

## Love in Kierkegaard's *Symposia*

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### Abstract

Kierkegaard presents two radically different conceptions of love (*eros* and *agape*) in his writings, in three different ways (parody, *aporia* and edification). Kierkegaard's prime literary model for *eros* is Plato's *Symposium*, which culminates in Diotima's argument for a continuum between immediate, sensate, erotic love and the divine. Kierkegaard repeatedly parodies the notion of *eros* as a *scala paradisi* in his pseudonymous "first authorship," in order to show its inadequacy from the point of view of Christian faith.

In his "second authorship" Kierkegaard presents a very different notion of love from this pagan, aesthetic notion — the Christian notion of *agape*, the selfless love of one's neighbor. *Eros* and *agape* are characterized in mutually exclusive terms (e.g. selfish/selfless, happiness/suffering, desire/duty, recollection/repetition, possession/debt, immanent/transcendent, luck/gift). But the conceptual presentation of *agape*, as a divine gift and as a self-effacing duty to others, results in *aporia*. It suffers from irresolvable conceptual puzzles (e.g. God is the subject of love, the object of love, and is the relation of love — love loves love — yet this love is directed towards others, not oneself) and is emotively counter-intuitive (e.g. love is a duty not a feeling). As long as we try to grasp *agape* conceptually or intuitively via Kierkegaard's writings, the latter will themselves constitute a *scala paradisi* — and must be thrown away.

The only proper presentation of *agape* is as edification, using God's own words of love. Kierkegaard's "Edifying Discourses" presuppose that "the single individual" to whom they are addressed has already received *agape* as a divine gift. The proper work of Christian love, then, is to build up this love that already exists in the reader.

This paper traces these two notions of love in Kierkegaard's writings, and their three modes of presentation, though it focuses in particular on the parodies of *eros* in the "aesthetic authorship" and the *aporias* of *agape* in the "second authorship." It leaves the "Edifying Discourses" to build up the reader on their own terms. The paper also shows how Kierkegaard superimposes Hegel's dialectic of selfhood on his parodies of the *Symposium*, with particular attention to Hegel's discussion of mutual recognition in the constitution of selfhood, and the relations between self-recognition and work in the master/slave dialectic. These Hegelian inflections are in turn explored in the *aporetic* treatment of love and self in the "second authorship."

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### *Eros and Agape*

Love is a widely distributed concept in Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker* [Collected Works]. It occurs in every published work. It is presented by a variety of terms, including the nouns *Elskov*, *Forelskelse*, *Kjerlighed* [also *Kjærlighed*], and *Forkjerlighed*, and the verbs *at elske*, *at opelske*, and *at fremelske*. The specific meanings of these terms

are distributed around two poles: love as *eros*, modeled on the discussion in Plato's *Symposium*, and love as *agape*, modeled principally on the Pauline and Johannine texts of *The New Testament*. This polar opposition of conceptions of love is underscored by a series of binary oppositions, with the first term elucidating erotic love and the second term elucidating Christian love. These binary oppositions include: psychosensual/spiritual, immediacy/higher immediacy, self/other, recollection/repetition, immortality/salvation, beloved/neighbor, desire/duty, luck [*Lykke*]/gift [*Gave*], happiness [*Lykke*]/task [*Opgave*], *lex talionis*/redoubling, possession/debt, hiddenness/transparency, visibility/invisibility, immanence/transcendence, and time/eternity.

Kierkegaard's presentation of erotic love [*Elskov*] follows a dialectical trajectory in his "aesthetic" works, which is modeled both structurally and thematically on Plato's *Symposium*. *Eros* is the power, intermediate between the human and the divine, by which the human being ascends to the divine. By a process of sublimation, the subject of sensate desire progressively substitutes ever more ethereal objects of desire, until it reaches divine beauty and virtue (*Symposium* 210a-212c). This is also a movement from temporality and transience to immortality and immutability. Kierkegaard transposes this Platonic dialectic of *eros* into the terms of his contemporaries. His aim is not to show the efficacy of *eros* as a path for ascension to the divine, but to parody it and show its limits. His "aesthetic" works explore many variations on the theme of erotic love as a *scala paradisi*, but ultimately his Johannes Climacus throws the ladder away.

*The Dialectic of Master and Slave*

Superimposed on the Platonic dialectic of erotic love in Kierkegaard's "aesthetic" works is the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave (Hegel 1977, 111-19). This Hegelian dialectic is aimed at the attainment of selfhood, which is achieved by mutual, respectful *recognition* of one self by another, and by this self of the other. One of the most intimate, searching contexts for such mutual recognition is the love relation. But Hegel's dialectic of master and slave starts with the confrontation of two individuals in mortal combat. By adapting Hegel's figure of master and slave, Kierkegaard sets up his dialectic of self-recognition in erotic love as adversarial and asymmetrical. In Hegel's dialectic, the master objectifies the slave, recognizing him as nothing but a means to satisfy his own desires. He fails to recognize the slave as an autonomous subject of desire. In Kierkegaard's version, the "master" becomes the seducer, who objectifies his victims overwhelmingly in *visual* terms (cf. Garff 2000, 239-45). At his most refined, and insidious, the seducer seeks to *construct* his victim as a subject of desire — by mirrors and controlled reflections. But rather than respecting the autonomy of the other, he violates it even further by substituting his own image of subjectivity for the innate subjectivity of the victim. Any recognition the seducer thereby receives from his victim then fails to be by a genuine other, and falls back into narcissism.

