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Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire:
Writing Word and Sacrament

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Writing Word and Sacrament

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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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This dissertation analyzes the central (but often unacknowledged) place that Kierkegaard accords to desire for God in the Christian life. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas's theme of infinite, ever increasing desire, and attending to the ways in which Kierkegaard's richly varied rhetoric seeks to incite an analogous *eros*, I compare Kierkegaard's early writings about the theater to his late meditations on the Eucharist. I argue that even Kierkegaard's most explicitly theological texts are marked by a kind of "theatricality," inasmuch as they adopt and transform the theater's aesthetic qualities in order to spark religious longing.

After establishing the context and key terms of my argument in my Introduction, I offer a close reading of the concept of desire in *The Concept of Irony,* suggesting that this early text can provide a paradigm for interpreting desire throughout Kierkegaard's subsequent writings. In Chapter One, I analyze desire's connection to theatricality in *Either/Or*, paying particular attention to the vaudeville play that the book presents as an exemplary means of soliciting *eros*. Chapters Two, Three, and Four then consider the themes of desire and theatricality within the starkly different context of Kierkegaard's Eucharistic Discourses. Even though these late texts initially seem entirely detached from Kierkegaard's early writings on theater, I argue that the two sets of texts use similar rhetorical strategies for the elicitation of longing. In Chapter Five, I consider how Kierkegaard's conception of faith as desire shapes his interpretation of Christian ethical life. In doing so, I respond to several prevalent interpretations of his work, which argue that it condemns *eros* in a fundamental way.

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PROLOGUE

Fairy Tales and Theology

> "Suppose there was a king who loved a lowly maiden. But the reader has probably already lost patience when he hears that the analogy is like a fairy tale and is in no way systematic. Well, the erudite Polus certainly found it tedious that Socrates constantly talked about food and drink and doctors and other such trivialities about which the erudite Polus did not talk at all (see *Gorgias*)....
>
> So suppose there was a king who loved a lowly maiden."[1]

The fairy tale that Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus begins to tell above is meant to shed light on no less an elevated theological topos than the incarnation. The fairy tale is the centerpiece of the second chapter of *Philosophical Fragments*—by any measure one of the weightiest and most central texts of Kierkegaard's authorship. Over the course of the book, Climacus studiously avoids mentioning Christ, Christianity, or the incarnation by name. Instead, he "stages" a series of other, more accessible dramas. First, he develops what he calls a "thought project" or "poetical venture," in which he asks the reader to try to imagine a teacher who taught otherwise than Socrates. What would it mean, he asks, to teach a truly transcendent truth—one not already latent within human reason? When an answer to this question proves elusive, Climacus introduces his fairy tale about a lowly maiden and a love-struck king. Yet before he even develops this story, he alerts the reader to its inadequacy. "No human situation can provide a valid analogy," he writes, "though we will suggest one here in order to awaken the mind to understanding the divine."[2] Inadequate as knowledge, but invaluable as a means of "awakening," this fairy tale is a story within a story, a staged scene within a staged scene, and its very setting as such—the text of *Philosophical Fragments*—is itself

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[1] *PF*, 26 / *SKS*, 4:233; translation modified.

[2] *PF*, 26 / *SKS*, 4:233; translation modified.

staged. Kierkegaard does not claim to be the author of the book, but attributes it to Johannes Climacus—an imagined authorial persona. In relation to him and the numerous other personalities who populate his authorship, Kierkegaard insists (in the "First and Last Explanation" that he appends to Climacus's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to* Philosophical Fragments*)* that he is nothing more than a *souffleur*, a stage prompter.[3]

Nowhere in Kierkegaard's authorship does he describe himself as a "theologian." He prefers a myriad of humbler titles for himself: a "singular kind of poet and thinker,"[4] a "poet of the religious,"[5] a "religious author,"[6] a "Christian author,"[7] a "Christian poet and thinker."[8] While many of his writings speak more directly about Christ and Christianity than *Philosophical Fragments* does, all resist the project suggested by the literal meaning of the word theo-logy: the statement of words about God. Kierkegaard resists attempting to speak directly about God not only in his pseudonymous and "aesthetic" writings, but also, in my view, in his explicitly religious discourses signed in his own name. The differences among Kierkegaard's rhetorical forms, authorial voices, and conceptual vocabularies are vast, but taken as a whole they conjure an ever-shifting array of scenes, tableaux, and stories, which at once draw the reader into their worlds, and signal their own inadequacy.

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[3] *CUP*, 1:625 / *SKS*, 7:569.

[4] *WA*, 165 / *SKS*, 12:281.

[5] *JP*, 6:6511 / *SKS*, 22:298 [NB13:37].

[6] *PV*, 23 / *SV*, 18:81.

[7] *JP*, 6:6205 / *SKS*, 21:20 [NB6:21].

[8] *JP*, 6:6391 / *SKS*, 21:369 [NB10:200].

Can such writing be theology? I see Kierkegaard's rejection of the standard dogmatic modes of post-Enlightenment theological discourse as motivated by deeply theological concerns. In my view, his relentless indirection is driven not merely by a healthy insistence on divine transcendence, but by faith in what is by any measure the heart of the Christian message: God's infinite love revealed in Christ. Kierkegaard never suggests, as many theologians would, that the incarnation makes God more accessible to human knowledge than God would otherwise be as a transcendent spirit. Rather, he assumes that the paradox of God's incarnation and the boundlessness of the love that motivates it exceed our capacities for representation and understanding even more insistently. As a consequence, I will argue throughout this dissertation that Kierkegaard conceives of faith as ever-increasing desire, rather than as doctrinal certainty. To begin to understand why, let us heed Johannes Climacus's admonition to consider his fairy tale. If it tells us anything about Christ, it is that he meets us and we meet him through a desire more potent than any in our desire-obsessed world.

Even if we are more patient with analogies than the Sophists Polus and Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, we may still wonder why Kierkegaard chooses *this* story to illumine the incarnation. Why does Climacus dwell for so many pages on a stock plot that seems so trite? Can he not find a more suitably pious illustration? A king falls passionately in love with a humble maiden—so far, so familiar. The inequality in station between the two characters is a recipe for the familiar story of "unhappy love"—a problem that Climacus's post-Romantic age had likely heard enough about. Yet he meditates upon this story for pages, weaving it together with his effort to imagine what a truly transcendent teacher would be. In order for the fairy tale to shed light on this puzzle, it

must come with a twist. Here is Climacus's description of the decidedly unconventional unhappy love that he imagines:

> There has been much talk in the world about unhappy love, and everyone knows what the term means: that the lovers are unable to have each other. And the reasons—well, there can be a host of them. There is another kind of unhappy love: the love of which we speak, to which there is no perfect earthly analogy but which we nevertheless, by speaking loosely for a while, can imagine an earthly setting. The unhappiness is the result not of the lovers' being unable to have each other but of their being unable to understand each other.[9]

In the story of unhappy love that is conventionally told, an external obstacle stands in the path of star-crossed lovers. A disapproving father, a scheming stepmother, warring families—any of these can obstruct a love's fulfillment. But Climacus twists this stock plot in order to throw sand into the gears of our conventional ways of conceiving desire. In his fairy tale, the very extent of the king's love is what prevents it from being fulfilled, not any exterior obstacle. The king, Climacus explains, wants to have a relationship of true equality and mutual understanding with the maiden. He does not want her to be forever awed by his majesty and forever in his debt. He wants her to love him freely and as her equal. Such a relationship is not easy to have when one is king—especially when the object of one's love is the lowliest of maidens. Climacus asks us to imagine how such an inexplicable, indeed irrational, desire would affect a king.

Climacus suggests two scenarios by which the king might try to overcome the chasm separating him from the maiden. The first—straightforward and obvious—is the strategy favored by the king's courtiers and confidants. To have the maiden for himself, the king could simply elevate her to the status of queen by magisterial fiat. As Climacus explains, "The king could have appeared before the lowly maiden in all his splendor,

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[9] *PF*, 25 / *SKS*, 4:233.

could have let the sun of his glory rise over her hut, shine on the spot where he appeared to her and let her forget herself in adoring admiration."[10] Climacus does not question whether the maiden would be content with such a scenario, but he is certain that the king would not be. The king as he imagines him does not want the maiden to be in his everlasting debt. He does not long for her adulation, but for her love. This desire pushes him toward the unthinkable.

Climacus thus imagines a second scenario, one whose resemblances to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation are obvious. Instead of raising the maiden to his level through a deception, the king might try to descend to hers. Since he knows that the maiden will never be royalty, the king could try to make himself into a peasant like her. In order that she might truly love him, he would forsake all the accoutrements of his kingliness—the robes, the riches, the power—and appear to her in the humblest possible form. The risk in doing so, of course, is that the more successful he is, the less likely the maiden is to be attracted to him. If he is unrecognizable as king, then she may well ignore him or even despise him because of his lowliness. But Climacus suggests that the king's consuming desire would push him to desperate measures. Out of love for the miaden, he would make himself unlovely—in the hope that she will love him with the same boundless and inexplicable passion with which he loves her.

While the analogy between this fairy tale and Christ's kenosis is palpable, Climacus is quick to call attention to the ways in which it fails to capture the supreme love about which he is trying to speak. Ultimately, he insists, no human king could make himself the equal of a lowly maiden, for fundamentally he would always be a king

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[10] *PF*, 29 / *SKS*, 4:236.

beneath his rags. "The king's plebian cloak...just by flapping open would betray the king," he writes.[11] No matter how committed the king is to the maiden, his transformation for her sake would always consist in disguise and deception. A truly infinite love would carry him beyond all cloaks and pretending. "This is the boundlessness of love," Climacus writes: "not in jest but in earnestness and truth to will to be the beloved's equal, and it is the omnipotence of resolving love to be capable of that of which neither the king nor Socrates was capable, which is why their assumed characters were still a kind of deceit."[12] Where a boundless passion will lead exceeds all our capacities for representation and understanding, Climacus insists. He stages both the thought experiment of a non-Socratic teacher and the fairy tale of the maiden and the king in order to incite readers' desire for such a love—yet these stagings do not satisfy this desire by representing it themselves. Through their very inadequacy, they seek to make us desire this love more and more.

When I assert throughout this dissertation that Kierkegaard's writings function as "stagings" of desire, I am drawing on a number of inter-related senses of the English word "stage." In the context of Kierkegaard scholarship, perhaps the most frequent use of the word is in reference to his famous "theory of the stages"—that is, his use of the categories of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious to name the different modalities of subjective existence. I explore the relationship between these categories throughout this project— calling into question whether they ever exist in isolation from one another

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[11] *PF*, 31-32 / *SKS*, 4:238.

[12] *PF*, 32 / *SKS*, 4:238; translation modified.

or ever make up a linear progression. A second common use of the word "stage" in Kierkegaard scholarship is in reference to the theater—one of the most recurring themes of Kierkegaard's writing, and an obsession of his age in general. I take Kierkegaard's relationship to the theater as a guiding thread for this project. I not only consider two of his extended meditations on plays from his era, but also argue that even when his writings do not make explicit reference to the theater, their rhetoric can be described as "theatrical." I argue that Kierkegaard's most explicitly religious writings employ the techniques of the theater in order to produce what Kierkegaard sees as theater's signature effect: the elicitation of desire.

The third, and most important, sense in which I use the word "stage" emerges from the context of theater but extends beyond it. The verbs "stage" and "staging" can be used in English to refer to an action that anticipates or is preparatory to a second, greater action after or beyond it. Since theatrical staging is by definition an effort to represent a fictional drama, it is necessarily conscious of itself as artifice. The theatrical stage is constituted by a real world that is always off-stage, which can never be made directly manifest. In this sense, Kierkegaard's writings can be read as stagings of something that is necessarily beyond their representational capacities—something that is, indeed, foreign to all objective representation. To use language that Climacus develops elsewhere in *Philosophical Fragments*, they are about a "moment" in relation to which they themselves can never be more than an "occasion." Such a moment can take many forms: for example, the "leap" of faith (in *Fragments*), the "reduplication" of the content of Christianity in one's life (in *Works of Love*), or the experience of being directly addressed by Christ at the Eucharist (in the third of Kierkegaard's Discourses at the Eucharist on

Fridays in *Christian Discourses*). Such extra-textual moments are at once central to Kierkegaard's writings and ineluctably exterior to them.

This dissertation is an effort to explore, through close readings of relatively narrow slices of Kierkegaard's authorship, how his writings strive to function as stagings of infinite, ever-increasing desire. Although the texts that I will consider sometimes veer far beyond the boundaries of mainstream theological discourse today, they touch upon some very traditional theological themes: the incarnation, the relationship between law and gospel, the atonement, the nature of Eucharistic presence, and Christian ethics, to name only the most prominent in the pages to follow. How might interpreting such doctrines through the lenses of theatricality and desire change how we write them? More importantly, how might contemplating Kierkegaard's fairy tales and stagings change *us*?

INTRODUCTION

Staging Desire
(With Constant Reference to *The Concept of Irony*)

> Who dares deny that Kierkegaard's relationship to the theater is lifelong, personal, passionate, existential? He spent most of his life's evenings in the Royal Theater, and he was more frequently in the theater than in the church....
>
> Sadly enough, Kierkegaard's public was quite limited in the years 1843-1845, when he gave that series of performances which is unique in world literature. He did not act for mighty Europe itself but for that little, choice inner circle of the Heibergians, of whose theatrical passion he himself was an all too willing sacrifice. When he did not feel satisfied with the applause he got for his performances up to and including the *Postscript*, he changed to other and somewhat more elderly roles—the Socratic peripatetic who instructed his sole disciple in the wisdom of life, the reverent author of edifying tracts, the preacher who seldom appeared in his pulpit, the favorite victim of the *Corsair*, the genius who was not understood and who chose not to cast his pearls before swine, the sinner doing atonement, the pious hermit—and many other roles, all of which are both true and acted.[13]

I do not cite Henning Fenger because I believe his book to be an exemplary work of Kierkegaard scholarship. *Kierkegaard, the Myths and their Origins* is now dated by any measure, and its limitations are rather obvious. (Exaggeration is the most glaring one here—*most* of his life's evenings at the theater?) Nonetheless, I do think Fenger's work is valuable insofar as it brings to light the theatricality that informs Kierkegaard's writing—even, as Fenger points out, his most "religious" writings, in which the thrill of the theater can seem like a distant memory.[14] In passages such as this one, Fenger shows the importance not only of Kierkegaard's personal interest in the theater, but also, more generally, of the manner in which every one of his texts can be viewed as a kind of stage.

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[13] Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard, The Myths and their Origins: Studies in the Kierkegaardian Papers and Letters*, trans. George C. Schoolfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 21 and 24. Fenger's book appeared in Danish in 1976.

[14] I will focus primarily on Aesthete A's essay "The First Love" in Part One of *Either/Or* (Chapter One) and, to a lesser extent, the farce scene at the Königsberg Theater in *Repetition* (Chapter Four). Other texts devoted to the theater in Kierkegaard's authorship include Kierkegaard's discussion of the playwright Ludwig Tieck in *The Concept of Irony*; A's essays "The Immediate Erotic Stages" and "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama" in *Either/Or*; and Kierkegaard's late article "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress."

Kings and maidens and seducers and judges and hermits and preachers are just some of the personae that he constructs. As I think Fenger is right to suggest, even Kierkegaard "himself," signing his own name, belongs to this ever-burgeoning cast of characters.

Fenger's book has provided fodder for seemingly endless polemic within Kierkegaard studies. Such debates typically pit those who emphasize the thoroughgoing aestheticism and irony of Kierkegaard's writings against those who emphasize their overarching religious purpose. For me, what is most valuable about Kierkegaard's writings is that *both* of these characterizations of them are simultaneously true. Fenger, at least, has the virtue of being more circumspect than most of his critics about asserting an eternal opposition between Kierkegaard's ironic aestheticism and his theological purpose—even though he freely admits that he is not a Christian and has no desire to read Kierkegaard from that vantage.[15] His "Concluding Nontheological Postscript" ends not with an assertion but with a question: "Can the theologians profit from this book?"[16]

This project can be seen as one way of answering yes to this question. My reading of Kierkegaard is fundamentally theological in orientation, though what I value most from this perspective is the way in which his writings' aestheticism, irony, and theatricality explode widespread assumptions about what theological writing is and can be. Kierkegaard continuously juxtaposes the aesthetic and the religious in such a way as to prevent any one doctrine, image, or concept from being definitive of true Christianity—figuring his writing as a continuous elicitation of desire, rather than the

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[15] Fenger, *Søren Kierkegaard*, xi. 214.

[16] The exact passage is embroiled in a Danish geographical pun that I make no effort to reproduce here: "The many Danes who think (if we are to believe our Danish weeklies) that things are fairest in Denmark, and who therefore are willing to abdicate their claims to heaven (with a little *h*), provided they can keep their Guru (with a big G)—these people can hardly profit from this book. Can the theologians?" Fenger, *Søren Kierkegaard*, 213.

direct communication of a static truth. In the first half of this Introduction, I lay the groundwork for the readings I present in the chapters to follow by analyzing how Kierkegaard describes the aesthetic-religious equivocality of his writing in *Works of Love* and *The Point of View*. I then highlight the roadblocks to appreciating the role of desire in Kierkegaard's writings caused by Anders Nygren's widely influential opposition between *agape* and *eros*. Then, in the second half, I turn from these general considerations to a very concrete analysis of the relationship between desire, irony, and equivocality in Kierkegaard's *magister* dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*. My analysis of these issues there will serve as an introduction to the core issues of this project.

I. Aesthetic-Religious Equivocation

By taking the themes of theatricality and staging as my guiding threads, I touch upon one of the perennial questions of Kierkegaard scholarship: the relationship between the aesthetic and the religious in his work.[17] Although many authors treat the aesthetic and the religious in Kierkegaard's work as disjunctive, I emphasize the ongoing duality or equivocality of Kierkegaard's writing. Even when his work is most recognizably theological, and even when he signs his writings under his own name, I argue that he never abandons irony or the aesthetic in order to declare Christian truth finally and directly. Metaphorically speaking, he never steps outside the half-light of the theater in

[17] The following texts in particular have explored the relationship between the aesthetic and the religious in Kierkegaard's work in insightful ways. Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, The Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theater to the Crucifixion of the Image* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992). Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993). Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994). Joel Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard's Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York and London: T & T Clark, 2005). I will allow the specific ways in which I draw upon and also critique these authors to become clearer as this project progresses.

order to present Christian truth in the bright light of day.[18] But can such thoroughly equivocal writing rightly be called theology? If his writings are equivocal from beginning to end, how can he, or anyone, assert that religiousness is the controlling factor in his writings?

My insistence upon the thoroughgoing aesthetic-religious duality in Kierkegaard's writings may strike some readers as antithetical to one of his frequently repeated themes, namely, the importance of distinguishing the religious from the aesthetic. Should a Christian reading of Kierkegaard's writings not strive to resist all aesthetic "contamination" of their essential religiousness? Do Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms not caution repeatedly against conflating these two spheres? Not only do such cautions appear frequently in Kierkegaard's writings, but, when they do, they tend to make particular reference to the theater. For example, in the first part of *Either/Or*, Aesthete A offers this condemnation of the confusion of his age in "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama":

> This is part of the confusion that manifests itself in so many ways in our day: something is sought where one should not seek it; and what is worse, it is

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[18] I make an opposite point here to that made by George Pattison in his book *The Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (London: Macmillian, 1992)—a text for which I have a good deal of respect. In his discussion of the farce scene in *Repetition*, Pattison asserts that Kierkegaard's writings call the reader to step outside the theater so as to embrace the daylight of religious truth: "We are, then, urged to leave the artistically contrived half-light of the theater for the harsher, but real, light of the newly dawning day—literally, perhaps, but also (and more importantly) metaphorically. For this process is (with Plato in mind) Kierkegaard's reworking of Plato's parable of the cave, and the mechanism of self-projection which Constantine sees as vital to the magic of the theater is a mechanism constantly at work in human situations and relationships of all kind" (p. 114). Throughout this project, I will argue that Kierkegaard does not believe that any human being can ever, metaphorically speaking, fully leave Plato's cave or the theater; as a consequence religious writing is constrained to confine itself to, yet subvert and redeploy, the dark and shifting images on the cave walls.

This contrast between my analysis and Pattison's notwithstanding, I find his more recent essay "Kierkegaard and Genre," *Poetics Today* 28:3 (Fall 2007): 475-497, which approaches Kierkegaard's work from the perspective of Heibergian aesthetics and Bakhtinian carnival, to be quite conducive to my reading of Kierkegaard here.

> found where one should not find it. One wishes to be edified in the theater, to be esthetically stimulated in church; one wishes to be converted by novels, to be entertained by devotional books, one wishes to have philosophy in the pulpit and a preacher on the lecture platform.[19]

Aesthete A warns here that to seek religious edification in the theater and aesthetic pleasure in church is a recipe for both bad religion and bad theater. In *Repetition*, Constantin Constantius mocks the confusion of the aesthetic and the religious in a similar way. He defends the aesthetic superiority of the Königstädter Theater, where he loves to watch farce, by disparaging the over-serious pomp of the city's more fashionable stages as "the exaltation of art that makes people jam a theater to see a play as if it were a matter of salvation."[20] Kierkegaard makes much the same point in his journal in a terse entry from 1853. In no uncertain terms, he condemns the category-confusion that he perceives in the Danish church: "And always this equivocation [*Tvetydighed*], that preaching becomes aesthetic. That is really desperate. Either—Or. Let a cobbler preach but his life express Christianity: great. Or let an actor declaim, so at least one knows where one is."[21] One can find other passages emphasizing the absolute either/or between the aesthetic and religious spheres in Kierkegaard's work.[22] To live religiously, he asserts again and again, is as far from living aesthetically as heaven is from earth.

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[19] *EO*, 1:149 / *SKS*, 2:148.

[20] *R*, 165 / *SKS*, 4:39.

[21] *SKS*, 24:244; my translation.

[22] It is important to recognize that Kierkegaard was by no means the first in his time to call for rigorous distinction between the existence-spheres. The motivation for such distinctions was often more about preserving the integrity of the aesthetic than about preserving the integrity of the religious. (Note that the first two passages cited above are the work of thoroughly aesthetic pseudonyms.) While an older generation of Danish dramaturgy, steeped in the optimism of the Enlightenment, viewed the theater as a vehicle for moral edification, this view was under criticism from a variety of fronts by Kierkegaard's time. J. L. Heiberg makes largely the same point as Kierkegaard about the necessity of distinguishing the aesthetic and the religious for altogether aesthetic reasons. In an essay on the theater that I will return to in Chapter One, Heiberg argues that seeking moral or spiritual

Yet Kierkegaard is equally adamant that no existing individual is ever able to leave earth behind and write from heaven. While he presumes that there is an infinite difference between the aesthetic and the religious on the level of abstract definitions, he simultaneously questions all pretensions to make such a difference manifest on the written page. He warns that to seek to write a purely religious language is not only folly, but also deceptive (or self-deceptive). The authentic religiousness that his writings strive to promote is a matter of existential striving rather than direct representation. To be a religious writer according to Kierkegaard is not to preserve one's words from aesthetic contamination, but to embrace the aesthetic as a means of eliciting a form of religiousness that can never become directly manifest. Let us consider two texts in which Kierkegaard describes this methodology.

