin 1995: 133-7)

In reading Martin's work, it is apparent that she is not fully in accord with Irigaray's concept of the divine. The writer finds more sympathy with the thoughts of Irigaray in terms of her concept of the divine, while Martin's approach seems to be more directed to the reality of the material world, so seems to deny the transcendental nature of Irigaray's idea, which is filled with emotions, feelings and thoughts. However, Martin is appreciated by Irigaray herself as she is focusing on the argument that women need the divine in the feminine. Martin critically evaluates this argument in the context of Irigaray's *oeuvre* as a whole.⁶³ There is the possibility in the argument being combined with Irigaray's philosophical view which is not simply materialist. Yet the status of the divine in the feminine casts doubt upon its realization, to the writer's mind.

For Irigaray, love sustains a difference marked by limit or constriction that should be respected by each sex. It is through the love of the other that the divine in the feminine represents an ideal for what women can become.

Irigaray proposes to sustain sexual difference; love transcends beings by sustaining the gap between them yet it is that which draws one to the other for mutual definition. She acknowledges that, to be capable of such a relationship, the love for the other must be strong, even absolute. **Love itself is thereby divine** (emphasis added) for Irigaray; love sustains the mediations between the two genders

⁶³ Martin (1998)'s work does not appear to be aligned with the religious discourse.

because it makes possible their alliance and yet in her account is the only movement that can let the other be” (Irigaray 1997: 28, quoted in Martin 2000: 133).

With this transcendental ideal, women would have an interiority of their own in their own image so that they could love themselves as a woman (Martin 2000: 118). Nevertheless, this kind of becoming may not be good enough for women under the constraints imposed by the patriarchal society in which they must exist. To the writer’s mind, many questions arise. What does this kind of the divine relationship offer women? Can it be completeness of womanhood? Or is it a possible way for the feminine soul to approach women’s spirituality? In addition to these questions, the writer still wonders whether women are really a benefactor from this transcendental ideal.

Martin might give an insight into these questions.

This has to be a central issue if women are to come to be as women. They can will their own becoming, and feel this as the creation and perfection of their subjectivity; they can have a goal and value for themselves, beyond that stipulated by the other sex ... The divine is not some unifying homogenizing force imposing its will upon all women across space and time. Indeed, it ostensibly facilitates the measure of individuality, and provides an objective through which women can at last begin to communicate and relate without the distancing mediation of men and without the terrifying proximity of immediacy in which they rub together

as open wounds. Most importantly, as the divine is what exists for its own sake, personal divine love as a love of the self, a mirror to reflect women's own beauty back to themselves as an identity value rather than to reflect their mean status, their suffering and chastity, and their masquerade. (Martin 1995: 139)

Martin seems to summarize women's spirituality as a cornerstone of women's own identity, while integrating and disintegrating their own identity, reflecting back at a mirror. Thus, she seems to pursue women's spirituality as a model of women's identity which can be the whole truth of womanhood. In comparison, Irigaray is more concerned about the relationship between the two sexes in conceiving the idea of 'divine love.' She believes that men resist relationship with women because of the general 'lack of any existing relationship with the other which respects differences' (Irigaray 2004b: 38). In search for subjectivity, Irigaray's 'divine love' is searching for transcendental forces as 'a process of becoming in which becoming itself is considered divine', as noted by Martin (2000: 139). Irigaray suggests that with the creation of the divine through the four elements women might come-to-be or be born as women, as seen in the first chapter. Irigaray's emphasis upon the four elements opposing her to male philosophers is supposed to offer the unconscious in the feminine, i.e. the return of the sacred feminine.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ One may give the reason for this. That is because 'woman is repressed as subject and desired as object in order to efface the gaze of the other. ... The female object does not look, does not have its own point of view: rather it is erected as an image of the phallus sustaining male desire' (Ives 2003: 26).

However, what does that really matter? In response to the question, the writer would recall the importance of questioning about God as the prime cause. Irigaray (1993: 93) says that it is necessary to go through the question of God every time the sexual relationship comes under consideration. In this regard, the exploration through Irigaray's notion of the divine in the feminine offers an opportunity to see women's spirituality in a different context. However, this notion is not directly related to Goddess Thealogy. Nonetheless, it will provide more relevant understanding of women's spirituality since Irigaray's intention does not seem to lie in creating a new religion, but a new understanding of the divine with a much clearer perception of the womanhood of the divine.

Section 2

Exploring Women's Spirituality: There is No Fixed Idea about Women's Spirituality

In this section, the writer attempts to illustrate how Irigaray's ideas compare with what medieval mystics were saying about women's spirituality. This is because it is not easy to find out a reference point in her philosophical works. Therefore, the main aim is to fill in the gap which is perceived in Irigaray's work.