Hegel's dialectic of master and slave has a characteristic moment of reversal, in which the slave advances further on the path to self-recognition than the master. This occurs by means of *work*. Whereas the master fails to advance beyond the developmental stage of infantile desire, the slave gains an objective understanding of himself through the work

he produces for the master. It does the slave no good to be objectified by the master, but it does help him to objectify himself. By creating artifacts for the master, the slave externalizes himself in the world in the sense that he makes concrete his plans, intentions and will, using his skills, knowledge and aptitudes. These objectifications of himself allow the slave a measure of self-recognition unavailable to the master. Nevertheless, because the objects are ordered and appropriated by the master according to his desire alone, the slave is alienated from his self-objectifications. These issues are explored in Kierkegaard's various notions of work. These range from the autoerotic work [*Arbeide*] of reflection pursued by the seducer, through his work [*Virksomhed*] as a writer, to works [*Gjerninger*] of love.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Eros as Scala Paradisi*

Between the dialectic of (erotic) love in the “aesthetic” works and love conceived Christianly as *agape* is a gulf unbridgeable by any human effort. Despite the efforts of so many writers to show the continuity between *eros* and *agape* in ladders of merit, mysticism or speculation — from Augustine, Origen, Dionysius the Areopagite, Johannes Climacus (monk of Mt. Sinai), Benedict, Bonaventura and Dante, to the German Romantics and Hegel — *eros* and *agape* are contradictory, especially in their conceptions of the relation between the self and the divine.<sup>2</sup> Christian *agape* is not reached by way of pagan *eros*, but represents a transvaluation of values. The movement from *eros* to *agape* is not one of step-by-step progress, but requires a radical *transfiguration* – a leap into a different set of values and perceptions. The main points of tension between *eros* and *agape* are: (1) *eros* is egocentric, whereas *agape* is theocentric; (2) *eros* is acquisitive

desire, whereas *agape* is self-sacrificing giving; (3) *eros* is conceived as the path of ascent to God, whereas *agape* is conceived as God's path of descent to the human; (4) *eros* springs from privation insofar as it lacks the object it desires, whereas *agape* springs from abundance, overflowing with its gifts; and (5) *eros* is attracted by the value it recognizes in its object, whereas *agape* creates value in whatever object it touches (cf. Nygren 1957, 210).

Kierkegaard recognized the ultimate incompatibility of love conceived as *eros* [*Elskov*] and love conceived as *agape* [*Kjerlighed*]. As he says in *Works of Love*, "... is it not remarkable that in the whole New Testament there is not a single word about erotic love in the sense in which the poet celebrates it and paganism idolized it?" (Kierkegaard SVI IX 48; KW XVI 45). But his "aesthetic" works repeatedly rehearse strategies for constructing a ladder of *eros* to the divine. In the process they also show what sort of self-conceptions underpin this model of love. Both these ladders of *eros* and the corresponding models of selfhood undo themselves throughout the aesthetic works. All apparent transcendence falls back into immanence. All apparent repetition remains mere recollection. All apparent communication with someone else collapses into soliloquy. All apparent gestures of love are revealed as forms of self-love.

A sharp division is drawn between the aesthetic works of the pseudonymous authorship, up to and including *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and the "second authorship" comprising those subsequent works signed "S. Kierkegaard" and "Anti-Climacus." In the "second authorship" love is transfigured. The binary oppositions used to clarify love

are revalued in unsettling ways. Their hierarchies are not simply reversed, nor are they sublated according to a dialectical calculus. There is a hiatus of perception between *eros* and *agape* more radical than any Gestalt switch of attention that sees a rabbit as a duck. Not simply aspect-seeing, but the whole self as a subject of experience is transformed — “everything is new in Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this transformation cannot be achieved by will, by work, or even by luck. It can only be received as a gift from the transcendent God. At least, that’s the story. I will argue that even those works that seem to be informed by *agape* collapse back into immanence, self-love and soliloquy — as they must if they are to avoid becoming ladders to *agape* themselves. Just like the “aesthetic authorship,” the “second authorship” must also be a “self-consuming artifact” — a “preface” that is not the preface to any “book.”<sup>4</sup> Only the “Edifying Discourses” [*Opbyggelige Taler* – literally ‘upbuilding talks’] present Christian love with the presupposition that the reader has already received that love as a gift. The “Edifying Discourses” are meant to build up *agape*, not to usurp the role of God in giving that love in the first place.

Although various words for “love” occur in every one of Kierkegaard’s published works, there are much larger concentrations in some works than in others. *Forelskelse* [the state of being in love] and its cognates occur most frequently in *Stages on Life’s Way*, followed by *Either/Or*. *Elskov* [erotic love] occurs most frequently in *Works of Love*, followed by *Stages on Life’s Way* and *Either/Or*. *Kjerlighed* or *Kjærlighed* [caring love] occurs most frequently in *Works of Love*, followed by *Either/Or*. The verb *at elske* [used for either erotic love or caring love] occurs most frequently in *Works of Love*, followed by *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life’s Way*. Based on these data, I will focus my examination

of Kierkegaard's discussions of love primarily on *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Works of Love*. *Repetition* also deserves some attention, not so much for the frequency of the occurrence of words for love, but because *Stages on Life's Way* is as much a reprise of *Repetition* as it is of *Either/Or*. I will also examine *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* briefly, since it highlights the withdrawal of the dialectical ladder of *eros*. In conclusion I will contrast the (calculated) failures of the "aesthetic authorship" and the "second authorship" in their presentations of love, with the series of "Edifying Discourses." These were published in tandem with the pseudonymous authorship and *presuppose* love as *agape* in the reader. They seek to augment, or build up [*at opbygge*], this love that the reader has already received as a divine gift — not to establish it on the basis of *eros*, nor on the basis of its conceptual presentation in the "second authorship."

*Love in the "Aesthetic Authorship"*

*Plato's Symposium as a Model*

*Either/Or*

A number of thematic and structural elements in *Either/Or* are modeled on Plato's *Symposium*. The principal theme of *Either/Or* is love. The authors of all that is said on love are men, except the three letters written to Johannes by Cordelia, which are incorporated into the preamble to "The Seducer's Diary" by the male pseudonym "A" — just as Diotima's words of wisdom on love are incorporated into Socrates' discourse in the *Symposium*. There is a parallel in the device of narrative nesting used in both works. Both Plato's *Symposium* and the first volume of *Either/Or* are prefaced by someone not involved in the discussion of love, and end with the views of a seducer.

Both Plato's *Symposium* and *Either/Or* contain dialectical progressions, starting from immediate, sensate love and ending with ethical or divine love. This dialectical progression starts in *Either/Or* with "The Immediate Erotic Stages Or The Musical Erotic." As in the *Symposium*, love is conceived as desire. Initially it is only an intimation of desire, represented by the Page from Mozart's *Figaro*. It then acquires a dreaming consciousness of its state of desire, represented by Papageno from *The Magic Flute*. Finally it reaches a state of consciousness entirely consumed by desire, represented by Don Giovanni. But these are all figures of immediate, sensual desire. The real dialectic begins with self-alienation, when the self becomes separated from itself to the extent where it can reflect on itself. This corresponds to the Hegelian dialectic of the self. Only through a process of self-alienation can spirit come to know itself. The ultimate goal is for spirit to return to itself in a "higher immediacy" after having come to know itself through self-alienation. The process of self-alienation starts with the loss of immediacy in perceived self-difference. This occurs with the onset of desire, which in Platonic terms, is the recognition of a lack in oneself which one is driven to fill (*Symposium* 199d-201c).