The first is *Works of Love*, a book to which I will return in much more detail in Chapter Five. In the first discourse of this book's second series, Kierkegaard argues that all speech about God, even that of the Bible, is "transferred" speech, speech that is "carried over" [*overført*] from the realm of the aesthetic to that of the religious.[23] He explains that because humans always live initially in the realm of the "sensate-psychical" and can never leave this realm behind, their reflective language about spirit can only ever

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edification in the theater is a misplaced goal, indeed, a sign of rank aesthetic dilettantism. "The immediate moral use of comedies is so extraordinarily miniscule," he cautions. If one's purpose in going to the theater is moral edification, then "one would be better off tearing down every theater and building a church in its place." J. L. Heiberg, *Om Vaudevillen, som dramatisk Digtart, og dens Betydning paa den danske Skueplads. En dramaturgisk Undersøgelse* in *J. L. Heibergs Samlede Skrifter: Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 6 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1861 [1826]),79.

[23] *WL*, 209 / *SKS*, 9:212-213; translation modified. The Hongs translate *overført* as "metaphorical," but this is misleading both because Kierkegaard has *metaforisk* available to him and because *overført* has the much more concrete literal meaning that I preserve here. In Danish literature, to use a word in an *overført betydning* is a specific and widely recognized rhetorical form. See the entry "overføre" in *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, XV (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1934), 1446-1447.

be "carried over" from it. As a consequence, he asserts that all language is marked by an essential "secret": is it being used in its native aesthetic sense, or is it being "carried over" for a religious purpose?[24] Kierkegaard maintains that this question is unanswerable on objective grounds. He writes that "there is no word in human language, not one single one, not the most sacred one about which we are able to say: If a person uses this word, it is unconditionally demonstrated that there is love in that person."[25] The most Christian communication conceivable, he asserts, is not recognizable as such from an objective vantage. "When you think that you see it you are deceived by a reflected image."[26] In writing about God, equivocality is not a deficiency; it is the consequence of a relating to God in authentic desire rather than in a pretense of conceptual mastery. Kierkegaard's strategy is not to seek to move beyond reflected images, but to multiply them—allowing their refraction in his texts' carnival mirrors to elicit ever greater desire.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard identifies a pervasive temptation in religious rhetoric to try to speak a purely religious language, to leave all aestheticism behind. He argues that any text that claims to be religious in this way betrays a misunderstanding of the nature of religiousness itself. He writes:

> The difference [between aesthetic and religious language] is by no means a noticeable difference. For this reason we rightfully regard it as a sign of false spirituality to parade a noticeable difference—which is just sensuousness, whereas spirit's being is the quiet whispering secret of what is transferred—for the person who has ears to hear.[27]

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[24] *WL*, 209 / *SKS*, 9:212.

[25] *WL*, 13 / *SKS*, 9:21.

[26] *WL*, 10 / *SKS*, 9:18.

[27] *WL*, 210 / *SKS*, 9:213; translation modified.

While Kierkegaard maintains that the true nature of a person's existence is infinitely different depending on whether it is governed by the aesthetic or the religious, he does not believe that this difference can be definitively recognizable either on the written page or in externally manifest actions.[28] Kierkegaard scholarship nonetheless frequently struggles with the temptation to attempt such discernment about his writings. How can their essentially aesthetic, or essentially religious, nature be demonstrated? Which texts are predominantly aesthetic and which are religious in orientation? What views belong to the "real" Kierkegaard, or to Kierkegaard "himself"? Passages such as this one suggest that the answers to such questions, according to Kierkegaard's own understanding of his rhetoric, will be necessarily elusive. Kierkegaard's equivocal writing does not seek to furnish an objective description of an essentially unrepresentable love, but rather to elicit the reader's desire, to make the reader *love*. "Like is known only by like," Kierkegaard writes; "only someone who abides in love can know love."[29]

Kierkegaard wrestles with the consequences of his aesthetic-religious methodology in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*—a text that he wrote soon after *Works of Love*, but which he allowed to be published only posthumously. In this book, originally intended to accompany the second edition of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard responds to critics who charge that there is an essential change in his writings from youthful aestheticism to strict religiousness. Kierkegaard views these critics as having fundamentally misunderstood the nature of his writing (even though, given its

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[28] As we will see when we discuss this text more fully in Chapter Five, Kierkegaard emphasizes the gospel injunction that love must bear fruit, but interprets this exclusively as an incitement to the individual to strive to make one's love manifest, not license to judge others or to be confident that one has succeeded. *WL*, 14-16 / *SKS*, 9:22-24.

[29] *WL*, 16 / *SKS*, 9:24.

equivocality, such misunderstanding is altogether inevitable). On the first page of *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard seems to promise a thoroughly transparent rebuttal of these critics, one that would clear up the nature of his authorship once and for all. He writes: "The content, then, of this little book is: what I in truth am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that my whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian."[30] Yet no sooner does Kierkegaard assert the purity of his writings' religious purpose than he calls into question whether it could ever be directly manifest—including in this book. He asserts that aesthetic-religious "duplexity" [*Duplicitet*] or "equivocalness" [*Tvetydighed*] is an essential feature of his authorship from beginning to end.[31] Kierkegaard does not wish to minimize or explain away this equivocality. Instead, he calls it to the reader's attention:

> It is not, then, as is ordinarily the case with a supposed duplexity, that others have discovered it and it is the task of the person concerned to show that it *is not*. By no means, just the opposite. Insofar as the reader might not be sufficiently aware of the duplexity, it is the author's task to make it as obvious as possible that it is there. In other words, the duplexity, the equivocalness, is deliberate, is something the author knows about more than anyone else, is the essential dialectical qualification of the whole authorship, and therefore has a deeper basis.[32]

Aesthetic-religious equivocation is essential to Kierkegaard's conception of his writing. It is so fundamental, in fact, that it is characteristic of *The Point of View* itself, even

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[30] *PV*, 23 / *SV*, 18:81.

[31] When Kierkegaard speaks of the aesthetic-religious duplexity of his authorship, his most obvious referent is to his two series of books, pseudonymous and signed, which roughly equate to those that are "aesthetic" and those that are "religious." In *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard emphasizes this macroscopic duality to his writings, yet he also makes clear that on a more microscopic level, each one of his writings manifests this same aesthetic-religious duplexity (e.g., *PV*, 23-24 / *SV*, 18:82). It is for this reason that Kierkegaard comes to recognize that *The Point of View* is such a problematic text. It attempts to accomplish the dubious goal of asserting that a univocal purpose governs all of Kierkegaard's equivocal writings in a text that is equivocal itself.

[32] *PV*, 29 / *SV*, 18:85.

though the book's purpose seems, on its face, to be to assert his encompassing religious purpose. Kierkegaard places the book under two epigraphs, one drawn from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, and one drawn from a Danish hymn—the first aesthetic, and the second religious. His explanation is thus beset by the very equivocality it purports to resolve.

Kierkegaard acknowledges the consequence of this all-pervasive equivocality before the reader even has time to object. How can he claim to assert a univocal purpose in his work without abandoning its essential equivocality? He writes: "But is there not a contradiction here? If it is substantiated in the preceding that the equivocalness is present to the very last, to the same degree as this succeeds, to the same degree it is made impossible to substantiate which [of these factors] is the explanation."[33] Just as Kierkegaard asserts in *Works of Love* that only the person who loves can recognize love, so too his answer to this objection is that only the religiously earnest person, or the person made earnest through reading his work, can vouch for his work's essential earnestness. Revealingly, Kierkegaard uses an *aesthetic* story of desire to illustrate what this religious earnestness consists in: "Just as a woman's coyness relates to the true lover, and then, but only then, yields, so also a dialectical redoubling relates to true earnestness."[34] An earnest suitor, a true lover, who woos the maiden of his desires, will at first meet only demure reserve, the nature and purpose of which are undecidable. Is it an erotic coyness, or an utter lack of interest? Unserious suitors, Kierkegaard suggests, will give up upon being faced with such a riddle, while the suitor who remains reveals in

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[33] *PV*, 34 / *SV*, 18:88.

[34] *PV*, 34 / *SV*, 18:89.

doing so the earnestness of his desire. How Kierkegaard's texts affect their readers—the desire that they incite in them—is what vouches for their earnestness, rather than any of their objective features considered in themselves. Objectively they can present only the riddle of aesthetic-religious equivocation.[35]

Thus Kierkegaard simultaneously asserts that the religious is the controlling element of his authorship, and that it can never be objectively manifest, even in his own assertion of it. He claims that the religious is the essential element of his work and the aesthetic "merely incidental,"[36] yet this putatively incidental factor is one that he can never discard. Although they are circular and contradictory from a detached perspective, these features of Kierkegaard's understanding of his rhetoric are inevitable consequences of his conception of religiousness as infinite desire. But is it even intelligible to speak of such desire as the controlling factor of Kierkegaard's authorship? Isn't the very nature of infinite desire to subvert and exceed all finite representations?

II. Desire, Beyond "Eros" and "Agape"

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the lack of finality or stasis in Kierkegaard's writings—their refusal to step outside the theater's half-light and present Christian truth in the bright light of day—is not a deficiency on their part, but an expression of Christian existence as taking the form of ever-greater desire for God rather than consummate knowledge. Desire in this sense is not a central theme in Lutheran theology, as usually expressed in Kierkegaard's time or our own. It is, however, central

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[35] I analyze the paradoxes of the point of view in much greater detail in my essay "Communicating Earnestness: Kierkegaard and Derrida Respond to their (Poorest) Readers" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary:* The Point of View, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010).

[36] *PV*, 24 / *SV*, 18:82.

to many strands of Christian tradition, whether one thinks of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, or Pseudo-Dionysius, to name only some of the most obvious examples. I will not engage directly with any of these theological figures here. Since their influence upon Kierkegaard's thought is at best indirect, I will focus instead on the two influences that Kierkegaard discusses at length in *The Concept of Irony* and throughout his authorship: Socrates and the German Romantic movement.

Far from speaking of desire as a single discreet and definable concept, Kierkegaard employs a range of words and images related to love and longing throughout his authorship.[37] One translation issue in particular demands to be flagged from the outset. As is well known, Kierkegaard has available to him two words for love, *Kjærlighed* [also spelled *Kjerlighed*; today spelled *kærlighed*] and *Elskov*. Howard and Edna Hong usually translate *Elskov* as "erotic love" (though some contexts force them to translate it simply as "love") and *Kjærlighed* as "love," with the implication that the latter is Christian and the former is not.[38] In my view, however, it is vital to recognize that this binary opposition owes far more to Anders Nygren's prodigiously influential book *Agape and Eros* than it does to Kierkegaard's own conception of love and desire.[39]

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[37] A wide range of Danish words can correspond to the semantic field of the English word "desire." Kierkegaard's Danish words *Ønske, Lyst*, *Begær*, *Attraa*, and *Trang* can all be translated as desire, though each carries its own nuances. As we will see, Kierkegaard also frequently speaks of *Længsel* ("longing"), and even uses the word *Sorg* ("sorrow") to refer to a kind of desire.

[38] Kierkegaard is often said to construct a particular opposition between these two terms in *Works of Love*. Since I will discuss the role of desire in *Works of Love* at length in the final chapter of this dissertation, I will confine my analysis to more general translation questions here.

[39] Although Nygren's book remains influential in many quarters, it has also provoked a large amount of criticism in theology. See for example, Anne Bathurst Gilson, *Eros Breaking Free: Interpreting Sexual Theo-Ehics* (Clevland: The Pilgram Press, 1995), 16-36 and the essays collected in *Toward a Theology of Eros*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

I provide a more historically oriented analysis of Anders Nygren's relationship to Kierkegaard in "Anders Nygren: Influence in Reverse" in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology,*

Nygren's book appeared serially in Swedish from 1930-1936. Its influence on 20th-century theology and philosophy has been so extensive that it is virtually impossible to speak of love and desire outside the shadow of its influence today. Nygren's distinction has informed how Kierkegaard has been read and translated in a profound way. In a recent essay, the Australian Kierkegaard scholar William McDonald argues that Kierkegaard's writings presuppose a paradigm that is virtually identical to the one Nygren develops, such that Kierkegaard's use of *Elskov* aligns with Nygren's use of *eros*, and his use of *Kjærlighed* aligns with Nygren's use of *agape*.[40] Similarly, on the first page of his still-influential book *Agape*, Gene Outka writes that Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* can for his purposes "in part serve as a substitute for Nygren's," since *Works of Love* is "more oriented toward specifically ethical matters."[41] It is not difficult to recognize how the Hongs' translations can give the impression that *Elskov* and *Kjærlighed* are merely ciphers for Nygren's *eros* and *agape*. They make this claim directly in their explanatory notes. In a footnote to the second volume of *Either/Or*, for

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Tome II: Anglophone, Scandinavian, and Jewish Theology, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham, England: Ashgate, forthcoming in 2012).

[40] A representative example of this tendency at its most egregious can be found in a recent article by the Australian Kierkegaard scholar William McDonald, "Love in Kierkegaard's *Symposia*," *Minerva—An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 7 (2003): 60-93. Arguing for a near-total conflation of Kierkegaard and Nygren, he writes: "The specific meaning of [Kierkegaard's terms for love] 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: psycho-sensual/spiritual, immediacy/higher immediacy, self/other, recollection/repetition, immortality slvation, beloved/neighbor, desire/duty, luck [*Lykke*]/gift [*Gave*], happinness [*Lykke*]/task [*Opgave*], *lex talionis*/redoubling, possession/debt, hiddenness/transparency, visibility/ivinisiblity, immanence/transcendence, and time/eternity." In his article McDonald reproduces the binary that Nygren constructs precisely—and attributes it wholesale to Kierkegaard.

[41] Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 2n.1

example, they define the difference between *Elskov* and *Kjærlighed* as follows: "*Elskov* is immediate, romantic, dreaming love, as between a man and a woman. *Kjærlighed* is love in a more inclusive and also higher sense. *Elkov* and *Kjærlighed* correspond to 'eros' and 'agape.'"[42] While the first two sentences of this footnote are helpful, the third reveals a foreign paradigm that they, and many others, have imposed on Kierkegaard's work.

The all-pervasive influence of Nygren's distinction is likely due in part to its simplicity. According to his definition, *eros* is egocentric desire motivated by the value of its object; *agape* is spontaneous self-giving, enacted toward all. It is important to recognize that although Nygren's work is frequently cited in the context of ethics, his immediate concern is to describe how humans should relate not to each other but to God (a relation that does, of course, imply an ethics indirectly). This context explains why, in a book that discusses *eros* so extensively, Nygren is able to dispense with sexuality almost entirely. The *eros* that he wishes to condemn is *eros* directed toward God—that is, "Eros...in its most sublimated and spiritualized form."[43] In Nygren's telling, *eros* and *agape* are two diametrically opposed ways of bridging the divine-human divide. When it comes to this bridge, he can countenance no shades of gray. These two ways of relating to God have, in his words, "no common denominator."[44] He explains that "in Eros and Agape we have two conceptions which have originally nothing whatsoever to do with one another." Yet he laments that they have "in the course of history...none the less

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[42] *EO*, 2:32n.39. Near identical versions of this same explanation can be found in *TDIO*, 43n.1 and *CD*, 116n.40.

[43] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1957 [1930-1936]), 51.

[44] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 33.

become so bound up with one another that it is hardly possible for us to speak of either without our thoughts being drawn to the other."[45] The task that Nygren sets for himself is to unmask the ways in which *eros* has infiltrated *agape*, and to banish it from Christianity forever.

Like his colleague Gustav Aulén, Nygren belonged to the Scandinavian "Luther Renaissance" of the early twentieth century, and recognizing his Lutheran background is also crucial to understanding what motivates his position. The entire argument of *Agape and Eros* turns out to be a way of replaying the Lutheran opposition between divine grace and human works. Martin Luther is the unquestioned—and only—theological hero of Nygren's book. No other theologian in Christian history is able to keep *agape* distinct from *eros* to Nygren's satisfaction. His reproach even extends to the author of the Gospel of John.[46] For Nygren, the category of *eros* encompasses all human efforts to reach God; its yearning is the futile chimera of works righteousness. *Eros* makes the mistaken assumption that acquiring more pleasurable and more beautiful goods will serve as a *scala paradisi* leading to God. *Agape*, in contrast, allows the grace offered in Christ to be what unites humans to God. According to this view, Christians mirror his spontaneous self-giving in the world out of gratitude and joy.

When Nygren's *agape*/*eros* distinction is framed in this Lutheran light, it may be difficult to see how any Lutheran, least of all Kierkegaard, could object to it. Why not assume, as the Hongs do, that Kierkegaard's use of the Danish terms *Elskov* and

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[45] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 30.

[46] Nygren is critical of the Gospel of John, which he reads as "the transition to a stage where the Christian idea of love is no longer determined solely by the Agape motif, but by 'Eros and Agape.'" For him, Paul provides the norm by which the rest of the New Testament must be read. *Agape and Eros*, 158.

Kjærlighed anticipates Nygren's distinction? For lexical reasons alone, I will show, this equation simply cannot be made. But it is worth analyzing this issue on the conceptual level as well. Nygren and Kierkegaard are both Lutheran theologians striving to express the Christian message in modern contexts, yet the ways in which they do so could not be more different.

Kierkegaard and Nygren are both intimately concerned with Christian love and the Lutheran *sola gratia* message. The first, and most fundamental, way in which they differ has to do with how they believe that gracious love can be represented. As we have already seen in the Prologue to this dissertation, Kierkegaard is acutely sensitive to the impossibility of even *thinking* divine love, of representing it for oneself in thought. His contrast with Nygren on this point could not be more extreme. Nygren explicitly condemns all efforts to portray Christian *agape* as "paradoxical," or as anything other than "simple," "clear," and "easily comprehensible." In a passage that seems as though it could be targeting Kierkegaard directly, Nygren writes:

> There is in many quarters today an unhealthy cult of the paradoxical and irrational, almost as if the lack of clarity and consistency were sufficient evidence of religious or Christian truth. When we describe the idea of Agape as paradoxical and irrational, we do not for a moment suggest that it contains any logical contradiction or implies a *credo quia absurdum*. The idea of Agape is by no mean self-contradictory. On the contrary, it is a quite simple and clear and easily comprehensible idea. It is paradoxical and irrational only inasmuch as it means a transvaluation of all previously accepted values.[47]

He thus specifies that however "paradoxical and irrational" Christian *agape* may *seem*, this appearance is not due to any essential contradiction in its nature, but to the apparently contingent fact that it was previously unknown to paganism. Nygren uses the Nietzschean language of "a transvaluation of all previously accepted values" to refer to

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[47] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 204-205.

nothing more than a historical accident of ignorance. Christ helps Christians discover *agape*, he seems to be saying, and, once they do, it turns out to be eminently accessible to thought, language, and representation.

Second, when Nygren speaks of *eros*, he is invariably construing desire as a need and thus as belonging to a finite economy of satisfaction. The desire that Nygren envisions can function only in a situation of lack. He explains: "Man only longs for that which he has not got, and of which he feels a need....An eros that was rich, and had everything it wanted, would be a contradiction in terms."[48] Desire for Nygren is by nature "acquisitive": it is "the will to get and possess which depends on want and need."[49] Although he presents these as universal features of all desire, it is important to recognize how limited and particular the version of desire that he presents is. One could certainly question whether it is recognizable as the desire described by any of the classic theological authors he criticizes. How can desiring communion with the God revealed in Christ be equated with a desire for a finite object? Can such desire really take the same form as needs such as hunger and thirst? No philosopher in recent times has written more provocatively on the nature of infinite desire than Emmanuel Levinas.[50] In the opening pages of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes what he calls "metaphysical" desire, and this desire is radically heterogeneous to the finite economy that Nygren envisions. Levinas writes:

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[48] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 176.

[49] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 210.

[50] I have been much influenced by the way in which Wendy Farley places such a Levinassian model of desire at the center of her Christian theology. See *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville: Westminester John Knox Press, 2005), especially 1-17 and 95-113, and *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996 [1961]), 67-110.

> We speak lightly of desires satisfied, or of sexual needs, or even of moral and religious needs. Love itself is then taken to be the satisfaction of a sublime hunger. If this is possible it is because most of our desire and love are not pure....the metaphysical desire has another intention; it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness—the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it.[51]

The infinite desire that Levinas analyzes here informs virtually all of his work, which would be almost nonsensical apart from it. I argue in this dissertation that if Kierkegaard anticipates a twentieth-century philosophy of desire, it is much more that of Levinas than that of Nygren, even though this point is made surprisingly rarely.[52] The desire that I am claiming is at the heart of Kierkegaard's authorship is not a finite need or lack, but rather an infinite longing that only grows more intense the more it relates to its "object."

Third, perhaps because of the finite character of the desire that Nygren describes, it is invariably a flight from the world, rather than an incitement to strive to follow Christ within it. Nygren condemns *eros* as a rejection of the created order for the sake of some purportedly higher, but ultimately illusory, reality. He argues that *agape* alone enables Christianity to affirm the created world as the site where humans meet God. He writes:

> Furthermore, Eros is in no sense an affirmation or acceptance of the sense-world; on the contrary, it is the turning of the soul away from it. *Eros is itself a form of flight from the world*. It is not beautiful things as such that are the object of love and desire. It is only because of the memory they awaken of the higher world that they have any such place in the scheme of Eros. Plato's interest in them attaches, not to their singularity and individuality, but to their

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[51] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 34.

[52] Jamie Ferreira's book *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's* Works of Love (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) is a notable exception. My analysis of desire in Kierkegaard and its relation to Levinas is greatly indebted to her reading of *Works of Love*. See especially 26-28. It is remarkable that two recent studies devoted to comparing Kierkegaard and Levinas make no mention whatsoever of the theme of desire in either thinker's work. Merold Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008). J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood, eds., *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

> being 'paradigms,' particular instances, which 'participate in' the universal beauty. They exist for him only as stepping stones to the universal.[53]

On the point that Christianity is not a flight from the world but a deeper and more faithful immersion in it, Kierkegaard and Nygren agree entirely. As we will see in our treatment of *The Concept of Irony*, one of Kierkegaard's central criticisms of the German Romantic tradition is that the desire it commends leads the Romantics to use irony to detach themselves from the world and to inhabit a dream-world of their own poetic creation. However, he disagrees with Nygren's assumption that such escapism is the only form that desire can take. He is critical of this aspect of Romantic desire, but he presents *Socratic* desire as immersing the individual more deeply in actuality, revealing it to be an infinite task. It is this Socratic desire that provides the model for the Christian *eros* that Kierkegaard commends. This *eros* is directed toward Christ, the God who appeared in actuality, and inspires a constant striving to follow him, even suffer with him, in the world.

Beyond these theological and philosophical differences, lexical reasons alone should be enough to reveal the considerable daylight between Kierkegaard's use of *Kjærlighed* and *Elskov* and Nygren's use of *Agape* and *Eros*. First of all, it is important to bear in mind that while Danish has two nouns for "love," it has only one verb, *at elske*. It is used to construct not only *Elkov* but also the nouns for "lover" [*Elsker*, *Elskende*] and "beloved" [*Elskede*], which appear frequently in Kierkegaard's work. In itself, this verb is not in tension with the noun *Kjærlighed*. The Danish is not the least bit jarring when Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love*, "Only when it is a duty to love [*at elske*] is

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[53] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 179.

love [*Kjerlighed*] eternally secure."[54] Second, when it comes to the two *noun* forms available in Danish, there are indeed differences in emphasis and connotation, but there is none of the mutual exclusivity and polar opposition of Nygren's *agape*/*eros* distinction. *Kjærlighed* is the more common and the more general word—employed everywhere in Danish from pulp literature to the New Testament. *Elskov* has more specific associations with passion, desire, romance, and poetry; it is widely used in Danish Romantic literature.[55] What is most problematic about the imposition of Nygren's paradigm onto Kierkegaard's writing is the implication that *Kjærlighed* cannot be erotic. This is manifestly not the case. The Danish title of Scribe's play that Aesthete A and Judge William discuss in *Either*/*Or* (and which will be at the center of Chapter One of this project) is *Den Første Kjærlighed*—even though it represents nothing but what Nygren would classify as "vulgar eros." Similarly, when Johannes Climacus writes in a passage quoted in the Prologue that "there has been much talk in the world about unhappy love, and everyone knows what the term means," the word he is using to refer to unhappy erotic love is *Kjærlighed*.[56] Kierkegaard's use of this word simply refuses to fit within Nygren's *agape* straightjacket. Neither does Kierkegaard's use of *Elskov* necessarily imply condemnation, as Nygren's use of *eros* always does. After all, it is the king's

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[54] *WL*, 29 / *SKS*, 9:33.