Regardless of the spiritual or theological background, one may find a 'profound interrelationship between a woman's social and spiritual status and the suffering of her soul', as Lanzetta says (2005: 9). In other words, women's inner life mirrors the outside circumstances. It is often said that women's thought and feeling are representative of embodied spirituality (*ibid.* 81). Taking this point further, one may ask how we account for speaking of women in general.⁶⁵

Irigaray has been concerned about the notion of women who are living in the unconscious as 'outsider' (Ives 2003: 43-4). Thus, she is interested in those women

⁶⁵ Lanzetta, one of radical feminist theologians, proposes a third way i.e. *via feminina* in describing two Christian's paths of union with God: *via positiva* and *via negativa*. According to her, *via feminina* is a linguistic expression that affirms the revelatory and prophetic in women's experience, which maps out a spiritual path to women's divine humanity. She also interprets in a new way that Irigaray's ideas can be a way of affirming women's unique embodiment *via feminine* rather than *via negative* (Lanzetta 2005: 13).

who have been ‘outsiders’ in history, for example, medieval mystics (Irigaray 1985: 20). Irigaray speaks of the position of the medieval mystics, who occupied the ‘liminal’ or sacral place of womanhood.⁶⁶ This indicates Irigaray’s spiritual concern which seeks to allow the unconscious to become conscious when she attempts to bring the repressed into the light.⁶⁷ Also it shows her seeking for a deep sense of the truth about womanhood. Irigaray’s poetic writing style reveals these qualities.⁶⁸

As King, one of famous feminist theologians, says, ‘One of recurrent themes in feminist spirituality is women’s need to find their true self’ (King 1993: 108). However, there is also the question of whether there is ‘a feminine form of subjectivity outside the limitations of gender roles’ (Lanzetta 2005: 95).

Due to women’s socially reinforced lack of self-awareness and attachment to excessive selflessness and other-centeredness, nothingness functions as a kind of reverse purgative process ... as it is passing through women’s gendered ‘nothingness’ to finally gain perspective and wisdom over their own lives (ibid. 96).

⁶⁶ Irigaray says that medieval mystics occupied ‘the only place in the Western history where women might speak and act so publicly’ (Irigaray 1985: 191).

⁶⁷ The other or outsiders are also the concept of Levinas, who is one of the most important European philosophers of the twentieth century. He introduces the other’s face, being ‘otherwise than Being’ and contributes to an ethical conception of the alterity of the other (Irigaray 1993).

⁶⁸ The theme is drawn from the conference, ‘Women and the Divine’, held on 17-19 June 2005 in University of Liverpool. The conference was about women’s spirituality. Irigaray attended as a key speaker, and gave a lecture under the title of ‘Fulfilling Humanity.’

We must consider how women mystics respond to the question of the true self for themselves. For instance, Marguerite Porete, in her book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, claims for herself a new kind of being - through 'becoming nothing.' Emptiness of self – nothingness- is the highest stage of awareness for everything floods back to its source, like a river which flows back into the sea.

As Lanzetta comments, Porete reminds us that;

Feminine subjectivity is discovered not in separation or individuation but in intimacy and interpenetration, not in naming but in emptying out, not in claiming or possessing but in opening and freeing (Lanzetta 2005: 98).

What draws the writer's attention here is the contradictory relationship between subjectivity and the quality of this nothingness. In what ways and to what extent are they related? How does it impact upon women's spirituality? The above questions may suggest that it is not satisfactory for women to seek spirituality only in a traditional way. This indication leads lends credit to Irigaray's line of examining theology.

As Jantzen says,

As long as woman lacks a divine made in her image, she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path of becoming divine. If she is to become

woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of her subjectivity (Jantzen 1998: 15)

The need to discover God who is not an abstraction but interiority, is a part of the recovery of self-esteem, the journey to heal or repair wholeness of existence⁶⁹. The divine sense was not accompanied with the denial of the body; instead it was integrated with the spiritual dimension. Thus the body can be a powerful way of encountering God (Bynum 1987).

Mystical experience was not personalized – the product of the modern individual self – but was the site in which the universal broke the limits of self-identity to become apparent in the depths of subjectivity. The highest value of this self was not to become self-less, but rather surrendered – an open plain of being in which God and soul were truly free to come and go, to share an intimate friendship without restraint or fear ... Mystical knowing was infused, meaning it came through no effort on the part of the receiver, but instead was a gift of divinity – a direct imprint of truth.

⁶⁹ For example, Julian of Norwich, who was one of medieval mystics in the fourteenth century, addressed very important questions concerning the (direct) relation with God. She tried to seek hidden wisdom from God, and used the marriage/love analogy to talk about the relation between herself and God. As for her, the body was usually considered as symbol of divine matters. The most important point that Julian made is to say that 'Love is his meaning' (Jantzen 1987: 91). Julian also suggested that God was our mother. Julian never implied that Christ is not like a woman, but women, in the special love that comes with giving birth and mothering, are like Christ. Through this, however, Julian spoke of the reunification of our sense and our nature. In her conception of the motherhood of God, we are able to find special relevance of Irigaray's thinking in contemporary time. Irigaray (1993) believes that one of the problems of Western thought lies in the absence of the maternal genealogy. This absence is detrimental to women's own identity, and also serves men's interests and helps men to escape the responsibility for their wrongdoing

