

# Love Among the Post-Socratics

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## *Abstract*

Victor Eremita proposes that the reader understand parts I and II of *Either/Or* as parties in a dialogue; most readers in fact view II as a devastating reply to I. I suggest that part I be read as a reaction or follow-up to Kierkegaard's dissertation. Much of part I presents reflective characters who are aware of their freedom but reluctant or unable to adopt the ethical life. The modern Antigone and the Silhouettes are sisters of Alcibiades—failed students of Socrates. I articulate and defend their modes of loving, which are significantly different from Don Giovanni's and Johannes the Seducer's purely aesthetic approaches to love. Such feminine love, I argue, dwells in the disputed territory between passion and action, substance and freedom, the aesthetic and the ethical. Antigone's love is a passion she both suffers and tries to appropriate. The Silhouettes' devotion to their beloved makes them dependent on him. I defend this dependence even though it is undoubtedly a form of despair. By appealing to Sartre's account of love, I argue moreover that this love involves a recognition and appraisal of the beloved absent in the love exemplified by *Fear and Trembling's* knight of infinite resignation.

Most interpreters obediently follow Victor Eremita's instructions when they approach *Either/Or*, reading the two parts as a philosophical juxtaposition of an aesthetic and an ethical approach to life. At the same time, the juxtaposition is usually thought to be asymmetrical. Since B's letters are presented as a response to A's notes and lectures, it is tempting to think of part II as a dialectical advancement upon part I: as an attack to which A could not give an effective retort. According to John Hare, it is only from Victor Eremita's limited point of view that A and B appear to be on equal footing; Kierkegaard leaves it to the reader to notice that Judge William "expose[s] vulnerabilities in the

Aesthete's position."<sup>1</sup> Jon Stewart writes that Kierkegaard seems himself "clearly to weight the argument in favor of Judge Wilhelm's position and not that of the esthete."<sup>2</sup> Michelle Kosch finds the interpretation that A and B are on equal footing (the standard interpretation in her assessment) implausible. One cannot choose A over B, according to Kosch, because only with B does one have the possibility of choosing in the first place.<sup>3</sup> It might seem ironic, in light of these interpretations, that Kierkegaard actually wrote much of part II before part I; but of course the order of writing is a historical fact that does not as such determine the dialectical order.<sup>4</sup>

Still, as historical facts go it is worth noting, because it might explain the further philosophical fact that the Judge addresses only a few of the issues raised in part I. As Joakim Garff notes, it is unclear how much of A's papers the Judge has actually read.<sup>5</sup> Indeed the Judge's criticism seems to target mainly the second half of part I: the three essays "The First Love," "Rotation of Crops" and "The Seducer's Diary." These essays

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<sup>1</sup> John Hare, "The Unhappiest One and the Structure of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*," in *Either/Or, I*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press 1995 (*The International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 3), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Kosch, "'Despair' in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2006, p. 95-96. In fact A's treatment of tragedy, anxiety and regret shows him not incapable of choosing but lamenting how difficult and sometimes vain choosing is. However committed we are to any given decision, we may regret that decision at a later time. Nor can we escape tragedy simply by acting in accordance with reason and the moral law, for we never enjoy perfect knowledge and can never be sure that our actions will have the consequences we intended. We do not need to be fatalists in order to believe that a good person with the best intentions can do ill in spite of himself. And because it's possible to regret actions that are morally neutral, it's not clear how repenting before God, as the Judge urges us to (*SKS 3*, 207f. / *EO2*, 216), can redeem us from all regret, or why repentance is appropriate in cases of unintentional harm.

<sup>4</sup> See Hong's "Historical Introduction," *EOI*, vii. Commentators often criticize the Judge's approach to love and life from a religious point of view, but rarely from the position of any of the figures in part I. Joakim Garff is one exception; see his *Den Søvnløse: Kierkegaard læst æstetisk/biografisk* (Copenhagen: Reitzel 1995, pp. 68-114). For an excerpt in English of his discussion of *Either/Or*, see "'The Esthetic is above all My Element,'" in *The New Kierkegaard*, ed. by Elsebet Jegstrup, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004, pp. 59-70.

<sup>5</sup> Garff, *Den søvnløse*, p. 80.

present a superficial, “Romantic” way of life; a life lived in the realm of ideas, in pursuit of the interesting, in constant fear of boredom, on the run from responsible agency. The Romantic ironist conjured forth in the “Diary” could not have served the ethical as a more perfect straw-man if the Judge had composed that work of fiction himself. But the artificial problems that keep the artificial Romantic ironist up at night are in stark contrast with the very real subject-matters A treats in “The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic of Modern Drama” and “Silhouettes.” Although the Judge does attack the tragic world-view and accuse all melancholy and sorrow of self-indulgence, he does not consider the modern Antigone and the Silhouettes in any depth and does not recognize that they have approaches to love and life in their own right, approaches that can’t just be lumped together with Emmeline’s or the seducers’ under the aesthetic rubric.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless the Judge’s limited response to the wealth of ideas and perspectives represented in A’s papers seems to have had a damning effect on the Kierkegaard scholarship’s own response to the work. There is a pervasive tendency to read part I with part II already in mind, so that the Judge’s blind spots are also neglected by the reader.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, some interpreters seem to defer entirely to the Judge’s projection in forming their image of A, and to the Judge’s negative terms in describing the aesthetic. But any reading

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the heterogeneity of “the aesthetic” in Kierkegaard’s works, see Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1989, pp. 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> M. Jamie Ferreira insists in the introduction to her chapter on *Either/Or* that A and B are on equal footing (*Kierkegaard*, West Sussex: Wiley/Blackwell 2009, pp. 18-21); yet she then summarizes part I in a single paragraph, remarking that it is “impossible to do justice here to ‘A’s papers’” (p. 20) and proceeds to devote six pages to the Judge’s letters, letting his critique of A serve as the reader’s guide to both the aesthetic and the ethical. Rick Anthony Furtak ignores many discussions in part I that are highly relevant to the topic of “emotional integrity”—the central concern of Furtak’s study—and which offer insights to which he, in his disenchantment with Stoicism, should be sympathetic. The omission seems to be due precisely to a reading of part I that is biased by part II. See his *Wisdom in Love*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2005, especially chapters 6 and 8.

of part I that is not blinded by an *a priori* condemnation of its alleged author should at least grant that A is a sophisticated philosopher who offers us an account of modernity and freedom no less important and insightful than the Judge's discussion of autonomy and choice.

This paper is devoted to A's Antigone and the Silhouettes and their characteristically feminine modes of loving.<sup>8</sup> Although Judge William's critique of despair does apply to these four women and although like Garff, I think that A's tender and inspired telling of their stories contains, in turn, a powerful challenge to the Judge, I will try to show that their approaches to love should be understood against the background of *The Concept of Irony*. Indeed, much of part I is concerned with the aftermath of the Socratic revolution. As such, it deserves to be read not exclusively as something to be refuted in part II, but as a follow-up to Kierkegaard's dissertation, a disenchanted and at times resentful response to its celebration of self-sufficiency and negative freedom. The essay on tragedy, Heinrich Fauteck notes, is essentially also *Zeitkritik*, one coming not from above but from below, from a victim of these modern times.<sup>9</sup> On my interpretation, the essays on tragedy and reflective sorrow portray persons who are stuck between the ethical and the aesthetic stages, torn between a freedom that wants to be asserted and the particular way of being claimed by something outside oneself that we call love. Like tragic guilt, the modern Antigone's love of her father is something she both undergoes and brings upon herself. Her love is not a passion merely suffered, but a passion reflectively endorsed.