[55] See the entries "*Elskov"* and "*Kærlighed"* in *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1919-56.

[55] *SKS* 3, 40 / *EO2*, 32.

[56] *PF*, 27-28 / *SKS*, 4:234.

Elskov for the maiden that provides the fundamental analogy to the Incarnation in Chapter Two of *Philosophical Fragments*.[57]

Throughout this project, I have chosen to amend the Hongs' translations of *Elskov* from "erotic love" to "romantic love." This captures its general connotation and also suggests Kierkegaard's association of the term with Romanticism. More importantly, it does not imply to readers reared on Nygren that Christian love is necessarily unerotic. Throughout this project, I include the Danish words in brackets when it is revealing or useful.

Having laid out some of this project's central pillars, let us now examine much more concretely how the themes of desire and theatricality play themselves out in the context of Kierkegaard's dissertation, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*. Although Kierkegaard did not consider this book to be part of his "authorship" properly conceived, his analysis of Socrates in it nonetheless sheds considerable light on his many and varied efforts to write about Christ in the works that follow. Like Christ's infinite love and paradoxical existence, the Socrates that Kierkegaard discusses in *The Concept of Irony* subverts and exceeds all finite representations. His followers can relate to him only in unquenched desire.

III. Staging Desire in *The Concept of Irony*

In *The Concept of Irony*, desire and irony always go hand in hand, such that to compare different modes of irony is to compare different kinds of desire. At several

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[57] *PF*, 28 / *SKS*, 4:235.

A good discussion of both the nature of these two words in Danish and their foreignness to the paradigm developed by Nygren can be found in Rick Furtack, *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 101-104.

points in his dissertation, Kierkegaard describes Socrates as an *erotiker*, an "eroticist" or "amorist," and, in taking Socrates as a model, Kierkegaard figures himself as an eroticist as well. The nature of irony as Kierkegaard presents it is to elicit desire—inciting passion, even though irony as such provides no satisfaction. "Irony is the negative in love [*Kjærlighed*]; it is love's incitement," Kierkegaard writes in the context of Plato's *Symposium*.[58] By negating what lovers think they know or possesses in the beloved, irony's effect is to make them desire the beloved more. Kierkegaard's discussion of Alcibiades' unrequited desire for Socrates is exemplary in this regard. He may be too cautious to describe the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades as anything other than an intellectual one, yet he still insists that it is erotic to the core. He writes:

> [Alcibiades] is like someone bitten by a snake—indeed, he is bitten by something more painful and in the most painful place, namely in the heart or the soul. That the love-relation [*Kjærligheds-Forhold*] that has come about between Socrates and Alcibiades was an intellectual relation scarcely needs mentioning. But if we ask what it was in Socrates that made such a relation not merely possible but inevitable (Alcibiades correctly observes that not only he but almost every one of Socrates' associates had this relation to him), I have no other answer than that it was *Socrates' irony*.[59]

It is Socrates' irony that makes Alcibiades' relationship to him one of desire—a longing as painful as a snake bite to the soul. But if Socrates' essence as an ironist is always to be desired rather than to be possessed, how can Kierkegaard claim to write a dissertation about his essential nature? This question prefigures the governing problematic of Kierkegaard's project as a religious author.

A. Which Socrates?

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[58] *CI*, 51 / *SKS*, 1:112.

[59] *CI*, 48 / *SKS*, 1:109. The italics are Kierkegaard's, though the Hongs do not retain them.

The title of Kierkegaard's dissertation proclaims that it makes "constant reference" to this master ironist and eroticist. In his Introduction, however, Kierkegaard grapples with the essential impossibility of representing such a figure. He asserts that if Socrates is indeed an ironist, then the goal of finding the "real" Socrates or Socrates "himself" is inherently contradictory. Socrates' foreignness to representation hints at the analogy that Kierkegaard draws later in his authorship between Socrates and Christ. In the Introduction, Kierkegaard gives two basic reasons for why Socrates cannot be directly represented. The first derives from the paucity of the historical record; Socrates, like Christ, wrote nothing down. He "has left nothing by which a later age can judge him."[60] The texts that we do have concerning Socrates, like those concerning Christ, are the biased testimonies of his followers (and opponents). The second impediment to representing Socrates derives from the nature of irony itself. Kierkegaard explains what it means for Socrates to be an ironist in this way: "The outer continually pointed to something other and opposite. He was not like a philosopher delivering his opinions in such a way that just the lecture itself is the presence of the idea, but what Socrates said meant something different."[61] To try to represent someone whose essential nature is the negation of all appearance is to be caught within an inescapable double bind. Anticipating a key point of the analysis of Christ in *Philosophical Fragments*,[62] Kierkegaard characterizes Socrates' irony as so extensive that "even if I were to imagine myself his contemporary, he would still be difficult to comprehend."[63] Kierkegaard

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[60] *CI,* 12 / *SKS*, 1:74.

[61] *CI*, 12 / *SKS*, 1:74.

[62] *PF*, 55-71 and 89-110 / *SKS*, 4:258-271 and 287-306.

[63] *CI*, 12 / *SKS*, 1:74.

suggests that contemporaneity with Socrates would yield no advantage for understanding him, since his outer appearance and inner meaning never aligned.

Kierkegaard concludes the Introduction to *The Concept of Irony* by saying that trying to represent Socrates is like trying to draw a picture of a Scandinavian mythological creature called a *nisse* who wears a magic invisibility cap:

> If we now say that irony constituted the substance of his existence (this is, to be sure a contradiction, but it is supposed to be that), and if we further postulate that irony is a negative concept, it is easy to see how difficult it becomes to fix the picture of him—indeed, it seems impossible or at least as difficult as to picture a *nisse* with the cap that makes him invisible.[64]

This image is certainly amusing, but does it not signal that this entire project is doomed from the start? Why does Kierkegaard even undertake a project like *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates* if he knows, already in the Introduction, that representing both irony and Socrates will be impossible?

Remarkably, the double bind in which Kierkegaard finds himself does not lead him to give up on his writing project, but to attend to the myriad concrete ways in which Socrates' persona has been presented by others. Rather than taking any one image or account of Socrates as definitive, Kierkegaard insists that he must study the many accounts of his character in their very multiplicity. He thus offers readings of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, a large number of Plato's dialogues, and Aristophanes' satirical play *The Clouds*. He reproaches Hegel for taking the opposite route—quickly abstracting from historical sources so as to view Socrates as emblematic of his own abstract categories. As Kierkegaard writes mordantly, Hegel is "in too much of a hurry" to deal with historical details because he is "too much aware of the great importance of

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[64] *CI*, 12 / *SKS*, 1:74.

his role as commander-in-chief of world history to take time for more than the royal glimpse he allows to glide over them."[65]

Thus Kierkegaard's goal is not to arrive at a single definitive portrait of Socrates, but rather to allow the juxtaposition of the many ways in which he has been staged to replicate his irony performatively.[66] Kierkegaard offers the following account of his methodology: "Even though we lack direct evidence about Socrates, even though we lack an altogether reliable view of him, we do have in recompense all the various nuances of misunderstanding, and in my opinion that is our best asset with a personality such as Socrates."[67] According to Kierkegaard, to study Socrates means to attend to "all the various nuances of misunderstanding" of the ways in which he has been portrayed, rather than trying to synthesize them into a single coherent portrait. For Kierkegaard, this process is by nature erotic. He asserts in the first paragraph of the Introduction that the scholar who would study Socrates must *desire* Socrates—even though, or because, a

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[65] *CI*, 222 / *SKS*, 1:266.

[66] Although the language of "staging" here is mine rather than Kierkegaard's own, it is worth noting that the Danish playwright Adam Oehelnschläger wrote a tragedy titled *Socrates*, which was performed at Copenhagen's Royal Theater in 1835. Although Kierkegaard never mentions the play explicitly in *The Concept of Irony*, he is virtually certain to have seen it and to be thinking of it as he writes about the impossibility of representing Socrates accurately. Oehenschläger's play was not well received, particularly by Heiberg and his acolytes, and Kierkegaard presumably shared their negative evaluation of it. By every account, Oehenschläger's *Socrates* was a thoroughly unironic production. Tonny Aagard Olesen describes his representation of Socrates this way: "Oehlenschläger had succeeded in making Socrates into a kind of Judge William. One meets on the stage 'Danish Romanticism's good and upright and piously believing best citizen,' who makes himself comfortable with his wife and children, although there are of course conflicts that need to be resolved. Even though there are lines that Socrates speaks that come straight out of Plato, it is striking to what degree the character in the situation lacks reflection, not to mention double reflection; most often Socrates' wisdom positively consists of *confirming* diverse dogmas instead of *showing* that he himself is also something of a dialectician." Tonny Aagard Olesen, "Kierkegaard's Socrates Sources: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth- Century Danish Scholarship," trans. Jon Stewart, in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception, and Resources*, Volume II, Tome I, ed. Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 262-263.). It is difficult to imagine a staging of Socrates that would be more of a misapprehension than this one in Kierkegaard's eyes.

[67] *CI*, 128 / *SKS*, 1:180.

faithful representation of him will forever elude his grasp. "The observer ought to be an eroticist," Kierkegaard writes: to write about this ironist is to become an eroticist oneself.[68]

The "misunderstanding" that Kierkegaard critiques in the mature Plato's representations of Socrates is, in a sense, emblematic of that to which every account of Socrates is susceptible.[69] Kierkegaard charges that in the mature Platonic dialogues Socrates' irony becomes merely "a negative power in the service of a positive idea."[70] The problem with these dialogues in Kierkegaard's eyes is that they allow their stagings to become mere vehicles for conveying objective truth, rather than giving irony free reign. Kierkegaard maintains that true Socratic irony, in contrast, is characterized by a

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[68] *CI*, 12 / *SKS*, 1:71; translation modified. The Hongs translate *erotiker* as "amorist."

Mark D. Jordan gives a largely parallel analysis of Plato's *Symposium* in an essay that has indirectly inspired many features of my analysis of Kierkegaard's Socrates here. Jordan notes that both the text of the *Symposium* itself and his own essay about it are products of "a line of men who chase after Socrates." "Alcibiades beside Augustine: Flesh in Confession" in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of a Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 28. See also 385n.6.

[69] It is important to recognize that despite Kierkegaard's criticisms of Plato here, he nonetheless attests to a profound affection for Plato's writings—an affection that is evident throughout his authorship. To attend to the various "nuances of misunderstanding" in the stagings of Socrates is not an act of hostility but of love. Kierkegaard could scarcely state his love for Plato's writings more breathlessly. He prefaces his treatment of Plato with the following encomium: "Dear critic, allow me just one sentence, one guileless parenthesis, in order to vent my gratitude, my gratitude for the relief I found in reading Plato. Where is balm to be found if not in the infinite tranquility with which, in the quiet of the night, the idea soundlessly, solemnly, gently, and yet so powerfully unfurls in the rhythm of the dialogue, as if there were nothing else in the world, where every step is deliberated and repeated slowly, solemnly, because the ideas themselves seem to know that there is time and an arena for all of them? Indeed, when was repose ever more need in the world than in our day, when the ideas accelerate with such haste, when they merely give a hint of their existence deep down in the soul by means of a bubble on the surface of the sea, when the ideas never unfurl but are devoured in their delicate sprouts, merely thrust their heads into existence but then promptly die of grief, like the child Abraham à Santa Clara tells of, who in the moment it was born became so afraid of the world that it rushed back into its mother's womb " (*CI*, 27-28 / *SKS*, 1:89).

[70] *CI*, 122 / *SKS*, 1:174.

"divine infinitude" that allows "nothing whatever to endure."[71] The absolute negativity of Socrates leads him to disavow the state, the family, and even his followers as making any kind of absolute claim upon him. Socrates' *daimon*, Kierkegaard emphasizes, never commands him to do anything, but only *dissuades* him from doing things.[72] The irony of Plato's Socrates is on Kierkegaard's reading much more limited in scope, serving always to prepare the way for a positive doctrine.

Kierkegaard's critique of Plato's positivist Socrates tends to target a much more immediate interlocutor—one for whom Kierkegaard has considerably less sympathy. His critiques of the mature Plato are often vehicles for a polemic against Hegel's Socrates, the figure who inaugurates "infinite subjectivity" and *Moralität*. "Hegel always discusses irony in a very unsympathetic manner," Kierkegaard reports. "In his eyes, irony is anathema."[73] For Kierkegaard, Hegel's distaste for irony, which prompts him to seek a positive truth beneath or beyond it, explains in large part why he is not as attentive to the particularities of the historical sources. By portraying Socrates' irony as a vehicle for the communication of positive truth, Hegel reduces it, Kierkegaard alleges, to "a mere conversational technique."[74] By attending to the multiplicity of stagings of Socrates' persona, Kierkegaard is attempting to take his irony more seriously.

Kierkegaard's insistence upon the infinitude of Socrates' irony implies that the desire that Socrates elicits is similarly infinite. The difference between Platonic-Hegelian and Socratic desire centers around whether they are amenable to finite satisfaction.

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[71] *CI*, 40 / *SKS*, 1:101.

[72] *CI*, 159 / *SKS*, 1:209.

[73] *CI*, 265 / *SKS*, 1:302.

[74] *CI*, 269 / *SKS*, 1:306.

Kierkegaard writes that Platonic desire can find satisfaction—for example, in contemplation of the forms, in the just state, or in myth—but Socratic desire never can. Kierkegaard writes that "in the mythical part of the *Symposium*, Plato daydreams and visualizes everything the dialectician Socrates was seeking; in the world of dreams, irony's unhappy love [*Kjærlighed*] finds its object."[75] This description of Platonic myth as furnishing a satisfaction of desire could not contrast more sharply with the following description of Socratic *eros*:

> He was to be sure an eroticist [*Erotiker*] to the highest degree, he had knowledge's zeal in inordinate measure, in short all of spirit's seductive gifts; but inform [*meddele*], fill up, enrich he could not do. In this sense one dares perhaps to call him a *seducer*. He captivated the youths, *awoke longings* in them, but did *not satisfy* them, let them break out in the thrilling enjoyment of contact, but strong and nourishing food he did not give them.[76]

Whereas Platonic desire is amenable to satisfaction through the truths of philosophical contemplation and myth, Socratic desire is beyond satiation, awakening longings whose object it cannot furnish.

Many scholars have been troubled by the extreme negativity that Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates. Such irony seems dangerous: its desire must find rest somewhere; it must be brought under control. Such scholars thus seek to scale back the infinitude of the irony that Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates. John Lippitt, for example, argues that the irony of Kierkegaard's Socrates cannot be "total," but must be a vehicle for conveying "certain substantive insights." He explains:

> Socrates cannot remain *totally* slippery; our relationship to Socrates cannot be one of 'anything goes.' How could a total enigma, whose irony is ultimately nihilistic, be an exemplary subjective thinker? It is thus vitally important that

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[75] *CI*, 108; *SKS*, 1:161.

[76] *CI*, 188; *SKS*, 1:235; translation modified.

> the figure of Socrates, to function as an exemplary subjective thinker, must show us, however indirectly, certain substantive insights, which I have already claimed are, at the very least, the importance of *elenchus* and that ethical and religious communication needs to be indirect, to allow the ethical autonomy of the recipient.[77]

Lippitt assumes that if Socrates is a "total" ironist, then "'anything goes' and nothing matters"; some latent positivity is necessary for Socrates to be in any way exemplary in Kierkegard's thought.[78] Sylvia Walsh draws a similar conclusion, arguing that Socrates' infinite negativity must itself be read "ironically"—that is, as an incognito for a positive ethical purpose. She writes:

> The problem with an ironic interpretation of *The Concept of Irony*—and with Kierkegaard's own 'final view' or ironic interpretation of the phenomenon of Socrates—is that it is not ironic enough, inasmuch as the irony of Socrates is taken literally rather than ironically. That is, Socrates' 'seeming indifference' to others may be just that, a seeming indifference rather than an actual one, and thus the mask or incongnito of a genuine ethical concern for others.[79]

I am not convinced by Walsh's assumption that ironizing irony necessarily yields a positive result. After all, the reason why Kierkegaard values Aristophanes' play *The Clouds* so much is that it *ironizes* Socrates the *ironist*—thus "performing" Socrates irony better than any scholarly analysis could.[80] Walsh openly acknowledges that her goal is to draw Kierkegaard's Socrates closer to that envisioned by Plato and Hegel. She writes: "Kierkegaard thus comes to view Socratic irony more like Plato and Hegel, as a

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[77] John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 155.

[78] Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 154.

[79] Sylvia Walsh, "Ironic Love: An Amorist Interpretation of Socratic Eros" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary:* The Concept of Irony (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 138.

[80] Kierkegaard evidences great affection for Aristophanes' play *The Clouds*, despite its mockery of Socrates. Indeed, Kierkegaard suggests that to ironize this ironist is in a sense to do him the greatest honor. He notes that Socrates is said to have attended and approved of performances of the play himself. *CI*, 129 / *SKS*, 1:180.

controlled element in service to the idea rather than as absolute infinite negativity."[81] Both Lippitt and Walsh assume that for Socrates to remain exemplary, his irony must not be absolute, but must be controlled by some positive idea.

A second way to approach the Socrates of *The Concept of Irony* is to concede the infinite negativity that Kierkegaard attributes to him, but to give up on claiming that this Socrates is exemplary for Kierkegaard. Brian Söderquist sketches such a position in a chapter titled "Kierkegaard's Nihilistic Socrates." He states his thesis about this Socrates as follows:

> I would like to propose a reading of *On the Concept of Irony* that does not shy away from admitting that at least in his dissertation, Kierkegaard's Socrates is less serious, less inclined to seek positive truth, and less virtuous than the Socrates discussed in Kierkegaard's later works. Not only is Kierkegaard's early Socrates unconcerned about realizing the virtuous life, he is radically dismissive of the prevailing ethical norms in Athens. And he is wholly unconcerned about the concrete consequences of counter-cultural activity. I am tempted to call Kierkegaard's Socrates a 'nihilist' insofar as he is radically critical of all established norms and has no serious intention of finding any others to stand in their place.[82]

I commend Söderquist for refusing to tone down the radicalness of the irony that Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates in his dissertation. However, I want to call into question his assumption that this infinite irony necessarily renders Socrates a "nihilist." Might the counter-cultural activity of ironizing established assumptions and prevalent norms be for Kierkegaard a gateway to ethico-religious life—even though it yields no positive philosophy or doctrine? Might inciting an *eros* beyond finite satisfaction bear its own ethical-religious value?

B. Irony under Religious "Control"

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[81] Walsh, "Ironic Love," 137.

[82] K. Brian Söderquist, *The Isolated Self: Truth and Untruth in Søren Kierkegaard's* On the Concept of Irony (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2007), 55-56.

It might seem that to answer yes to such questions would simply mean returning to the dialectical positivity that Lippitt and Walsh ascribe to Kierkegaard's Socrates. Any treatment of Socrates as exemplary, especially in an ethico-religious sense, seems susceptible to a charge of implicit Hegelian positivity. Kierkegaard himself is acutely sensitive to this concern. It is worth considering the ways in which he seeks to avoid this implication, since they not only clarify his analysis of Socrates, but also shed light on his use of irony and indirection in his authorship as a whole.

By claiming to be ignorant about everything, does Socrates not know at least one positive truth: namely, his own ignorance? Versions of skepticism throughout history, from that of Socrates and other ancients to recent deconstruction, have struggled to escape from such a latent positivity. Kierkegaard's basic explanation in *The Concept of Irony* of what prevents Socrates from succumbing to such a positivity is the following: "What kept Socrates from a speculative absorption in the remotely intimated positivity behind this ignorance was, of course, the divine call that he had to convince every individual of the same thing."[83] For Kierkegaard's Socrates, the work of infinite negation was a divinely ordained calling. It required him to "affirm [this irony] practically against every single human being," rather than finding rest in any theoretical knowledge, even about his own ignorance. No sooner had Socrates deployed his ignorant irony in one interaction than he "hastened on to new ventures."[84] There was always more work to be done, more people to converse with. Kierkegaard writes that whereas Platonic-Hegelian desire finds satisfaction in the positivism of "science and scholarship," Socratic desire is

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[83] *CI*, 173 / *SKS*, 1:220.

[84] *CI*, 178 / *SKS*, 1:225.

a summons to a "purely personal life."[85] This for Kierkegaard is the nature of irony in general: "Anybody who does not understand irony at all...lacks *eo ipso* what could be called the absolute beginning of personal life."[86] For Kierkegaard, practicing infinitely negative irony is a way of life, a mode of existence. Far from being nihilistic, it is a veritable divine calling.

Kierkegaard's characterization of Socrates' irony as a response to the divine is not a mere rhetorical flourish. He returns again and again to the ethico-religious nature of Socrates' existence, despite its lack of objective content. He writes, for example, that "the negativity implicit in [Socrates'] ignorance was not a conclusion, not a point of departure for a more profound speculation, but...the divine authority by virtue of which he practiced in the realm of the particular."[87] Kierkegaard goes so far as to compare the total negativity of Socratic irony to the "feeling of absolute dependence" in Schleiermacher, the basis of all religiousness in his thought. In the passage where he does this, Kierkegaard makes clear both that irony yields no theoretical content and that it has ethico-religious value. He writes:

> Naturally this theoretical ignorance, for which the eternal nature of the divine remained a mystery, must have had its counterpart in a similar religious ignorance of the divine dispensations and direction in human life, a religious ignorance that seeks its upbuilding and discloses its piety in a total ignorance, just as, for example, in a far more concrete development Schleiermacher sought the upbuilding in the feeling of absolute dependence. Naturally, this also conceals a polemic and dismays anyone who has found his repose in one or another finite relation to the divine.[88]

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[85] *CI*, 166 / *SKS*, 1:215.

[86] *CI*, 326 / *SKS*, 1:355.

[87] *CI*, 175 / *SKS*, 1:222-223.

[88] *CI*, 176 / *SKS*, 1:223.

While Socrates is truly ignorant, ignorant even about his own ignorance, this is not mere nihilism but a manifestation of genuine religiousness. His ignorance "discloses its piety" in its infinite negativity. Such religiousness necessarily "conceals a polemic," for it calls into question every "finite relation to the divine." All relations to the divine that human beings name and define are ultimately subject to this polemic—especially those that speak confidently about a wholly Other God. Kierkegaard describes Socrates' religiousness as a continual process of coming to the good, rather than actually arriving there. He writes: "The movement in Socrates is this, to be coming to the good [*at komme til det Gode*]. His significance in the world-development is this, to be coming to it (never once to have come to it) [*at komme dertil (ikke engang at være kommen dertil)*]."[89] Kierkegaard sees this never-completed process as more earnest than all direct attestations of earnestness and certainty.

In Kierkegaard's conclusion to *The Concept of Irony*, titled "Irony as a Controlled Element" or "Mastered Moment"[90] [*behersket Moment*], he presses the question of whether such an ethico-religious use of irony could ever truly be infinite. By speaking of irony under "control" or "mastery," does Kierkegaard not once and for all renounce infinite negativity, as Walsh and others are quick to assume? Taken at face value, his conclusion seems to bring a doctrinaire end to the infinite play of irony that he has been discussing throughout. The question, of course, is whether this conclusion can be taken at face value. Both Lippitt and Walsh willingly answer yes to this question.