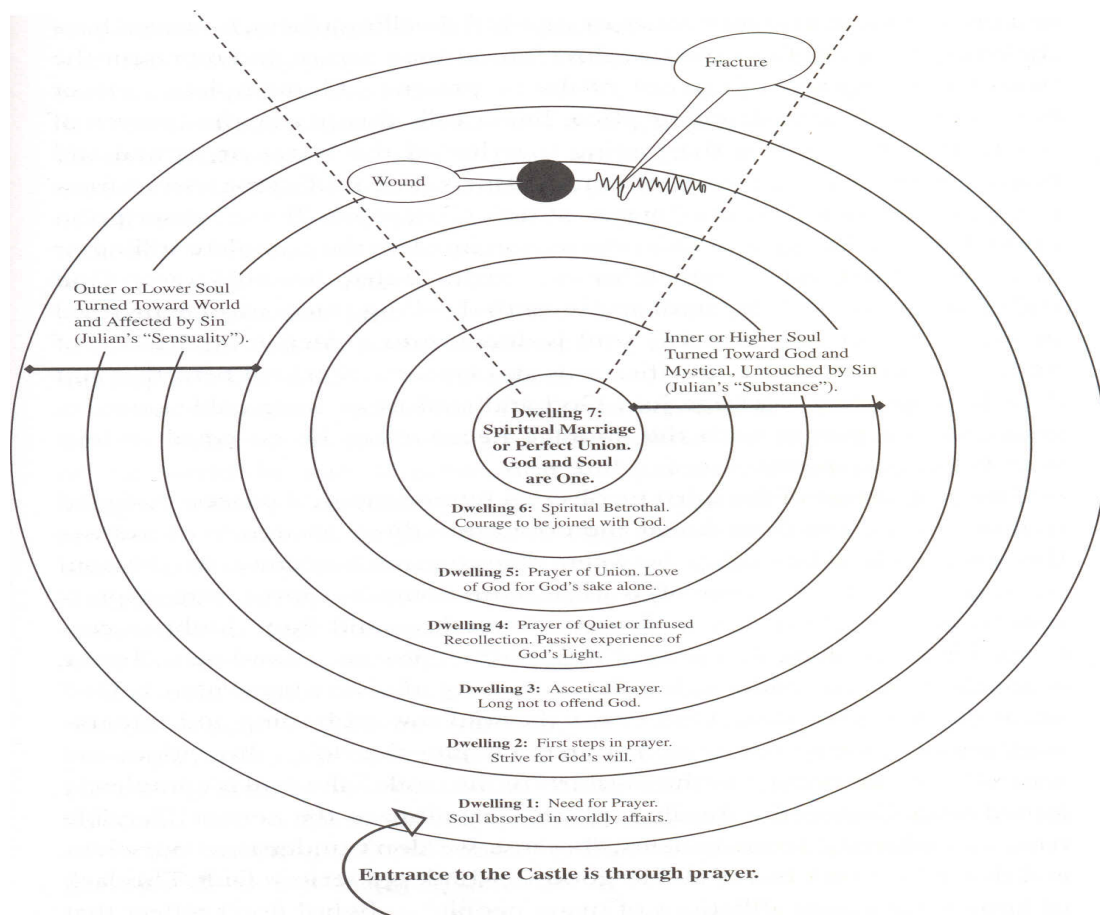
Higher than rational thought or reason, infused knowing activated the contemplative, passive mind, revealing truths unseen and unstudied by ordinary, everyday consciousness. What a woman was able to bear, what she embodied, loved, and suffered became the text of a new book of wisdom (Lanzetta 2005: 100).

From this point, we may need the problematic of the interaction between the body and soul because human existence is based on this physicality. The body is the very place by and in which we live; on and into the soul, in which all kinds of social codes are inscribed, becoming corporeal. Through the body, the souls chart a new domain of conscious awareness bringing it into reality. What is suggested here, therefore, is ‘to understand the inner dynamics of the souls and to chart its growth was a requirement on the path of its spiritual growth of a physical being’ (*ibid.* 99).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Here is an example of cartography of the souls that charts a new domain of conscious awareness. Extracted from Lanzetta (2005: 107)

According to this cartography,

In various ways, our women mystics conceptualize the inner (or higher) and outer (or lower) soul, and how the true self is always one with God ... The inner soul remains pure and holy, turned toward communion with God, while the outer soul, turned toward the world, is susceptible to human desires, attachments, and sins. The lower soul speaks of what is achievable through human efforts and the ordinary help of grace, and it



Seven Dwellings (Moradas) in the Interior Castle

God Heals the Soul from the Inside out

thus considered to be 'active.' The higher soul functions through the operation of supernatural grace; it is receptive, operating in non-dualistic, unitive states of consciousness, and deals with the 'passive,' or mystical, elements of the spiritual life. (Lanzetta 2005: 103).

Thus, the journey toward the inner soul is a journey of self-knowledge and self-discovery. As the soul advances toward the center of its castle, consciousness moves from oppression to freedom, from human love to 'divine love', and from doubt to certainty. Despite the noise, disruption, and wasted time that occurs 'on the outskirts of the castle', the soul is completely joined with God in the dwelling places very close to the center (*ibid.* 108). The intimacy achieved in this mystic contemplation impresses on the mystic how the soul in its essence is always one with God.

In the soul's journey, the female lover confronts 'a deeper and more radical fracture that inhabits her consciousness and battles to recognize the misogyny that is at the bottom of her self-doubt and feeling of worthlessness as a woman' (*ibid.* 149).

Therefore,

It is crucial to women's full presence on earth that they understand, in order not to undermine, how divine revelation expresses itself in and through female bodies. Reading God's presence through the body of women is the writing of women's divinity in the world' (ibid. 157)

Therefore, to pose ‘the question of the divine’ (Martin 2000: 2) in Irigaray’s works is to investigate notions of God, the ideal, and transcendence and immanence, which can be extended to the theological discourse for ‘a new horizon of the divine’ (Anderson et al. 2004: 36). This horizon may give us an opportunity to get involved in the suffering of women and compassion for and solidarity with human suffering is not separable from ‘becoming divine’ (Jantzen 1998: 263), if we are willing to explore it.