The immediate erotic stages, which represent the onset of desire, are superseded by processes of self-alienation. These are represented by tragic victims of seduction: Elvira, seduced by Don Giovanni, and Margarete, seduced by Faust. Faust desires Margarete precisely because she embodies innocent immediacy, a state he has lost for himself in his reflective *ennui*. She ultimately loses her innocent immediacy by being seduced — not



only physically, but also subjectively into Faust's world of reflection. Antigone is a tragic figure who has lost her immediacy by other means. She is burdened by the pain of a shameful family secret — much as Kierkegaard himself seems to have been. This introduces the themes of secrecy, hiddenness and temporality into the dialectic of love and self. The modern Antigone imagined in *Either/Or* is prevented from communion with the one she loves, because of this painful secret, which she must keep hidden. The secret alienates her from herself and from her beloved (Kierkegaard SV1 I 137-140; KW III 160-164). The secret comes from her past, but inhibits her future. “The Unhappiest One” develops the idea of temporal self-alienation. Like Hegel's “Unhappy Consciousness” the unhappiest one yearns most for that which is unattainable. In Platonic terms, this amounts to an unquenchable desire for an absence impossible to make present. In the case of the unhappiest one, this impossibility is guaranteed by a misrelation in the self's temporal categories. He hopes for that which can only be recollected and recollects that which can only be hoped. Immediate experience is doubled in reflective imagination, and reconstructed as a narrative that has ended. This is the process by which a “young man” becomes “poeticized.” In Kierkegaard's own life it corresponds to his engagement to Regine Olsen. He recollected its demise before it was over, and hoped for its continuation after its loss.

The reflective seducer represents the ultimate form of self-alienation in *Either/Or*. He is alienated from all sense of the autonomy of the other, as well as from his own immediacy. Like the unhappiest one, he lives in self-contradictory temporal categories. But rather than regard that as a source of unhappiness, it becomes his greatest source of

happiness. He uses his temporal displacement to titillate himself with his own reflections. Since he is categorially denied any immediate experience, he lives only in possibility, never in actuality. He converts every potential experience into a set of reflective possibilities, which he then turns in the mirror of consciousness for his aesthetic delectation. The other person becomes merely an occasion for his own narcissistic reflections. He refuses to allow any other subject to impinge on his own subjectivity, and guarantees this by his “unhappy” temporal dislocation. He compensates for this dislocation by an agronomy of moods, whereby he can generate “the interesting” from arbitrariness and prudent rotation of psychological states. The cost is that he is trapped in the immanence of his own reflections. In terms of the Hegelian dialectic of self, he can never attain full selfhood, either through genuine recognition by another or of another. Nor can he attain selfhood in Christian terms, since he cannot open himself to recognize the alterity of God. This entrapment in immanence becomes a trope for erotic love in general, and serves to mark it off from Christian *agape*.

*Either/Or* points explicitly to the incompatibility of Christian and erotic love. It claims that Christianity, whose essence is spirit, excludes the sensuous [*Sandseligheden*], which is the basis of erotic love (Kierkegaard SV1 I 44; KW III 61). This is later specified as exclusion of the sensuous conceived as “the flesh” — which in turn is understood to be “selfishness” (Kierkegaard SV1 II 46; KW IV 49). So erotic love, at least as posited by Christianity, is by definition selfish, whereas Christian love is defined as selfless. Thus, erotic love and Christian love are contradictories.

Contradiction or opposition frames the discussion of love in Plato's *Symposium*. The opposition between tragedy and comedy is metonymic for the contradictory basis of love. Johannes Climacus later defines both tragedy and comedy themselves in terms of contradiction (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 447; KW XII.1 514). Plato's banquet is held in honor of a tragedian, but has as its guests a comedian and an ironist. The speeches of the tragedian (Agathon) and the comedian (Aristophanes) are juxtaposed, and ultimately mediated by the ironist (Socrates). In the end, Socrates compels his listeners "to acknowledge that the genius of comedy was the same as that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy was an artist in comedy also" (*Symposium* 223d). This accords with the claim in all the speeches in which love is construed as contradictory, that ultimately the contradiction can be overcome by ascent from immediate, sensate desire to love of the good, the beautiful and the divine. The first volume of *Either/Or* also juxtaposes the tragic and the comic: "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama" and its extensions in "Silhouettes" and "The Unhappiest One" are juxtaposed with discussion of Scribe's comedy "The First Love." But the primary opposition, alluded to in the very title *Either/Or*, is between the aesthetic and the ethical. This opposition stands in for all the contradictions inherent in (heterosexual) love in *Either/Or*. Ultimately they seem to be reconciled in the possibility of the aesthetic validity of marriage, where marriage is the main trope for the ethical.

If the *Symposium* and *Either/Or* are strictly parallel in this respect, then the ultimate reconciliation of opposites should be ironic. Socrates' listeners were constrained to agree not by the force of his argument *per se*, since they were too drowsy to follow it, but

because he had argued them under the table (*Symposium* 223d). The irony in *Either/Or* emerges in the sermon appended to Wilhelm's two discourses on the possibility of reconciling the aesthetic and the ethical, both in marriage and in one's personality. The topic of the sermon is "The Edification That Lies In The Thought That Against God We Are Always In The Wrong." The ethical advocated by Wilhelm is only a limited, civic virtue, not divine goodness. The reconciliation of aesthetic, erotic love with the ethical, then, is only a reconciliation of all-too-human elements. Ultimately *eros* has not provided a ladder to divine virtue or wisdom. No matter how hard we strive with our merely human resources, we can never escape our own immanence. The gap between *eros* and *agape* is unbridgeable by human effort. Against God we are always in the wrong. Immanence is a trope for selfishness — for being trapped solipsistically within one's own desires, like Hegel's master. Even frenetic self-fragmentation, to create a multiplicity of personae, only forges counterfeit others. The dramatic adoption of pseudonymous selves fails to transport the individual beyond the stage of his or her own immanence.

