

Lipstick Signification and Written Flirtation: Gendering Metaphor in Locke's "The Abuse of Words"

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"Metaphors are no arguments, my pretty maiden"
—*The Fortunes of Nigel*

Abstract

This paper investigates the twofold nature of the philosophical renunciation of figurative language and the feminine. I begin by examining the claims of feminist philosopher Phyllis Rooney, who echoes the familiar observation that reason has conventionally been linked to masculinity, while unreason has been linked to femininity. Rooney's innovative move is to expose this link by highlighting how the reason/unreason dichotomy has been constructed through "sex metaphors" in prominent philosophical works. A "sex metaphor" refers to some aspect of a "male-female dynamic," such as a voyeuristic act, a sexual act, or a marriage relationship. Rooney aptly draws upon John Locke's chapter "The Abuse of Words" to illustrate how the use of a sex metaphor can suggest that femininity is emblematic of unreason and hence, works to justify the expulsion of femininity from philosophy. However, as Rooney later acknowledges, Locke not only utilizes a sex metaphor in "The Abuse of Words," he also genders the linguistic mechanism of metaphor itself. Locke's curious comparison of woman with figurative language calls for a thorough analysis of the role of gender in Locke's semiotic theory. What follows is an attempt to expose the chain of association that allows Locke to imagine he can connect up metaphor with femininity and expel each from philosophy as perpetrators of an "Abuse of Words."

In Phyllis Rooney's article "Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason" she suggests that throughout the history of philosophy, "Reason has regularly been portrayed and understood in terms of images and metaphors that involve the exclusion or denigration of some element—body, passion, nature, instinct—that is cast as 'feminine'" (77). Rooney echoes the familiar feminist observation that reason has conventionally been linked to masculinity while unreason has been linked to femininity.¹ Her innovative move is to expose this link by highlighting how the reason/unreason dichotomy has been constructed through sex metaphors in prominent philosophical works. A "sex metaphor" refers to some aspect of a "male-female dynamic," such as a voyeuristic act, a sexual act, or a marriage relationship (Rooney 78). Enumerating

¹ See Genevieve Lloyd's 1984 publication *The Man of Reason: "Male and Female" in Western Philosophy*. Rooney credits Lloyd's well-known study on the regular association between reason and maleness in the Western philosophical canon (78).

passages from Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Rousseau, Hegel, Kant and Schopenhauer, Rooney details how in each a sex metaphor is deployed in the explanation of reason and unreason. She proclaims “the pattern is well set in place,” the early uses of sex metaphor portray the growth of reason in terms of an extrusion of some aspect that is seen as feminine, while the later examples characterize a lapse in reason as involving an explicit or implicit intrusion of a feminine element (85).

Inspired by Rooney’s paper, I wish to take a slightly different direction with my own investigation of metaphor and gender in philosophy. Instead of looking at the appearance and impact of sex metaphors in philosophical texts, I will discuss how the linguistic mechanism of metaphor itself, and figurative language at large, has been cast as an inferior and feminine mode of expression in philosophy. Here I do not mean that there is something inherently ‘feminine’ revealed in the use of figurative language. Rather, I mean that there is an antipathy towards the use of figurative language in philosophy, and that antipathy is expressed in sexist terms. What results, I propose, is a twofold construction about what philosophy is not: philosophy is not figurative language, and philosophy is not feminine.