Section 3

Synthesis of ‘Divine Love’ in Luce Irigaray’s Philosophical Works and Goddess Theology

It is certain that Irigaray’s idea of ‘divine love’ is concerned with ‘the forgetting of the nature or Goddess, as woman’ (Irigaray 2004: vii) Moreover, Irigaray in her poetic writing seems to invent some sort of women’s ritual in the meditation including elemental language of the four elements, to introduce key themes of Goddess Theology.⁷¹ These are critiques of ‘traditional’ representations of the divine and certain aspects of women’s spirituality and sexuality. Thus, this section deals with the synthesis of her ideas and Goddess traditions.⁷² There are three points;

First, there is the fundamental approach in Irigaray’s notion of ‘divine love’ which challenges the image of God. This challenge seems to have to do ‘with a more fully fleshed out female imaginary’ in Goddess traditions (Grey 2001: 28). The same reason for questioning the image of God is found from the fact that this generally accepted image functions to exclude women and to exclude female imagery from being able to symbolize the divine (Ruether 1983)

⁷¹ For more understanding of women’s rituals, see Walker (2002).

⁷² Goddess traditions in this dissertation are used to represent the concept of metaphorical figures and not narratives related to the traditional Goddess figures.

However, Carol Christ, a pioneering figure in Theology, asks many questions that the writer is able to rephrase like this. What are effects of this newly found love of the divine for women whose spiritual experience has been imposed upon them by the male God? Is this spiritual dimension of feminism avoiding its own responsibility in the movement? Or does the emergence of the symbol of Goddess among women have significant meanings for women's sake? (Christ 1992: 274)

In order to answer these questions, according to Christ (*ibid.*), we must first understand the importance of religious symbol in human life and consider the effect of male symbolism of God on women. Even people who no longer 'believe in God' or participate in the institutional structure of religion still may not be free of the power of the symbolism of God the Father. A symbol functions at the level of the unconscious, which enables people to cope with the extreme situation in human existence (i.e. death, evil, suffering) and to pass through life's important transitions (i.e. birth, sexuality, death).

Therefore, religious symbol systems focused around exclusively male images of divinity create the impression that female power can never be fully legitimate or wholly beneficent. Woman may consider herself as like God (created in the image of God) only by denying her own sexual identity. But she can never have the experience that is freely available to every man and boy in the culture, of having her full sexual identity affirmed as being in the image and likeness of God (Christ 1992: 275).

Second, there is a certain similarity between Irigaray's poetic writing and theological methodology. In the way of listening to women's spiritual lives,

‘theological method and content is intentionally imaginative, holistic, intuitive and artistic’ (Raphael 1996: 60). Addressing the deity in the feminine imagery is a way of moving towards the female divinity. Irigaray seems thereby to be preparing a journey towards Goddess in describing the pathway to the union with the divine in the feminine, to lead the reader that way.

Third, as in goddess spirituality, Irigaray retrieves the locus of the female sacredness by associating women’s embodied finitude or bodily presence with the sacred. Through veneration of the goddess, ritualizing of female biological processes, and respect for the maternal productivity of the earth, women were associated with divine power in goddess traditions (Raphael 1996: 23). In goddess spirituality, women’s otherness ‘is **no longer the shame of being denied subjecthood, but a sign of the spiritual power of female being**’ (emphasis added, *ibid.* 35)

In this regard, Christ suggests that the simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of goddess is the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power (Christ 1992: 277). It is only logical to assume that the strength and independence of female power can be intuited by contemplating ancient and modern images of the Goddess. Although the meaning of the symbol of Goddess is simple and obvious, it is yet difficult for many to comprehend since it stands in sharp contrast to the paradigms of female dependence on males that have been predominant in the culture.

This kind of recognition may have led to the consciousness that ‘it may best be described as female sacrality: a kind of embodied energy or ‘woman power’ (Raphael 1996: 52). If that is so, this raises many questions. For example, is there any discernible principle in the female divinity? Does it give woman an ultimate power to define what the divine means as an emerging subject? Where does the boundary lie? If women’s sacral power redirects towards their own need, what would happen, even though ‘thealogy does not propose the automatic empowerment by simply happening to be female’ (*ibid.* 67)?

In order to answer these questions, we may need to introduce the leading figure of Thealogy again. Carol Christ seeks to overcome the dualistic hierarchy of male and female, mind and body, heaven and earth, feeling and thinking, dark and light, the one and many, transcendence and immanence, transforming them into a new interactive unity, in an attempt to give a comprehensive account of thealogy (in Ruether 2005: 290). It would be a necessary starting point to value the female, the body, the earth, the emotions, and the unconscious from goddess traditions. For Christ, the Goddess is defined as ‘intelligent embodied love as the ground of all being.’ The Goddess is the immanent life energy in all things. She is a loving relation with existing beings. She is mind and body, spirit and matter, not as a dualism of one against the other, but as one embodied energy and spirit (*ibid.* 290-1).