The work of writing in *Either/Or* seems incapable of reconciling the aesthetic and the ethical. *Either/Or's* aesthetic first volume is characterized by immanent, monological reflections, unconcerned about communication with another. It is concerned primarily with self-titillation and bears the epigraph *ad se ipsum* [to himself] (Kierkegaard SV1 I 1; KW III 17). *Either/Or's* second volume — Assessor Wilhelm's ethical writings — by contrast, is in the form of letters, which are explicitly addressed to another. They seek to open the aesthete to the concerns of community, and emphasize the virtues of

transparency, by demonstrating the continuity of the aesthetic and the ethical. Yet in the end the aesthetic and ethical writings are presented as a single book, stitched together by the ironist Victor Eremita. They are juxtaposed under the title *Either/Or* as if there can be no continuity, no dialogue, between the aesthetic and the ethical, but only an exclusive choice. The apparent movement from aesthetic to ethical is only a *parody* of false movement.<sup>5</sup> This parody of the dialectical ladder of *eros* is repeated in some form throughout the “aesthetic” authorship. Ultimately none of these works transcends itself to reach an existential stage beyond that with which it starts, or to reach the reader conceived as actual and independent, or to reach the absolute other, God.

### *Repetition*

The notions of immanence and transcendence are also encapsulated, respectively, in Platonic recollection [*anamnesis*] and Christian repetition [*Gjentagelse* — literally, ‘taking again’]. Both purport to connect the individual to eternal truth. But whereas recollection is an immanent retrieval, from within the individual, of a truth present but forgotten, repetition is an act of faith, which connects the individual to transcendent truth to transfigure the old into something new (“everything is new in Christ”). The condition for the transcendent truth uncovered in repetition, though, does not come from the individual, but from Christ as teacher (Kierkegaard SV1 IV 184ff.; KW VII 14ff.). Even though Constantine Constantius has provided the reader with a conceptual understanding of repetition, his book *Repetition* contains nothing but false repetitions – or recollections. Constantine’s own return journey to Berlin failed to “repeat” his previous experience by transfiguring it in Christian faith. The young man, poeticized by his erotic love affair,

seems to move in the direction of the religious. He is obsessed with Job as a figure who achieved repetition (in getting everything back, double, through faith). But he only succeeds in becoming a poet of repetition, not its practitioner. In fact he is not even that, since he turns out to have been “brought into being” as a thought experiment by the ironist Constantine Constantius (Kierkegaard SV1 III 262; KW VI 228). Even the reader, addressed by Constantius in his “Concluding Letter,” is construed as “fictional” (Kierkegaard SV1 III 259; KW VI 225). The whole work seems not to be conceived as a communication between real, autonomous individuals, but another occasion on which the author is writing to himself as reader. Retrospectively, Kierkegaard regarded himself “as a *reader* of the books, not as the *author* ... I call my whole work as an author my own upbringing and development” (Kierkegaard SV1 XIII 501; KW XXII 12). This confession is itself a “recollection” of what Kierkegaard said about his relation to his pseudonymous texts, in “A First and Last Explanation” appended under his own name to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 546; KW XII.1 626).

### *Stages on Life's Way*

*Stages on Life's Way* is a “recollection” of *Either/Or*, *Repetition*, and Plato's *Symposium*. It explicitly duplicates the structure of the *Symposium*, but is populated by characters from Kierkegaard's earlier pseudonymous works. Johannes the seducer, Victor Eremita and Assessor Wilhelm pop up from *Either/Or*, and Constantine Constantius and the “young man” from *Repetition*. “Guilty? Not Guilty?” was originally conceived, under the title “Unhappy Love,” as a counterpart to “The Seducer's Diary” and a draft was begun in 1843 (Kierkegaard *Pap.* IV A 215; *JP* V 5628).

The title of the first part of *Stages on Life's Way*, "In Vino Veritas," is borrowed directly from Plato's *Symposium* (217e). But the whole of *Stages on Life's Way*, and not just "In Vino Veritas," is modeled on the structure of Plato's *Symposium*. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the characters: Hilarius Bogbinder = Apollodorus; William Afham = Aristodemus; the young man = Phaedrus; Constantine Constantius = Pausanias; Victor Eremita = Eryximachus; the Fashion Designer = Aristophanes; Johannes the Seducer = Alcibiades; Assessor Wilhelm = Agathon; Frater Taciturnus = Socrates; and Quidam = Diotima. Hilarius Bogbinder stitches together a metanarrative, which includes William Afham's recollection of the speeches on love at the banquet. Note that, just like Aristodemus, Afham claims to have been present at the banquet he recollects, yet was the only one present who failed to make a speech on love. A further parallel with Plato's *Symposium* is that Frater Taciturnus' discourse on love is presented indirectly in the words of Quidam, just as Socrates' discourse is presented indirectly as the wisdom of Diotima. As we have seen, many of these parallels have already been reproduced in *Either/Or*.

Just like *Either/Or* and Plato's *Symposium*, there is an *apparent* dialectic of love in *Stages on Life's Way* from the immediate and sensate, to the ethical and religious. The very name of the book underscores this idea of dialectical progression in life. But just as in *Either/Or* and *Repetition*, it turns out to be a false dialectic. It seems that Quidam, like the young man in *Repetition*, has progressed towards a religious conception of love. But Frater Taciturnus, like his counterpart Constantine Constantius, disabuses the reader of

this understanding in his “Letter to the Reader.” There he states that Quidam is “a demoniac character in the direction of the religious,” whom Taciturnus has “conjured up” as “an imaginary construction.” Considered as a lover, Quidam is deemed to be “mad” (Kierkegaard SV1 VI 372-374; KW XI 398-400). Taciturnus characterizes himself as a “sophist” since he sees only one side of the religious. He calls his particular type of sophism “the unity of the comic and the tragic, which is the infinite concern about oneself in the Greek sense,” but maintains that this is “an offence against the holy passion of the religious” (Kierkegaard SV1 VI 452; KW XI 486-487). Furthermore, he raises the possibility that his letter addressed to the reader has no reader. But that doesn’t bother him, since he has “forever and a day for myself and can talk with myself about myself undisturbed” (Kierkegaard SV1 VI 451; KW XI 485). Again, the letter as a form directed to the other is used for immanent, self-communication. Again the dialectic of communication parallels the dialectic of self-recognition in love, which turns reflexively into itself as self-love.