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[89] *CI*, 235 / *SKS*, 1:276; translation modified. It must be admitted that the Hong translation perverts this passage entirely: "The movement in Socrates is toward arriving at the good. His significance in the world development is to arrive there (not to have arrived there at some time)."

[90] The second of these is Capel's translation. *The Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates*, trans. Lee M. Capel (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 336.

Additionally, a spate of recent scholarship has emphasized Kierkegaard's indebtedness to Hegelian terminology and concepts in his dissertation, arguing that Kierkegaard's stance toward Hegel is not nearly as critical here as it becomes later.[91] I believe that such contextualization sheds light on *The Concept of Irony*, yet I still believe that scholars such as Mackey and Poole are right to interpret this concluding chapter as supremely ironic.[92] Kierkegaard indeed employs Hegelian or Heibergian vocabulary to speak of

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[91] Jon Stewart has published widely on this theme. See especially *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 132-181. "Heiberg's Speculative Poetry as a Model for Kierkegaard's Concept of Controlled Irony" in *Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Philosopher, Littérateur, Dramaturge, and Political Thinker*, edited by Jon Stewart (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008). The wealth of historical and philosophical knowledge that Stewart presents is invaluable, and he is able to demonstrate that Kierkegaard's writing is much subtler than older summaries of his work as little more than anti-Hegelian polemic would suggest.

That being said, I think that there is no question that some of Kierkegaard's most original and valuable insights about irony in his dissertation are in fact criticisms of what can be loosely described as "Hegelian" interpretations of irony—whether Kierkegaard is thinking of Hegel himself, Danish Hegelians, or simply universal tendencies of thought for which Kierkegaard uses "Hegel" as a convenient shorthand. One of Kierkegaard's journal entries from 1850 is often cited as evidence that he himself admitted to, and regretted, an overriding Hegelian tendency in his thesis: "What a Hegelian fool I was!" (*JP*, 4:4281 / *SKS*, 24:32). Stewart writes that this entry "leaves little ambiguity" about Kierkegaard's own assessment of the degree to which *The Concept of Irony* is influenced by Hegel. Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations*, 142. However, I think it is important to recognize the highly specific context in which Kierkegaard is here evaluating the book. His is focused specifically on the theme of the single individual, against all numerical leveling. Kierkegaard's memorable exclamation is preceded by the following sentence: "Influenced as I was by Hegel and whatever was modern, without the maturity really to comprehend greatness, I could not resist pointing out somewhere in my dissertation that it was a defect on the part of Socrates to disregard the whole and only consider numerically the individuals" (*JP*, 4:4281 / *SKS*, 24:32). The fault that Kierkegaard is confessing here is thus a very particular one, and it is by no means clear that it implies a revocation of any of the criticisms of Hegel that I have been discussing here.

[92] Louis Mackey, "Starting from Scratch: Kierkegaard Unfair to Hegel" in *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1986). Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 28-60. Sylvianne Agacinski is very much in line with these same readings, although she treats the conclusion to the book more as Kierkegaard's concession to the exegencies of the dissertation form. She sees its subversion prepared in advance, however, in the "aparté" she analyzes in the chapter "Observations for Orientation." *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Kevin Newmark (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1988), 66-72.

"controlled irony,"[93] but he does so in order to subvert all ordinary conceptions of authorial "control" when it comes to writing about ethico-religious life.

On this first page of this conclusion, Kierkegaard offers a thoroughly straightforward answer to the question of who should control irony: "the poet himself must be master over the irony."[94] He then explains what this means by asserting that the poet must allow his irony to be governed by "a totality-view of the world."[95] Possessing such a "totality-view" is a matter of being "properly situated" in actuality, being "oriented and thus integrated in the age in which he lives."[96] So far this all sounds uncontroversially Hegelian. Jon Stewart has shown, more specifically, that Kierkegaard here is echoing J. L. Heiberg's concept of "speculative poetry."[97] This formal similarity notwithstanding, it is important to press the question of what specifically this "totality view" that Kierkegaard calls for consists in. Is it some kind of positive ethical or speculative framework, as Hegel and Heiberg would assume?

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[93] In the last paragraph of the first part of *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard both explicitly links the concept of "controlled irony" to Hegelianism and gives the distinct impression that this is not a good thing: "The space Hegel gives to irony is itself sufficient indication that he views irony in Socrates more as a controlled element, a way of associating with people, and this is confirmed by explicit statements" (*CI*, 237 / *SKS*, 1:278).

[94] *CI*, 324 / *SKS*, 1:353.

[95] *CI*, 325 / *SKS*, 1:353.

[96] *CI*, 326 / *SKS*, 1:354.

[97] Heiberg outlines his vision for this consummate art form in his essay "On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age," trans. Jon Stewart, *Heiberg's* On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age *and Other Texts* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel's Publishers, 2005). True speculative poets, such as Goethe, Dante, and Calderón, are "didactic," in that they "present their age's philosophy insofar as poetry can do so without forsaking its own characteristic nature" (109, 108). Poetry thus does the same thing as philosophy, presenting speculative truth, but it does so through a different form. That Kierkegaard is thinking of such a conception of poetry when he first defines "controlled irony" in the opening pages of this conclusion seems confirmed by the fact that the exemplary practitioners of this irony that he cites are Goethe and Heiberg, as well as Shakespeare (*CI*, 324-325 / *SKS*, 1:352-354).

Kierkegaard, it must be admitted, makes little effort to define this term in his Conclusion. Yet perhaps this lack of positive definition has its own reasons. In his discussion of Schlegel, Kierkegaard gives the following definition of authentic selfhood: it is not "to compose oneself poetically [*at digte sig selv*]" (as he believes Romantics such as Schlegel strive to do), but "to let oneself be poetically composed [*at lade sig digte*]."[98] In contrast to the Romantic dream of self-creation, the Christian goal is to "to develop the seeds that God himself has placed in the human being."[99] If what it means for Kierkegaard to be "properly situated" in existence is to relate to God authentically in faith, then this goal is hardly equivalent to the Romantic dream mastery over a text or oneself. Indeed, it is much closer to the desire for another that "controlled" Alcibiades. To be properly situated within existence is to orient one's existence according to love for God, and this love can only take the form of infinite desire. Yet if the "controlling element" of one's existence is infinite desire for God, then Kierkegaard's conclusion is ironic through and through. The "controlling element" is a loss of control; the "mastered moment" consists in being mastered by another—who evades representation as insistently as irony itself.

Kierkegaard takes up the theme of desire explicitly in the Conclusion's closing pages. Unlike the longing of the Romantics, the desire of which Kierkegaard speaks does not call the individual away from actual existence to find satisfaction in a constructed dream world. Rather, Kierkegaard argues that it incites the individual to continuous striving within actuality. The infinite desire that Kierkegaard asserts should be the

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[98] *CI*, 280 / *SKS*, 1:316; translation modified.

[99] *CI*, 280 / *SKS*, 1:316; translation modified.

"controlling element" in the individual's existence is, like the irony of Socrates, a divine call to treat actuality as an infinite task.[100] In a revealing passage emphasizing both infinite desire's embrace of actuality and its refusal of finite satisfaction, Kierkegaard writes:

> Irony as a controlled element manifests itself in its truth precisely by teaching how to actualize actuality, by placing the appropriate emphasis on actuality. In no way can this be interpreted as wanting to deify actuality in good St. Simon style or as denying *that there is, or at least that there ought to be, a longing in every human being for something higher and more perfect*. But this longing must not hollow out actuality; on the contrary, life's content must become a genuine and meaningful element in the higher actuality *whose fullness the soul craves* [*attraaer*]....Actuality, therefore, will not be rejected, *and longing* [*Længsel*] *will be a healthy love* [*Kjærlighed*], not a weak and sentimental sneaking out of the world.[101]

Romantic longing may be a "weak and sentimental sneaking out of the world," but for Kierkegaard this means that it is a desire that is sickly rather than in good health. Kierkegaard takes pains in the continuation of this passage not to criticize desire as such,

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[100] One of the defining features of controlled irony is that, like the irony of Socrates, it impels the individual into actuality rather than away from it. Kierkegaard returns to this theme again and again by stressing that one of the results of controlled irony is that it forces the individual to appropriate truth in personal life. For example, he writes: "In our age there has been much talk about the importance of doubt for science and scholarship, but what doubt is to science, irony is to personal life. Just as scientists maintain that there is no true science without doubt, so it may be maintained with the same right that no genuinely human life is possible without irony. As soon as irony is controlled, it makes a movement opposite to that in which uncontrolled irony declares its life. Irony limits, finitizes, and circumscribes and thereby yields, truth, actuality, content....Anybody who does not understand irony at all, who has no ear for its whispering, lacks *eo ipso* what could be called the beginning of personal life" (*CI*, 326 / *SKS*, 1:355). In the same section, Kierkegaard specifies that what his age lacks is not scientific progress but existential appropriation: "Particularly in our age, irony must be commended. In our age, scientific scholarship has come into possession of such prodigious achievements that there must be something wrong somewhere; knowledge not only about the secrets of the human race but even about the secrets of God is offered for sale at such a bargain price today that it all looks very dubious. In our joy over the achievement of our age, we have forgotten that an achievement is worthless if it is not made one's own....If our generation has any task at all, it must be to translate the achievement of scientific scholarship into personal life, to appropriate it personally" (*CI*, 328 / *SKS*, 1:356).

[101] *CI*, 328-329 / *SKS*, 1:356-357; translation modified, emphasis added.

specifying that it can be "true when the Romantics long after something higher."[102] The problem is not that we *desire*, but that too often our desires are tepid, content with a "weak and sentimental" satisfaction. Kierkegaard opposes to such desire a longing that is a "healthy love"—one that desires beyond all finite satisfaction. In the closing lines of *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard hints elliptically at where such a longing might lead. Such a desire, he writes, requires not only irony but also the higher category of humor, which "finds rest not by making man man but by making man God-man."[103] Louis Mackey is right to describe *The Concept of Irony* as "slouching toward Bethlehem."[104] Desire, Kierkegaard seems to suggest, can only find rest in this infinite God who enters actuality.

Such an incarnation is for Kierkegaard the ultimate paradox. Can it provide the human being who relates to it any kind of rest? Is this paradox not even more radically heterogeneous to representation than irony? The authorship that Kierkegaard undertakes almost immediately after *The Concept of Irony* can be interpreted as a response to such questions. I argue in this project that Kierkegaard's writings consistently undermine the idea that relating to Christ could bring an end to desire. Christ's incarnation, more even than the life of Socrates, can only ever be staged, in misunderstanding after misunderstanding. To relate to him is to desire him more and more passionately, rather than ever being able to claim objective undertanding.

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[102] *CI*, 329 / *SKS*, 1:357; translation modified. It is noteworthy that in both this passage and the preceding one, the Hongs' translation choices consistently diminish the importance that Kierkegaard is giving to desire.

[103] *CI*, 329 / *SKS*, 1:357.

[104] Louis Mackey, "Starting from Scratch: Kierkegaard Unfair to Hegel" in *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 22.

C. On, and beyond, the Romantic Stage

For all of Kierkegaard's criticisms of the Romantic tradition, he nonetheless embraces two of its central themes: longing and the fragmentary stagings that incite it. Much as he criticizes the sickly longings of the Romantics, Kierkegaard draws on Romantic rhetoric to elicit a more robust desire. Philosophers and theologians in Kierkegaard's time were eager to move beyond the fragments of Romantic theatricality to achieve systematic and objective truth. Even though Kierkegaard judges Romantic longing to be ultimately a form of despair, he insists that "this does not necessarily mean that every sausage peddler, fed and fattened on self-confidence, has more courage than the person who succumbed to despair."[105] The "sausage peddlers" who have so smugly left behind the desires of the theater and contentedly slaked their thirst for truth may well be the pastors and professors who talk most piously about God, ethics, and the meaning of life. Throughout his authorship, Kierkegaard returns again and again to the theater and its desires—not in order to repristinate Romanticism, but to use its rhetoric of desire to subvert both its own dogmaticism and that of speculative philosophy and theology. To follow Christ means to be caught up in a desire beyond any that Romanticism can imagine, yet Kierkegaard embraces its fragmentary theatricality in order to incite it.

Scholarship on *The Concept of Irony* tends to be very good about highlighting the book's criticism of the Romantic tradition, but strangely silent on what Kierkegaard values and appropriates in it. Thus, for example, scholars are quick to emphasize Kierkegaard's condemnations of Schlegel's *Lucinde* for being immoral, without underscoring the ways in which Kierkegaard endorses Schlegel's critique of finite norms

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[105] *CI*, 327 / *SKS*, 1:355.

and institutions and his longing for something beyond them.[106] Kierkegaard begins his discussion of *Lucinde*, a novel that scandalized polite society and was widely said to be pornographic,[107] with an ironically exaggerated apology for daring to discuss it at all. He writes:

> But this discussion is not without its difficulties, because, inasmuch as *Lucinde* is a very obscene book, as is well known, by citing some parts of it for more detailed consideration I run the risk of making it impossible for even the purest reader to escape altogether unscathed. I shall, however, be as circumspect and careful as possible.[108]

In this passage, Kierkegaard is as much lambasting the petty moralism of *Lucinde*'s readers as he is criticizing the novel itself. While Kierkegaard hardly subscribes to the absoluticization of sensuality that he finds in the novel, he sees a bourgeois absoluticization of prevalent norms as equally dangerous. Consider this defense of Schlegel's use of irony:

> If we examine more closely what it is that Schlegel was combating with irony, presumably no one will deny that there was and is much in the entries, progresses, and exits of the marriage relationship that deserves a correction such as this and that makes it natural for the subject to want to be liberated. There is a very narrow earnestness, an expediency, a miserable teleology, which many people worship as an idol that demands infinite endeavor as its legitimate sacrifice. Thus in and of itself love is nothing but becomes something only through the intention whereby it is integrated with the pettiness that creates such a furor in the private theaters of families.[109]

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[106] Both Joel Rasmussen and Sylvia Walsh manifest this tendency. Both speak willingly of the "epithets" that Kierkegaard hurls at Romanticism—"obscene," "immoral," "irreligious," etc.—without hearing any irony whatsoever in his mimicry of bourgeois prudery, and without perceiving anything in Romanticism that Kierkegaard does endorse. Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, 23. Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 53.

[107] As generations of disappointed students have learned, and even the book's English translator notes, this accusation could really only be made by people who had not read the novel. Peter Firchow, "Introduction" to *Friedrich Schlegel's* Lucinde *and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1971), 7.

[108] *CI*, 286 / *SKS*, 1:321.

[109] *CI*, 287 / *SKS,* 1:322; translation modified.

Kierkegaard has little patience for the petty dramas played out in these "private theaters." Just as he praises Socrates' and Schleiermacher's polemics against all "finite relation to the divine," so too he lambasts the tendency to "worship as an idol" the institution of bourgeois marriage. He condemns the manner in which an idolatry of actuality has eliminated every hint of the erotic from marriage. He writes:

> Let an injustice be done to Schlegel, one must bear in mind the many degradations that have crept into a multitude of life's relationships and have been especially indefatigable in making love [*Kjærlighed*] as tame, as housebroken, as sluggish, as useful, and as usable as any other domestic animal—in short, as unerotic [*uerotisk*] as possible. To that extent we would be very obligated to Schlegel if he succeeded in finding a way out.[110]

The rendering of marriage as "unerotic as possible," as tame as any domesticated animal, justifiably demands irony's quickening of desire.[111] Kierkegaard casts himself as a partisan of the erotic in love. He does not mince words about the necessity of negative critique. "There is a moral prudery, a straightjacket, in which no reasonable person can move. In God's name, let it break to pieces."[112]

Thus Kierkegaard does not fault Schlegel for depicting an excessive desire, but for depicting a tepid one. He continues the long passage quoted in the paragraph above as follows:

> But unfortunately the climate [Schlegel] discovered, the only climate in which love can really thrive, is not a more southern climate compared with

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[110] *CI*, 286 / *SKS*, 1: 321.

[111] Kierkegaard makes much the same point in his discussion of Ludwig Tieck. He defends Tieck against previous critics in this way: "But it must be borne in mind that Tieck and the whole romantic school stepped into or thought they were stepping into an age in which people seemed to be totally fossilized in finite social forms....The glorious principles and maxims of habit and custom were the objects of a pious idolatry; everything was absolute, even the absolute....Everything proceeded calmly with measured step, even the person on his way to proposing marriage, because he knew, of course, that he was on a licit mission and was taking a very earnest step" (*CI*, 303 / *SKS*, 1:336).

[112] *CI*, 288 / *SKS*, 1:322.

> ours in the north but is an ideal climate nowhere to be found. Therefore it is not just the tame ducks and geese of domestic love that beat their wings and raise a dreadful cry when they hear the wild birds of love swishing by over their heads, but it is every more profoundly poetic person *whose longings are too powerful to be bound by romantic spider webs, whose longings are too great to be satisfied by writing a novel*, who precisely on poetry's behalf must register his protest at this point, must try to show that it is not a way out that Friedrich Schlegel found but a wrong way he strayed into, must try to show that *living is something different from dreaming*.[113]

The problem with *Lucinde* in Kierkegaard's analysis is that it allows its altogether commendable longing to be satisfied by a self-created dream—that of the novel itself. Kierkegaard goes on to say that if *Lucinde* were a truly Socratic work of infinite negation, "if it were a merely hilarious playfulness that took joy in setting everything on its head, in turning everything upside down," he would then take nothing but delight in it.[114] Sadly, however, *Lucinde* actually has a "highly doctrinaire character," propounding its absoluticization of sensuality with a certain "melancholy earnestness."[115] Kierkegaard's criticism of *Lucinde* is ultimately the same as his criticism of Hegel and Plato, that its weak desire is able to find rest in a dogmatism.

Just as Kierkegaard embraces the Romantic theme of longing by radicalizing it, so too he uses the irony created by the fragmentary nature of Romantic poetry to incite an ever deeper desire for God. Consider the following passage in which Kierkegaard analyzes the rhetoric of the satirical playwright Ludwig Tieck. Tieck's plays, as Kierkegaard describes them, are emblematic of Romanticism at its most trivial: "Animals talk like human beings, human beings talk like asses, chairs and tables become

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[113] *CI*, 287 / *SKS*, 1: 322; emphasis added.

[114] *CI*, 290 / *SKS*, 1:324.

[115] *CI*, 290 / *SKS*, 1:324.

conscious of their meaning in existence, human beings find existence meaningless."[116] Kierkegaard criticizes Tieck's work because he says it is not "ordered in a poetic totality" and lacks an "ideal"—qualities that only a God-relationship can provide.[117] As a consequence, Tieck's writing never produces anything more than "the continual approximation to the mood that nevertheless can never find its perfectly adequate expression."[118] In this never-ending approximation of mood is "poetry about poetry into infinity."[119] His writing is an infinite series of stagings—parodies of parodies of parodies:

> The polemic endeavor never finds rest, because the poetic consists precisely in continually freeing itself by means of a new polemic, and it is just as difficult for the writer to find the caricature as it is for him to find the ideal. Every polemical line continually has in it a something more, the possibility of going beyond itself in a still more ingenious deception. The ideal endeavor in turn has no ideal, since every ideal is instantly nothing but an allegory hiding a higher ideal within itself, and so on into infinity. Thus during all this the writer grants neither himself nor the reader any rest, inasmuch as rest is the very opposite of this kind of writing.[120]

Slyvia Walsh cites this passage as a description of the sort of rhetoric that Kierkegaard is able to surpass by bringing irony under religious control.[121] While I agree with Walsh that Kierkegarard is critical of Tieck for lacking a "totality view," I question whether writing that is "controlled" by a desire for God would take a demonstrably different form. If expressing a relationship to God of infinite desire is writing's "ideal," would such

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[116] *CI*, 303 / *SKS*, 1:336.

[117] *CI*, 306 / *SKS*, 1:338.

[118] *CI*, 307 / *SKS*, 1:339.

[119] *CI*, 307 / *SKS*, 1:339; translation modified.

[120] *CI*, 306 / *SKS*, 1:338.

[121] Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 54.

writing not be continually in the process of ironizing and exceeding itself? Would it not always, according to the analysis that Kierkegaard puts forward in his dissertation, consist in a never-ending series of "nuances of misunderstanding"? Is the God-man to whom Kierkegaard devotes his authorship not *more* foreign to representation than the vagaries of poetic mood, not *less*?

Kierkegaard writes that because mood is the paltry (and all too accessible) ideal of Tieck's poetry, "the fountain that wells up here does not well up into an eternal life."[122] He draws this image from the story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at a well in John 4. Like most of Kierkegaard's biblical allusions, this one is almost uncannily rich with meaning. Christ asks the woman for a drink of water and she is shocked, for regnant norms called for Jews to shun the slightest contact with unclean Samiratans. Christ not only transgresses this boundary, but also stuns the woman by telling her that he can provide a "living water" that surpasses the meager satisfactions of that found in worldly wells. This water, Christ tells her, "will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."[123] The woman, like every reader of the biblical story, rightly desires this water. She exclaims, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."[124] But does she receive it? If her life were at that instant filled with a water "gushing up to eternal life," how would we know it? Rather than responding directly to the woman's plea for living water, Jesus calls her to account for her sins. ("You are right in saying 'I have no husband,'; for you have had five husbands,

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[122] *CI*, 305 / *SKS*, 1:337.

[123] John 4:10, 14.

[124] John 4:15.

and the one you have now is not your husband."[125]) As a conclusion to the story, John tells us only that the woman leaves her jug by the well and goes into the city to recount what has happened to her, asking, "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"[126]

The difference between the well at which the woman meets Jesus and the spring of water that he promises is an infinite one. Perhaps the difference between Tieck's plays about talking donkeys and Kierkegaard's endlessly provocative texts is equally great. But the greatness of this difference implies its continuous escape from representation. The infinity of the distance between the aesthetic and the religious creates the necessary "equivocality" that Kierkegaard discusses in *The Point of View*. It incites staging after staging, pseudonym after pseudonym. Each stage that Kierkegaard constructs collapses and leads on to another. To stage an encounter with Christ is to catch the reader up in a movement of desire—and to be caught up in this movement oneself. It is not to make use of a controlled element or mastered moment from a detached vantage. Kierkegaard's stagings strive to make themselves impossible to watch with objective detachment. They call the reader up on stage, and then on to ever new stages. To learn more about what happened to the Samaritan woman, we must leave our own pots behind at the well.

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[125] John 4:17.

[126] John 4:29.

CHAPTER ONE

Desiring "The One"—
in Vaudeville, Marriage, and Beyond

Instantly evocative, equally clichéd, the phrase "the first love" names one of the most recurring themes in *Either/Or*, and a play by Eugène Scribe to which the book's two main authorial voices, Aesthete A and Judge William, each respond. It is a quintessentially Romantic ideal, the dream of a singular and absolute passion transcending all compromises and torpor. As Aesthete A explains it, "The first love is the true love, and one loves only once."[127] To find "first love" is to find "the One"—a goal as familiar in our own time as it was in Kierkegaard's. But one of the central questions of *Either/Or* is whether the singularity that first love claims for itself can be represented in art or realized in existence. Lovely as *Romeo and Juliet* may be, Eugène Scribe, Aesthete A, and Judge William all concur that first love can never be adequately represented on the theatrical stage. At the same time, both Aesthete A and Judge William *desire* first love, though this desire takes vastly different forms.

It is tempting to read *Either/Or* as offering exactly what its title seems to promise: an absolute choice between wrong and right, aestheticism and faith, nihilism and Christianity. Much has been written enumerating the ways in which the content of William's ethico-religious worldview advances beyond A's pure aestheticism. Kierkegaard himself writes in his journal that the Judge's ethico-religious views are "unconditionally the winner of *Either/Or*."[128] Still, as most commentators would recognize, it is not only the Aesthete's views that prove themselves deficient in this book,

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[127] *EO*, 1:254 / *SKS*, 2:246.