A quintessential example of this antipathy can be found in John Locke’s chapter entitled “The Abuse of Words” given in Book III of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Rooney herself touches upon this chapter in support of her own argument, for indeed, Locke does invoke a sex metaphor. But Locke not only makes use of a sex metaphor, he claims that figurative language itself is like a woman:

[...]all the art of rhetorick, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions. And thereby mislead the judgment...eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived. (Locke 146)

Eleven years later in her essay on Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Philosophy, Language and Wizardry,” Rooney revisits this passage, correctly noting that Locke appears to perform a dual displacement of women as “other than the ideal or ‘normed’ philosopher subject,” and metaphor as “other than the proper language and discourse of philosophy” (32). Building upon Rooney’s observation, I subject Locke’s chapter to close analysis in order to address the following questions that arise from his strange comparison: how is it that something ostensibly gender-neutral, like a form of signification, can be thought of in gendered terms? What is the chain of association that allows Locke to connect figurative language with femininity? What picture of both figurative language and femininity does Locke construct by connecting one to the other? If both figurative language and women commit Locke’s “abuse of words,” then is literal language the ‘proper’ mode of signification for philosophical discourse, and is that masculine by default?

To assist in addressing these questions I draw on the work of American philosopher of language Max Black and French feminist philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff. Both thinkers note that metaphor, allegory, or any terms considered to invoke image in thought, are historically dismissed as 'ornamental' in terms of their philosophical contribution. Philosophers tend to assume that metaphor can be clarified if it is replaced with literal terminology, and consequently, that figurative language is nothing more than a diversion from the real substance of a philosophical statement. The metaphor is to philosophy as lipstick is upon the mouth, it gives aesthetic pleasure but it is inessential to discourse. In the patriarchal imagination this caricature of figurative language slides very quickly into an association with femininity. Like figurative language, 'woman' can also be constructed as mere ornament, as a source of aesthetic pleasure but not a source of philosophy. However, just as women are indeed capable of philosophy, so too is figurative language significant in philosophical meaning-creation. Black claims that metaphors cannot simply be replaced by literal language, and that there is something irreducible in their deployment. Le Doeuff contends that imagery is operative in the conceptual foundation of prominent philosophical texts. In light of both Black and Le Doeuff's work, I conclude that Locke's repudiation of figurative language is ill considered because it is confused with sexist associations. In other words, his conflation of a linguistic mechanism with a sexist stereotype limits the usefulness, and credibility, of his semiotic analysis.

1. Rooney's article focuses on the use of sex metaphors in the history of philosophy to expound the dynamics of reason and unreason. A very clear example of Rooney's project is given in her treatment of Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle imagines that the rational part of the soul naturally rules over the irrational part. But, Rooney observes, this relationship of domination is explicated in terms of political metaphors, the 'natural' authority of master over slave or, free man over free woman. Specifically, Aristotle writes that

[...] while in the body we see that which moves astray, in the soul we do not. No doubt, however, we must none the less suppose that in the soul too there is something contrary to the rational principle, resisting and opposing it [...] Metaphorically and in virtue of a certain resemblance there is a justice, not indeed between a man and himself, but between certain parts of him; yet not every kind of justice but that of master and servant or that of husband and wife. For these are the ratios in which the part of the soul that has a rational principle stands to the irrational part. (quoted in Rooney, 81)

Aristotle illustrates his sense of the 'just' relationship between the rational and irrational parts of the soul by means of such 'just' relationships between master and slave or, between husband and wife (Rooney 81). This is a clear example of a sex metaphor

whereby the dynamics of a heterosexual, patriarchal relationship are called upon to illuminate the bifurcation of reason from unreason. The comparison reinforces the notion that masculinity is associated with reason, while femininity is associated with unreason, and that one ought to rule over the other.

Rooney moves from her analysis of Aristotle to a series of similar examples found in Augustine, Descartes, Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, Locke and Schopenhauer. In each case, she highlights an example of sex metaphor and details its connection to the philosophical development of reason or unreason. When Rooney turns her attention to Locke, she writes: “Of particular interest for my project are examples where woman is cast as the *other* of the knowing subject, or in opposition to such ‘proper’ knowing.” An example from Locke’s chapter “The Abuse of Words” in Book III of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* “illustrates his connection between woman and deception,”

[...]all the art of rhetorick, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment...*eloquence*, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived (quoted in Rooney, 84).

Rooney briefly concludes her analysis here by noting Locke’s ironic use of figurative language in the very effort to persuade his reader of the deceptive nature of figurative language (84).