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<sup>8</sup> Although Anti-Climacus, too, considers it essentially feminine, we will encounter four male representatives of this approach to love.

<sup>9</sup> Heinrich Fauteck, "Kierkegaards Antigone," *Skandinaviastik*, vol. 4, 1974, p. 94.

The Silhouettes' love is also a form of dependence upon the beloved and therefore a form of despair. Their grief is that their love is unrequited and I consider and rebut the charge that because it wants to be reciprocated, their love is a form of self-love. This feminine love contains an appraisal of the beloved absent in commanded impartial love of the neighbor. Comparing and contrasting the Silhouettes' approach to love with that of *Fear and Trembling's* knight of infinite resignation helps us see this more clearly. Though most Kierkegaard scholars would say that disenchantment with the ethical should prompt a leap into religious faith, I criticize also the knight of faith's attitude toward the princess. In the end, it was not in a work of ethics or theology but in two essays on tragedy and despair that Kierkegaard articulated his most convincing account of personal love.

### I.

Though he's never mentioned in it, Socrates haunts *Either/Or*. The Socratic revolution, as laid out in Kierkegaard's dissertation, is a premise of the two-volume pseudonymous work on love. This is perhaps most obvious in A's discussion of *Antigone*, for we know from *The Concept of Irony* that it was Socrates who discovered the individual freedom that "cut the umbilical cord of substantiality"<sup>10</sup> and thereby, according to A, killed ancient tragedy. In fact, that A's Antigone is "modern" just means that she is post-Socratic. "Our age," A writes, "has lost all the substantial categories of family, state,

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<sup>10</sup> SKS 1, 238 / CI, 191.

kindred; it must turn the single individual over to himself completely in such a way that, strictly speaking, he becomes his own creator.”<sup>11</sup>

The modern individual has discovered in himself an infinite negative freedom that promises to make him self-sufficient. As far as A is concerned, this is no cause for celebration. For it also means that we moderns “know that there is something called responsibility and that this means something,” and this awareness depresses us. Freedom is the cause of our *Tungsind* [*heavy-mindedness*], it weighs us down.<sup>12</sup> In his dissertation, Kierkegaard put forth his own version of the ancient thesis that Socrates founded morality. With Socratic self-consciousness, fatalism ends. That the individual is infinitely free means that he is fully responsible for his actions and this in turn makes feeling sorry for him, when he has done wrong, misguided. And if life gives him grief through no fault of his own, he should not—presumably—let it get to him. A Stoic detachment from whatever is beyond our control can be seen as a straightforward application of infinite absolute negativity. Man’s negative freedom must also be the freedom not to care.<sup>13</sup>

Genuine tragedy, A explains, is played out on the middle ground between Pelagianism—which affirms human freedom and denies original, or “hereditary,” sin—and monism. If the individual is completely isolated and, as Pelagianism would have it,

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<sup>11</sup> *SKS* 2, 148 / *EOI*, 149. Cf. *SKS* 1, 232-233 / *CI*, 185.

<sup>12</sup> *SKS* 2, 141 / *EOI*, 142.

<sup>13</sup> In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche made a similar argument by asking his reader to consider “the consequences of the Socratic maxims: ‘Virtue is knowledge; man sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy.’ In these three basic forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Modern Library 1992, p. 14). Whereas Kierkegaard emphasizes that Socrates’ philosophical stance is entirely practical, Nietzsche’s Socrates is an exemplary “theoretical man” (p. 94) whose optimism consists not in a certainty of his freedom but in a faith in knowledge—a conviction that “thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate to the deepest abysses of being” (p. 95). In other words, Nietzsche attributes the death of tragedy to Socrates’ insistence on the world’s intelligibility. His conclusions are nonetheless very close to Kierkegaard’s: as the Euripidean hero tries to explain himself, to “defend his actions with arguments and counterarguments,” Nietzsche writes, he “often risks the loss of our tragic pity” (p. 91).

“absolutely the creator of his own fate, there is nothing tragic anymore, but only evil.” If, on the other hand, “the individuals are merely modifications of the eternal substance of life,”<sup>14</sup> then there can be no collision between different forces or principles—the obligations of citizenship against religious piety or love of kin, for example—and then the tragic is lost in a different way. Tragedy requires a soft notion of guilt; an event can be tragic if it is partly but not wholly the result of intentional action. Oedipus both does and does not actively marry his own mother. He marries Jocasta voluntarily, but that she is his mother, he does not know. The fact that his actions fulfill a prophecy made before his birth suggests to the spectator a collaboration between his actions and fate unknown to Oedipus himself—suggests that his will is not the ultimate cause of his actions. There is thus an ambiguity in Oedipus’ responsibility; his incest is both deed and suffering.<sup>15</sup> But to rational reflection such “softness,” such “ambiguity,” is plain contradiction. As the reflective mind asserts man’s infinite negative freedom, it rejects the idea of fate. It also severs the individual from such a connection to others—his family, for example—as would give him a share in the responsibility for their deeds. Every event in which an individual participates is either deed or suffering—so rationality insists. And if it is a deed, then he is responsible. But if it is suffering, then he is not responsible. When he discovered this freedom, Socrates discovered morality—that good and evil are a matter of choice—and morality killed ancient tragedy.

“Pain,” in A’s technical sense, is a conscious, reflective displeasure. The worst pain is remorse—what we feel when we recognize that we’ve done wrong. Remorse is freedom’s pain—the pain par excellence for a free, reflective being. “Sorrow” denotes an

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<sup>14</sup> *SKS 2*, 159 / *EOI*, 160.

<sup>15</sup> *SKS 2*, 143 / *EOI*, 144.

individual's immediate awareness of having suffered displeasure or misfortune. Like such suffering, it is passive and unreflective.<sup>16</sup> The modern tragic hero, who "stands and falls entirely on his own deeds," feels pain rather than sorrow.<sup>17</sup> But unlike sorrow, pain only hurts and in no way soothes; it does not contain the seeds of its own redemption. In ancient tragedy, fate was the hero's downfall. To know that he could do nothing to change his fate undoubtedly hurt, but it also offered relief from his pain. The fact that his misery was not entirely his fault redeemed him from it. And it allowed the spectator to abandon himself to cathartic compassion, a compassion that wished to further redeem the hero by sharing his sorrow. The modern tragic hero, bearing full responsibility for his crime, must bear also the pain alone. Because his crime is not a passion, it cannot elicit *compassion* from others. The modern spectator shouts at the tragic hero: "Help yourself, and heaven will help you!"—in other words, A says, "the spectator has lost compassion."<sup>18</sup>

A rejects the metaphysical assumptions underlying that stance. Even if man's freedom were "infinite," it would not make him all-powerful. Our generation, A says, thinks of itself as "a kingdom of gods." But our conviction that we design our own fate is an illusion.<sup>19</sup> The modern emphasis on the individual's responsibility in fact makes for comedy more than tragedy, A says. It is comical to think oneself so powerful, so capable at every moment of doing the right thing that any misfortune that comes one's way is one's own fault. Nor can we abstain from grieving over those misfortunes in our lives for which we bear no responsibility: we are not infinitely free from care. Incest, patricide,

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<sup>16</sup> *SKS* 2, 146f. / *EOI*, 147f.