[128] *JP*, 5:5804 / *SKS*, 18:243.

but also those of Judge William. The Ultimatum with which the book concludes is less an endorsement of either author's position than a relativization of the very either/or choice that the book seems to present. But might *Either/Or* be about more than the content of these two inadequate worldviews?

In this chapter I analyze the forms of desire for first love manifested by Aesthete A and Judge William and the means by which each writer strives to elicit this desire in others. By focusing on the clichéd Romantic ideal of first love and its staging in Scribe's admittedly silly *comédie-vaudeville*, I may seem to be singling out the most nugatory elements of *Either/Or* for extensive consideration. What makes these elements of the text worth considering is that they model ways of relating to and representing a purportedly absolute and transcendent singularity—even if "first love" ultimately proves unable to bear such weight. I will read *Eihter/Or* as "staging" possible ways of relating to another unrepresentable but desired singularity, which could scarcely be more different from Romantic sentimentality or vaudeville tomfoolery: the paradox of the incarnate Christ. Startling as such an analogy is, both characters hint at it in their own ways. I will argue that *Either/Or* implies that if one is to relate to Christ authentically in faith, then one must not only move beyond the content of its worldviews, but also, in doing so, embrace the forms of infinite desire and theatricality modeled by the Aesthete and rejected by the Judge.

I begin this chapter with a description of the genre of *comédie-vaudeville*, underscoring its curiously prominent place in the theater of Golden Age Denmark. After summarizing the plot of *The First Love* and its critique of Romantic sentimentality, I compare Aesthete A's and Judge William's responses to it as manifesting divergent

forms of desire for first love. I then argue that much as the Ultimatum with which *Either/Or* concludes supersedes A's aestheticism, it also condemns William's satiated desire and his concomitant condemnations of the theater. I thus conclude this chapter by returning to A's review of *The First Love* in order to analyze the concrete dramaturgical features of the play's production at the Royal Theater that he so esteems. In his review, A describes how the situations and characters in Scribe's play present theatergoers with endlessly captivating tableaux, provoking endless contemplation and eliciting mimetic desire. As different as this review of vaudeville is from later more religious texts in Kierkegarad's authorship, I argue that its study of such theatrical techniques can shed light on the nature and purpose of Kierkegaard's writings even when they have long since exchanged the theatrical setting for that of the church.

I. Why Vaudeville?

Aesthete A's review of *The First Love* is one of the easiest "fragments" of *Either/Or* to skip or at least skim over.[129] It makes reference to a forgotten play, by a French playwright history scorns, in a genre that has fallen into oblivion and must be described from a contemporary perspective as bizarre. A's review of this play not only

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[129] Several helpful treatments of this fragment do exist in the secondary literature. Brief but valuable discussions of it can be found in Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 11; George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 99-101 and "Søren Kierkegaard: A Theatre Critic of the Heiberg School," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23:1 (1983): 27-28; and Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 85-88.

The most extensive treatment of Aesthete A's review of *The First Love* of which I am aware is an intriguing psychoanalytic reading of it by Sigi Jöttkandt in *First Love: A Phenomenology of 'The One'* (Victoria, Australia: re.press, 2010), 121-164.

An excellent introduction to Kierkegaard's relationship to Scribe's plays—not only *The First Love* but also numerous others—can be found in Ronald Grimsely, *Søren Kierkegaard and French Literature: Eight Comparative Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), 112-129. Grimsely's work is especially valuable in that it traces Kierkegaard's evolving attitude toward Scribe in his journals from his student days until the late years of his life.

assumes that the reader is familiar with it, but also leans heavily on the dramaturgical theories of J. L. Heiberg, which are scarcely more familiar to most readers today. It is perhaps with good reason that the abridged Penguin Classics edition of *Either/Or* omits this text.[130] But alien as A's review of *The First Love* can appear to us, it was undoubtedly one of the most immediately accessible parts of *Either/Or* to Kierkegaard's Golden Age readership. Scribe's plays were box office hits in Copenhagen throughout much of the early- to mid-19th century, and *The First Love* was the most popular of them all. First performed at Copenhagen's Royal Theater on June 10th, 1831, it was staged 138 times thereafter.[131] Described in general terms, the genre of *comédie-vaudeville* is unabashedly frivolous, consisting in snappy one-act plays featuring stereotyped and superficial characters interacting in increasingly absurd situations. The plays come complete with song-and-dance numbers. Their plots are typically characterized by *double entendres*, confusions of identity, and seemingly insignificant circumstances acquiring decisive significance. In the 19th century, Scribe's dramas came to be described as emblematic of *la pièce bien faite*—a play in which the timing, plot, situations, and characters worked together like a well-oiled machine for the audience's entertainment.[132]

Aesthete A is fully aware that such an unabashedly popular and seemingly frivolous genre does not meet many people's standards of high art.[133] It is not a stretch to

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[130] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

[131] *SKS, K*, 2-3:175.

[132] Helene Koon and Richard Switzer, *Eugène Scribe* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 7-8, 36. Hening Fenger, *The Heibergs*, trans. Frederick J. Marker (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), 70-71.

[133] Louis Mackey helpfully interprets A's review as a deliberate expression of arbitrariness. He explains: "[The review] is a product of A's ingenuity, and a typical product at that. He knows that the

say that his review of *The First Love* anticipates vanguards of cultural studies such as Roland Barthes' structuralist readings of James Bond novels and Slavoj Žižek's Marxist-Lacanian takes on popular films. Not only does he apply an excessive degree of dialectical acumen to an unambitious bit of popular culture, but his interpretation of it is also what we would call today a "subversive reading." His disproportionate enthusiasm for this trifle is puzzling enough, but more surprising still is that the play he so esteems seems to advocate a worldview virtually antithetical to his own. Taken as a whole, Scribe's vaudevilles are emphatic rejections of Romanticism, passion, poetry, and longing. They satirize the excesses of Romantic literature and ideals, and endorse a thoroughgoing embrace of prudence and materialism, treating the world as it is rather than as one might like it to be. A theater historian describes Scribe's work this way:

> He put reason, interest, and desire for luxury in the place of passion.... Antithetic himself to all that is *romanesque*, Scribe painted the world as he saw it, with its sorry realities, its prejudices, and social conventions, which he respected and did not protest against. And while this earned for him the scorn of many idealists, he had on his side the great mass of spectators, the parents especially, who were delighted to find an argument and safeguard against the raptures and temptations of youth.[134]

Scribe's vaudevilles promote an acceptance of actuality whatever its problems, and a decided suspicion of passion and desire. They are a "championship of reason against romance," a "defense of common sense as opposed to sentiment and passion."[135] Making

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play is trivial, and reviews it for precisely that reason. Otherwise wholly nugatory, the little comedy serves as an occasion on which A can display to himself his own poetic cleverness—and revel in the conceit of doing something worthless in the most exquisite style. By seizing the occasion—*any* occasion—and turning it to capricious ends, he makes and unmakes his situation as it pleases him" (Mackey, *Kierkegaard*, 11).

[134] Neil Cole Arvin, *Eugène Scribe and the French Theatre, 1815-1860* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1924), 58.

[135] Arvin, *Eugène Scribe and the French Theatre*, 40. In a more recent study of Scribe's plays, Helene Koon and Richard Switzer echo these summaries. As they write, for Scribe, "Romantic love was

money, marrying well, calculating one's interests, and keeping up appearances are the chief virtues enjoined by these plays. A second history of French theater defines the "reasonable life" they endorse as follows: "'Reason' in his terms meant honoring the authority of parents and the sanctity of marriage vows. Happy (i.e. reasonable) marriages required constant personalities, mutual esteem, equality of social rank and a sound financial basis. Romantic love was unstable at best, chimerical at worst, and a sure road to tragedy."[136] How can Aesthete A express any sympathy for a play of this sort—much less describe *The First Love* as "a flawless play, so consummate that it alone is bound to make Scribe immortal"?[137] It is difficult to imagine a play more antipathetic to his Romantic aestheticism. Why does he write about it so rapturously?

A partial answer to this question can be found in the exalted role that vaudeville occupies in the aesthetic philosophy of Johann Ludwig Heiberg, who translated Scribe's play into Danish. Heiberg was the leading man of letters in the Danish Golden Age, and while his influence touched virtually every realm of Danish culture, from philosophy to literature to theology, it shaped Copenhagen's theatrical scene most decisively. He wrote extensively for the Royal Theater from 1825 onward and served as the institution's Managing Director from 1849-1856.[138] In 1831, he married the leading Danish actress of the day, Johanne Luise Pätges, who became known simply as Madam Heiberg. Together they were the cultural power couple of the Golden Age, creating in their home "a salon

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unstable at best, chimerical at worst, and a sure road to tragedy" (*Eugène Scribe* [Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980], 21).

[136] Koon and Switzer, *Eugène Scribe*, 21.

[137] *EO*, 1:248 / *SKS*, 2:241.

[138] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 158.

which determined literary taste and tone in Denmark for thirty years."[139] Kierkegaard was an occasional guest in their home during his student days, and during this time he desired their approval rather desperately.

Heiberg was in many ways everything that Kierkegaard was not: worldly, cosmopolitan, well-traveled, a leader of many followers and an initiator of many schools. He spent several formative years of his youth living in Paris, where he delighted in the theater scene and became convinced of the paucity of what was available in Denmark. He left Paris determined to revitalize the theater in Copenhagen, but it was only after spending several months reading Hegel's philosophy and meeting him in Berlin in 1824 that he discovered the theoretical foundations he needed to do so.[140] Heiberg would become one of the earliest and most enthusiastic proponents of Hegelianism in Denmark. What is less well-known is that his Hegelianism directly motivated his enthusiasm for vaudeville. In his *Autobiographical Fragments*, he gives a famous account of his Hegelian "conversion," describing how it inspired his resolve to transplant vaudeville onto Danish soil.[141] It is likely that few of Hegel's readers before or since have

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[139] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 99.

[140] J. L. Heiberg, "Autobiographical Fragments," trans. Jon Stewart in *Heiberg's* On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age *and Other Texts* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel's Publishers, 2005), 64.

[141] Heiberg's famous "conversion" narrative is worth quoting in its entirety because of the prominent role it comes to play in Kierkegaard's writings, which mock it rather mercilessly: "While resting on the way home in Hamburg, where I stayed six weeks before returning to Kiel, and during that time was constantly pondering what was still obscure to me, it happened one day that, sitting in my room in the König von England with Hegel on my table and in my thought, and listening at the same time to the beautiful psalms which sounded almost unceasingly from the chimes of St. Peter's Church, suddenly, in a way which I have experienced neither before nor since, I was gripped by a momentary inner vision, as if a flash of lightning had illuminated the whole region for me and awakened in me the theretofore hidden thought. From this moment the system in its broad outline was clear to me, and I was completely convinced that I had grasped it in its innermost core, regardless of however much there might be in the details which I still had not made my own and perhaps never will. I can say, in truth, that that strange moment was just about the most important juncture in my life, for it gave me a

interpreted his philosophy as an injunction to write vaudeville theater. But for Heiberg this was the result of "the new light which dawned on me":

> I would never have come to write my vaudevilles and in general would never have become a poet for the theater if I had not learned, by means of the Hegelian philosophy, to see the relation of the finite to the infinite and had not won thereby a respect for finite things which I previously did not have, but which it is impossible for a dramatic poet to do without.[142]

For Heiberg, vaudeville was the preeminent dramatic form of his age, the crystallization of its spirit. Its popular appeal was not something to be scorned, but a Hegelian synthesis of the infinite and the finite. Moreover, he saw the genre's popular appeal as a means of renewing Danish interest in the theater, so that one day a more cultivated public might be ready to appreciate more substantive fare.

When Heiberg returned to Copenhagen in 1825, he was a man with a mission—to use vaudeville to rejuvenate the Danish theater scene. As Henning Fenger writes in his excellent history *The Heibergs*: "There is no better example in the history of Danish theater of a calculated dramatic campaign based on a conscious esthetic program. Heiberg wished to instill a new and improved taste in the audience, the actors, and the

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peace, a security, a self-confidence which I had never known theretofore" (J. L. Heiberg, "Autobiographical Fragments," 65).

Kierkegaard mocks Heiberg's story rather mercilessly in his journals and published authorship, most notably under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. There he provides the following parody: "But I have no miracle to appeal to; ah that was Dr. Hjortespring's happy fate! According to his own very well written report, he became an adherent of Hegelian philosophy through a miracle at Hotel Streit in Hamburg on Easter morning (although none of the waiters noticed anything)—an adherent of the philosophy that assumes there are no miracles. Wondrous sign of the times! If this man is not the expected philosopher, who is it, then, who knows the demands of the times as he does! Wondrous sign of the times, far more magnificent and important than the conversion of Paul, because Paul's conversion through a miracle to a doctrine that declares itself to be a miracle is rather straightforward, but to be converted by a miracle to the teaching that accepts no miracles is topsy-turvy" (*CUP*, 1:184 / *SKS*, 7:169).

[142] Heiberg, "Autobiographical Fragments," 66.

dramatists."[143] What Heiberg was opposing were the Romantic genres of tragedy and melodrama, for which he had an unabashed distaste.[144] He saw these reigning styles as tired and dated, and accused all who appreciated them of dilettantism.[145] He advocated zealously on vaudeville's behalf, developing Hegelian-style taxonomies of the dramatic arts in which this genre sits at the pinnacle.[146] (Its preeminence in his mind was eventually supplanted by the new genre of speculative poetry, which he began to write about in 1833.[147]) Moreover, Heiberg and his wife saw vaudeville as the perfect training ground for aspiring actors, because it forced them to develop the dignified bearing and cultured elocution that they believed actors should model for their audience. As Fenger quotes Madam Heiberg as writing:

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[143] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 80-81.

[144] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 5, 79-81.

[145] Condemnations of dilettantism, and exhortations to good taste, are some of Heiberg's most frequently recurring themes. For example, in his essay *Om Vaudevillen* he turns the accusations of the genre's critics on their head by accusing them of dilettantism when they claim that the genre is insufficiently dignified to be performed at the Royal Theater. J. L. Heiberg, *Om Vaudevillen, som dramatisk Digtart, og dens Betydning paa den danske Skueplads. En dramaturgisk Undersøgelse* in *Johann Ludvig Heibergs Prosaiske Skrifter* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1961 [1826]), e.g., 8-12.

[146] Heiberg sketches such taxonomies throughout *Om Vaudevillen* and does so concisely in one of the installments of his polemic with Oehlenschläger. J. L. Heiberg, *Svar paa Hr. Prof. Oehlenschlägers Skrift 'Om Kritiken i Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post, over Væringerne i Miklagard*,' *Københavns flyvende Post* 13 (February 15, 1828).

In 1837 Kierkegaard dutifully diagrams the taxonomy Heiberg sketches in this latter article in his journal. *KJN*, 1:107 / *SKS*, 17:113.

Henning Fenger is correct to note that, while the place assigned to vaudeville at the pinnacle of his taxonomy of the dramatic arts can seem to imply a judgment of its superior value, this place is more a marker of its status as the most current of forms than an absolute judgment of its worth. Fenger explains: "It is obviously striking that Heiberg's own favorite genres, the vaudeville and the speculative comedy, rank so highly in this system, but it is incorrect to assume, as both his own contemporary critics and later scholars have done, that the Heibergian system represents an order of poetic excellence. Two things are all-important for Heiberg: to find the appropriate place in the system for a particular work, and to develop the individual genres continually so that they correspond to 'the demands of recent times'" (Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 138).

[147] J. L. Heiberg, "On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age," trans. Jon Stewart in *Heiberg's* On the Significance of Philosophy, 108-115.

> Modern French plays place demands on the actors to speak simply, clearly, and with natural intonations taken from the tone of cultured conversation. This is the indispensible requirement in this case. Actors must possess social cultivation and the conversational tone which accompanies it. We can no longer get by with *seeming*, we must *be* cultured individuals.[148]

Through vaudeville, Heiberg thus hoped not only to incite greater interest in the theater, but to use the theater as a kind of school of good taste for actors and audiences alike.

Heiberg began his campaign for the renewal of Danish theater by penning four original vaudevilles in 1826-1827—plays which are considered classics of the Danish stage today.[149] These works mimicked Scribe's style of situation comedy and amplified his integration of music into the drama; they were on the whole more artistically ambitious.[150] Thematically, they were less a didactic satire of Romantic sentimentality than a satirical exploration of the situation of modernity, with its economic crises and emerging middle class.[151] When Heiberg's first vaudevilles were performed at the Royal Theater, a significant portion of spectators found them to be outrageously undignified; his play *The Critic and the Animal* was even hissed off the stage on October 22, 1826.[152] Heiberg, however, issued an impassioned defense of the genre in his essay *Om*

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[148] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 106.

[149] These plays are *Kong Solomon og Jørgen Hattemager* [*King Solomon and Jørgen the Hatter*, 1825], *Den otte og tyvende Januar* [*The Twenty-Eighth of January*, 1826], *Aprilsnarrene* [*The April Fools*, 1826], and *Recensenten og Dyret* [*The Critic and the Animal*, 1826]. Heiberg published more vaudevilles sporadically through 1845, but his primary focus tended to be elsewhere during this later period. All of his vaudevilles can be found in *Johan Ludvig Heibergs Poetiske Skrifter* V-VII (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel's, 1862).

[150] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 84-88.

[151] Kirsten Wechsel provides an interesting thematic analysis of Heiberg's vaudevilles in "Lack of Money and Good Taste: Questions of Value in Heiberg's Vaudevilles" in *Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Philosopher, Littérateur, Dramaturge, and Political Thinker*, ed. Jon Stewart (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008).

[152] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 82.

Vaudevillen, which eventually won over the public. After that, the genre's popularity was assured. It was in order to satisfy the public's appetite for plays in this genre that Heiberg began translating Scribe's prolific range of works, including *The First Love*.[153] While one can debate whether vaudeville ever provided the gateway to popular cultivation for which Heiberg had hoped, it unmistakably received the public's enthusiasm. By Ronald Grimsely's calculation, between 1823 and 1895 there were some 2,676 performances of 101 different plays by Scribe at Copenhagen's Royal Theater.[154]

Heiberg never overestimated the literary or philosophical merit of Scribe's vaudevilles. Fenger explains:

> Heiberg's relation to Scribe is misunderstood if he is viewed merely as a Scribe disciple or fan. Heiberg exploited Scribe cynically to further his esthetic program and to educate the public and the actors. He himself had other ideals. He was too much of a poet and a romantic to be satisfied with Scribe's anti-lyrical and anti-romantic plainness."[155]

Thus Heiberg was understandably embarrassed by the extraordinary praise lavished on *The First Love* in the first part of *Either/Or*. Indeed, when he reviews the book in 1843, he criticizes A's review because he "has sought to make a masterpiece of a pretty little bagatelle and has ascribed to it a motive which is virtually the opposite of that which Scribe openly acknowledges."[156] Heiberg charges Aesthete A with attributing to the play vastly more significance than it was ever intended to contain, indeed, significance that

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[153] Heiberg was by no means the only Danish translator of Scribe, but he was the most prominent one. Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 105.

[154] Grimsely, *Kierkegaard and French Literature*, 113.

[155] Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 110.

[156] Quoted in George Pattison, "The Initial Reception of *Either/Or*" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, Part II*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 295.

subverts Scribe's obvious intent. The reading of A's review that I provide is perhaps susceptible to a similar charge. But let us consider this bagatelle and Aesthete A's seemingly excessive review of it to ponder why these texts might merit similarly excessive attention today.

II. *The First Love*

The play tells the story of two cousins, Emmeline and Charles, who, when the play begins, are just reaching adulthood and have not seen each other for eight years. Because Charles was an orphan, the two were raised together in the home of Emmeline's father, Monsieur Dervière: a wealthy widower who is "one of the leading forge owners in Franche-Comté, with 50,000 pounds of revenue."[157] Worldly and wise, Dervière has every intention of securing for the children in his charge the same sort of material success that he has achieved. The play opens with him describing to Emmeline the suitor that he has chosen for her. His name is Monsieur Rinville, a responsible young man with career promise who is, conveniently enough, the son of the capitalist who lent Dervière the money he needed to buy his forge many years before. Emmeline's marriage to Rinville will be a win-win situation in her father's eyes. She shocks her father, however, by saying that such a marriage is impossible. She has pledged herself to another with "sacred promises and previous oaths."[158] Emmeline explains that she is betrothed to none other than her cousin Charles, whom she has not seen since she was eight years old.

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[157] References are given to *Les premières amours ou les souvenirs d'enfance: Comédie-vaudeville en un acte* in *Œuvres complètes de M. Eugène Scribe* (Paris: Furne et Companie, Aimé André, 1841), hereafter *PA*. They are cross-referenced to *Den förste Kjærlighed*, trans. J. L. Heiberg in *Det kongelige Theaters Repertoire*, n. 45 (1832), hereafter *FK*. *PA*, 215 / *FK*, 1.

[158] *PA*, 216 / *FK*, 1.

Such an engagement is ludicrous to Dervière, but Emmeline pleads with him to comprehend her passion. As she tells him, "You do not know, father, that first impressions are never forgotten, for one loves well only the first time; at least, my aunt Judith often repeated this to me, and I feel it."[159] Emmeline's Aunt Judith is long since deceased, but her influence upon Emmeline has been profound. A kindly old maid who performed the daily labors of raising Charles and Emmeline, she is said to have had "just one fault only, consuming a novel a day."[160] Emmeline recounts that her Aunt Judith read Romantic novels aloud to her and Charles, and that they were influenced by one novel in particular: *Paul et Virginie*, the pinnacle of French romantic sentimentality. (It has been described as "one of the most mediocre and most read books of all French literature."[161]) The novel tells the story of two cousins, who fall into a forbidden love and must be separated from one another by their families. As children, Emmeline and Charles came to identify with these characters, especially when Charles grew old enough to be expected to leave home to seek his fortune. Emmeline explains this process to her father as follows: "I was Virginie, he was Paul; and the result of all that was that we loved each other passionately, and we swore each other eternal faithfulness."[162] Before Charles leaves, he and Emmeline exchange rings, and they conceive a ritual to confirm their fidelity to their love in the midst of their separation. Every night, at the same hour, wherever they are, they will each gaze longingly at the moon.

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[159] *PA*, 217 / *FK*, 2.

[160] *PA*, 216 / *FK*, 1.

[161] Qtd. by Jean Ehrard in his Preface to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 7.

[162] PA, 216 / *FK*, 2.

Scribe thus portrays Charles and Emmeline as quintessential children of Romanticism, reared on Romantic novels and nourished on Romantic dreams. Taken as a whole, his play is a scornful parody of Romanticism in general and *Paul et Virginie* in particular. Dervière, who seems to provide a mouthpiece for Scribe's views, does not mince words when condemning Emmeline's "romantic ideas" and the way she has imagined Charles as "a hero of a novel," rather than recognizing him for what he really is, her cousin and a wholly unsuitable mate.[163] Dervière enjoins her to become reasonable and to plant her feet in reality as quickly as she can.

The play's principal intrigue revolves around the arrival at the family home of Rinville, Dervière's chosen suitor. Having surmised the nature of the challenge that faces him, Rinville resolves to win Emmeline's hand by presenting himself as Charles; after all, he has been away for so long that Emmeline can no longer be certain of what he looks like. At first, winning her confidence is easy. Emmeline needs merely to "remind" Dervière that "you were Paul..." for him to learn his lines. "And you, Virginie!" he exclaims in response.[164] The fact that Rinville so adroitly follows the script of *Paul et Virginie* is enough to convince Emmeline of his authenticity as Charles. She exclaims, "How charming; he hasn't forgotten anything!"[165]

Soon the real Charles returns to the family home. It is apparent that he shares neither Emmeline's ardor for first love nor her faithfulness to it. As Aesthete A remarks in his review, Charles's romantic upbringing has produced the opposite effect of

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[163] *PA*, 226, 217 / *FK*, 11, 2.