But, Rooney is not done with Locke. Eleven years later she revisits his passage in an essay about the feminist promise of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language. And here it becomes clear there is even more to be said about Locke’s semiotic theory. For not only does his passage deliver an excellent example of sex metaphor in the history of philosophy, it is also a commentary on metaphor itself. Locke’s sex metaphor ‘genders’ the mechanism of metaphor, presenting a unique double meaning not given in Rooney’s previous examples. Building upon this observation, it is important to ask about the line of reasoning that leads Locke to link up “rhetoric,” “the artificial and figurative application of words” and “eloquence,” with “the fair sex”? What does Locke’s chain of association reveal about how philosophy is imagined as a linguistic enterprise and as a gendered enterprise? Let us now turn to “The Abuse of Words” in order to contextualize Locke’s curious ‘metaphor about metaphor.’

2. In his *Essay* Locke aims to unfold how it is that language can serve philosophical knowledge. The key to unlocking the “use and force of Language as subservient to instruction and knowledge” he writes, is to consider things like,

the right use of words; the natural advantages and defects of language; and the remedies that ought to be used, to avoid the inconveniences of obscurity or uncertainty in the signification of words: without which it is impossible to discourse with any clearness or order concerning knowledge (Locke 6).

For Locke, language is ripe with both possibilities and pitfalls for philosophy. His *Essay* is intended to guide thinkers towards the possibilities, while avoiding the pitfalls. What we are concerned with here is the status of these so-called pitfalls of language; what determines “obscurity” or “uncertainty” for Locke, as opposed to good “clearness or order”?

For Locke there are two general sources of error in language. There are “natural imperfections” in language, which present inevitable moments of confusion, and then there are avoidable blunders, whereby speakers are simply more confusing than need be:

Besides the imperfection that is naturally in language and the obscurity and confusion that is so hard to be avoided in the use of words, there are several *wilful* faults and neglects which men are guilty of in this way of communication, whereby they render these signs less clear and distinct in their signification than naturally need to be (122).

In describing those linguistic errors that are “willed,” Locke adopts a prosecutorial, almost moralizing tone. It seems that some people are guilty of intentionally abusing language, and his *Essay* is aimed at correcting those people or at least, pointing out their wrongs.

The first and “most common” of willful abuses Locke outlines is, “the using of words without clear and distinct ideas; or, which is worse, signs without anything signified” (122). According to Locke, words are signs of ideas, which are themselves signs of sensation or internal reflection (Nöth 23). It seems that this abuse happens when a person deploys ‘word-signs’ without a clear connection to ‘idea-signs.’ For example, “Wisdom, glory and grace” Locke writes, “are words frequent enough in every man’s mouth,

but if a great many of those who use them should be asked what they mean by them, they would be at a stand, and not know what to answer: a plain proof, that, though they have learned those sounds and have them ready at their tongues ends, yet there are no determined ideas laid up in the minds, which are to be expressed to others by them (123-124).

Thus according to Locke, many speakers are reckless chatterboxes, simply babbling terms without actually knowing how to define the ideas behind them. *Prima facie*, it is not clear that one could speak or write a word without at least invoking the idea behind that word. Is it truly possible to replicate language without doing any thinking? However, it seems what Locke is essentially denouncing here is the sin of superficiality. We shall

see that Locke's distaste for perceived superficiality is sustained throughout the chapter, and links up thematically to his critique of the ornamental use of language.