#### *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, there is another reprise of the pseudonymous dialectic, together with further “recollections” of the familiar themes of tragic and comic contradiction, immediacy, immanence, erotic love, and dialectic. Whereas the specific target of the parody in *Either/Or* was the German Romantic attempts to construct a ladder of *eros* to the divine, the specific target here is Hegel’s speculative logic as a *scala paradisi*. There is also a reprise of the whole pseudonymous authorship to date in “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature,” and another attempt to kick away



the ladder so assiduously constructed in the course of the work, this time under the term “revocation” [*Tilbagekaldelse*]. The first occurrence of this term is in reference to the subtitle of *Repetition*, which is “an imaginary psychological construction [*psychologisk Experiment*].” This imaginary construction, Climacus claims, “establishes a yawning abyss between reader and author ... so that a direct understanding is made impossible. The imaginary construction is the conscious, teasing revocation of the communication” (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 223; KW XII.1 263 - translation modified). In another occurrence, immanence is said to revoke everything through recollection (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 229; KW XII.1 270). Furthermore, “all immanent speculative thought is essentially a revocation of existence” (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 397; KW XII.1 456). Revocation is also used to underscore the absolute discontinuity between immanent religiosity and Christian paradoxical religiosity: “... there is no analogy to the sphere of the paradoxically religious, and thus the application [of an analogy], when it is understood, is a revocation” (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 494; KW XII.1 567). For Climacus, the self-professed humorist, “humor is always a revocation (of existence into the eternal by recollection backward...)” (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 524-525; KW XII.1 602). Finally, in his appendix, “An Understanding with the Reader,” Climacus claims to revoke the whole book (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 539; KW XII.1 619). He also “repeats” the device, used in both *Repetition* and *Stages on Life’s Way* in his apparent address to the reader, of fictionalizing the reader, thereby rendering the book an immanent address to himself (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 540; KW XII.1 620-621).

Of course the pseudonym “Johannes Climacus” itself “recollects” the monk of Mt. Sinai who wrote his *Scala Paradisi* about the end of the sixth century. Although that Climacus found biblical justification in the story of Jacob’s ladder (*Genesis* 28:12), he was most indebted to Plato’s notion of ascent through *eros*. Kierkegaard clearly intended to end his “authorship” with *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, though seduced himself back into the fray of writing by provoking the *Corsair* to attack him. His subsequent “second authorship,” like his first, consists of two series of texts: those written under his own name, and those written pseudonymously. In the “second authorship,” however, one pseudonym predominates, viz. Anti-Climacus. He is meant to represent the ideal Christian position. The use of this pseudonym underlines the gulf that separates Johannes Climacus’ ladder of *eros* from the ideal Christian point of view.

*Love in the “Second Authorship”*

*Transfiguring the Binary Oppositions*

According to Kierkegaard *eros* is conceived primarily as a *psycho-sensual* drive. It is *immediate* in the sense of coming straight from the individual heart, rather than being mediated by intellectual reflection or social consideration. It is directed preferentially towards its object, and experienced as *desire*. It is believed that possession of its object will bring *happiness*. Finding the appropriate object of erotic love, and having that love reciprocated is a matter of *luck*. Courtship, seduction, and other wiles of erotic love require strategic alternation of *hiddenness* and openness — in an alluring dance of veils. The object of love is construed primarily in *visual* terms, and as an object rather than as an autonomous subject of desire. Although erotic love engenders expansive feelings in

the direction of eternity, it is typically beset with anxieties about whether it will last forever. Jealousy, obsessive control, and fear of love's *transience* are symptomatic of these anxieties. Ultimately, the lover is concerned primarily for his own feelings and welfare, rather than those of his beloved. If he falls out of love, or is spurned by his beloved, his love can turn to hate. Erotic love is ultimately a form of *self-love*. In terms of the Platonic dialectic of *eros*, love's ultimate aim is *immortality* — through sexual (self)-reproduction or through artistic or intellectual “offspring” or through “immortal” deeds. Ultimately this “immortality” is achieved by *recollection* — whether through intellectual *anamnesis* or, in terms of the Aristophanic myth, by recovering one's lost “half.”

*Agape*, on the other hand, is almost the inverse. It is essentially *spiritual*, excluding “the flesh” - though not necessarily all psycho-sensual elements. It is non-preferential, being directed to “the *neighbor*” rather than to an object of desire or attraction. Yet it is not devoid of passion [*Lidenskab*]. This passion, however, is more akin to suffering [*Lidelse*] than to desire [*Lyst*] – as in the Passion of Christ. This passion is a disposition to self-sacrifice for the sake of the *other*. It does not result in worldly happiness, but is an ongoing *task* for the duration of one's temporal life. *Agape* is not immediate, although it is spontaneous. Since it requires a transformation of the self, the self has first to have been formed. That process of formation entails self-alienation and social mediation. So the spontaneity of *agape* has to be a “*higher immediacy*” on the other side of that process, although it continues to be mediated by God. That is, *agape* is a three-term relation, with God as the ever-present “third.” Paradoxically, the three terms seem to

reduce to two, since *agape* requires that one become transparent or “as nothing” before God, to *disappear* in acts of love so that only God is seen to be their author. If in turn the recipient of *agape* is thereby transfigured, he or she will also disappear and become as nothing — leaving only God.

The aim of *agape* is not immortality, but *salvation*, which cannot be guaranteed by the individual through work, knowledge or merit. It is entirely a matter of God’s grace. *Agape* is a *duty* that overrides any preference — even requiring the sacrifice of erotic love if it conflicts with love as duty. This duty applies always and unconditionally, but must be reaffirmed by the individual in the *repetition* of faith. Yet love is also a *gift*. How can a gift be a duty and a task? How can the human giving of this gift place the donor in “infinite *debt*” (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 169; KW XVI 176-177)? If God *is* love, and God is absolutely transcendent, how can we be commanded to love? “Ought” implies “can”: if love is a duty, access to this love must already have been given. God’s incarnation and self-sacrifice are put forward precisely as this gift. But then God is no longer absolutely inaccessible, since He has already given Himself as *agape* to human beings. Those who have received the word of God as love can appreciate the counterintuitive understanding of love as transcendent, duty, gift, task, debt, suffering, and self-sacrifice. Those who have not received this divine gift cannot understand, but must remain within an immanent conception of love. The attempt to communicate this love to those who have not received it as a gift from God is doomed. The critique of erotic love, as narcissistic or solipsistic, forever failing to connect with the genuinely

other, seems just as applicable to *agape* — since it can be preached successfully only to the converted.