[164] *PA*, 221 / *FK*, 6-7.

[165] *PA*, 221 / *FK*, 7.

Emmeline's: Romanticism has given him a prodigious confidence in his capacity for mystification, rather than the devotion to illusion that Emmeline has.[166] Charles is a chameleon of a thousand disguises, but the irony of his character is that, in the end, he is deceiving himself as to the efficacy of his deceptions.[167] He returns home burdened by crushing debt and chased by his creditors. Indeed, to his horror, a German capitalist beats him to his father's house, demanding to be paid.[168] Worst of all, far from being faithful to Emmeline, he has married someone else—a humble British seamstress named Pamela, a woman of whose lowly station Dervière will certainly disapprove. Confident to the end in his power to mystify, Charles decides to impersonate Rinville as an effort to ingratiate himself to Dervière; perhaps under that guise he can persuade the old man to pay off his debts.

With such a set-up, hijinks predictably ensue. I will refrain from diagramming the hilarity here. After a series of scenes filled with *double entendres* and confusions of identity, everyone's true identity is revealed, and Charles's unfaithfulness is unmasked. Realizing that Charles was never worthy of her love, Emmeline offers her hand to Rinville. She acknowledges her folly with the closing line: "I was wrong; I mistook the past for the future."[169] The play ends rather abruptly, as the spectator is not entirely sure what lesson Emmeline has drawn from her experience. But no matter what Emmeline has learned, the message to the spectator is clear: Romantic love is childish and illusory; clear-headed prudence wins the day; and reason and reality prevail against passion and

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[166] *EO*, 1:250-251 / *SKS*, 2:243-244.

[167] *EO*, 1:251 / *SKS*, 2:244.

[168] *PA*, 222 / *FK*, 7-8.

[169] *LPA*, 230 / *FK*, 14.

dreaming. The original French title already hints at such lessons. Although Heiberg translates the title in the singular as *Den Første Kjærlighed*, Scribe's title in French is in the plural: *Les Premières Amours ou les Souvenirs d'Enfance*. The original title suggests that the presumed singularity of "first" love inevitably splinters into a multiplicity; at best, it is but one of many quaint childhood memories.

To be sure, there are features of Scribe's critique of Romanticism in *Les Premières Amours* that overlap with some of Kierkegaard's criticisms of Romantic literature in *The Concept of Irony*. Both texts fault Romanticism for the sentimentality of its yearnings, for privileging dreaming over actuality, and for encouraging the goal of self-creation. Still, neither Kierkegaard nor Aesthete A could ever be confused with Dervière, with his crass materialism and rejection of passion. What then possesses A to term the play a "masterpiece"?[170] Is Judge William's skepticism about the play's denigration of love not the more fitting response to it?

III. Two Modes of Desire for First Love

What makes A's review of *The First Love* a "subversive reading" is that first love is for him, as it is for Judge William, an object of deep desire rather than merely an empty ideal to be mocked. In this respect, the two authors of *Either/Or* agree. Each of the book's two parts stands under an epigraph valorizing passion. Part One's epigraph asks with Edward Young, "Is reason then alone baptized, are the passions pagans?"[171] Part Two's epigraph asserts in Chateaubriand's French, "*Les grandes passions sont solitaires,*

[170] *EO*, 1:277 / *SKS*, 2:268.

[171] *EO*, 1:1 / *SKS*, 2:9.

et les transporter au désert, c'est les rendre à leur empire."[172] The principle tension between *Either/Or*'s two responses to *The First Love* is therefore not between passion and reason, or between Romanticism and reflection, but between two competing modalities of desire. The authors' divergent forms of desire shape their responses to Scribe's play, their attitudes toward first love, and the rhetorical means by which they write about them.

A. A Parody of a Parody of a Parody...

Based on the summary of *The First Love* above, it is difficult to imagine how any reviewer could praise it as a masterpiece without sharing its suspicion of passion and desire. And at first glance, the Aesthete seems to amplify Scribe's criticism of the Romantic ideal. He spends much of his review sneering at Emmeline's enthusiasm for first love and smugly lamenting that she "represents a large class of people."[173] More dialectically adept than Scribe could ever be, Aesthete A identifies and mocks the ways in which people use the ideal of first love self-servingly and self-deceptively. He sneers at the way in which a widow and a widower with five children apiece can declare on their wedding day that their love is first love.[174] His criticism of the Romantic ideal is at its core that it is equivocal and sophistical. He defines its slipperiness as follows:

> For the thesis that the first love is the true love is very convenient and can be of service to people in many ways. If one is not so fortunate as to obtain what one desires [*ønsker*], there is still the sweetness of the first love. If one is so unfortunate as to love several times, each time is nevertheless the first time. In other words, the thesis is a sophistical thesis. If one loves a third time, one says: My present love is, nevertheless, my first true love, but the true love is

[172] *EO*, 2:1 / *SKS*, 3:9. "Great passions are solitary, and to transport them to the desert is to deliver them to their empire."

[173] *EO*, 1:254 / *SKS*, 2:246.

[174] *EO*, 1:254 / *SKS*, 2:247.

> the first—*ergo* this third love is my first. The sophistry consists in this, that the category *the first* is supposed to be a qualitative and a numerical category simultaneously.[175]

A is unlikely to make himself the hero of many wedding-day cocktail hours with such analysis, however just it is. On such occasions, people are likely to indulge in the sentimentality of Emmeline—or at least that of the widow and widower. Mercilessly pointing out the slippage between the qualitative and numerical senses of first love, A is more aggressively critical of the Romantic ideal than even Scribe allows himself to be.

Nonetheless, it is precisely A's infinitization of Scribe's critique of first love that renders his review so subversive of Scribe's apparent intent. As A acknowledges, he does not interpret the play "as it probably is generally understood."[176] According to his idiosyncratic analysis, what makes the play a masterpiece is that it is "infinitely comic," rather than "finitely moralizing."[177] His central thesis is that the play has no moralistic lesson to teach the spectator, but that its irony, like the irony of Socrates in *The Concept of Irony*, is all-consuming. A does not see the play as endorsing Dervière's calculating prudence any more than Emmeline's dreamy devotion. His argument hinges on his interpretation of the play's final scene. When Emmeline extends her hand to Rinville, does she give up on Romanticism? Does she at last make "a sensible match with Mr. Rinville" and let "the spectator hope the best for her future, that she will become a diligent housewife, etc., etc.?"[178] Most spectators would probably answer yes to these questions. But A disparages this interpretation. "If this is the intention," he writes, "then

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[175] *EO*, 1:254 / *SKS*, 2:247; translation modified.

[176] *EO*, 1:255 / *SKS*, 2:248.

[177] *EO*, 1:255 / *SKS*, 2:248.

[178] *EO*, 1:255 / *SKS*, 2:248.

The First Love is changed from a masterpiece to a theatrical triviality."[179] He argues passionately that the genius of the play is that Emmeline learns nothing whatsoever from her misadventures, but is "just as silly at the end as at the beginning."[180] When she extends her hand to Rinville, he claims, she is not recognizing the failure of her ideal, but merely cathecting it to another beau. Thus on A's interpretation, "the play does not end."[181] As he explains, "When the spectator thinks the play is over and that he has secured a good foothold, he suddenly discovers that what he is stepping on is not something firm but, so to speak, the end of a see-saw, and as he steps upon it he tilts the whole play up and over himself."[182] A's infinitization of the irony in *The First Love* recalls Kierkegaard's analysis of Tieck's plays in *The Concept of Irony*. He argues that the spectator can find no secure point of rest or closure, but that each parody and satire leads on to another. He describes the genius of *The First Love* this way:

> In it there must not be a single character, not a single stage situation, that could claim to survive the downfall that irony from the outset prepares for each and all in it. When the curtain falls, everything is forgotten, nothing but nothing remains, and that is the only thing one sees; and the only thing one hears is a laughter, like a sound of nature, that does not issue from any one person but is the language of a world force, and this force is irony.[183]

The Aesthete so magnifies *The First Love*'s irony that it consumes all directly accessible lessons about first love—whether the sentimental ideal of Emmeline, or the cold-hearted prudence of Dervière.

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[179] *EO*, 1:255 / *SKS*, 2:248.

[180] *EO*, 1:257 / *SKS*, 2:250.

[181] *EO*, 1:258 / *SKS*, 2:251.

[182] *EO*, 1:258 / *SKS*, 2:251.

[183] *EO*, 1:273 / *SKS*, 2:265.

Is the Aesthete, then, simply a nihilist, with no earnest desire underlying his irony? This charge can be levied easily enough against him. He describes the pleasure he takes in watching *The First Love* as analogous to a smoker's pleasure as he gazes into the smoke dissipating before his eyes.[184] Manifesting a basic disregard for actuality and a wish to negate it *in toto*, he describes going to the theater as a way to fall asleep, and he judges the finest plays to be those that jolt him the least from his repose.[185] Problematic as the Aesthete's desire to escape actuality and find rest in fantasy is, however, his satirical criticisms of first love should not be interpreted as a flat rejection of desire and passion. In his preface to his review, he shows that his response to the play is one of passion rather than apathy. He describes how watching *The First Love* performed inspired his own personal history of first love. Just as *The First Love* parodies *Paul et Virginie*, so too A's personal history parodies that of the play. He recounts that when he first went to see it performed, he was in love with a young lady, but had not yet expressed his feelings to her. He goes to the theater in the hope that "the poetic power of this play will help the romantic love [*Elskov*] in my breast to spring forth, its flower to open with a snap as the passion flower does."[186] When he shows up at the theater, he is delighted to find that his beloved is also in attendance. When the curtain is raised, his love blossoms:

> The overture was over. The chandelier was raised; my eyes followed it for a moment; for the last time it cast its light over the first balcony and over her. The theater was enveloped in a twilight that to me was even more beautiful, even more infatuating. The curtain was raised. Once again it seemed as if I were peering into a dream when I gazed upon her. I turned around; the play began. I wished to think only of her and of my love; everything that was said in honor of the first love I would apply to her and to my situation. There was

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[184] *EO*, 1:263 / *SKS*, 2:256.

[185] *EO*, 1:248 / *SKS*, 2:241.

[186] *EO*, 1:241 / *SKS*, 2:235; translation modified.

> perhaps no one in the whole theater who would understand the poet's divine discourse as I would—and perhaps she. The thought of the powerful impression made me even stronger; I felt the courage to let my secret feelings burst forth the next day.[187]

The First Love thus provides the impetus for A to declare his feelings to his own first love. Nonetheless, external circumstances require A and his beloved to keep their feelings secret for a time—a situation that only amplifies their identification with Emmeline and Charles. They make this identification complete when they create their own ritual to pledge mutual fidelity amidst separation. Just as Emmeline and Charles stare every night at the moon, A and his beloved resolve to see *The First Love* performed at every possible opportunity and in every possible language.[188] A's review of *The First Love* thus not only critiques Emmeline's vapidity, but also mimics her desire—carrying it further than she ever dreams. In the same way that Kierkegaard interprets Aristophanes' mockery of Socrates in *The Clouds* as a performative extension of his irony, so too A's review of *The First Love* extends Emmeline's desire by infinitizing it.

As we will see, Judge William interprets the Aesthete's response to the play in just this way; he objects to it for the same reasons that Plato and Hegel object to Socrates' infinite irony. In the following section, I will analyze Judge William's very different desire for first love, and the ways in which the Ultimatum that he appends to his letters critiques it. I will argue that the form of Aesthete A's desire—though not its content—is vital to surpassing the limitations of all the points of view expressed in *Either/Or*.

B. Living First Love Rather Than Staging It

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[187] *EO*, 1:242 / *SKS*, 2:236.

[188] *EO*, 2:243 / *SKS*, 2:236.

It should come as no surprise that Judge William does not share A's delight in Scribe's play. First love is one of William's most cherished ideals,[189] and he interprets Scribe's vaudeville as doing nothing but undermine it. His letters engage directly with the Aesthete's critical stance toward this ideal and his idiosyncratically exuberant reaction to Scribe's play. He is perceptive enough to see A's reaction to Scribe's play as an expression of desire for first love, but he judges the form of this desire to be fundamentally misguided because it can find no satisfaction in finite actuality. He strives to persuade A to give up on the theater and to find first love realized in the lived experience of Christian marriage instead. What follows is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive summary of the Judge's letters, which cover a wide range of important themes.[190] My focus is on how the Judge responds to the themes developed in A's review of *The First Love*, which he attests to having read.[191] While he is clearly right from Kierkegaard's point of view to encourage the Aesthete to confront actuality rather than to flee from it through the theater, the form of desire that he endorses is equally

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[189] In A's terminology, the sense of first love that the Judge defends is "qualitative," yet he also maintains that his own wife is his first love not only in this sense but also in the "numerical" one. When it comes to his own marriage, he wants to assert that there is none of the equivocality that the Aesthete criticizes. See *EO*, 2:9-10 / *SKS*, 3:19.

[190] Edward F. Mooney provides a particularly fine study of Judge William's moral vision that emphasizes its constructive elements in "Kierkegaard on Self-Choice and Self-Reception: Judge William's Admonition" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995). Mooney shows that William's account of what it means to become a self in time is a compelling exploration of the themes of self-choice, responsibility, freedom, and repentance, which anticipate treatments of these same themes in Kierkegaard's subsequent works.

[191] "I recall that you once sent me a little review of Scribe's *The First Love* that was written with almost desperate enthusiasm. In it, you claimed that it was the best Scribe had ever written and that this piece alone, properly understood, was sufficient to make him immortal" (*EO*, 2:19 / *SKS*, 3:27-28).

dangerous.[192] The Judge presents Christian marriage as the satisfaction not only of the desire for first love, but also of all human yearning for the eternal. I will argue that the Judge's idyll of desire satisfied in the domestic serenity of Christian marriage verges on becoming an idol.[193] As we will see, he construes his relationship to his wife in absolute terms—terms that for a Christian are appropriate only for God.

Judge William's core objection to *The First Love* is that its satire is "devouring"—making a mockery of the ideal of first love and the institution of Christian marriage. He feels that love and marriage are under attack from all sides in his age: from Scribe, from Aesthete A, from culture in general. Early on in his first letter to the Aesthete, he writes:

> On the whole modern literature is totally occupied with ridiculing love in the abstract immediacy in which it is found in the world of the regular novel. For example, in examining Scribe's works, we find that one of his main themes is

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[192] Too often Kierkegaard scholarship has been content to endorse the superiority of Judge William's viewpoint over that of the Aesthete without subjecting it to equally substantial critique. I disagree with scholars such as George Pattison and Sylvia Walsh who interpret the Judge's thought as an unambiguously constructive step beyond A's aestheticism. When it comes to the form of desire he embodies and the rhetoric through which he communicates it, I argue that the Judge represents a significant step backward. Sylvia Walsh writes that William's "ethico-religious aesthetics is congruent with Kierkegaard's initial attempts to formulate an existential aesthetics in *From the Papers of One Still Living* and *The Concept of Irony* and in fact represents a further development of the basic ideas introduced in those works" (Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 124). Although Walsh does criticize several features of Judge's William's worldview (124-125), I believe that he should be evaluated much more ambiguously than she does. I argue that on matters relating to desire and representation, it is much more the Aesthete who aligns with the arguments that Kierkegaard develops in *The Concept of Irony* than it is the Judge.

I thus also disagree with George Pattison's argument that William gives voice to Kierkegaard's own unambiguous rejection of Romantic aesthetics. George Pattison, "Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde:* A Case Study in the Relation of Religion to Romanticism," *Scottish Journal of* Theology, 38 no. 4 (1985): 545-564. I argue that *Either/Or* not only uses the Judge to criticize Romantic aesthetics, but also, just as importantly, uses Romantic aesthetics to criticize the Judge.

[193] Amy Laura Hall is a rare example of a Kierkegaard scholar who makes this point strongly. I commend her for arguing that even though "the religious reader may be tempted to rest, finally, in William's resolute Part II," such a reader must "'take a hatchet' to....William's constructed world of moral assurance." Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 110.

> that love [*Kjærlighed*] is an illusion. But I need merely remind you of this; you have far too much sympathy for Scribe and his polemic.[194]

Modernity, the Judge claims, does not respect love, but disparages it as an illusion. In one of his pithier moments, he quips that the modern age "has invented a new definition of what unhappy love is, namely to be loved when one no longer loves, rather than to love without being loved in return."[195] Whereas the Aesthete's response to Scribe's didacticism was to twist his polemic by infinitizing it, the Judge's response is to provide a straightforward apology against Scribe's sneers. The difference between his response and Aesthete A's is clear when he writes:

> Here I shall adopt an expression, despite your and the whole world's mockeries, that nevertheless has always had a beautiful meaning for me: the first love (believe me, I will not yield, and you probably will not either; if so, there will be a strange misrelation in our correspondence). When I use this phrase, I think of one of the most beautiful things in life; when you use it, it is the signal that the entire artillery of your observations is firing. But just as for me this phrase has nothing ludicrous about it, and just as I, to be honest, tolerate your attack only because I ignore it, so neither does it have for me the sadness that it presumably can have for someone else....For me the phrase 'the first love' has no sadness at all, or at least only a little admixture of sweet sadness; for me it is a password, and although I have been a married man for several years, I have the honor to fight under the victorious banner of the first love.[196]

For the Judge, both Scribe and Aesthete A threaten to discredit first love through their satire, and his job is to defend its enduring—indeed, eternal—significance. He summarizes his goal in his first letter to the Aesthete as "showing that marriage is the transfiguration of the first love and not its annihilation, is its friend and not its enemy."[197] Christianity makes realizing first love possible through the institution of marriage.

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[194] *EO*, 2:18-19 / *SKS*, 3:27.

[195] *EO*, 2:22 / *SKS*, 3:31; translation modified.

[196] *EO*, 2:36-37 / *SKS*, 3:44.

[197] *EO*, 2:31 / *SKS*, 3:39.

There, according to William, first love is "transfigured" and baptized with the blessing of the eternal.

Far from asserting any opposition between Christianity and *eros*, the Judge argues that Christianity includes the erotic within itself. In good Hegelian fashion, he writes that if Christianity is "the highest development of the human race," then it must have a place "within itself for the eroticism [*Erotik*] of first love."[198] The sort of eroticism that the Judge endorses as Christian takes a specific form, namely, *satisfied* desire. Just as he believes that Christianity realizes all that human consciousness can be, so too he asserts that marriage satisfies all an individual's possible yearnings. He is perpetually counseling the Aesthete that only Christianity can provide satisfaction to his wayward desires. Whereas "reflective love continually consumes itself," he writes that the religious is where "the reflection of the understanding ends."[199] Praising Christian marriage as the transfiguration of first love is a way for the Judge to speak of Christianity as the *telos* of all *eros*. "In the religious," he writes, "love again finds the infinity that it sought in vain in reflective love."[200] Lest anyone suppose that the Judge's praise of marriage refers to an ideal that is never realized in actuality, he asserts baldly that "my humble marriage has had this meaning."[201] Thus, in his defense of first love, the Judge subsumes all reality in neat concentric circles of satisfied desire: Christianity is the

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[198] *EO*, 2:31 / *SKS*, 3:38.

[199] *EO*, 2:30 / *SKS*, 3:38.

[200] *EO*, 2:30 / *SKS*, 3:38.

[201] *EO*, 2:31 / *SKS*, 3:39. To be fair to the Judge, his larger point about marriage is that it is a continual striving to realize the ideal of love in time's duration, rather than a definitive manifestation of it at any given moment. Still, the Judge does seem to believe that, taken as a whole over time, his marriage truly realizes first love.

satisfaction of the yearnings of consciousness in general; marriage is the satisfaction of each individual's desire; and the Judge's own marriage is the satisfaction of the Christian ideal.[202]

The Judge is perceptive enough in his evaluation of the Aesthete to recognize that A's response to Scribe's play is a manifestation of desire rather than outright nihilism, but he is critical of the form that this desire takes. He praises the way in which the Aesthete seems to desire first love, yet he criticizes the manner in which this desire consistently expresses itself as deflationary criticism. He reproaches A directly for his inconsistency:

> For you...the concept of the first, its significance, its over-and under-valuation, is an enigmatical undulation. At times you are simply and solely inspired by the first. You are so impregnated with the energy concentrated in it that it is the only thing you want. You are so kindled and inflamed, so hot with love [*elskovsvarm*], so dreamy and creative....The gentlest touch is enough to make this invisible, expanded, spiritual body tremble.[203]
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> At other times, however, you are as cold, as sharp and biting, as a March wind, as sarcastic as hoarfrost, as intellectually transparent as the air tends to be in spring, as dry and sterile, as egotistically astringent as possible. If it so happens that a person comes to harm in speaking to you in that condition about the first, perhaps even about his first love, you become downright ill-tempered. Now the first becomes the most ludicrous, the most foolish of all, one of the lies in which one generation reinforces the next.[204]

William recognizes that, on the one hand, the dream of first love excites A's enthusiasm like little else. A is "so impregnated with the energy concentrated" in the dream of first love that it is the only thing he wants; it is, William writes, like an erotic touch upon his

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[202] The Judge's point here is not that the particularities of his marriage should be held as universally normative, but that his particular marriage is the satisfaction of a universal duty. Throughout his letters, he declares his intention to write transparently about marriage such that what he says applies to his particular marriage as much as to a universally incumbent ideal. See especially *EO*, 2:9 / *SKS*, 3:18-19.

[203] *EO*, 2:37-38 / *SKS*, 3:45; translation modified.

[204] *EO*, 2:38-39 / *SKS*, 3:46.

spiritual body, kindling and inflaming his passion. On the other hand, what troubles William is A's relentless criticism of all claims to represent or embody first love. If A values first love so much, the Judge seems to be saying, why does he not raise his glass enthusiastically when first love is toasted at weddings, rather than smirking sarcastically in the corner?

The Judge recognizes that the Aesthete's longing is fundamentally insatiable, and he does not deny that this can have a religious valence. Here is how he describes the insatiability of A's desire:

> To see all the glories of the world is no concern of yours, for in thought you are beyond them, and if they were offered to you, you would very likely say, as always: Well, maybe one could spend a day on that. You do not care that you have not become a millionaire, and if the chance were offered to you, you would very likely answer: Well, it could really be interesting to have been a millionaire, and one could probably spend a month on it. If you could be offered the love [*Kjærlighed*] of the most beautiful of girls, you would nevertheless answer: Yes, it would be all right for half a year.[205]

The Judge certainly does not wish to suggest that worldly adventures, material wealth, or beautiful women are sufficient in themselves to satisfy human longing. Indeed, he praises the way in which the Aesthete will not allow his desire to be satisfied by worldly goods: "At this point I shall not add my voice to the frequently heard lament that you are insatiable. In a certain sense you are right, for nothing that is finite, not even the whole world, can satisfy the soul of a person who feels a craving [*Trang*] for the eternal."[206] Even as the Judge gives Aesthete A credit for not being hooked on worldly pleasures, he makes two core arguments against the insatiability of his desire for first love.

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[205] *EO*, 2:202-203 / *SKS*, 3:195.

[206] *EO*, 2:203 / *SKS*, 3:195.