Interestingly enough, Christ insists that biology matters, in response to the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate. According to Christ,

Men and women have different bodies, which give them different experiences and capacities. The goddess traditions celebrate and valorise the female body and its functions and thus restore beauty and dignity to that which has been devalued in the male-dominated society (ibid. 291)

All in all, there are striking similarities between two approaches. Moreover, we should be able to reconstruct two approaches in a new light through interchanging conversations. However, it is noted to indicate that Irigaray's approach to 'divine love' continues to insist on holding to a central position between views of feminists and Goddess advocates. Although there is a certain advantage in engaging with religious traditions, it is still not easy to say which side Irigaray takes. This may be confusing, but may be providing the catalyst that we may seek when we engage with women's spirituality in religious discourse. Therefore, the writer would suggest making a connection between the two perspectives in bringing about an appreciation of women's spirituality. Irigaray sheds light into unconsciousness bringing it into consciousness, which somehow makes it possible to engage with women's spirituality from Goddess Theology.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, this dissertation has been framed by the question of what 'divine love' comprises in Irigaray's works. In speaking of 'divine love', Irigaray suggests the centrality of an intermediary role of the four elements between the two sexes in relation to 'divine love.' Marginal as it seems to be, this understanding may have a significant implication in broadening theological perspectives on women's spirituality.

In terms of 'spirituality', genuine feminine identity may lie in the unconscious which is repressed beyond the realm of reason in Irigaray's thinking (Graham 1996). It may be stated that Irigaray's ideas on 'divine love', both theological and poetic in her approach, are situated at the opposite pole to theological thinking. Theological thinking encompasses well-defined spiritual doctrine with male-centered principles. There is common ground in that both philosophies are aiming for the same goal-the relationship with the divine and the position of God. However, Irigaray adopts an entirely different approach in seeking this goal, but starts from a position challenging existing theological discourse and rejecting its established structure and concepts. Rather, Irigaray produces a unique voice in speaking of women and their part in the unconscious. She seeks the divine in the feminine, with women reaching their own identity and standing separately from the male image of God. Perhaps, a

wider approach was needed to verify the true nature of Irigaray's ideas of 'divine love.'

Therefore, in the first chapter, the writer has covered three narratives of two lovers in order to throw light upon the symbolic order which originated in a masculine-centred manner. The writer traces a process of the allocation of the 'lesser or lower functions' to women in 'divine love' through Irigaray's 'elemental' poetic language. In so doing, the writer may be able to open up an ambivalent possibility before women in the form of alternate choices: accepting or dismissing Irigaray's approach. However, the question is how the unsymmetrical relationship between the two sexes impacts upon women's choices on a spiritual journey.

In the second chapter, three key problematic consequences of Irigaray's idea of 'divine love' have been identified. Firstly, the methodology is problematic because of certain negative effects on women. Secondly, there are issues of essentialism and hetero-sexism that raise questions about her commitment to sexual difference in 'divine love'. Thirdly, Irigaray's relationship with feminist theological perspective should be oriented towards 'a feminist standpoint', rather than remaining in-between. Irigaray's reading on 'divine love' appears to share important aspects with a feminist standpoint. It seems that she misses out some important common ground that could be gained from engaging with theological perspectives.

In the third chapter, the writer has dealt with spiritual dimensions of Irigaray's idea of 'divine love' coupled with the writer's own experience. Irigaray is preparing

a journey towards the divine in the feminine, if the reader is prepared to accept this direction. She seems to shed light into the unconscious, which makes it possible to engage in women's spirituality from Goddess Theology. Later in the chapter, the writer attempted to clarify how Irigaray's ideas compare with what medieval mystics thought about women's spirituality. Finally, theological perspectives exploring the divine in the feminine tend to lead to the Goddess Theology in terms of some commonality. Although Irigaray's relationship with Goddess Theology is ambiguous, the writer would suggest making a connection between the two approaches in bringing into perspective women's spirituality.

Through this dissertation, the writer may have asked very basic but fundamental questions. Should we talk of women's spirituality? Should there be special identity for women at all? When we are asking about women's spirituality, what is it that we are actually asking? Most of us believe or pretend to believe that women's spirituality is important, but there is no general consensus regarding women's spirituality. It seems that a few women are still confined as a repressed being. It has led the writer to search for the very foundation of its philosophical justification and she chose Luce Irigaray as a guide in this journey. She took a critical approach to Irigaray's theoretical position in order to start the conversation with Irigaray's thinking.⁷³ Following Irigaray's line of thought, the writer's approach is a logical process in looking for 'God according to our gender.'

⁷³ The writer has benefited from attending the doctoral seminar held by Luce Irigaray in Queen Mary College, University of London (School of Business and Management) between 15th and 21st June 2008. The seminar included explanations by Luce Irigaray of the key-words and key-thoughts of her work, and presentation by the students about their works.

According to Irigaray (1993: 114), women as ‘the other’ are excluded from the symbolic exchange as a speaker or listener. Nevertheless, the other can be visible with a ‘mirror’ (*speculum*) reflecting women’s experience in the negative, following the line of Irigaray’s thought. Meanwhile, there is awareness in the Western world that ‘the other’ is becoming increasingly a less acceptable concept.