### *The Gift of Love*

The gift is a paradoxical notion. Emerson, Nietzsche, Mauss, Bataille, Benveniste, Derrida and others have drawn attention to the aporetic nature of the gift (cf. Schrift 1997). According to Benveniste, Indo-European languages contain a deep ambiguity in their terms for “give,” which commonly also mean “take.” The proto-Indo-European *\*do-* indicated the fact of taking hold of something. The verb itself did not discriminate between taking hold in order to keep, and taking hold in order to offer (Benveniste 1997, 34). Mauss’s seminal contribution to the analysis of gift giving points towards this ambiguity, but situates it in the economic system of exchange (Mauss 1997). On the one hand the gift appears to be given freely, as an act of generosity imposing no obligation; on the other hand, it invariably conceals some expectation of a return. In pre-capitalist societies, gift giving is an indispensable mechanism for the exchange of goods. In capitalist societies it still functions, but the gift is often reduced to a monetary equivalent and is thereby overtly recognized as part of an economic exchange. This recognition undoes its value as a gift in the original sense of a gratuitous offering or expenditure arising from magnanimity, generosity and abundance.

Christian *agape* is conceived as a gift in the sense of an undeserved gratuity with no expectation of return. It arises from superfluity, not privation, overflowing from God’s excess. In this sense it is like Bataille’s unconditional expenditure, or Zarathustra’s

mellifluous overflow of wisdom.<sup>6</sup> In this sense it is compatible with the conception of *agape* as theocentric, and with the notion that it is dispensed without consideration of desert. Yet it also retains some of its poisonous ambivalence, and through “miscognition” is reinserted in an economy of exchange.

Whereas the aim of Platonic *eros* was unambiguously happiness, the effect of the gift of *agape* is suffering: “Christianity cannot keep anything other than what it has promised from the beginning: the world’s ingratitude, opposition, and derision, and continually to a higher degree the more earnest a Christian one becomes” (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 184; KW XVI 194). Christian love is self-denying and self-sacrificing. It can only be received at the cost of one’s (worldly) self. Although it is dispensed willy-nilly, it creates selflessness in whatever it penetrates. The self becomes “invisible,” “transparent” and “nothing” (cf. Kierkegaard SV1 VIII 278-279; KW XV 192-193). This creates its own *aporia*, since it seems that the very subject that receives this love is thereby annihilated by it. Note that in Danish, as in German, the word “Gift” means “poison” — the gift that takes life.

If the self is really annihilated by God’s *agape*, then God Himself starts to resemble the self-enclosed aesthete from Kierkegaard’s “first authorship,” who writes as if to another but then revokes it. As with the pagan Zeus, if we look too closely at the Christian God’s glory, it consumes us. If we fly too close to the sun, we are incinerated by its excessive expenditure of energy. If the recipient of God’s love is consumed by His gift, then He gives to no one.

One way out of this apparent *aporia* is that in the taking of our old self, we are given a new one. God's own act of self-sacrifice, in Christ, allows us to be "reborn." Our former, selfish selves are annihilated, and our new, self-sacrificing, loving selves are born. These new selves, to revert to the Hegelian dialectic of selfhood, are recognized by "worldly" selves as despicable, cheek-turning wretches. They sacrifice recognition by "the world" in favor of "eternal" recognition by God. But what is the ontological status of these "new selves"? If we take recognition by God to be *constitutive* of an ontologically different self, this creates difficulties about personal identity. Is the recipient and subsequent user of the gift of love the same person if the former is annihilated and replaced by the latter? These difficulties are avoided if we take "before God" to be a *regulative* concept in the Kantian sense, rather than constitutive of the self (cf. Pattison 1997). One does not literally become "nothing," but only counts oneself as nothing in the sense of setting aside all one's egotistical and self-interested concerns. One's egotistical, worldly self disappears in the sense that it is displaced from the top of one's hierarchy of values. Preferential and erotic love can coexist with Christian love as duty, but only as long as they are not in conflict. As soon as they conflict, then love as duty takes precedence (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 124-125; KW XVI 129-130).

Nevertheless, a problem persists. Kierkegaard claims that God is "indeed the sole true object of love" (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 125; KW XVI 130). This creates a problem if God is the subject of love, since He has to take Himself as the sole object of His love. But love as *agape* is selfless love, love of the other, not self-love. Love as *agape* is supposed

to be spontaneous overflow, which falls on whomever is nearest — the neighbor [*Næste*]. Strictly speaking, the Christian God as omnipresent is always nearest. But in that case God's love will always spill over in the first instance into God. If God is to avoid mere self-love, the command to love the neighbor must mean to direct the flow of *agape* to the nearest *other* person. But commands, duties and directions with respect to *agape* seem incompatible with its nature as spontaneous expenditure.

If the gift of love is part of an economy of exchange, Christian love seems to be autarkic. God is defined as love, which transfigures human subjects into nothing but conduits of love, who take God to be “the sole true object of love.” Love loves love. An alternative to this autarky, or *agapic* solipsism, is to reintroduce the notion of a return for the gift of love. This seems to be concealed in the notion of Christian redoubling and the eternal like for like, which replaces the “Jewish” *lex talionis*. One is blessed or judged by God as one blesses or judges others. The Christian category of like for like “is such an important and decisive Christian specification” that Kierkegaard would like to end “if not every book in which I develop the essentially Christian, then at least one book with this thought” (SV1 IX 356; KW XVI 376). The like for like operates on the basis of Christian inwardness. The manner in which we judge or bless or love others earnestly and inwardly is redoubled in us by God as “like for like.” We cannot act for the sake of this “like for like” as a reward, since we will only be rewarded if we act selflessly for the sake of others (and not for the sake of a reward). But this fits precisely the structure of much gift giving. As Pierre Bourdieu points out, it requires a social “miscognition” of the role the gift has as “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1997, 232). Gifts are given in order to build



up symbolic capital, to put others under obligation, not in order to receive some finely calculated equivalent gift in return, but to build up social status, honor, and reputation. Under some circumstances these can be “cashed in” for services, but generally underpin social bonds of friendship and family. These gifts might often be given quite unselfishly, for the sake of the other, but can also be given in a rather more calculating manner. Everyone knows, at least in the back of their minds, that gifts do function in an economy of exchange, but put it out of their minds. We can even take offence if reminded too blatantly that gifts do have exchange value. That is, to use Bourdieu’s coinage, there is a collective “miscognition” of the exchange value of gifts, together with an awareness that they do have exchange value. The Christian is constrained to do good works for the sake of others, rather than for the reward of eternal salvation. But the Christian is aware of the possibility of eternal salvation, either as an exchange by God for the good works done in life or as a gratuitous act of grace. Yet it seems sinners will only be saved by an act of grace in this life, in which God’s love transfigures them from selfish to selfless, so that they come to deserve salvation in the eternal like for like.