The Judge's first argument echoes one of Kierkegaard's central critiques of Romanticism in *The Concept of Irony*. William faults A for allowing his irony to become a means of negating actuality through the constructed world of the theater. He perceptively points out that by criticizing finitude as such, A allows his supposedly infinite desire to find rest in a kind of dogmatism about the worthlessness of the finite. The Judge's criticism of the Aesthete here echoes Kierkegaard's critique of the portrayals of Socrates that describe his ignorance as the one thing he knows. Neither of these latent positivities should be sufficient to satisfy a truly infinite desire. William thus admonishes A that because "you are finished with the finite altogether,...you are satisfied, but that in which you find your satisfaction is absolute dissatisfaction."[207] He thus argues that A's dogmatic negation of actuality is a refusal of authentic desire rather than an expression of it. He writes:

> Therefore you crave [*attraaer*] nothing, desire [*ønsker*] nothing; for the only thing that you could desire [*ønske*] would be a divining rod [*Ønskeqvist*, lit. "wishing" or "desiring" rod] that could provide you with everything, and you would then use it for cleaning out your pipe. So you are finished with life 'and do not need to make a will, for you will leave nothing behind you.'[208]

Because A seeks to negate actuality entirely, William charges, he finds repose in his theatrical fantasies, rather than striving to inhabit actuality more and more authentically. Without question, William, for his part, indeed embraces actuality. Yet his embrace of it occurs through satisfied, rather than infinite, desire.

Although William agrees with A's view that humans rightly long for the eternal, he differs from him by viewing the eternal, not as an ever-elusive beyond, but as

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[207] *EO*, 2:202 / *SKS*, 3:195.

[208] *EO*, 2:203 / *SKS*, 3:196; translation modified.

immediately present to him through his marriage. He unabashedly conflates the universal—that is, ethical duty—with the absolute—the individual's relationship to God. Consider this description of his ideal of an ethico-religious "hero":

> The ethical teaches him that the [marriage] relationship is the absolute. The relationship is, namely, the universal. It takes away from him the vain joy of being out-of-the-ordinary in order to give him the true joy of being the ordinary. It brings him into harmony with all existence, teaches him to rejoice in it, because as an exception, as an out-of the-ordinary person he is in conflict.[209]

Passages like this one virtually cry out for *Fear and Trembling*'s meditation upon Abraham, whom Johannes de Silencio describes as the father of faith precisely because of his transgression of the universal. The Judge can conceive of nothing higher in existence than universally incumbent ethical duty. Moreover, ironically enough, his conception of this "universal" duty is highly contestable. He argues that it is a universal duty for every human being to marry—scarcely a necessary outcome of the categorical imperative as it is usually interpreted. He both collapses the absolute into the universal and construes the universal in highly suspect terms.[210]

It must be admitted that Judge William's exaltations of first love and marriage verge on the blasphemous. At first, his argument that marriage makes first love eternal

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[209] *EO*, 2:304 / *SKS*, 3:287.

[210] As several scholars have argued, Judge William is guilty of an extraordinarily patriarchal conception of marriage, which borders on outright misogyny. It is precisely his confidence in the propriety of actuality and its prevailing norms that prevents him from wanting to critique even the most troubling aspects of traditional conceptions of this institution. Even if he wanted to critique them, his uncritical embrace of actuality would give him no leverage to do so. William in fact reports disapprovingly that A, for his part, is "scandalized" by normative conceptions of a husband as the wife's "lord and master." He does not hesitate to defend such patriarchy against his more critical and more desirous friend. *EO*, 2:54 / *SKS*, 60.

Feminist critiques of Judge William can be found in Céline Léon, *The Neither/Nor of the Second Sex: Kierkegaard on Women, Sexual Difference, and Sexual Relations* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 75-130; Wanda Warren Berry, "Judge William Judges Woman: Existentialism and Essentialism in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, Part II" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*: Either/Or, Part II, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995).

seems innocuous enough. "When the lovers refer their love to God," he writes of the marriage ceremony, "this thanks will already place an absolute stamp of eternity upon it."[211] A stamp of the eternal is one thing, but the Judge comes to attribute to marriage a veritably salvific character,[212] construing it as a means of transcending, even conquering, finitude and time. He writes: "Like a true victor, the married man has not killed time but has rescued and preserved it in eternity. The married man who does this is truly living poetically; he solves the great riddle, to live in eternity and yet to hear the cabinet clock strike in such a way that its striking does not shorten but lengthens his eternity."[213] Judge William's absolutization of marriage becomes so excessive that he comes to laud it with the very attributes that Christian theology classically applies to Christ. In the following encomium, virtually every descriptor that William applies to first love could be applied in the most orthodox way to a Christian's relationship to the incarnate Christ:

> The first love is an absolute awakening, an absolute intuiting, and this must be held fixed lest a wrong be done to it. It is directed upon a single specific actual object, which alone exists for it; nothing else exists at all. This one object does not exist in vague outlines but as a specific living being. This first love has an element of the sensuous, an element of beauty, but nevertheless it is not simply sensuous....Like everything eternal, it has implicit the duplexity of positing itself backward into all eternity and forward into all eternity.[214]

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[211] *EO*, 2:58 / *SKS*, 3:63.

[212] Judge William makes this assertion in the most literal sense possible: "Believe me, as surely as corruption comes from man, salvation comes from woman. I am a married man and thus I am partial, but it is my conviction that even though a woman corrupted man, she has honestly and honorably made up for it and is still doing so, for of a hundred men who go astray in the world, ninety-nine are saved by woman, and one is saved by an immediate divine grace" (*EO*, 2:207 / *SKS*, 3:199).

[213] *EO*, 2:138 / *SKS*, 3:137.

[214] *EO*, 2:42 / *SKS*, 3:49.

The Judge at one point even appeals unblushingly to the nature of the Incarnation in order to cast light on the nature of first love. In the midst of one of his encomiums to first love, he permits himself the following "philosophical flourish":

> There, if someone has spoken with a tinge of sadness about the first love, as if it can never be repeated, this is no minimizing of love but the most profound eulogy on its power. Thus, to make a little philosophical flourish, not with the pen but with the mind, God became flesh only once, and it is futile to expect that it could happen more than once. In paganism, it could happen more frequently, but that was simply because it was not a true incarnation.[215]

The analogy that the Judge proposes here can only be described as perverse. In order to illumine the enigma of first love, the Judge appeals to the example of God becoming flesh—as though *that* were more accessible to the human mind. As Amy Laura Hall has written with decided understatement, "If William's wife can plausibly 'fill in' for God, as the lovely *deus ex machina* in this treatise on morality, then William's ethical question is inadequately complex."[216] While he is right to condemn the desire of the Aesthete as being too tepid, William is wrong to assume that his satisfied desire is healthier. Although it is common in Kierkegaard scholarship to enumerate what the Aesthete might learn from the Judge, it is equally important to imagine how the Judge might learn from the Aesthete to desire more than finite satisfactions.

The Judge's second criticism of Aesthete A's desire for first love is found in his lengthy critique of mysticism in his second letter. When he tells the Aesthete that "you by no means lack the elements for becoming a mystic," he does not mean this as a compliment. Sensing that such a form of spirituality threatens his worldview at its foundation, he undertakes to provide a thorough refutation of it: "Perhaps it might not be

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[215] *EO*, 2:40 / *SKS*, 3:47.

[216] Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*, 6.

out of the way here to emphasize more explicitly the falsity in such a life, all the more so because every deeper personality always feels moved by it."[217] Mysticism threatens William's worldview because it figures an individual's relationship to God as insatiable *eros*. He describes mystical eroticism as follows: "For the mystic the whole world is dead; he has fallen in love [*forelsket sig*] with God....For him prayer is more meaningful the more erotic [*erotisk*] it is, the more it is fired by burning love [*Kjærlighed*]. Prayer is the expression for his love, the only language in which he can address the deity, with whom he has fallen in love."[218] The Judge condemns such mysticism as merely another way of accomplishing the Romantic goal of escaping from actuality, time, and ethical duty. Certainly any form of mysticism that encouraged such goals would be problematic, but the Judge scarcely makes a convincing case that they are typical of actual mystics. What is most problematic about his argument is that he equates rejecting prevailing human norms with rejecting actuality as such. Any form of life that encourages forsaking marriage is, in his view, a violation not only of actuality but also of the absolute. He writes:

> Ordinarily the mystic chooses the solitary life, but with that the issue is not clarified, because the question is whether he has the right to choose it. Insofar as he has chosen it, he does not deceive others, for he indeed says thereby: I do not want a relationship with you. But the question is whether he has the right to say that, the right to do that. It is especially as a married man as a father that I am the enemy of mysticism. My domestic life also has its *aduton* [private altar], but if I were a mystic I would have to have still another one for myself alone, and then I would be a poor husband. Since in my view, which I shall develop later, it is a duty for every person to marry, and since it cannot possibly be my view that a person should marry in order to become a poor husband, you readily perceive that I must have an animosity toward all mysticism.[219]

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[217] *EO*, 2:243 / *SKS*, 3:232.

[218] *EO*, 2:243 / *SKS*, 3:231-232.

[219] *EO*, 2:244-245 / *SKS*, 3:233-234.

The Judge is right to insist upon embracing actuality rather than fleeing from it, but the form of actuality that he is content to embrace is decidedly finite. As we have seen, the satisfaction provided by his relationship to his wife supplants his desire to relate authentically to Christ. He interprets the mystic's infinite desire for Christ as a rejection of actuality as such. He does not dare to believe that actuality might be the place where the believer encounters Christ through longing.

It is precisely because of the Judge's need for a quickening of desire beyond finite actuality that his rejection of artistic depictions of first love, particularly those of the theater, is so problematic. He maintains, fairly enough, that first love is fundamentally heterogeneous to aesthetic representation because it must be realized in time's duration rather than in a single moment. Speaking of his own first love, he is not ashamed to admit that "Scribe himself would despair over our prosaic marriage, because I believe that even for him it would be impossible to make it poetic."[220] But while he is right to argue that love can never be equated with the fleeting moment depicted in a painted tableaux or a vaudeville stage situation, he is wrong to assume that encountering such moments can have no value as a means of quickening desire. His embrace of actuality at the expense of art implies a troubling certainty that his own life realizes ethico-religious ideals absolutely. He writes: "The married man...is truly living poetically....And although this cannot be portrayed artistically, then let your consolation be, as it is mine, that we are not to read about, listen to, or look at what is the highest and the most beautiful in life, but are, if you please, to live it."[221] Once one actualizes first love through

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[220] *EO*, 2:325 / *SKS*, 3:306.

[221] *EO*, 2:138-139 / *SKS*, 3:137.

marriage, "then in truth there will be no need for hardhearted fathers or maiden bowers or enchanted princesses or trolls and monsters in order to give love [*Kjærlighed*] an opportunity to show what it can do."[222] William maintains that it is an ethical duty for every individual to forsake theatricality and to exist transparently in actuality's clear light. "Are you not aware that there comes a midnight hour when everyone must unmask?" he asks the Aesthete.[223] His message is clear: give up on staging and theatricality, shun the dreams of poetry and fiction, and plant your feet firmly in actuality, where you can realize first love as your ethical duty. He does not hear the faintest hint of blasphemy when he describes doing so as a means of incarnating the absolute.

IV. Staging a Sermon, Infinitizing Desire

Either/Or ends with a third communication from Judge William to Aesthete A after his two prolix letters. He appends a sermon by a friend from his university days, who is now a pastor in a small village upon the Jutland heath. William tells A to read it meditatively because the Pastor "has grasped what I have said and what I would like to have said to you; he has expressed it better than I am able to."[224] The Judge thus offers this sermon as an encapsulation of the content of his thinking, which, he assures A, "is and remains the same."[225] However, as many commentators have noted, it is by no means

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[222] *EO*, 2:18 / *SKS*, 3:27.

[223] *EO*, 2:160 / *SKS*, 3:157.

[224] *EO*, 2:338 / *SKS*, 3:318.

[225] *EO*, 2:337 / *SKS*, 3:317.

clear that the Judge understands this sermon well, or that it confirms his unchanging perspective.[226]

Perhaps the most salient way in which the Pastor's sermon diverges from the Judge's philosophy concerns the relationship between its rhetorical form and actuality. While the Judge urges A to give up on art so as to embrace actuality, the Pastor's sermon is by any measure a highly imaginative staging. William's preface to the sermon quotes the Pastor as describing its inception as follows:

> The Jutland heath...is a real playground for me, a private study room beyond compare. I go out there on Saturday and meditate on my sermons, and everything unfolds for me. I forget every actual listener and gain an ideal one; I achieve total absorption into myself. Therefore, when I step into the pulpit, it is as if I were still standing out there on the heath, where my eyes see no human being, where my voice rises to its full power in order to drown out the storm.[227]

The Pastor is scarcely claiming here that his sermon is a transparent description of actuality in the way that William claims that his entire discourse on marriage is a description of his relationship to his wife. Instead, this sermon is theatrically constructed on multiple levels. Its preface invites the reader to leave behind the Judge's soporific parlor and to imagine an anonymous Pastor standing upon a windswept heath, raising his voice against the wind—a setting as dramatic as the heath in *King Lear*. Moreover, William cites the Pastor as saying that the sermon has not *actually* been delivered yet; so far, it lives only as a sermon that he *imagines* preaching one day.[228] When he does preach it, the Pastor informs the reader in the passage above, his body will be present in the

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[226] Amy Laura Hall goes farther than most, arguing that "the sermon closing *Either/Or* hints at A's vindication over the sturdy Judge," suggesting, that he "may be better prepared to receive Kierkegaard's advice on love than is William" (*Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*, 122).

[227] *EO*, 2:338 / *SKS*, 3:318; translation modified.

[228] *EO*, 2:347 / *SKS*, 3:318.

pulpit, but his mind will still be gazing into the endless distances of the heath. To accomplish the edification that he asserts to be his fundamental purpose, the Pastor does not mimic the Judge's purportedly transparent descriptions of actuality, but the constructed theatricality so valued by the Aesthete.

In the theatrical construction of this sermon, the Pastor meditates upon the following undeniably provocative theme: "The Upbuilding That Lies in the Thought That in Relation to God We Are Always in the Wrong."[229] This statement is certainly an injunction to humility and repentance, as it is often interpreted, but to treat it only as an exhortation to such virtues would be to miss its central drama. Throughout the sermon, the Pastor asks his listeners to meditate on a universally accessible story of earthly love.[230] He suggests that this story of desire can teach us something about what loving God involves.

The Pastor writes that when we experience disagreement or conflict in an intra-human relationship, our response can take one of two forms depending on the nature of the relationship in question. In what is by far the more common scenario, we take solace in believing that we are in the right and the other is in the wrong. As the Pastor explains:

> However much they outrage me, you say, they still will not be able to deprive me of this peace—that I know I am in the right and that I suffer wrong. In this view there is a satisfaction, a joy, that presumably every one of us have tasted, and when you continue to suffer wrong, you are built up by the thought that you are in the right.[231]

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[229] *EO*, 2:339 / *SKS*, 3:320.

[230] Note that the Pastor has told the Judge that he "is confident that he will make every peasant understand" his sermon. As William explains, "it is precisely the beauty of the universal that all are able to understand it" (*EO*, 2:338 / *SKS*, 3:318).

[231] *EO*, 2:347 / *SKS*, 3:326.

It is normal to want to be in the right amidst the slights and quarrels of quotidian life. But the Pastor asserts that there is another type of intra-human relationship in which conflict elicits a very different response. When we truly love someone, he argues, knowing that we are in the right provides no solace against the sting of discord. When conflict arises in such a situation, "you would wish that you might be in the wrong; you would try to find something that you could speak in [the other's] defense, and if you did not find it, you would find rest only in the thought that you were in the wrong."[232] The Pastor argues that the first kind of relationship is finite and the second is infinite. He writes:

> How can this be explained except by saying that in the one case you loved, in the other you did not—in other words, in the one case you were in an infinite relationship with a person, in the other case in a finite relationship? Therefore wishing to be in the wrong is an expression of an infinite relationship, and wanting to be in the right, or finding it painful to be in the wrong, is an expressing of a finite relationship—because only the infinite builds up; the finite does not![233]

Even as the Pastor uses this easily recognizable situation to point to the nature of a truly infinite relationship, he also uses it to argue that no relationship to a human being can ever achieve truly infinite status. All finite beings ultimately prove themselves unworthy of infinite love; however much we desire to be in the wrong in relationship to another, the other will be unmistakably in the wrong eventually. The Pastor explains: "You loved a person, you desired [*ønskede*] that you might always be in the wrong in relation to him—but alas, he was faithless to you, and however reluctant that it should be so, however much it pained you, you proved to be in the right in relation to him, and wrong in loving

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[232] *EO*, 2:348 / *SKS*, 3:327.

[233] *EO*, 2:348 / *SKS*, 3:326.

him so deeply."[234] The Pastor thus argues that our desire to love carries us beyond even the most treasured human others. A truly infinite desire cannot be satisfied even by Judge William's apparently glorious wife.

Only God, the Pastor asserts, can be a suitable object of infinite love, for only God is always faithful. He continues in the same passage:

> And yet your soul demanded you to love that way; only in that could you find rest and peace and happiness. Then your soul turned away from the finite to the infinite; there it found its object; there your love [*Kjærlighed*] became happy. I will love God, you said, he gives everything to the One who loves. He fulfills my highest, my only desire [*Ønske*]—that in relation to him I must always be in the wrong.[235]

When the Pastor speaks of the "fulfillment" of desire in this passage, the nature of this fulfillment is paradoxical indeed. The desire that an infinite relationship to God "fulfills" is the desire to be always in the wrong in relation to God. This "fulfillment" is the deepening of desire rather than its end. Loving God does not satisfy desire, as Judge William's marriage to his wife does; it elicits it ever anew, in a continual process of edification. Knowing oneself to be in the wrong in relation to God provides no rest, contentment, or domestic tranquility; it summons an ongoing life of repentance and striving. The Pastor's chosen text for this sermon is the story of Christ weeping over Jerusalem and overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple.[236] Embodying the ease of the religious establishment—and likely also the self-deluded certainty that their buying and selling is God's work—the moneychangers are not without their parallels to Judge William. The infinite desire that the Pastor commends in this sermon

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[234] *EO*, 2:350 / *SKS*, 3:329.

[235] *EO*, 2:350-351 / *SKS*, 3:329.

[236] Luke 19:41-47.

would be as disruptive of William's self-confidence and assured comfort as Jesus' overturning of the tables in the temple.

The Pastor concludes his sermon by taking stock of a significant objection to his thesis that believing oneself to be in the wrong in relation to God continually incites a desire for more perfect communion with God, a striving to serve God more faithfully. Does such a thought not simply lead to fatalism? Does believing that one is and will always be in the wrong in relation to God not simply deaden desire? The Pastor expresses this objection as follows:

> In relation to God we are always in the wrong. But is this thought not anesthetizing; however upbuilding it may be, is it not dangerous for a person? Does it not lull him into a sleep in which he dreams of a relationship with God that nevertheless is no actual relationship; does it not vitiate the power of the will and the strength of the intention?[237]

Versions of this objection have already presented themselves at several points throughout this dissertation. If every staging of first love will fail, why go to the theater? If adequately representing Socrates is impossible, why study him at all? If no image can capture the incarnate Christ, why use a fairy tale to describe him? The Pastor's response to the analogous question here is that, while such an outcome might be expected from a detached theoretical perspective, it is not faithful to the nature of desire. The passage quoted above continues as follows:

> Not at all! Or the person who wished to be always in the wrong in relation to another person—was he apathetic and idle, did he not do all he could to be in the right and yet desired only to be in the wrong. And then should not the thought that in relation to God we are always in the wrong be inspiring, for what else does it express but that God's love is always greater than our love....In relation to God we are always in the wrong—this thought puts an end to doubt and calms the cares; it incites and inspires to action.[238]

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[237] *EO*, 2:353 / *SKS*, 3:331.

[238] *EO*, 2:353 / *SKS*, 3:331; translation modified.

For the person who desires God infinitely, knowing that one will always be in the wrong in relation to God does not anesthetize. It incites an even greater desire to relate to God faithfully and to embody this relationship in the world. The Pastor argues that just as on the human level love incites both a hope to be in the wrong and an attempt to be in the right, so too, in relation to God, the thought that we are always in the wrong provokes endless edification and striving.

V. Beyond *Either/Or*, Returning to "The First Love"

The Ultimatum with which *Either/Or* concludes thus undermines Judge William's rejection of theatricality and his uncritical embrace of actuality's prevailing norms. It impels the reader beyond the content of *Either/Or*, to be sure, but it also suggests that moving forward will involve returning to the forms of desire and theatricality that the Aesthete manifests in his review of *The First Love*. In addition to being an ironic analysis of the concept of first love, this review is also an appreciation of the specific elements of the Royal Theater's production of Scribe's play that enable it to captivate the spectator's gaze, solicit ever deeper contemplation, and elicit mimetic desire. Let us now conclude this chapter by considering these dramaturgical elements in detail. Though much of the content of the Aesthete's worldview will be left behind in the subsequent texts of Kierkegaard's authorship, these theatrical qualities, I argue, will inform them to the end.

Throughout his review of *The First Love*, Aesthete A pays special attention to two key elements of J. L. Heiberg's theory of vaudeville, situation and character,[239] which he

[239] Heiberg gives a detailed formal definition of the vaudeville genre in *Om Vaudevillen* in *Heibergs Prosaiske Skrifter*, 45-57.

claims are put to masterful use in the Royal Theater's production of the play. Just as A's interpretation of the play's meaning is unrecognizable as Scribe's intent, so too the captivating power that he ascribes to these dramaturgical elements exceeds anything envisioned by Heiberg. What makes the situations[240] of the play so significant in A's analysis is the way in which they lend themselves to endless contemplation. As such, their importance supersedes even the wit of Scribe's dialogue. A writes: "Some people prefer to linger over the lines to preserve them in memory, to return to them often. Others prefer to linger over the situation and to reconstruct it from memory. The latter are the contemplative natures."[241] By speaking of the "contemplation" of situations, A asserts that their infinite irony captivates the spectator's gaze and provides it no final point of rest. He describes the infinite movement of contemplation elicited by *The First Love*'s situations as follows:

> The curtain falls; the play is over. Nothing remains but the large outline in which the fantastic *Schattenspiel* of the situation, directed by irony, discloses itself and remains afterward for contemplation. The immediately actual situation is the unreal situation; behind it appears a new situation that is no less awry, and so on. One hears the dialogue in the situation, and when it is most sensible it turns out to be most lunatic, and just as the situation regresses, so also does the dialogue, more and more meaningless despite its sensibleness.[242]

The Aesthete asserts here that it is the lack of rest afforded by vaudeville's situations that distinguishes the genre from the older genre of Romantic tragedy. Tragedy certainly does

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[240] For both theater historians looking at Scribe's works and for Heiberg's theories of the dramatic arts, situation is the defining element of the vaudeville genre. See Heiberg, *Om Vaudevillen* in *Heibergs Prosaiske Skrifter*, 42-43. Fenger, *The Heibergs*, 70. Arvin, *Eugène Scribe and the French Theater*, 38. On the most concrete level, they are referring to the ways in which these plays' plots conspire to bring the characters into situations in which their motivation is hopelessly conflicted, their identity unwittingly mistaken, and their best intentions embarrassed. Understandably enough, such situations create a deep well of irony for the spectator to enjoy.

[241] *EO*, 1:263 / *SKS*, 2:255.