At this stage, the writer would like to make a point of her own relationship with the philosophical discourse of Luce Irigaray, which serves to deconstruct a homogenous picture of her own cultural identity as a Korean woman.⁷⁴ The concept of sexual difference is likely to be adapted well to the strict gender role of the traditional Korean culture. This is because most Koreans tend to equalize all the differences into the one single and homogenous cultural identity as a gender-based society. A common culture is viewed as an essential element in their identity. Those who do not share such a feature are often rejected by society. In most cases, Korean women’s lives are so limited that they are not able to pursue their own lives because of the restrictions, which expect them to be dedicated only to the family matters, especially on the husband’s side. Women’s fate usually goes hand in hand with that of their own family, not by their own wishes. There is only vague hope that their sacrificial life might be rewarded within a familial structure. That is because women will be able to increase their power within a family depending upon their own

⁷⁴ It is almost certain that Irigaray is of help in analyzing its reality as there are many women confined as the repressed in Korea. This may be not unexpected. Irigaray (2002) is now in search of how to renew a bond with the Eastern tradition, which would be relevant to this dissertation.

family's prominence, their own father's and husband's social status or wealth and/or their own children's social and academic achievement. Even though for the women there is no time and space, it can be said to be a comfortable cage like Nora's in *A Doll's House*.⁷⁵ There is no room for formal complaint. It can hardly be said that the family provides an environment which allows a woman to pursue her own wishes. This nature of the society may appeal to Irigaray's commitment to sexual difference. For this reason, the writer would like to consider the Korean society as 'the other' through Irigaray's *speculum* (mirror). In terms of spiritual conditions,⁷⁶ the Korean society is based on quite a unique family ideology.⁷⁷ As for the Korean society, the established patriarchal and authoritative social relations that have reflected in every aspect of social life, e.g. the private and the public and that have resulted in the

⁷⁵ Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) was a playwright and his work, *A Doll's House* (1879), was considered to enquiry into the condition of family life and the issue of morality. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henrik_Ibsen; Internet, accessed 22 June 2010

⁷⁶ Seen from the religious landscapes, Korean society is presented as a unique multi-religious society. Confucian ethics dominate the daily life of Koreans, and *hyanggyo*, Confucian educational institutions, are found scattered throughout the country. At every scenic spot, there is a Buddhist monastery, and most of the nation's tangible cultural assets are Buddhist. Yet when entering any Korean city, one is immediately impressed by the number of Protestant churches. During the 1980s, Catholic churches have served as the representative of the conscience of Korean society. At present, Buddhists and Protestants, each makes up about 20 percent of the population, while Catholics make up around four percent. Thus, about 25 percent of the population are Christians. Thus, Korea is the most actively Christian society in East Asia. In addition to these groups, there are a number of shamanism devotees, new religions, and Confucianism worshippers who are still not represented in religious surveys. In addition, an Imam attached to the Turkish army (one of the 16 U.N. forces which participated in the Korean War) introduced Islam to Korea. Through his efforts, some Koreans worshiped with the Turkish soldiers and converted to Islam. In 1966, a Korean Islamic organization was formed and in the same year, a mosque was erected in Seoul. Since then, there are now more than twenty-thousand Moslems in Korea. Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are the representative of world religions which have made a decisive contribution to the formation of the various aspects of world culture. Although these religions all coexist in Korea, at present none of them is able to represent Korean culture. http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea/rel/multireligious_societies_and_the.htm; Internet; accessed 26 July 2008

⁷⁷ To sum up very briefly, the family in Korea is implanted as the nuclear family without the mass consumption as it is located in a place semi-peripheral to the world economy. The family wage exists only in the upper working class and the middle class, and the neo-Confucian ideology functions as the family ideology, which complements the nuclear family, not like the sexual liberation ideology in the USA. For the influence of the neo-Confucian ideology in the Korean society, see Chung (2005)

marginalization of Korean women, still remain dominant.⁷⁸ At the same time, a change similar to that of the 1960s' sexual liberation in the West is now occurring. Given the circumstances, Irigaray's ideas are able to help us appreciate the barbarity of the Korean society: both sexes' genealogies reduce to only that of husband, just as broadly happens in the West, but in a significantly more oppressive manner. It can be clearly understood in term of Irigaray's concept of 'maternal genealogy' (Irigaray 1993). Once one genealogy has been reduced to the other's, it becomes impossible to define two different sexes; the genealogy of the woman has been collapsed inside the man's (*Ibid.* 3). Indeed it is simply not possible to introduce the Korean context without recognizing women's systematic exclusion from the society or inclusion in a restricted way through the structure of the family. Family structure is virtually based on the symbolic violence against women. It means that the violence has been deeply associated with the internal social order, rather than the external one. Moreover actual sexual violence is a central part of women's oppression partly due to the colonial legacy in the first half of the twentieth century, but mainly due to the internal familial and social structure.

To look at it from a feminist perspective, the increasing awareness of the violence against women would affect their lives in a positive way, especially in terms of the family and the community. However, the majority of women do not even ask the nature of their existential condition in an existing social structure. One

⁷⁸ As a matter of fact, the Korean society strive its survival in the two contradictory attempts: traditional neo-Confucian culture has been challenged, especially traditional role of women, whilst many of Koreans still stick to the certain aspects of the culture in order to maintain their own identity.

might not change the attachment to the human bondage, but might ask what benefits the bond is supposed to bestow upon them.⁷⁹ It is also inspiring to see the different picture of the relationship between the two sexes, as visualized by Irigaray.

It is a fact that Irigaray's philosophical thinking is essentially embedded in the European context, but it has equal relevance in the Eastern part of the world in respect to women's position of exclusion or oppression. The Korean situation is more or less unknown in the Western world. It is an interesting thought to consider an impact of introducing Irigaray's alternative way of thinking by a Korean woman. Therefore, this would be a suggestion for future research. However, it is not realistic to generalize women's experience because this would ignore the unique nature of individual experience, both culturally and historically. Hence this dissertation considers women's spirituality by examining Irigaray's philosophical discourse within the Korean context in a limited way.