<sup>17</sup> *SKS* 2, 143 / *EOI*, 144.

<sup>18</sup> *SKS* 2, 148 / *EOI*, 149.

<sup>19</sup> *SKS* 2, 144 / *EOI*, 145.

unrequited love—the modern world-view wants to write these off as mundane concerns, has to claim that to grieve for them is cowardice, tantamount to refusing responsibility for one's deeds. Representing modernity, Anti-Climacus calls such grief despair—"despair over something earthly."<sup>20</sup>

But, A would ask, if we are not to care about family, about love—what then is left to give meaning and value to life, what remains of any substance? Every individual, he writes, "however original he is, is still a child of God, of his age, of his nation, of his family, of his friends, and only in them does he have his truth. If he wants to be the absolute in all this, his relativity, then he becomes ludicrous."<sup>21</sup> An individual who imagines himself to be his own creator and foundation is at best comical. At worst, life will be for him either unbearably heavy or unbearably light. Heavy insofar as he must carry his whole life on his back. Light insofar as his infinite negative freedom would detach him from such cares and desires that could guide him in his choices, the loves and purposes that can bind his freedom and give him a positive content. As Socrates "placed individuals under his dialectical vacuum pump" and, as Kierkegaard puts it, "pumped away the atmospheric air they were accustomed to breathing,"<sup>22</sup> he freed them "as he himself was free."<sup>23</sup> But for them, "everything was now lost, except to the extent that they were able to breathe ethereal air."<sup>24</sup> And for A it's really a tragedy that modern man has to shoulder his life all alone; indeed, modern tragic dramas take as their subject-matter the anxiety that inevitably accompanies freedom. The focal point of such tragedies

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<sup>20</sup> *SKS* 11, 164 / *SUD*, 49-50.

<sup>21</sup> *SKS* 2, 144 / *EOI*, 145.

<sup>22</sup> *SKS* 1, 225 / *CI*, 178.

<sup>23</sup> *SKS* 1, 223 / *CI*, 176.

<sup>24</sup> *SKS* 1, 225 / *CI*, 178.

is the hero's psyche rather than the objective facts of his situation; *Hamlet*, for example, portrays the agony of reflection as the protagonist tries, first, to determine whether his uncle killed his father, and second, to decide on a course of action of his own.

In the drama *A sketches*, the tragic does not lie in reflection itself but in the struggle between substantiality and reflection inside the individual, where the claims of substance prevent action, prevent resolve. Contrary to the tendency of modern tragedy, *A* wants to emphasize the non-reflective part of the individual—the finite in the infinite-finite synthesis that is the human being. To this end he chooses a female protagonist. “As a woman,” he says, “she will have enough substantiality”—will be finite and earthly enough—“for the sorrow to manifest itself but as one belonging to a reflective world she will have sufficient reflection to experience the pain.”<sup>25</sup> If reflection were “present in its infinitude” it would “reflect her out of her guilt,” but a limited reflectiveness, a reflection that constantly runs up against the ties to the external world that she cannot sever, will “reflect her not out of her sorrow but into it; at every moment it will transform sorrow into pain for her.”<sup>26</sup>

The ancient Antigone's kinship with Oedipus is an objective relation, and, *A* says, “the father's guilt and suffering are an external fact” in which Antigone participates with “childlike piety.”<sup>27</sup> But as the Socratic revolution undermined the metaphysical status of kinship and the authority of the gods, such objective ties were severed. Modern society does not force Oedipus' sin upon Antigone, does not judge her guilty by proxy. *A* makes this clear when he stipulates, contrary to Sophocles, that no one around his modern

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<sup>25</sup> *SKS 2*, 152 / *EOI*, 153-154.

<sup>26</sup> *SKS 2*, 152 / *EOI*, 154.

<sup>27</sup> *SKS 2*, 137 / *EOI*, 160.

Antigone ever finds out what Oedipus has done. Her bond with her father is neither a matter of fate, nor a mandate from the gods, nor a cultural construct enforced through social pressure. It is not objective but subjective, like a call only she can hear and that she answers, “yes.” The modern Antigone incriminates herself all by herself and even enforces her own penalty. Her father’s misfortune is a heritage she appropriates actively, consciously and continually; she inherits his guilt voluntarily, with all her heart. Just as the curse of the Labdakos family is due to the gods in the Greek version, so too is a goddess—Aphrodite—said to preside over Antigone’s love for her brother. Thus the ancient Antigone’s loyalty to kin is dictated by the gods and comes as naturally to her as her religious piety. The modern Antigone’s love for Oedipus, by contrast, is an unmoved mover. Nor is she subject to any divine mandate to bury herself alive in tending to her father’s disgrace, whereas the ancient Antigone gave her life to save her brother’s honor. What keeps a modern family together is a love that unlike fate is subjective, and unlike piety is deeply personal and directed at a particular beloved person without the mediation of a god.<sup>28</sup>

Modern love like the new Antigone’s is then subjective, reflective and active. But that love is also a passion is evidenced by the fact that why we love one person rather than another is something we can never fully explain. To reflection, which seeks reasons in terms of general principles, personal love must ultimately seem unjustified. At the same time, when I say that I speak “from the bottom of my heart” or that I do something

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<sup>28</sup> On Daniel Greenspan’s interpretation, it is the new Antigone’s erotic love for Haemon that manifests her modern subjectivity, in contrast with her relation to her father which Greenspan calls objective (*The Passion of Infinity: Kierkegaard, Aristotle and the Rebirth of Tragedy*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2008 (*Kierkegaard Studies, Monograph Series*, vol. 19), p. 153. But Antigone’s relationship to her family must also be more subjective in the modern version than in the ancient in order to manifest the difference in guilt, though it is true that in giving up romantic love for filial love, the modern Antigone is affirming a more substantial tie over a more subjective one.

“with all my heart,” I use the supreme natural metaphor for love to express that I am fully and voluntarily invested in my speech or deed. The modern Antigone’s love is not resolute, voluntary action: it is not through an act of will that she loves. But her feeling of attachment to and care for her father is a feeling with which she identifies, a feeling she happily affirms. In fact, for lack of an external metaphysical, cultural or religious ground, the feeling requires affirmation, requires reflective reinforcement. Her capacity for reflection, which would otherwise separate her from the object of her love and thereby absolve her of responsibility, is assigned the task of appropriating her father’s guilt—for this is what it means to be united with him. She “loves her father with all her soul,” A says, “and this love pulls her from herself into her father’s guilt.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus whereas an aesthetic lover like Don Giovanni is constituted entirely by his desire and is all first-order (this is the meaning of “immediacy”), the modern Antigone also belongs “to a reflective world” and is capable of taking higher-order attitudes to that which she undergoes. And whereas Johannes the Seducer is so reflective as to separate his love entirely from his beloved and take up residence in a closed-off dream-world of his own creation, Antigone’s reflective love is the project of sustaining a bond with her father. In this way, her love has the ambiguity between deed and suffering that for A is essential to tragedy. At the same time, her approach to love is distinctly modern. The ancient world-view had blood and name and gods and did not need a subjective, reflectively endorsed love as the bond between family members. A love like the modern Antigone’s is in fact a distinctly post-Socratic phenomenon.