Locke identifies six more abuses of language, figurative language is the last of these. He describes figurative language as "whitty" and "entertaining" (Locke 146). It stands in contrast to "dry truth and real knowledge," and we use it primarily in discourses where we seek "pleasure and delight" over "information and improvement" (Locke 146). Not only does figurative language "insinuate the wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment," it is "certainly in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned cannot but be thought at a great fault" (Locke 146). Thus for Locke, figurative language is a good source of entertainment, pleasure and delight, but it has no part in serious scholarship. Hence "men" must be sure to keep figurative language in its place, for it has historically tended to creep into formal learning environments, "It is evident how much men love to deceive and to be deceived, since rhetoric, that powerful instructor of error and deceit, has its established professors, is publicly taught, and has always been had in great reputation[...]" (Locke 146). It is not clear what history of "great reputation" Locke is referring to here, since rhetoric is famously jettisoned by Plato. And yet, whether one heeds Plato's admonitions or not, it seems that according to Locke figurative language may always take advantage of those who "love to be deceived."

Let us take stock of the inventory of terms Locke has used thus far to describe the abuse known as figurative language. The terms are: "entertainment," "pleasure," "delight," "misleading," and "deceptive." These terms stand against non-figurative language, which is described as "dry," "truthful," and "real." The last line in the chapter tells us which final terms to add, "Eloquence, *like the fair sex*, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving, wherein men find pleasure to be deceived (Locke 146). The concluding terms are "fair sex" and "men," to be added to the first and last list respectively. The final inventory then, looks like this:

<i>Figurative Language</i>	<i>Non-Figurative Language</i>
Entertaining	Dry
Delightful	Truthful
Pleasurable	Real
Misleading	Men
Deceptive	
Fair Sex	

Locke has managed to give figurative language a gender and conjure up a sexist stereotype, all in one sentence. What connects these two moves? Clearly, Locke imagines that the qualities of figurative language similarly describe women, and vice versa. Needless to say, the comparison calls upon old yet persistent, sexist notions in the Anglo-

European world, that women are intended to invoke pleasure, that women are preoccupied with superficial artifacts, that women live for appearance but not for substance or meaning, and that women are devious. And yet, despite all these unflattering descriptors, the very worst implication of Locke's comparison is that women are deemed analogous to an "abuse of words," which seems to imply that women ought not to talk at all, or perhaps that if they are to talk, they ought to talk like men.

But, how is one to go about 'talking like a man'? We can deduce from Locke's passage that to 'speak like a man,' one cannot use the language associated with the "fair sex." Thus, to 'speak like a man,' one must abandon figurative language entirely and communicate without calling upon imagery. According to Locke, literal language may be "dry," but at least it yields "truth," and "real knowledge." Thus for Locke, literal language, 'man's language,' is the language of philosophy.

3. Locke's denigration of figurative language is not foreign to the history of philosophy. As Black notes, "To draw attention to a philosopher's metaphors is to belittle him-like praising a logician for his beautiful handwriting. Addiction to metaphor is held to be illicit, on the principle that whereof one can speak metaphorically, thereof one [ought] not to speak at all" (25). Le Doeuff confirms Black's sentiment, noting that, "Whether one looks for a characterization of philosophical discourse to Plato, to Hegel or to Bréhier, one always meets with a reference to the rational, the concept, the argued, the logical, the abstract" (1). No agnosticism remains about what philosophy is not, Le Doeuff continues, philosophy is not a story, a pictorial description, or a work of literature. Philosophical discourse is "inscribed and declares its status as philosophy through a break with myth, fable, the poetic"—in short, through a break with the domain of the image (Le Doeuff 1).

What is behind this philosophical aversion to figurative language? According to Black, the aversion stems in part from the "substitution view of metaphor," the theory that any literal expression can be used in place of a metaphorical one (31). Black claims that until recently, most writers "who have had anything to say about metaphor" have "accepted one or another form of the substitution view of metaphor" (31). Thus it is not just philosophers who assume this view. For example, Black recounts how Richard Whately, rhetorician, logician, and author of *Elements of Rhetoric* published in 1846, defined a metaphor as "a word substituted for another on account of resemblance or analogy between their significations" (quoted in Black, 31). And in modern times, the substitution view persists. Black finds it in the Oxford English Dictionary, "Metaphor: The figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which is it properly applicable..." (31). According to the substitution view of metaphor, the author substitutes metaphorical sign M for literal sign L. It becomes the reader's task to recognize M as metaphor, and to mentally switch L for M in order to grasp the full meaning of the sentence. In this sense,

