

Outside Diotima's Educational Matrix: Queer Remains in Socrates' Silenic* Enfoldings

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"Did you know that the Ancient Greeks had homosexual sex?" The tactical gesture is amongst the most predictable ones to occur in Greek Cypriot classroom debates over the compromised, feminized masculinity of the homosexual, as well as over the minoritarian vs. universalist (Sedgwick 1985) nature of homosexuality's spread. The gesture is as likely to embarrass the homophobe's vocal claim that sodomy is un-national as to sharpen the reticent policy maker's view that one should always be careful which Ancient Greek texts to include in the curriculum. A feminist reclaiming of Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, like Halperin's (2004) historicism, could help contain homophobic panic against the *Symposium* and create possibilities for a comprehensive reception of the work's pedagogical ideas and pathos. The shifts and twists of teacher-student roles, the corrosion of their asymmetry, the egalitarian redistribution of ignorance and desire, the metaphors of birthing, nurturing and enabling, the parody of banking notions of education and the deliberate leading of the search for comfort zones to misfire resonate with poststructuralist approaches to learning and critical pedagogy. In fact, such a pedagogical reading inspires a textual reorientation of the whole text around the pedagogical matrix, since Diotima's speech gestates and births, anew, phantasms from the previous speakers' eulogies of eros. The pedagogical matrix of Diotima, this paper argues, drains the *Symposium* of misogynist male homoeroticism but also drains the imagination from queer affect. Outside the female erotics of gestation and birth, which overlap with heteronormativity's dream of immortality through reproduction, the paper traces remains of queer affectivity and precarity, such as the silenic self-figurations of Socrates and the rupturing, childish erotics of Alcibiades' shame (contrasted to shame as a disciplinary apparatus in Phaedrus' praise of the loved-lover homosocial bond). A backwards reading (Love 2007) of the *Symposium*, around and outside Diotima's pedagogical matrix, indulges in the queer affect that remains alive so long as it remains incongruous and irreconcilable to pedagogical promise.

*Silenic: relating to, or characteristic of Silenus or the sileni.

"Silenuses were little figurines split down the middle (imagunculas ... sectiles) and manufactured in this way so that they could be opened to display their richness, whereas, when they were closed, they showed the ridiculous and grotesque outline (ridiculum ac monstruosam ... speciem) of a flute-player. Open (apertae), they suddenly revealed the figure of a god (numen) [...], a great soul, a sublime and truly philosophical soul (animum ... sublimem ac vere philosophicum)" (Erasmus, *Sileni Alcibiadis* (1527), pp. 3-8, in Usher (2002).