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<sup>29</sup> *SKS 2, 159 / EOI, 161.*

*II.*

The modern Antigone loves her father both immediately and reflectively: her love has a first and second order. In some sense, she “chooses herself” in devoting herself to her father, though as A devises things she never seriously considered doing otherwise, and never enjoyed that moment of indifference before choosing that marks true negative freedom of the will. It is obvious to Antigone upon reflection that loving her father is her task in life. Only by devoting herself to him can she become herself. Reflection, though it effects an intellectual separation between Antigone and the object of her love, does not cut the emotional ties, but raises her suffering from sorrow to pain. Her freedom from responsibility for her father’s incest and the distance it puts between them is for her not a source of redemption, but something to be overcome.

Moreover it is not in consultation with general principles, universally valid maxims that she chooses to affirm her love. If any such reason can be invoked to justify her love, still that reason is not what moves her. Therefore there can be no rational answer to the question why Antigone loves her father. Any justification she gives—“Because he is my father”—just begs further questions in a vicious explanatory circle. For what does it mean that he is her father? It means that she is tied to him in this subjective way, that she loves him from the bottom of her heart. Yet the fact that he is her father does not generate an imperative that she should love him. The modern Antigone’s love is not dutiful obedience to a categorical imperative and in that sense is not ethical. It has no justification; or it is its own justification.

Among Sophocles' works is one that—even in its ancient form—tends toward modern tragedy, according to A. This is *Philoctetes*.<sup>30</sup> The insult added to Philoctetes' snakebite injury was that he did not enjoy his comrades' compassion. Annoyed by his cries and disgusted by his infected wound, they abandoned him. This is the premise of the play. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades offers the moral of this story: that we can only sympathize with the kind of suffering we ourselves have endured. You “know what people say about snakebite,” he says, “that you'll only talk about it with your fellow victims: only they will understand the pain and forgive you for all the things it made you do.”<sup>31</sup> What is remarkable for A in this tragedy is how reflection—something essentially modern—awakens in it. Philoctetes does not just suffer but ventures to ask questions about his suffering. Pain begins when a certain kind of doubt enters the hero's mind. “The first doubt with which pain really begins,” A writes, is “Why is this happening to me; can it not be otherwise?”<sup>32</sup> Reflection awakens and demands the reason for human suffering: demands explanation, justification. Philoctetes would serve Schopenhauer as a good example when he writes that the world poses a theoretical problem only because it is a practical, or moral, problem.<sup>33</sup> The first philosophical question, on this view, is “Why is there suffering in the world?” Philoctetes' predicament seems unjust to him: he doesn't see what he's done to deserve it. By virtue of lacking a moral justification, his suffering

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<sup>30</sup> *SKS 2*, 150 / *EOI*, 151.

<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing 1997, 217e-218a. A refers to this remark in the closing of “Silhouettes.” I give an extended interpretation of the significance of that reference in my “Love as a Problem of Knowledge in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* and Plato's *Symposium*,” *Inquiry*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> *SKS 2*, 150 / *EOI*, 151.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. by E.F.J. Payne, New York: Dover 1958, p. 579.

strikes him as a brute fact, as inexplicable. If the modern Antigone's reflection is a means of appropriating her father's guilt, Philoctetes' own guilt is for him still in question.

In asking for reasons, Philoctetes opens himself to the possibility of finding that the suffering was justified after all—that he is himself to blame for his suffering. As the reflective individual demands a justification from the world, he thus sets himself up for the deep pain of remorse. The kind of answer that would satisfy reflection's question would at the same time transform Philoctetes' sorrow into pain, for only a justification would be a conclusive explanation. But if, on the other hand, his question remains unanswered, reflection must continue to ponder the matter and for as long as no answer is found, Philoctetes will be in limbo. For he can neither be sent to the hell of remorse nor go back to the soothing sorrow that presupposes unreflective fatalism. When he raised the question "why," he crossed a dialectical Rubicon.

Caught up in such barren reflection, the tragic individual vacillates between sorrow and pain. A calls this intermediate state "reflective sorrow" and devotes the next essay, "Silhouettes," to the living dead who populate that limbo between the aesthetic and the ethical. Three fictional characters serve him as examples of this kind of sorrow: Marie Beaumarchais from Goethe's *Clavigo*, Donna Elvira from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Margaret from Goethe's *Faust*. Each of them suffers from unrequited love: they have all been seduced and abandoned. That is what's significant for A. "Her story is brief," he says of Marie: "Clavigo became engaged to her; Clavigo left her. This information is enough" to give an idea of her predicament, just as it is sufficient to know of Sisyphus that he "rolls a stone up the mountain."<sup>34</sup> In Elvira's case it is not a question of a broken

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<sup>34</sup> SKS 2, 174 / EOI, 177.

engagement but the bond she broke to be with Don Giovanni. For as A points out, Elvira used to be a nun: “it is from the peacefulness of a convent that Don Giovanni has snatched her.”<sup>35</sup> Regarding Margaret, finally, suffice it to recall the image Goethe evokes for us of this young girl, herself a flower, picking the petals off a daisy, one by one.

The trauma that affords the Silhouettes a chance at achieving autonomy is an experience of a deceptive appearance. In that sense their experiences serve as what Plato, in the *Republic*, calls “summoners”: perplexing impressions or experiences that *summon reason* to come to the aid of perception.<sup>36</sup> Such experiences prompt the individual to turn inward in trying to make sense of the external world. As with Philoctetes and Antigone, these women are given the task of assigning guilt. Like Philoctetes, they run aground on the theoretical reflection that must precede any well-founded verdict. Elvira, who takes sensuality to be infused with love, is not only heartbroken when Don Giovanni abandons her: she is also quite simply perplexed. His deception is not just an ethical problem but becomes, for her, a theoretical one.

Now some illusions can be dispelled by simple explanations: if a deception is proven, A says, “and the person concerned has perceived that it is a deception, the sorrow certainly does not cease, but then it is an immediate sorrow, not a reflective sorrow,”<sup>37</sup> and falls outside the scope of A’s study. But “that a deception is actually a deception is often very difficult to determine clearly.”<sup>38</sup> For all that could be brought in as evidence of a man’s true feelings and intentions are outward signs: what he said, what he did, how he

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<sup>35</sup> SKS 2, 187 / EO1, 190.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. by George M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John Cooper, Indianapolis: Hackett 1997, 523b-c.

<sup>37</sup> SKS 2, 176 / EO1, 178.