While this dissertation has considered the field of theology, it is focused particularly on feminist philosophical works despite the complexity of engaging with Irigaray's works. There is much scope for developing further the relationship of Irigaray's works and the field of religious discourse, perhaps with greater emphasis on the contribution of religious thinkers to the concept of the Divine.

⁷⁹ Despite the long legacy of women's oppression, Korean women do not consider their men, as an enemy, but tend to feel sympathy with them. This is because Korean women have established a stable and rewarding role within the society, so long as they remain faithful to the familial responsibility.

At the conclusion of this research, the writer finds herself seeing Irigaray in a new light. That is because the writer has focused on a certain aspect of Irigaray's theological developments, perhaps the second phase (Irigaray et al. 1995). One may see that the writer shows a tendency to confuse Irigaray's critical and constructive projects. This has its own merit and limitation as two points are intertwined. The more one examines her work, the more it becomes apparent that she seeks to be both an observer and participant in her arguments. Irigaray appears to stand at the extreme pole of philosophical view in her approach to the Divine. This stance is also reflected upon the distance taken from so-called 'mainstream feminism.' In her work, she projects feelings of negativity, as though she lives in a dark area of thought, and she does not offer insights on how to escape from her position. Some other method should be found to allow women identity and spirituality in a positive manner, and this work would offer scope for more research, examining approaches removed some distance from Irigaray's negativity.

But her work provides a powerful voice for women and a refreshing new approach to thinking on the relationship of women and the Divine. Irigaray speaks for women everywhere, and particularly for those who exist in cultures where oppression of women is the norm. This is especially cogent to the writer's own experience as a Korean woman living in the culture which is described in the following appendix.

APPENDIX
A BRIEF HISTORY OF KOREA FROM A FEMINIST
PERSPECTIVE⁸⁰

If you educate a man, you educate a person; if you educate a woman, you educate the whole family (Sinith Sittirak 1998:131).

It is generally acknowledged how important it is to recognize ‘the significance of producing knowledge’ based on its own experience (Mohanty 1991: 11).

⁸⁰ Here is a brief chronology of Korean history in modern times
Extracted from Seungsook Moon (2005: 183-4).

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1905 | Annexation of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910) to Japan as a protectorate |
| 1910-45 | Japanese colonization |
| 1945-48 | Rule of the U.S. Army military government |
| 1947 | Establishment of the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea) |
| 1948 | Establishment of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) |
| 1948-60 | First Republic (Present Syngman Rhee) |
| April 19, 1960 | Student uprising and the overthrow of Rhee’s regime Second Republic (Prime Minister Chang Myŏn) |
| May 16, 1961 | Military coup led by General Park Chung Hee Military junta rule |
| 1963-72 | Third Republic (President Park Chung Hee) |
| Oct. 1971 | Declaration of Yushin Constitution Fourth Republic (President Park Chung Hee) |
| Oct. 26, 1979 | Assassination of Park by his KCIA chief Interregnum (President Choi Kyu-ha) |
| Dec 12, 1979 | Military coup led by General Chun Doo Hwan |
| May 18-28, 1980 | Kwangju citizens’ democracy movement and their massacre by the military Fifth Republic (President Chun Doo Hwan) |
| June 29, 1987 | Declaration of Democratization Six Republic (President Roh Tae Woo) |
| 1993-97 | President Kim Young Sam |
| 1998-2002 | President Kim Dae Jung |

The Romanization of Korean words here follows the McCune-Reischauer system. The Korean names also follow the Korean way of writing surname and given name in order.

However, it is also not possible to create the knowledge with a mere file of facts. To the writer's mind, the situation requires a 'mirror' reflecting its own reality. A feminist point of view could be one. Feminism is a part of its complicated history, which can provide a valuable mirror reflecting its own reality.⁸¹ Korea was not colonized by any western powers, but was strongly influenced by China throughout the history and has experienced colonization (1905-1945) by Japan at the threshold of modern times. To put it simply, one can say that Korean national identity was shaped by foreign influences and this history has left an indelible mark on Korean society of the present time.

A feminist researcher, who specializes in the relationship between militarism and women, Kwon In Sook (2005: 24-5) says, "The common experiences of all Koreans during the Japanese occupation, and of the post-1945 division of the Korean peninsula have helped elevate cultural/political nationalism to the status of a religious ideology that is embraced across sharp social and ideological divisions." It would be controversial whether Koreans do share a common ethos in a single 'community.' What does it mean to be a woman in the context? How does the history shape, construct, and influence the reality of the Korean woman?

Korea was colonized by the Japanese until 1945. After the liberation from Japan with its defeat in World War II, Korea was divided into North Korea, ruled by the military force of the Soviet Union, and South Korea supported by the United States. By 1948, a socialist government was created in North Korea with the support of the USSR, whilst a capitalist government took the reins in South Korea with the

⁸¹ It is useful to consider Jayawardena (1986: 213-225), which summarizes briefly the history of Korea until the end of World War II and of colonization by Japanese.

support from the USA. In 1950, the invasion of the South by the North led to the Korean War and its devastating results, and lasted for a period of three years. The war destroyed the agricultural economy, as well as the economic infrastructure and whole towns in both the North and the South. Moreover, the tragedy of the war was that more than 5 million Koreans were killed. Since the hostility ended in 1953, Korea has been faced with permanent division between North and South. Continued and vengeful ideological conflict has left people's minds severely affected in both North and South Korea, with the emergent states entrenching their own domination by manipulating the mind of the populace. Each state has served its own ruling group's interests by encouraging popular enmity towards the other. In South Korea, the state effort has been successful until very recently in making most Korean people see the possibility of another war as a threat for almost 50 years. National defence, consequently, has become a persistent theme and undeniable priority, not just politically but personally as well.