The importance of *this life* for Christian salvation has a counterpart in Bourdieu’s analysis of the gift. In order to function in an economy of exchange and be subject to “miscognition,” the gift and counter-gift need to be separated by the passage of time (Bourdieu 1997, 190ff.). If the counter-gift is given immediately on receipt of the gift, it will be perceived as a return rather than as an independent act of generosity. The Christian cannot earn eternal salvation in eternity, but must do so in this life: “... in eternity it is impossible to become a Christian; there the settlement comes, and the

settlement has to do with whether one has been a Christian” (Kierkegaard *Pap.* X 4 A; *JP* 1 539). This does not mean that God’s gift of love cannot be used selflessly, for the sake of others. But nor does God’s gift of love exclude the sort of dual consciousness people commonly exercise with respect to gifts and exchange over time. By loving selflessly, the Christian builds up symbolic capital, whether that is actually despised by “the world” and only recognized by God, or not. The sort of self-sacrificing love that effected the Christian transvaluation of values might not have been recognized as symbolic capital by those steeped in the values of *eros*, but it has certainly been recognized as such subsequently in Christendom. Piety, goodness and humility have themselves been invoked as rungs on the *scala paradisi*.<sup>7</sup> Precisely this provokes both Kierkegaard and Luther to criticize all idea of ascension through merit. If good works are done for the sake of earning salvation, they are thereby robbed of their value (Nygren 1957, 799).

#### *The Work of Writing as Gift*

Whereas work in the Hegelian dialectic objectifies the slave, work in Kierkegaard’s dialectic of erotic love also objectifies the subject of love – in the work of art, or reflective imagination. Erotic love typically “poeticizes” a young man, through imagination - the medium of infinite possibility (Kierkegaard SV1 XI 144; KW XIX 30). Even Johannes the seducer objectifies himself in his work of art, whether that work is conceived as “The Seducer’s Diary” or as the “free spirit” he has fashioned out of Cordelia. These self-objectifications turn out to be misleading phantoms in the quest for selfhood, since they merely multiply the reflections already within the reflective self. They contribute no more genuine new knowledge of oneself or another than Platonic

recollection. “Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out” (Kierkegaard SV1 VI 14; KW XI 8). But in the work of love as *agape*, the self disappears – to make room for the incursion of God as absolute other. The self must disappear, since to recognize a human author of a work of love undoes it as a work of love. This is because the only true work of love is to help another person become independent, and if that person sees that he has “become his own master” by the help of another human being, his autonomy is undone — along with the work of love (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 261-266; KW XVI 274-279). When writing is a work of love, it must erase its human authorship in order to avoid undoing itself in this way. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard effects this self-erasure with the device of “the dash” [*Tankestreg*] (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 262-264; KW XVI 275-264).<sup>8</sup>

In Danish there is a further ambiguity in the word “Gift,” which means not only “poison,” but also “married.” The latter meaning derives from the practice of “giving one’s daughter away in marriage” (Nielsen 1966, 129). This is particularly telling for Kierkegaard, who was so ambivalent about being married. On the one hand he used it as his prime trope for universal civic virtue and communion with another; on the other hand he shied away from it like poison in his own life. Much of his work as a writer revolves around the problem of communicating with an other, whether through works of writing or love. Yet the “reader” as other is often reduced to his own “imaginary construct” - and thereby “revoked.” Since he reduces other human beings to the same through his category of immanence, he is left with the transcendent God as the only true other. His paradigm of love is based on a relation exclusively with this divine other – human love

being at best mediated by love of God. When this divine love threatens to reduce to love loving itself, Kierkegaard's leap from the immanence of *eros* in the "first authorship" to *agape* in the "second authorship" appears to be a leap back into himself.<sup>9</sup>

The dialectic of *eros* in the "first authorship" leads from unhappiness, through doubt, to humor – the inverse of the Hegelian dialectic that succeeds the dialectic of master and slave, viz. stoicism, skepticism, and unhappy consciousness (Hegel 1977, 119-38). Yet ironically, the dialectic of the "second authorship" seems to follow this Hegelian dialectic closely, from resignation, through despair [*Fortvivlelse* – an intensified self-doubt], to suffering and self-sacrifice. The rejection of the dialectic of *eros*, in favor of the leap into *agape*, seems to lead to the same result as the Hegelian dialectic parodied as a speculative incarnation of the heavenly ladder.

Finally, self-concern and self-communication pervade Kierkegaard's deliberation on "The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead." Here Kierkegaard says that "one who is dead is no actual object" (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 329; KW XVI 347). The point of recollecting one who is dead is to disclose "what resides in the one living" (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 329; KW XVI 347). Like the erasures of the reader, and the revocations of actual existence in the false dialectic of the "first authorship," this work of love is aimed at self-communion. This comes out starkly in the analogy Kierkegaard draws between loving the dead and dancing alone: "if you could prevail upon a dancer to dance solo the dance he customarily dances with another, you would be able to observe his motions best, better than ... if he were dancing with another actual person" (Kierkegaard SV1 IX 329;

KW XVI 347). It is this figure of love for the dead that Adorno calls “both the worst and the best part of [Kierkegaard’s] doctrine of love” (Adorno 1939-40, 427). It is the worst aspect because it eschews all reciprocity in love; but it is the best because “it is love absolutely void of any barter, of any “requit,” and, therefore, the only unmutated love permitted by our society (Adorno 1939-40, 427).”<sup>10</sup> Kierkegaard’s “Edifying Discourses” are dedicated to his deceased father — a gift of writing to the dead, an act of writing to himself. They are addressed to “that single individual, my reader.” When he first used this address, Kierkegaard had a particular individual in mind — his beloved Regine Olsen (Kierkegaard *Pap.* X.1 A 266; *JP* 6 144). Subsequently this is transfigured by “Governance”: “I remember what a pseudonymous writer [Johannes Climacus] said about Socrates: ‘His whole life was personal preoccupation with himself, and then Governance comes and adds world-historical significance to it’” (Kierkegaard *Pap.* X.1 A 266; *JP* 6 144). Kierkegaard, as his own reader, is “that single individual” to whom “Governance” may add world-historical significance. But not in his lifetime.