“understanding a metaphor is like deciphering a code or unraveling a riddle”(Black 32). On this view, it seems as if metaphor is nothing more than a linguistic trick: fancy, but unnecessary and potentially confusing. So, why might an author play this kind of game with his or her reader? “We are told that the metaphorical expression may (in its literal use) refer to a more concrete object than would its literal equivalent; and this is supposed to give pleasure to the reader[...]the reader is taken to enjoy problem-solving-or to delight in the author’s skill at half-concealing, half-revealing his meaning” (Black 34). Thus, it seems as if proponents of the substitution view frame figurative language as a kind of written flirtation. Metaphor is a literary tease, aimed at stirring pleasure in the reader by leading him or her up the path of playful diversion. Thus ultimately, according to the substitution view, “if philosophers have something more important to do than give pleasure to their readers, metaphor can have no serious place in philosophical discussion” (Black 34).

Black’s description of the substitution view of metaphor resonates significantly with Locke’s description of figurative language. Both approaches cast the use of metaphor as ornamental, as a trivial diversion that is intended to induce pleasure but is ultimately ancillary to meaning-creation. Interestingly, where Locke’s discussion of pleasure in deception is directly linked to his feminization of metaphor, Black’s reference to the delight of “half-concealed, half-revealed” meaning tiptoes around outright sexualized terms. Indeed, while both Locke’s theory and the substitution view of metaphor call upon a group of concepts germane to a sexist stereotype, (“entertaining” “pleasurable,” “delightful,” “misleading” and “deceptive”) only Locke makes this connection explicit for us.

Besides this whiff of sexist logic, there is something else controversial about the substitution view of metaphor. According to Black, the substitution view is mistaken because a metaphor cannot simply be replaced with literal terminology. Rather, “when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction” (Black 38). This is what Black calls the “interaction view of metaphor,” the theory that each of the terms in a metaphor function in tandem to produce a meaningful phrase that is irreducible to its literal translation (38).² For example, Black applies the interaction view to the metaphor “the Man is a wolf” (39). The first term “man” obtains a new meaning within the metaphor, a meaning that is not apparent in the literal use of the word “man.” This is because the second term “wolf” imposes a peculiar kind of meaning upon the first term. If “the man is a wolf,” he is ferocious, he is wild, he is a hunter, he is dangerous, (possibly he is very hairy) etc. These descriptors are not normally implied by our literal uses of the word “man.” When someone says, “a man is at the door” we do not immediately conjure up the associations ‘ferocious,’ ‘wild,’ etc., these are ‘wolf specific’

² Black credits I.A. Richards and W. Bedell Stanford with the original development of the interaction view (see Black, 38).

associations. As Black puts it, “Any human traits that can without undue strain be talked about in ‘wolf-language’ will be rendered prominent, and any that cannot will be pushed into the background” (41). Thus, the wolf metaphor suppresses some senses of man and emphasizes others; the term “wolf” organizes our specific view of “man” in this metaphor (Black 41).

Ultimately, the interaction view tells us that the literal translation of a metaphor is impossible because the words in a metaphor are not reducible to simple definitions. A metaphor does not compare two singular ideas but rather, the metaphor compares two clusters of association, the meaning of which only become narrowed by their mutual implication in the metaphor. Thus according to the interaction view, Locke’s semiotic theory goes astray in the claim that a ‘word-sign’ has meaning because it is connected to a distinct ‘idea-sign,’ for the sense of a word only emerges in reference to the words around it. For example, I could use the metaphor, “Eloquence, like the fair sex, is expressive, powerful, and effective.” I have entirely altered the picture of woman that Locke gave us with his metaphor about eloquence, and yet I have still described eloquence using correct synonyms. I can alter the understanding of “eloquence” in this sentence, as well as the representation of “woman,” not because a metaphor is somehow more “deceptive” than other styles of expression, but because neither word points to an entirely singular idea. The sense in which I mean either word, indeed the significance of the entire sentence, depends on which clusters of association I choose to highlight in the metaphor.