<sup>38</sup> SKS 2, 169 / EO1, 171.

looked and sounded. But such signs are themselves sensory, are themselves appearances, and as long as what's in question is the relation between sensory appearance and reality, they cannot yield any conclusive verdict. Moreover, the possibility that what a man says out loud does not manifest what he feels inside is a possibility to which the Silhouettes have an instinctive resistance. As she turns the question of her beloved's guilt over in her heart, Marie fumbles for a causal principle that would let her deduce his innermost feelings from his speech and dismiss the charge of deception. His voice, she notes to herself,

was so calm and yet so agitated, it sounded from an inwardness, the depth of which I could scarcely suspect, as if it were breaking a path through masses of rock. Can that voice deceive? What is the voice, then—is it a stroke of the tongue, a noise that one can produce as one wishes? But it must have a home somewhere in the soul; it must have a birthplace.<sup>39</sup>

Something in Marie revolts against the very idea that a person might project a false exterior and, more generally, that what appears in the world might just be show. Yet even if intention could be infallibly inferred from speech, the result of this inquiry would be at odds with the painfully obvious fact that her beloved is no longer by her side.

As long as there are doubts about the deception, A says, the sorrow “will find no repose but must continue to ramble back and forth in reflection.”<sup>40</sup> What's special about reflective sorrow is precisely “that the sorrow is continually seeking its object.”<sup>41</sup> For the Silhouettes, the theoretical question whether the beloved was a deceiver remains open

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<sup>39</sup> *SKS 2*, 184 / *EOI*, 187-188.

<sup>40</sup> *SKS 2*, 169 / *EOI*, 171-172.

<sup>41</sup> *SKS 2*, 175 / *EOI*, 178.

and is indeed plagued by particular dialectical difficulties. Marie's grief is uncertain of its object and indeed, as those around her ask impatiently, "what is she sorrowing over? If he was a deceiver, then it was indeed good that he left her, the earlier the better; she should rejoice over it instead and sorrow because she had loved him, and yet it is a deep sorrow that he was a deceiver."<sup>42</sup> The reason it's easy for others to believe that Clavigo was a deceiver is that they never loved him.<sup>43</sup> But for Marie the very idea that her lover was a deceiver is unfathomable; for love, A says, deception is a paradox—"an absolute paradox, and therein lies the necessity of a reflective grief."<sup>44</sup>

Love requires transparency: a lover neither deceives nor accepts deception from the beloved. Transparency is so essential to love that it is inconceivable to the Silhouettes that the seducer deceived them. Nor can the contrapositive formulation of this conditional—that if he deceived, then he did not love—help them, for they have solid evidence that he did love. What was Don Giovanni's seduction, after all, if not a sensuous manifestation of love? The other half of the transparency requirement—that a beloved cannot be a deceiver—is equally problematic. For if the beloved was a deceiver then, by *modus tollens*, he is not lovable. But the Silhouettes are incapable of ceasing to love the beloved. As long as they refuse to abandon either the principle of transparency or their love, they will run up against the paradox. "The paradox is unthinkable," A says, "and yet love wants to think it, and, in accordance with the momentary predominance of the various factors"—the different bits of evidence supporting one side or the other—"it makes an approach in order to think it, often in contradictory ways, but it does not

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<sup>42</sup> *SKS 2*, 176 / *EOI*, 178.

<sup>43</sup> *SKS 2*, 178 / *EOI*, 181.

<sup>44</sup> *SKS 2*, 176 / *EOI*, 179.

succeed.”<sup>45</sup> This “path of thinking,” he continues, “is infinite,”<sup>46</sup> and like “the pendulum in a clock,” reflective sorrow “swings back and forth and cannot find rest. It continually begins from the beginning and deliberates anew, interrogates the witnesses, checks and examines the various statements.”<sup>47</sup> It is really a trial that takes place in the minds of these women. The aim of the process is a judgment, a verdict: guilty or not guilty of deception. But a young girl, like Marie Beaumarchais, “is not a jurist.” She cannot pass a conclusive judgment; any judgment she passes “will always be such that although at first glance it is a judgment, it also contains something more that shows that it is no judgment, and also shows that the very next moment a completely opposite judgment may be passed.”<sup>48</sup>

Marie is seeking to arrive at a judgment through reflection. Judgments, however, are not products of thought but acts of will; and will and thought are distinct mental faculties between which there can be no mediation.<sup>49</sup> Nor can thought provide the will with anything that would constitute sufficient conditions for a particular judgment. (If it could, it would in effect yield the judgment.) In that sense, every path of thinking is infinite: it cannot bring itself to an end. A real judgment is always an interruption, never a conclusion, of thought. Analogously, the evidence provided by a prosecutor does not mandate a jury or judge in a court of law to give a particular verdict. The evidence is subject to assessment. This is what allows a judge to arrive at a single verdict even when presented with opposing views from defense and prosecution. The unity of this judgment

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<sup>45</sup> *SKS 2*, 177 / *EOI*, 179.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *SKS 2*, 168 / *EOI*, 170.

<sup>48</sup> *SKS 2*, 182 / *EOI*, 185.

<sup>49</sup> *SKS 2*, 185 / *EOI*, 188.

is not a synthetic unity: the judge does not mediate between the two sides—his task is not to make them agree with one another. Therefore he is not prevented from making a judgment just because the two sides persistently contradict one another. He makes a verdict that cuts their argument short. Though a judge must be sensitive to the evidence presented by both the defense and the prosecution, he is not bound by a prior allegiance to either party. Similarly an effective will, “must be altogether impartial,” A says; it “must begin in the power of its own willing.”<sup>50</sup> But Marie’s will does not have the courage to stand on its own; it wants to rely on reflection and remains, as A puts it, “in the service of reflection.”<sup>51</sup>

A judgment is an assertion of the will and, by extension, an exercise of the judging subject’s autonomy. The will’s freedom and independence is also the individual’s self-sufficiency: in judging, the individual demonstrates his superiority to any external forces—what Kierkegaard sums up under the rubric “substantiality”—that try to make claims on him. Through a free act of will, the subject can assure himself that he is an individual, that he exists unto himself. The Silhouettes shun such assertion of the self and indeed have no interest in the superior form of existence that is autonomous individuality. For such emancipation from the world also precludes the kind of love the Silhouettes long for. In fact, they would rather be nothing than be alone in the world. If Margaret, A says, “could sustain the thought that in the strictest sense she was nothing, then reflection would be precluded, and then she would not have been deceived, either, for if one is nothing, there is no relationship, and where there is no relationship, there cannot be a

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<sup>50</sup> *SKS 2*, 184 / *EOI*, 188.

<sup>51</sup> *SKS 2*, 185 / *EOI*, 188.

deception, either.”<sup>52</sup> This tendency to self-denial has defined Margaret’s approach to Faust from the very beginning. Her first impression of her seducer “is completely overwhelming,” A says; “in relation to him, she feels her nothingness.”<sup>53</sup> Eventually she “completely disappears in Faust” and imperceptibly, “without the slightest reflection, he becomes everything to her. But just as from the beginning she is nothing, so she becomes, if I dare say so, less and less the more she is convinced of his almost divine superiority; she is nothing, and at the same time she exists only through him.”<sup>54</sup> Marie, likewise, “does not have the strength to stand” when her Clavigo “thrusts her away, and she collapses weakly into the arms of those around her.”<sup>55</sup> Donna Elvira, lastly, gave up her world—religion—for Don Giovanni. Now she needs him to be her world:

In him she has all, and the past is nothing; if she leaves him, she loses all, the past also. She had renounced the world; then there appeared a figure she cannot renounce and this is Don Giovanni. From now on, she renounces everything in order to live with him. The more meaningful that was which she leaves, the more firmly must she cling to him; the more firmly she has embraced him, the more terrible becomes her despair when he leaves her. From the very outset, her love is despair; nothing has meaning for her, neither in heaven nor on the earth, except Don Giovanni.<sup>56</sup>

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus diagnoses this resistance to self-sufficiency as a form of despair from which women generally suffer. For woman’s nature is devotedness: “In devotion she loses herself, and only then is she happy, only then is

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<sup>52</sup> *SKS 2*, 206 / *EOI*, 211.