Even in his supposed works of *agape* Kierkegaard turns the address to another back into himself. Even the incursion of a transcendental power fails to transfigure Kierkegaard’s solitary love of the dead into anything other than a quest for self-disclosure – to become himself as reader (albeit of “the old familiar text handed down from the fathers”) (Kierkegaard SV1 VII 549; KW XII.1 630). His writing is an ambivalent gift to himself — to which he is married and through which he is poisoned. It is an autoerotic substitute for love of the other.<sup>11</sup>

Or is it the ultimate incognito – the dash – under which the selfless donor of the Christian gift of writing disappears?

*Concluding Unscientific Edification*

Kierkegaard’s “aesthetic authorship” both repeats and problematizes Platonic accounts of the relation between human and divine love. These words on love “recollect” the ladder of *eros* only to parody it as inadequate to escape the immanence of human self-love. His repetitions of this inadequacy, under the guise of different pseudonyms, underscore the futility of attempting to scale the heights of heaven — either to take God’s love by storm or to be the mid-wife at one’s own “rebirth.” This creates an emphatic distinction between sensuous self-love (*eros*) and divinely given, selfless Christian love (*agape*).

But attempts to understand *agape* conceptually, through Kierkegaard’s “second authorship,” lead to *aporia*. The “second authorship,” too, must deconstruct any ladders it apparently builds to divine love, since “every good and perfect gift is from above” (*James* 1:17) - not from within human immanence. Love as *agape* is a gift from God, which, once received, can be used by the recipient only to build up love in those who have already received it. The “Edifying Discourses” repeat God’s words, with humility and without authority, inviting the reader to dwell with them in faith. Therefore it is only in the “Edifying Discourses” that we find true works of Christian love, since they aim only to re-read the (familiar) word of God in ways that augment the love of God presupposed in “that single individual” — the reader.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Although Elsebet Jegstrup (2001, 131) speculates that the word *Gjerning* derives from the verb *at give* [to give], there is no philological warrant for this. Niels Åge Nielsen (1966, 129) shows that *Gjerning* derives from Old Norse *gørning* [deed]. Jegstrup’s intuition, though, is correct that *Gjerninger* is better translated as “acts” rather than “works” in *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger* [Works of Love]. *Virksomhed* is better translated as “activity,” but I use “work” here, as I do for *Gjerning*, to indicate the connection with the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. All fabrication of external artifacts or activities from internal states I will call “work” for this purpose.

<sup>2</sup> Guillermine de Lacoste (2002, 3) claims that Plato, Plotinus and Augustine “immure themselves within a binary framework according to which there is an antinomy between the finite and the infinite, between the here and now and the eternal. Within this framework, the material world, the body, and even human love have often been considered to be hindrances in our quest for the infinite and the eternal.” I argue that what is characteristic of the position of these thinkers is that the material, the corporeal, and human (erotic) love can serve precisely as the means of ascent to the infinite and eternal.

<sup>3</sup> Elsebet Jegstrup (2001, 128) suggests that there is much more continuity between *Elskov* [*eros*] and *Kjerlighed* [*agape*] than I argue is the case, and that the difference is simply one of perspective. She underscores this by pointing to parallel “ontological assurances” presupposed by the Platonic philosopher and the Christian believer (2001, 126).

<sup>4</sup> The phrase “self-consuming artifact” is due to Stanley Fish (1973). Just like the preface to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, any preface to the Christian “book” must revoke itself, show itself to be redundant, since only by understanding the book will the preface to the book become intelligible. Any such “preface” will turn out to be intelligible only as an anticipatory “postface,” in which case it will be redundant. Cf. Jacques Derrida (1981, 1-59) and Søren Kierkegaard’s *Prefaces* (Kierkegaard SVI V; KW IX).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Begonya Saez Tajafuerce (2000, 78-88) who takes the aesthetic work of seduction, and its writing, to effect movement towards the ethical.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Georges Bataille, (1985, 118-120); and Friedrich Nietzsche (1968, 121-122). Note that both Zarathustra and Bataille (elsewhere) also use the sun as a trope for unconditional expenditure.

<sup>7</sup> Anders Nygren (1957, 594ff.) cites the Monastic Rule of Benedict, which speaks of twelve steps of humility as the rungs of Jacob's heavenly ladder. He also draws attention to the ladder of merit, virtue, or good works, adduced by Augustine (1957, 513) and Gregory of Nyssa (1957, 442).

<sup>8</sup> In an unfortunate oversight, an important dash is omitted from *Works of Love* translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Kierkegaard KW XVI 374). In the Danish editions, Section X "The Work of Love in Praising Love" ends with a dash. This dash in the Danish text immediately precedes the "Conclusion" of *Works of Love*, which consists in introducing the words of the Apostle John. That is, it is meant to function as an erasure of the author-ego of Søren Kierkegaard in favor of the word (or work) of God. If Kierkegaard fails to disappear under this dash, and he (rather than God) is recognized as helping the reader attain independence, *Works of Love* fails on its own terms to be a work of Christian love.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard characterized Socrates in *The Concept of Irony* precisely as "leaping back into himself" (Kierkegaard SV1 XIII 249; KW II 166). Kierkegaard, as a self-styled latter day Socrates, constantly leaps back into himself by means of irony or humor ("irony to a higher power").

<sup>10</sup> M. Jamie Ferreira (2001, 210ff.) attempts to retrieve something of the spirit of *agape* from this passage in *Works of Love*. She does so by arguing that the act of loving the dead brings out the *asymmetrical* character of Christian love. But asymmetry is equally a feature of Kierkegaard's conception of erotic love, in the one-sided manipulations of the objects of desire.

<sup>11</sup> Joakim Garff (2000, 211) points out that the "young man" in *Repetition* substitutes a book for his beloved, even taking it to bed with him. Kierkegaard's love affair with language perhaps culminates in the encomium to his "mother tongue" in the "Letter to the Reader" that concludes *Stages on Life's Way* (Kierkegaard SV1 VI 454-455; KW XI 489-490). But he came to regard his method of indirect communication as a temptation to the demonic - understood as "self-enclosed reserve" (e.g. Kierkegaard *Pap IX A* 260; *JP 2* 383; *Pap IX B* 63; *JP 3* 159; *Pap X 1 A* 122; *JP 1* 312; and *Pap X 2 A* 375).

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