Le Doeuff’s study of figurative language leads her to a conclusion that supports Black’s, but her method of analysis is quite different. Rather than theorizing about the meaning immanent to individual metaphors and sentences, Le Doeuff reflects on strands of the imaginary as they operate in entire philosophical texts. Le Doeuff proposes to do an “iconographic investigation” of certain prominent works in the history of philosophy in order to show where figurative language has an essential, if undervalued role (9). In her preface she writes that philosophy has always arrogated to itself “the right or task of speaking about itself, of having a discourse about its own discourse and its (legitimate or other) modes, writing a commentary on its own texts.” This meta-discourse, she continues, “regularly affirms the non-philosophical character of thought in images. But this attempted exclusion always fails” (6). She finds her first example of this failure in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and his *Critique of Practical Reason*. She observes that in both *Critiques* there is the running metaphor of an island. For example, in the Transcendental Analytic of the first *Critique*, Kant tells his readers that,

We have now not merely explored the territory of pure understanding, and carefully surveyed every part of it, but have also measured its extent and assigned to everything its rightful place. This domain is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth-seductive name!-surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion[...](quoted in Le Doeuff, 8)

Kant later continues the metaphor: Before we venture on this sea, to explore it in all directions and to obtain assurance whether there be any ground for such hopes, it will be as well to begin by casting a glance on the map of the island which we are about to leave [...] (quoted in Le Doeuff 8).

Le Doeuff posits that this island as it appears and reappears in the *Critiques*, is “the emblem of the Kantian enterprise,” in the sense that the image of the island underlies the entire critical endeavor of the first *Critique*. What is this endeavor? To establish the conviction that philosophers ought to seek safety and certainty over stormy illusion, and that they can best achieve this through an exploration and documentation of the understanding. “The promise of the island of the understanding” Le Doeuff writes, “is balanced by some terrifying dangers. Its security value is hardly explained, and can be grasped only through contrast: the island is a good object only by being excepted from an uninhabitable world” (12).

One might object that Locke wrote before Kant and thus, it is unfair to use Le Doeuff’s example to critique Locke’s points about the role of figurative language in philosophy. However, one imagines that Locke was at least familiar with the famous allegory of the cave in Plato’s *Republic*, to which Le Doeuff’s point about the *Critiques* may just as well be applied. The allegory of the cave is also the “emblem” of the Platonic enterprise, taught in many (if not all) introductory philosophy classes. The allegory is taught ubiquitously for a reason, because the image of the cave gives allows students to grasp Plato’s metaphysical system in a way that purely literal explanations do not. Hence, we can see that Le Doeuff’s thesis is not necessarily limited to the *Critiques*, and that figurative language plays a powerful role in the *Republic* as well.

Unlike Black’s exploration of metaphor, Le Doeuff expresses an awareness of the dual rejection of both figurative language and femininity in philosophy. She writes that, “The images that appear in theoretical texts are normally viewed as extrinsic to the theoretical work, so that to interest oneself in them seems like a merely anecdotal approach to philosophy[...]It is of course well known that women can only ever look at history in terms of little stories” (2). She argues that philosophy is a “masculine discourse,” either outright hostile to female thinkers or, recognizing them only insofar as they create inferior, “anecdotal” philosophizing (100-101). Anecdotal philosophizing is of course, storytelling, which is the province of figurative language.