<sup>53</sup> *SKS 2*, 205 / *EOI*, 210.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *SKS 2*, 177-178 / *EOI*, 180.

<sup>56</sup> *SKS 2*, 187 / *EOI*, 191.

she herself.”<sup>57</sup> If you take this devotion away, “then her self is also gone.”<sup>58</sup> When a young girl despairs, he writes, it is usually over love—over “the loss of her beloved, over his death or his unfaithfulness to her.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, she wants to be only in being loved by him: “This self of hers, which she would have been rid of or would have lost in the most blissful manner had it become ‘his’ beloved, this self becomes a torment to her if it has to be a self without ‘him.’”<sup>60</sup> But when despair is occasioned by a loss, it becomes evident that the person was in despair all along. For to depend on something that can be lost—something contingent and external to the individual—is to be in despair, whether one knows it or not.<sup>61</sup> A human being is “a synthesis of the infinite and the finite” and to try to give oneself over to something contingent and external is to deny one’s own infinity. Such devotion is doomed to failure, because what is infinite, eternal and necessary cannot be grounded in the finite and contingent. The Silhouettes’ self-effacing devotion is a hopeless project; this is their tragedy. According to Anti-Climacus, if one were to say to a girl who despairs over a lost love, “‘You are destroying yourself,’”<sup>62</sup> she would answer that what destroys her is precisely that she cannot destroy herself.

### III.

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<sup>57</sup> *SKS* 11, 164f. / *SUD*, 50f.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *SKS* 11, 135 / *SUD*, 20.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, translation modified.

One fundamental way in which each of these women is dependent on her beloved is that she wants him to love her back. This feminine love is not all giving but contains a need: the need to be requited. This makes it vulnerable to the charge Kierkegaard brings against preferential love in *Works of Love*. Such love is selfish, Kierkegaard argues, because the desire to be loved is really a form of self-love.<sup>63</sup> The claim has some initial plausibility, yet it is not obvious that the desire to be loved involves disrespect for the beloved or makes of him a mere means. Jean-Paul Sartre, who gives love a central role in his discussion of interpersonal relations in *Being and Nothingness*, considers the desire to be loved in return constitutive of love.<sup>64</sup> Love is a desire—in fact, a demand, according to Sartre—that my beloved love me, but also that he do so freely, that is, not as an act of obedience to that demand. If he were an automaton that could be programmed to love me, that love would be worthless. This means that my beloved must be someone who is free *not* to love me: he must be independent of me. His love is a recognition that confers a certain status and a certain value upon me that I cannot confer upon myself. A commanded love, such as Christian love of the neighbor, could have no redemptive power for the beloved, on Sartre's view. By making a demand of the beloved that it nonetheless does not want the beloved to obey, love is always on the brink of undermining itself: the demand to be loved freely contains a tension that haunts all love. But for Sartre, this “selfish” love is the first ethical attitude for it involves recognition of the beloved as a free person. Love is indeed an appraisal of the beloved's freedom, that

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, *SKS* 9, 56 / *WL*, 66.

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel Barnes, New York, New York: Washington Square Press 1956, pp. 475-478. In fact, Sartre thinks that loving a person has no content other than this desire to be loved. This seems mistaken to me, but all that matters for my present purposes is that the desire to be loved is one component of love.

which makes him a person rather than a mere thing. Sartre's account of love thus raises the question whether a love that does not want to be requited is actually indifferent to the beloved's freedom and thereby indifferent as to whether the beloved is a person or a thing.

In *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, Sharon Krishek, too, notes that the beloved must be someone who potentially does *not* love me, someone I cannot possess as private property and who, even if he does love me back and I call him "mine," is potentially lost to me. She writes that a beloved is always "essentially lost" to his lover, because she could in principle lose him. True love, Krishek argues, must begin with a sober recognition of this fact. The threat of loss, she states, "may express itself in many ways, but all are essentially connected to the passage of time": we live in the world of becoming where things come to be and pass away.<sup>65</sup> Everything in that temporal realm, because it will some day wither, is essentially lost. But Krishek is too quick to blame all loss on time: time cannot account for the loss, in the form of privation, involved in unrequited love. The Silhouettes suffer a loss that is due not to temporality or mortality, but to the beloved's freedom and independence, to the fact that what moves in his heart and how he chooses to act on it is not up to them. When Margaret falls for Faust, it is obvious to her that whether he loves her or not is not for her to decide. That Goethe lets her pick the petals off a flower, repeating "He loves me; he loves me not," is not supposed to illustrate her curiosity, A says, but humility before love and her beloved.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> *SKS 2*, 200 / *EOI*, 205. Other sources of loss that are not essentially tied to time include human malevolence and indifference; human benevolence thwarted by imperfect knowledge; natural disasters of various scales; and—if there is a God—God's will insofar as it is guided by a conception of the good which differs from ours. Surely, even an eternal life could be hell.

Judge William would not consider this attitude humility so much as the passivity and fatalism that mark the aesthetic life. But bringing Sartre's account of love to bear on *Either/Or* shows that the aesthetic label is not entirely suitable for the Silhouettes. These women may not have asserted their freedom like Socrates has; they may not will to be themselves. But they do recognize the beloved's freedom, that in him which is infinite and raises him above mere earthly things. According to Anti-Climacus' conception of personhood, it is not quite true to say that when she despairs over her beloved, a young girl despairs over something finite and mundane. Because a self, a person—the kind of being that the Silhouettes love, the kind of entity over which they despair—is not a proper part of the earthly realm of contingency where things come to be and pass away. He is also something beyond that realm, something superior to nature. As Anti-Climacus writes, a human being “is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity”;<sup>67</sup> and aside from God, “there is nothing as eternal as a self.”<sup>68</sup> Anti-Climacus' characterization of the typically feminine despair actually appears to be in tension with his own theory of selfhood.

*Fear and Trembling's* Johannes de Silentio might have a response to this objection, a response that dispels the appearance of tension. What is earthly in the Silhouettes' despair, he could say, is not the beloved himself but the fact of his requiring or not requiring their love. The knight of infinite resignation takes an approach to love not unlike the Silhouettes': his love, too, is complete devotion. He “falls in love with a princess,” Johannes writes, “and this love is the entire substance of his life.”<sup>69</sup> But

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<sup>67</sup> SKS 11, 129 / SUD, 13.

<sup>68</sup> SKS 11, 168 / SUD, 53.