The Park Chung Hee military regime (1961-1979) peaked in the era of the militarized state, especially after 1968, the year when North Korea provoked several military attacks to protest the dispatch of South Korea troops to Vietnam. The regime of General Park Chung Hee fostered both anti-communist feelings among the South Korean and a sense of nationalistic sacrifice to promote rapid industrialization, both in the name of national security and national self-defence.

In the 1960s, Korea pursued a path towards industrialization. Park Chung Hee, who assumed power through a military coup in 1961, proclaimed the principal policy of the Korean state to be modernizing the nation by means of the industrialization. In order to fulfil these goals, Korea was to be drastically mobilized

as nationalist collective. He was successful in grafting the concept of the patriotic warrior on to a statist agenda for economic development. Park put stress on the promotion of economic power in order to counter North Korea. This ‘economic growth first, reunification later’ principle became Park’s main ideological claim through the 1960s. One of Park’s main propaganda efforts through the 1970s was to instil in all Koreans the idea that industrial soldiers would save the nation from poverty by building a self-reliant defence. The intentional direction of Korean modernization was production and development represented by masculine images, while women’s introduction into the workforce was seen as a rather dangerous aspect of modernization, exemplified by consumerism and loose morality (Kim Eun Shil 1999). In 1970s, the state-built censorship did not allow any kind of individualistic desire and consumerism, which usually women are considered to represent. However, women were invited to become involved into the state project as workers and active participants in population control. ‘Dutiful daughters willingly sacrifice themselves for the good of the nation,’ was the chief image the Korean government used for mobilizing young women, while attempting to limit the family to two children. Women played a critical role in the ‘economic miracle’ by providing low-wage labour for light industry that anchored Korea’s economic development in the 1960s and 1970s (Sievers 1988: 235).

There are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, women were supposed to break with Korea’s traditional home oriented feminized sphere by participating in the public domain and doing manual work for the state. On the other hand, the industrializing scheme to fend off the communist threat from the North was relied upon to sustain the traditional image of the sacrificing daughter, thus ensuring that

Korean women stayed firmly located within the rigid framework of gender division. Women could be more assertive, proud and communal by taking part in the government scheme, but their role was limited by the expectation that they still remain true to the ideal of Korean femininity; a wise mother and good wife.⁸² Women's sacrifice and acceptance of the existing hierarchical order was said to be for the sake of larger social causes. This meant that the taken-for-granted acceptance of military build-up for the nation sought individuals to concede their interests, consciously or unconsciously, for the bigger authority and cause, which suggests the roots of an authoritarian and collective ideology and culture (Kwon In Sook 2005: 17).

In the 1980s, the military launched another attempt to seize power after the assassination of Park Chung Hee, and the military leader, Chun Doo Hwan took over power again. In the process, Chun ordered the execution of many civilians in the city of Kwangju in 1980. The victims were mainly local people demanding civil democracy and protesting against the arrest of the opposition leader, Kim Dae Jung, who later became the president of South Korea (1997-2002).⁸³

Since 1987, militarism began to decline in many sectors of the society as massive number of citizens pursued democratic reform and the civilian governments

⁸² Kendall (1985) enthusiastically indicates the social subordination of Korean women in an ethnographic ritual realm in her book, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*. Similarly, *Korean Shamanism: The Cultural Paradox*, written by Kim Chong Ho (2003), investigates the place of the shamans within the Korean society, which is based on the ethnographic field work in Korea. As for a similar reality of women in South Asia, see Bhasin et al (1986).

⁸³ Lee Joo Hee (1997: 135-155) gives special attention to democratization in South Korea as it is one of very few examples where political liberalization was initiated by massive mass demonstrations despite the economic performance of the authoritarian governments. However, Pak Se Jin (1998: 45-73) points out that both forces from above and from below played equally important roles in the process of democratization in Korea.

were established.⁸⁴ In 1988, after three decades of the authoritarian rule by two military generals, Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, Korea had an open presidential election resulting in the first elected president, Roh Tae Woo, despite his military background. Entering 1990s, the process of political liberalization in Korea became irreversible. Although a new concept of defining the identity in the name of the civil society becomes a primary task for the Korean people, nationalism and gender seem to be again an escape route from the contradiction between the strong western orientation of the modernization project and search for the identity in Korea (Kim Eun Shil 1999). It is suggested that nationalism and gender are ‘the offspring of modernity’, in which the ‘order of the nation is firmly rooted in essential and hierarchical differences between woman and man’ (quoted in Sievers 1988: 237). While men identify themselves according to the social relations they occupy, not according to their gender identity, women are still bound by an identity that is seemingly historic and by their essential existence, despite the diverse identities they create themselves.

It is seen that despite the dramatic changes which have taken place in the last decades, there still remain strong vestiges of the male dominated society with women perceived as occupying a subordinate role in that society.

⁸⁴ It is noteworthy to consider the book, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, written by Moon Seung Sook (2005), which explores the possibility of the differences between men and women in terms of their citizenship trajectories in the period of beginning in 1963, when the military regime started, up to the 1990s, when militarism retreated to some extent and civil society emerged following the democratization movement of 1987.

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