Le Doeuff ends up subsuming the dual rejection of figurative language and femininity under an analysis of philosophy’s propensity towards exclusion at large. This is not to say that paying attention to the dual rejection is unimportant, but simply that figurative language and women are only two of many elements that philosophy seems eager to expel. “The discourse which we call ‘philosophical,’” Le Doeuff writes,

produces itself through the fact that it represses, excludes and dissolves, or claims to dissolve, another discourse, other forms of knowledge...For philosophical

discourse is a discipline, that is to say a discourse obeying (or claiming to obey) a finite number of rules, procedures or operations, and as such it represents a closure, a delimitation which denies the (actually or potentially) indefinite character of modes of thought; it is a barrage restraining the number of possible (acceptable) statements[...] (114).

And what is “repressed, excluded and dissolved”? Indeed, figurative language and whatever is considered feminine fall under that category, along with “seductive discourse, inconclusive syllogisms, recourse to final causes or occult forms, arguments from authority, and so forth” (Le Doeuff 115). But for Le Doeuff, paying too much attention to the list of excluded elements risks ignoring the essential dynamic, which is simply one of eviction at large. There is something about philosophy itself, she claims, that demands the indiscriminate act of expulsion (115). In fact according to Le Doeuff, philosophy is created through this act of expulsion, just as a field is created by virtue of its fences. Hence, whatever is ejected from philosophy is simultaneously essential to philosophy’s creation. “The old wives tales and nannies’ lore are always ‘obscuring’ the clear light of the concept” she writes, “not because the repressed in general might be overwhelming by nature, but because the finite stock of admissible procedures is never sufficient.” Philosophy presupposes an “undefined area, a certain play of structures, a certain margin of free-floating around the codified procedures. Thus shadow is in the very field of light and woman is an internal enemy” (Le Doeuff 115).

Thus, like Black, Le Doeuff highlights the contradictory relationship philosophy has to figurative language. Formally, philosophy jettisons figurative language, and yet it is partially constituted by it, either through the direct utilization of metaphor, (such as in Kant’s *Critique* or Plato’s *Republic*) or through the self-creative act of expelling metaphor. And according to Le Doeuff, whatever is cast as feminine in philosophy is also caught up in this stranglehold of simultaneous necessity and repudiation.

4. Locke warns us about the abuse of words in philosophy, but if there really is a disciplinary imperative to repudiate, as Le Doeuff claims, then this is the real abuse we ought to watch out for. Particularly when the bundles of notions repudiated (the ornamental, the superficial, the deceptive) seem to be cross-fertilized with sexist stereotypes. Whatever this compulsive disciplinary rejection is, it has been used in the service of, or is symptomatic of, an entrenched patriarchal spirit in philosophy. Furthermore, this exclusionary move simply leads to an analytic mess. Locke soils the credibility of his semiotic analysis, by indefensibly condemning an expressive style because he associates it with a particularly derogatory picture of femininity. This is simply not a good reason to dismiss figurative language as philosophically “abusive.” Locke is thus unconvincing on his own, but in light of Black and Le Doeuff’s work his argument seems further unjustified, for both thinkers have demonstrated that despite

philosophy's formal exclusion of figurative language, the latter nonetheless plays a significant role in meaning-creation.

We can conclude from this study that there is, to say the least, a complicated relationship between what kind of language counts as “good” or “clear” philosophy, and who is articulating that language in what social context. For it is not a coincidence that in a historically sexist society women have been associated with the kind of speech that Locke tells us does not count as philosophy. This reveals a disturbing snapshot of how something that seems like it ought to be utterly gender neutral, like the philosophical discussion of signification, can still be informed by sexism. There is a more optimistic up-shot of this conclusion however: for, should we begin to question the nature of philosophy's discursive limits, perhaps we can begin to unlock philosophical potential in and beyond figurative expression. Not only then, might we become more attentive to the philosophical significance of figurative language, but also, perhaps we may begin to attend to philosophical richness of the figure itself. Understanding the historical and political nature of prohibitions on certain kinds of expression in philosophy can, perhaps, help us to embrace radically new modes of philosophical expression rooted in more progressive contextual dynamics.

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