<sup>69</sup> SKS 4, 136 / FT, 41.

although this love “cannot possibly be realized,” the knight does not stop loving.<sup>70</sup> He makes a movement of infinite resignation whereby “the princess is lost.”<sup>71</sup> He resigns from his desire to be with the princess and in fact makes himself immune to anything his beloved does. If she were to marry, for example, this would be an earthly fact that could affect the knight’s love only if he had not resigned from being loved and if his love for her were not the substance of his life.<sup>72</sup> Although according to Johannes the knight still loves and desires the princess, he has grasped “the deep secret that even in loving another person one ought to be sufficient to oneself.”<sup>73</sup> Any person who understands this, “whether man or woman, can never be deceived.”<sup>74</sup>

It seems that what Johannes wants to emphasize is that the knight stands in different modal relations to his own love for the princess and her attitude towards him. Loving her is up to him; whether she loves him or not is not for him to decide. Insofar as this involves an acknowledgement of the beloved’s independence, Sartre would be sympathetic to Johannes’ account. Sartre seems in fact to think that what is beyond our control is precisely thereby most worth desiring. It is because I cannot coerce my beloved into loving me that his love is valuable. But from the fact that something is beyond a person’s control, it would be wrong to infer the imperative that he must refrain from desiring it. Understandably, Johannes wants to block the possibility that the knight loves the princess only insofar as she loves him, as though love were a kind of economic exchange, a game of tit-for-tat. The love Sartre advocates, though, is not conditioned

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *SKS* 4, 139 / *FT*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> *SKS* 4, 139 / *FT*, 45.

upon its actually being returned, but only on the *possibility* of voluntary reciprocity. The Sartrean lover is perfectly capable of doing what Jean-Luc Marion calls “loving first.”<sup>75</sup> Whereas Johannes’ ideal is Stoic detachment, Sartre endorses the lover’s rebellion against his powerlessness that is implied in his desire to be loved freely. By making his knight immune to the princess’ desires, Johannes de Silentio actually makes him indifferent to the fact that his beloved is a person and not a mere thing.

Of course, Johannes de Silentio’s story doesn’t end with resignation. There is a second movement: the movement of faith. The knight, he writes, “makes one more movement even more wonderful than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her—that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible.”<sup>76</sup> Resignation is something a person can achieve on his own; being loved, on the other hand, is a gift bestowed from without. That the princess loves him is now an object of religious faith for the knight—not an object of interpersonal, romantic desire.<sup>77</sup> It is for God, then—not for the princess—to bestow this gift upon the knight. The direct object of the knight’s faith is God and God’s power; his faith is only indirectly about the princess. Nonetheless, this faith contradicts the resignation the knight has already accomplished, for “the moment the knight executed the act of resignation, he was

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<sup>75</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. by Stephen Lewis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2007, pp. 67-105. I thank Michael Strawser for urging me to clarify this point. Of course the lover can try to make the beloved fall for him—can try to seduce her. The more he manipulates her, the more self-deception will it take on his part to maintain the belief that she loves him freely. Unless, like Johannes the Seducer, he does not care to be loved freely but wants to conquer, and that his conquest believes herself to be free: “I shall make her free; only in that way shall I love her. That she owes this to me, she must never suspect...I want to possess her only in her freedom...I shall be victorious as surely as it was an illusion that she was victorious in the first [struggle]” (*SKS 2*, 372 / *EOI*, 384).

<sup>76</sup> *SKS 4*, 141 / *FT*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> As Krishek also points out, faith of some kind is required not only in religious life but also in romantic love. Since we cannot know everything about our beloved, we cannot have certainty but only faith in his feelings and intentions (Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, pp. 12f.; pp. 166-189). But it is not clear that such faith should be a faith in *God* or that there can be no genuine human relationships if there is no God.

convinced of the impossibility, humanly speaking,” of ever being loved by the princess and had, moreover, reconciled himself to this fact.<sup>78</sup> The alleged absurdity is noteworthy in the present context since Sartre, similarly, claims that love is inherently contradictory. This commonality invites thinking of the knight’s faith as a rebellion much like that of Sartre’s lover who vainly demands to be loved freely. Indeed, the question arises whether the two accounts of love may in fact at bottom be equivalent—whether Johannes merely presents as two distinct movements what could in principle be, as in Sartre’s picture, concurrent and intertwined. Perhaps Johannes would concede that the two movements can occur simultaneously and that in presenting them as successive in time he was looking to underscore their modal distinction from one another. But there is a fundamental difference between the two theories that cannot be mediated by such an interpretation—cannot be put down to differences in presentation. Loving and wanting to be loved are not only concurrent and intertwined for Sartre: they are one and the same thing. The Sartrean lover’s desire is for the beloved’s desire: he wants his beloved to desire him—that is, to desire that he desires her. His love has her desire as its direct object and her freedom and independence as its prerequisites. He cannot and should not be indifferent to the question whether the princess returns his love—to love her involves as an essential component taking an interest in whether she loves him. Johannes de Silentio, by contrast, makes the beloved’s feelings, intentions and actions irrelevant in the first movement and brings them back into the picture in the second movement only through the mediation of God and as objects of God’s infinite power. Loving a person, according to Johannes, consists in achieving a certain relation to oneself—sufficiency—

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<sup>78</sup> *SKS* 4, 141 / *FT*, 46.

and, subsequently, a certain relation to God. But thereby the knight finally regards the princess as less than a person. It is not by being a gift from God that she can never truly belong to the knight: it is because she's a person. And it is not in virtue of time that the princess is essentially lost to him, but in virtue of her freedom. It's remarkable that Johannes who, like Anti-Climacus, everywhere else stresses freedom as constitutive of personhood, nonetheless construes personal love as indifferent to the beloved's freedom—as a relation to the divine will that overrides that freedom. Johannes' account of love does not after all dispel the tension between Anti-Climacus' view of human beings and his claim that to despair over unrequited love is to despair over something merely finite, something earthly.

The word "resignation" suggests weakness; indeed, insofar as an act of resignation merely preempts an impending defeat, it may be considered equivalent to defeat. But Johannes de Silentio presents the achievement of infinite resignation not as a tragic, sorrowful acceptance of one's fate but as a victory. Purged of vain desires, the knight achieves self-sufficiency. Nor is he a rebel like Philoctetes, who cannot make peace with his loneliness. Although the knight stands alone, he is not lonely: stoically, he triumphs in solitude. Johannes calls the knight's love "complete devotion," but his position is actually more akin to Socratic irony than to the love that gives substance to the Silhouettes' lives. It is also strangely reminiscent of a certain aesthetic approach to love, one that according to Krishek is practiced by both Johannes the Seducer in *Either/Or* and Quidam of *Stages on Life's Way*. This is love by way of recollection; that is, imaginary love. By loving idealized memories or figments of their imagination, these men make themselves immune to loss. While a real girl is the occasion of Johannes' love, he makes his love self-

sufficient by loving not Cordelia but his fantasy of her.<sup>79</sup> But, Krishek points out, such a lover is so “closed *within himself*” that he “precludes the possibility of being in a *relationship*; he is closed within himself and cannot open himself to any other.”<sup>80</sup> The remedy Krishek proposes is a movement of resignation like the one Johannes de Silentio describes in *Fear and Trembling*. But if I am right, this movement would actually take these lovers of recollection back where they started, for it involves not just the crucial recognition that the beloved is free and beyond their control. As Johannes de Silentio insists, it also involves becoming self-sufficient. The knight of infinite resignation may not be deluded like the lovers of recollection but his position, too, is solipsistic. Though he is aware of the existence of persons other than himself, he chooses to close himself off from them. To be truly open to the princess would involve acknowledging and affirming his dependence on her. Only thus can his love be the entire substance of his life.

So far I have focused on the dependence a lover bears to her beloved in virtue of wanting him to love her. But let me suggest a different, more concrete form of dependency that can obtain between lovers. We can imagine Anti-Climacus using one of Kierkegaard’s signature arguments to condemn the Silhouettes’ mode of loving: he would show that their love rests on an unstable ground and infer that if ever it is happy, it is only superficially and contingently so. I would like to turn this line of reasoning around, defending the Silhouettes’ mode of loving despite the fact that it can be unhappy by insisting that it sometimes is happy and then offers what is probably the highest form of redemption available to us in this life. Nor do we need to look beyond Kierkegaard’s

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<sup>79</sup> Adorno argues that in being indifferent to its object, Johannes the Seducer’s aesthetic love is much like the religious love of neighbor Kierkegaard promotes in *Works of Love* (Theodor Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1939, p. 416).

<sup>80</sup> Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, p. 44.

oeuvre to find an illustration of such happy love, an example of two lovers blissfully united in mutual dependence. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard describes how Plato discovered philosophy when he met Socrates. To discover philosophy was for Plato, first, to discover a beautiful and refreshing abundance of ideas; and, second, to realize that he had access to that ideal realm through his own mind. But because Plato owed this discovery to Socrates, he always, for the rest of his life, associated philosophy with Socrates. Socrates figures in every single dialogue of Plato's; even after Socrates' death, Plato could not think without thinking of Socrates, according to Kierkegaard. Plato's third discovery was that the life of the mind is also a way of being with others. Socrates "flows through the whole fertile territory of Platonic philosophy," Kierkegaard writes; "he is present everywhere in Plato," and Plato

cherished nothing unless it came from Socrates or unless he at least was co-owner and co-knower of these love-secrets of knowledge, because there is for the kindred spirit a self-expression that is not constricted by the limitations of the other but is expanded and is endowed with a preternatural magnitude in the other's conception, since thought does not understand itself, does not love itself until it is caught up in the other's being, and for such harmonious beings it becomes not only unimportant but also impossible to determine what belongs to each one, because the one always owns nothing but owns everything in the other.<sup>81</sup>

Plato's relation to Socrates is, like Margaret's relation to Faust, an intellectual relation. She, too, "owes him everything," and when he leaves her, her relation to all those ideas they shared is also undermined.<sup>82</sup> If Kierkegaard is right, Plato would be just as lost as

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<sup>81</sup> *SKS 1*, 91-92 / *CI*, 29-30.

<sup>82</sup> *SKS 2*, 206 / *EO2*, 211.

Margaret if his beloved deceived him, for Plato similarly “feels himself so inseparably fused with Socrates in the unity of spirit,” according to Kierkegaard, “that for him all knowledge is co-knowledge with Socrates.”<sup>83</sup> In her despair, a young girl is no more silly, no less authentic than a Plato. It is just Margaret’s bad luck that her beloved loves her not.

#### *IV.*

The feminine modes of loving I have described are products of the Socratic revolution. That Socrates first aroused this kind of love is illustrated beautifully in Plato’s *Symposium*, in the figure of a young man whose very love of Socrates prevented him from taking Socrates’ teachings to heart. In his speech, Alcibiades describes in his own terms what it is like to be trapped between substantiality and freedom, between an aesthetic and an ethical way of life. And the question why Socrates doesn’t want him is a question he can reflect upon for the rest of his life. Insofar as love is not a voluntary action compelled by reasons, such questions—Why have you abandoned me? Why does he love her and not me?—can receive no rational answers. For even if the beloved were to answer, “Because you are thus-and-so,” there remains the question why the beloved does not love those qualities, and why it is the lover’s fate to be thus and so. Yet because we feel that love nonetheless must depend in some measure both on lover and beloved—that whether someone loves me or not is a reflection of something essential both in me

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<sup>83</sup> *SKS* 1, 92 / *CI*, 30.

and in him—we cannot but try to assign responsibility and blame either to ourselves or to our beloveds when they do not love us back. But there cannot be an obligation to love, and to be unloved is not to suffer a moral injustice. Unrequited love is a truly tragic suffering, for which no one is to blame.

That Alcibiades compares himself to Philoctetes in the *Symposium* did not escape Kierkegaard who, in turn, compared himself to Alcibiades in his journal. In an entry titled “My Judgment of *Either/Or*,” he writes: “There was a young man as fortunately gifted as an Alcibiades. He lost his way in the world. In his distress he looked around for a Socrates, but among his contemporaries he could find none.”<sup>84</sup> If I am right, there is a kinship between this remark and Kierkegaard’s haunted confession, after a night at the opera in 1839, that he could say of *Don Giovanni* what Elvira says of the man: “You murderer of my happiness.” For truly, he continues, “this piece has gotten such a diabolical grip on me that I will never be able to forget it; this was the piece that drove me, like Elvira, out of the convent’s silent night.”<sup>85</sup> Kierkegaard had in fact thought of writing his dissertation about Don Juan, in a study comprising two other mythical figures: Faust and the Wandering Jew.<sup>86</sup> Instead he included extended theoretical discussions of these figures in his second book. Thus even if he rejected the aesthetic life upon reflection—judged that he ought to reject it—he must have been personally invested in those first few essays in *Either/Or*. Their pathos and enthusiasm, which are altogether

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<sup>84</sup> SKS 18, 157 / KJN 2, 146, translation modified.

<sup>85</sup> SKS 18, 46 / KJN 2, 41, translation modified. Regarding Kierkegaard’s personal investment in the aesthetic, see Garff, *Den Søvnløse*.

<sup>86</sup> See Hong’s “Historical Introduction” in *CI*, vii.

missing in “The Seducer’s Diary,” reveal that investment.<sup>87</sup> Also for his dear Princess Antigone, Kierkegaard found a place; and in her modern tragedy, a place for himself. This gives us reason to suspect that it is Kierkegaard’s own voice we hear when A says, in “The Immediate Erotic Stages,” that “although I otherwise thank the Gods that I was born a man and not a woman, Mozart’s music has taught me that it is beautiful and refreshing and abundant to love as a woman loves.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Hare also notes this loss of pathos somewhere in the middle of *Either/Or* part I (“The Unhappiest One,” p. 93). In my view, this cannot be understood simply as a manifestation of the difference between immediacy and reflection. To be sure, Kierkegaard sometimes exaggerates A’s pathos, thereby mocking it and marking an ironic distance between himself and the fictional author. Yet as Fauteck insists, interpreters like Walther Rehm are wrong to say categorically that A is a detached observer who finds his subjects merely interesting (“Kierkegaard’s Antigone,” p. 90; cf. Walther Rehm, “Kierkegaard’s ‘Antigone’” in his *Begegnungen und Probleme*, Bern: Francke 1957). In the essays on tragedy and sorrow, A is a spectator of the old school, who participates with compassion in the suffering of his tragic heroines.

<sup>88</sup> *SKS* 2, 130 / *EOI*, 128, translation modified. For helpful conversations and suggestions I thank Karsten Harries, David Possen, Michael Della Rocca, Paul Franks and Daniela Dover. Special thanks are due to Tomer Barak who, through his interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel, helped me see that all unrequited love is tragic and cause for reflective sorrow.