[242] *EO*, 1:277 / *SKS*, 2:268-269.

depict situations, he argues, but they are of a fundamentally different kind. He describes them as follows: "The soul rests with infinite sadness in a situation like that, but it does rest—contemplation is completely in repose."[243] Contrast such repose to the way in which situations function in vaudeville: "The comic situation, to be sure, has a similar continuance for contemplation, but at the same time reflection is in motion within; and the more it discovers—the more infinite the comic situation becomes inside itself, so to speak—the dizzier one becomes, and yet one cannot stop staring into it."[244] In A's analysis, the situations depicted in *The First Love* unfurl before the spectators' eyes endlessly captivating tableaux, which arrest their gaze and will not let go. As Aesthete A remarks several times in his review, to watch a play like *The First Love* is to want to see it performed again and again.[245]

The second prominent element of Heiberg's dramatic theory to which A refers is the importance of the characters who populate and animate the situations. Heiberg defines a vaudeville play as "a situation piece with roughly suggested characters,"[246] and for A the superficiality of the characters is of utmost importance. He begins his review of *The First Love* by analyzing each of the principle characters in detail, though Emmeline is his central focus. He argues that the defining feature of all the characters, Emmeline most of all, is a constitutive contradiction. As a consequence, no immediate, one-dimensional representation can do them justice. Defined at its most abstract, the fundamental contradiction in Emmeline's character is between the fervency of her

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[243] *EO*, 1:263 / *SKS*, 2:255-256.

[244] *EO*, 1:263 / *SKS*, 2:256.

[245] *EO*, 1:243, 277 / *SKS*, 2:236, 269.

[246] Heiberg, *Om Vaudevillen* in *Heibergs Prosaiske Skrifter*, 54.

passion—her absolute fidelity to her first love—and the vacuity of its ideal and object. The Aesthete describes this contradiction as follows:

> She has pathos, but since its content is nonsense, her pathos is essentially chatter; she has passion, but since its content is a phantom, her passion is essentially madness; she has enthusiasm but since its content is nothing, her enthusiasm is essentially frivolity; she wants to sacrifice everything for her passion—that is, she wants to sacrifice everything for nothing.[247]

Emmeline's very existence as a character is thus ironic according to A due to the misrelation between her passion's form and its content. In the closing line of his review, he summarizes *The First Love*'s intrigue as being "the confusion that arises, like a rushing wind, from Emmeline's contentless [*indholdsløse*] passion."[248]

Emmeline's conflicted character presents a formidable challenge to representation. In the closing pages of his review, A reflects at length on what is required of an actress who would play her. How can such a paradox be incarnated on the stage? According to Aesthete A, the task that faced Johanne Luise Heiberg in playing Emmeline was not, as one might expect, to render her character coherent and believable. It was not, as one would usually envision an actor's task, to bring her to life as a three-dimensional human being. To the contrary, Aesthete A argues that the job of the actress who plays Emmeline is to transform herself into a surface. The actress must make Emmeline's contradictions baldly manifest. A makes this point in a difficult but important passage:

> Without irony, an artist can never sketch; a stage artist can only produce it through contradiction, since the essence of a sketch is superficiality. Where portrayal of character is not required, the art is to transform oneself into a surface, which is a paradox for the stage performance, and given to only a few to solve. A spontaneous comedian can never play Dervière, since he does not have character. Emmeline's whole being is contradiction and therefore cannot be represented spontaneously. She must be charming, for

[247] *EO*, 1:253 / *SKS*, 2:246.

[248] *EO*, 1:279 / *SKS*, 2:270; translation modified.

> otherwise the effect of the whole play is lost; she must not be charming, but extravagant, for otherwise the total effect of the whole play is lost in another sense.[249]

Aesthete A underscores throughout this passage the degree of reflection required of actors who would play personages as contradictory as Dervière or Emmeline. Because they are not coherent characters, they "cannot be represented spontaneously." An actress who would play Emmeline, he is saying, must be reflective enough to incarnate her contradictory qualities in a single moment. Rather than seeking to integrate them into a coherent whole, she must allow them to stand before the spectator's eyes in their contradiction. By transforming herself into a surface, the actress must make herself, as it were, into a tableau analogous to the play's situations. Just as they arrest and captivate the spectator's gaze, so too does the character of Emmeline.

Aesthete A meditates not only upon the challenge that Emmeline's character poses to the actress who would play her, but also upon the challenge that it poses to the spectator who would truly "see" her. Can one ever fully take in such a paradox? What does it mean to see such a character for what she is? On a general level, A asserts that seeing Emmeline in all her paradoxicality is an outright impossibility if one merely reads about her on the written page. One must see her incarnated before one's own eyes—indeed, see her performed again and again. He describes this necessity as follows:

> In order to enjoy the irony in this play contemplatively, one must not read it but see it; one must see it again and again, and if one is then so fortunate as to be contemporary with the four talented dramatic artists in our theater who in every way contribute to disclosing and intimating to us the transparency of the situation, the enjoyment becomes greater and greater every time one sees it.[250]

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[249] *EO*, 1:278-279 / *SKS*, 2:270; translation modified.

[250] *EO*, 1:277 / *SKS*, 2:269.

Even once one has seen the play performed, truly taking in the paradoxes incarnated on the stage is never a finished accomplishment, but an ongoing process according to the Aesthete. His description of what it would mean to see these characters anticipates, almost eerily, the way Johannes Climacus describes what it would mean to "become contemporaneous" with Christ through faith in *Philosophical Fragments*.[251] To become contemporaneous with the paradoxical characters incarnated in this production of *The First Love* requires not merely seeing them performed again and again, but also striving to believe both what one sees at one moment with one's eyes and the opposing truth that one knows with one's mind. In a passage that runs remarkably parallel to a passage in *Philosophical Fragments*,[252] A describes what the spectator must do in order to become contemporaneous with the characters of Dervière (played by Jørgen Peter Frydendahl) and Emmeline (played by Madam Heiberg). He suggest that, in order to "see" these characters, theatergoers should engage in a continual process of closing and reopening their eyes:

> Look at Frydendahl; now turn your eyes away, shut them, imagine him standing before you. Those pure, noble features, that aristocratic bearing—how can this be the object of laughter? Open your eyes and look at Frydendahl. Look at Madame Heiberg; lower your eyes, for perhaps Emmeline's charm might become dangerous to you; hear the girl's

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[251] See the chapters "The Situation of the Contemporary Follower" and "The Follower at Second Hand." *PF*, 55-71 and 89-110 / *SKS*, 4:258-271 and 287-306.

[252] "The contemporary learner possesses an advantage for which, alas, the subsequent learner, just in order to do something, will very much envy him. The contemporary can go and observe that teacher—and does he then dare to believe his eyes? Yes, why not? As a consequence, however, does he dare to believe that he is a follower? Not at all, for if he believes his eyes, he is in fact deceived, for the god cannot be known directly. Then may he close his eyes? Quite so. But if he does, then what is the advantage of being contemporary? And if he does close his eyes, then he will presumably envision the god. But if he is able to do this by himself, then he does indeed possess the condition. What he envisions will be a form that appears to the inner eye of the soul; if he looks at that, then the form of the servant will indeed disturb him as soon as he opens his eyes" (PF, 63 / *SKS*, 4:264-265).

> sentimental languishing in the voice, the childish and capricious insinuations, and even if you were dry and still like a bookkeeper, you still must smile. Open your eyes—how is it possible? Repeat [*Gjentag*] these movements so quickly that they become almost simultaneous in the moment, and you will have a conception of what is being performed.[253]

Just as mere historical contemporaneity with the God-man is insufficient in *Philosophical Fragments* to lead to the contemporaneity of faith, so too spectators' mere presence in the theater is insufficient to enable them to take in the paradoxes incarnated on the stage. Given A's statement that he has seen *The First Love* performed again and again, "in Danish, in German, in French, abroad and here at home, and I have never grown weary of its inexhaustible wittiness,"[254] it is not an exaggeration to describe his understanding of the task of becoming contemporaneous with these characters as a "task of a lifetime." This process is a striving for the impossible: to "repeat these movements so quickly that they become almost simultaneous in the moment."

A's preface to this review suggests how the play's situations and characters, unfurled as tableaux on *The First Love*'s stage, serve to provoke a desire for imitation in those who see them. At least two distinct expressions of mimetic desire can be found in A's preface. First, as we have seen, A recounts how watching the play provokes him to imitate its dramas in his personal life. He says that as his life came to imitate the story of *The First Love* more and more, "I rejoiced in the thought that I was a poetic character."[255] However, he must eventually recognize that the empty passion of Emmeline is scarcely a constructive object of mimesis. It should come as no surprise to anyone, least of all to Aesthete A, that his relationship with his first love eventually fails. She becomes

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[253] *EO*, 1:278 / *SKS*, 2:269-270.

[254] *EO*, 1:243 / *SKS*, 2:236.

[255] *EO*, 1:241 / *SKS*, 2:234.

engaged to another, her new "first love." A recounts that "she informed me that she had never loved me but that her fiancé was her first love, and then proceeded to tell the same story as Emmeline, that only the first love is the true love."[256] Only after experiencing this disillusionment does A refer to the play as *Les premières amours* rather than as *Den første Kjærlighed*—in the French's fractured plural rather than the Danish's aggrandized singular.[257] Imitating these characters means mimicking their misplaced hopes and inevitable disappointments.

But A's preface to his review also manifests a second kind of mimesis that is more provocative. It opens with a long discussion of the nature of writing itself, in which A figures all poetic writing, not least his review of *The First Love*, as a kind of performance of paradox. He asserts that all poetic writing is the ungraspable conjoining of a quasi-divine poetic "inspiration" with an entirely mundane worldly "occasion."[258] These two elements, he writes, "belong inseparably together" in all poetic writing, such that the lowly occasion is "simultaneously the most significant and the most insignificant, the highest and the lowest, the most important and the most unimportant."[259] On one level, then, A's construal of writing mimics the nature of the theatrical production he is about to describe. It figures the scene of the text itself as a kind of stage. Constantly

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[256] *EO*, 1:244 / *SKS*, 2:237.

[257] *EO*, 1:244 / *SKS*, 2:237.

[258] *EO*, 1:233-240 / *SKS*, 2:227-233. In the case of this particular review, such a paradoxical character manifests itself because while A is on the one hand certain of the profundity of the views it expresses, he recounts that he only published it because he was forced to after spilling a bottle of ink on another manuscript. *EO*, 1:245-247 / *SKS*, 2:238-240.

[259] *EO*, 1:238 / *SKS*, 2:231-232.

conjoining inspiration and occasion, A unfurls in his review his own series of paradoxical tableaux.

On another level, A playfully links this paradox to a much more famous one from an altogether different domain. He describes it as "an offense to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks," as well as a writer's "thorn in the flesh."[260] I do not suggest that A intends these references as anything more than sheer frivolity. But his review invites to be read as extravagantly as it reads Scribe's play and Heiberg's dramaturgy. Judge William rejects the tableaux that A analyzes in this review in favor of transparent truth and satisfied desire. But might later pseudonyms—and Kierkegaard himself—strive to create such tableaux in their writings? In the chapters to come, I will suggest that Kierkegaard's theatrical depicitions of paradoxical situations and characters draw on many of the same rhetorical techniques that Aesthete A praises in this trivial vaudeville play. Rather than presenting objective representations of Christian truth, as Judge William would like, Kierkegaard's texts function more like verbal icons or sacramental images, which seek to elicit an infinite desire for Christ. Perhaps his writings are best understood as a mimesis of the paradox he finds in the incarnate Christ, even as A's review is a mimesis of the paradox he sees performed on *The First Love*'s stage.

In the next three chapters, I will consider a series of very different texts, from the opposite end of Kierkegaard's authorship—his Eucharistic Discourses written from 1846-1851. In many ways, it is difficult to imagine texts more different from Aesthete A's

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[260] *EO*, 1:234 / *SKS*, 2:228. See also A's description of those who denigrate the paradoxical nature of writing as "Pelagian" (*EO*, 1:237 / *SKS*, 2:231) and as God's way of "mocking the greatness of human beings" (EO, 1:237-238 / *SKS*, 2:231; translation modified). Note also his enigmatic reference to there being "something else in the world about which one can say much under the impression that it is something, and yet it is of such a character that, once it is said, it turns out to be nothing" (*EO*, 1:240 / *SKS*, 2:233).

review of Scribe's silly *comédie-vaudeville* than these sermons. But I will argue that, different as they are in their content and their authorial voice, they present tableaux as captivating and disruptive as those of A's review of Scribe's play and the Jutland Pastor's sermon. Like both of these texts, their purpose is to elicit ever-greater desire.

CHAPTER TWO

Vor Frue Kirke as Stage:
Aesthetics and Desire in Liturgy and Sacrament

The transition from Aesthete A's scribblings on *comédie-vaudeville* to Kierkegaard's sober meditations on the Eucharist may not qualify as a "leap" in the technical Kierkegaardian sense of the term, but it is jarring nonetheless. The chronological gap between *Either/Or* and the Eucharistic discourses[261] is wide. Published in 1843, *Either/Or* is the first text in what Kierkegaard came to refer to as his "authorship"; the Eucharistic discourses, spanning the years 1848-1851, belong to his career's penultimate phase.[262] Thematically, the distance between "The First Love" and

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[261] Readers familiar with these texts will recognize that I am not employing the customary English name for them as "Communion" discourses. I do this with some reluctance, since there is no perfect way to translate Kierkegaard's Danish vocabulary for the Eucharist into English. The Danish word for it is *Altergang*, literally, "going to the altar." To receive the sacrament is *at gaae til Alters*, "to go to the altar." Outside of the specific context of Kierkegaard's thought, there would be no reason to insist upon the literal meaning of the Danish idiom or to question the standard translation of it as "Holy Communion." However, as will become clear in this chapter, Kierkegaard uses the the idiom's literal meaning to highlight the gap between our approach to the altar and the "communion" or "fellowship" [*Samfund*] with Christ that is its object. While the first is visible, representable, and nameable, the latter, according to Kierkegaard, eludes objective language and experience. In order to allow this fundamental tension to be heard, I here translate *at gaae til Alters* and its variants as "to receive the Eucharist"—or, if the context allows, simply as "to go to the altar." The first possibility does not do a *better* job of conveying the literal meaning of the Danish than "to receive Holy Communion," but it at least avoids conflating outward acts with spiritual communion. Kierkegaard's Eucharistic vocabulary includes a number of more straightforward ways of referring to the sacrament that I simply translate literally: for example, *den hellige Nadvere* [the holy supper], *Nadverens hellige Malltid* [the supper's holy meal], and *Herrens Bord* [Lord's table].

David R. Law provides a very helpful account of Kierkegaard's Eucharistic vocabulary and the translation difficulties associated with it in "Kierkegaard's Understanding of the Eucharist in *Christian Discourses*, Part Four" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*: Christian Discourses, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 273n.2. I return to the semantic questions discussed here in the body of this chapter.

[262]Kierkegaard himself experienced the development of the Eucharistic discourse genre as a drastic, and welcome, change. His writing began to stall somewhat in 1847, but the new genre provided him with what he describes in his journal as a "continuing source of productivity" [*en staaende Productivitet*] (*JP*, 6:6494 / *SKS*, 22:245-246 [NB12:170]; translation modified). For details on Kierkegaard's writing process at this time, see Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion in the Church of Our Lady," trans. K. Brian Söderquist, in *International Kierkegaard*

the Eucharistic discourses is even wider. It seems to be nothing less than the distance between pure aestheticism and earnest Christianity. Intended to be preached in Copenhagen's preeminent church just before the distribution of the Eucharist, these sermons imagine themselves in a setting that cries out for a clear declaration of spiritual truth. But the nature of their staging within this setting disrupts this expectation. Far from abandoning aesthetics, these sermons refer again and again to the architecture and ornamentation of Vor Frue Kirke, especially Thorvaldsen's famous statue of Christ above the altar. They situate themselves intentionally amidst the rituals and movements of the Friday Eucharist service. They show acute awareness of the debates concerning church architecture and aesthetics taking place at their time. Contrary to the stereotypes about Kierkegaard's late writings, the religiousness expressed in these texts is neither anti-ecclesial nor wholly inward. Instead of abandoning the aesthetic sphere, these sermons call attention to the aesthetics of their surroundings again and again.

To be sure, Kierkegaard does not take up these topics in the way that they are usually discussed in church. Although Vor Frue Kirke and its statues were new and controversial in his time, he offers no judgment of their aesthetic merit or theological evaluation of their meaning. He spends no time mulling whether the church's neoclassical style is appropriate for a Christian space. When invoking the rites of the Friday service, he refuses to wage battles about liturgical propriety—even though we know from his journals that he had plenty of opinions about the evolving liturgical

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Commentary: Practice in Christianity, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 289.

practices of his time.[263] His invocations of the aesthetics of Vor Frue Kirke and its Friday Eucharist service are numerous, but he never treats them as ends in themselves, as objects to be contemplated for their own sake. How then does he believe that Christians should relate to the church aesthetics he summons? The answer, I will suggest, bears a closer resemblance to Aesthete A's relation to the theater than it does to habitual Christian pieties about church.

I. The Eucharist, and Eucharistic *Discourses*, in Vor Frue Kirke

A. The Danish Friday Eucharist Service

Depending on how one counts them, Kierkegaard's Eucharistic discourses number twelve or thirteen. (The sermon whose status is ambiguous was delivered as a Eucharistic discourse, but published as part of *Practice in Christianity*. In a footnote, Anti-Climacus reports that Kierkegaard preached it on September 1, 1848 in Vor Frue Kirke and says that he is publishing it with Kierkegaard's consent.[264]) Of the twelve discourses published as Eucharistic discourses, Kierkegaard actually delivered two, on June 18 and August 27, 1847.[265] The remaining ten take Vor Frue Kirke's Friday service as a kind of stage setting. Kierkegaard is doing something similar in these texts to what he does in his *Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, when he imagines sermons for the

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[263] To take just one example, Kierkegaard laments the abolition of individual confession in his journal, describing it as stemming from cowardice on the part of both the congregation and the clergy (*JP*, 1:598 / *SKS*, 24:125-126 [NB22:81]). However, in the Eucharistic discourses, he speaks frequently and respectfully of the group-confession practice that supplanted it, describing his sermons as taking place "between the confessional and the altar" (*WA*, 144 / *SKS*, 11:280; translation modified). See also *CD*, 266 and 271 / *SKS*, 10:283 and 289.

[264] *PC*, 151 / *SKS*, 12:155.

[265] Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion in the Church of Our Lady," trans. K. Brian Söderquist, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 284. I rely consistently on this article for historical information about the Friday Communion service during Kierkegaard's time.

ritual settings of a confession, wedding, and burial. Kierkegaard's first set of Eucharistic discourses comprises Part Four of *Christian Discourses*, published in 1848. He publishes a stand-alone book in this genre in 1849. Its title names the biblical characters on whom the sermons focus: *"The High Priest"—"The Tax Collector"—"The Woman Who Was a Sinner": Three Discourses at the Eucharist on Fridays*. In 1851, Kierkegaard published his final collection, *Two Discourses at the Eucharist on Fridays*, presenting it as the conclusion of his authorship, wherein it "seeks its decisive place of rest, at the foot of the altar."[266]

Vor Frue Kirke's Friday morning service, which continues to be practiced today in largely similar form, is an idiosyncratic ritual of Danish Lutheranism. Its existence derives from a Reformation-era law mandating that all market towns offer a church service on Friday in order to enable penitential preparation for the Sunday feast.[267] As the church whose liturgies were the official prototype for all Danish churches,[268] Vor Frue Kirke was charged with meeting the requirement in Copenhagen. Nothing mandated that the Friday morning service be a Eucharist service, but this tradition had been followed since the time of the Reformation. Vor Frue Kirke thus offered the Eucharist on both Friday and Sunday mornings, but the Danish custom of the time dictated that individuals receive the sacrament only a few times per year out of respect for the magnitude of the occasion. It has been documented that Kierkegaard received the Lord's Supper exactly 41 times in his life; by the standards of the time, this was faithful participation in the

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[266] *WA*, 165 / *SKS*, 12:281.

[267] Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 245.

[268] The church was named the cathedral for Zealand in 1929. Even before this, however, the church had special status as the *Mynsterkirke* or "model church" for the entire Danish realm.

sacrament.[269] On Sunday mornings, the custom was for the vast majority of congregants to leave after the sermon.

Vor Frue Kirke's Friday morning Eucharist services were generally sparsely attended. They took place at nine o'clock in the morning, when most people were working. Kierkegaard had a special fondness for these services for precisely this reason, praising them in his journal as "the quietest and most intimate of all our worship services."[270] He saw them as a time when no individual could be lost in the churchgoing crowd. He also valued the way in which the service enbled an encounter with God in the midst of everyday life. He praises the Friday service as "originality's break," because its significance was not corrupted by habit and complacency.[271]

Church records reveal that on the three Fridays when Kierkegaard preached at Vor Frue Kirke, the congregation numbered 27, 26, and 26 people. The names and occupations listed on these records conjure an intriguingly disparate assembly of souls. They included:

> State Councilor Andersen and Miss Jagd
> Nightwatchman Rasmus Pedersen and wife
> Pub Owner Hansen and wife, daughter, son and Miss Erb
> Retired Butchter Thostup with wife and daughter
> Ironsmith Peter Andersen and wife
> Maid Karen Bagger
> Widow of Priest Svendsen
> War Councilor Andersen and wife
> Theology Student Carl Joachim Møller
> Widow of Alehouse Keeper Lassen with daughter
> Widow of Pastry Chef Oder with daughter.[272]

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[269] Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 261.

[270] JP 5:6121 / *SKS*, 20:336 [NB4:105].

[271] *JP*, 4:3921 / *SKS*, 20:208 [NB2:168].

[272] Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 285.

How would this motley congregation have perceived the sermons we read today, as they were preached by the hunchbacked eccentric with a weak voice?

The Friday morning service took place according to a distinctive choreography. Congregants gathered in the choir of Vor Frue Kirke, since their number was too small to use the nave. They sang a hymn and said a prayer, then left the sanctuary through a door on the right side of the choir. They entered a small, unadorned room furnished with simple benches. In Danish, this room was referred to by the name *Skriftestolen*, "the confession chair." Although the practice of individual confession had largely disappeared in Danish Lutheranism by Kierkegaard's time, the Danish language continued to apply the term for an individual confessional to this group space. The congregation would go into this chamber together if numbers permitted, or would be cycled through in groups of family and friends.[273] They did not state their confessions individually; rather, they listened to a "confession discourse" intended to express their confession for them.[274] This was the first of two short "sermons" that they would hear on Friday morning. Although there has been some confusion on the matter in the secondary literature, Kierkegaard's Eucharistic discourses did not belong to this genre.[275] He would not have been permitted to preach a "confession discourse" because these sermons were directly tied to the office of confession and absolution, and he was not ordained. After the confession discourse,

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[273] Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 271-272.

[274] Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 267. Kierkegaard alludes to this practice when he writes that "through the speaker's voice" in a Confession discourse, "you yourself confess privately and secretly before God" (*CD*, 271 / *SKS*, 10:289).

[275] See Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 279.

the pastor would lay hands on the congregants two by two to absolve them of their sins. They then returned to their places in the choir.

As the congregation left the shadows of the confessional for the airy light of the sanctuary, the remainder of the service centered around the altar, the Eucharistic table. In the Danish context, this focus made the Friday service unique. Even though the Eucharist was offered on Sunday mornings, the focus of these sermons was emphatically on the preaching of the Word. As Cappelørn explains, "On Sundays, the Eucharist was appended to the church service, which was 'essentially' finished after the sermon; on Fridays, the sermon was appended to the Eucharist: only after Eucharist began had the service 'essentially' started."[276] Kierkegaard preached his Eucharistic discourses in the choir just before the beginning of the Eucharistic liturgy proper. His sermons were thus understood to be extraneous to the essential focus of the rite. These texts thus strive to point beyond themselves, to the Sacrament of the Altar that they anticipate.

Largely for this reason, Kierkegaard consistently resists calling these texts "sermons" [*Prædikener*], preferring the more humble language of "speeches" or "discourses" [*Taler*].[277] As is well known, he refers to almost all of his religious writings as *Taler* in order to signify that he is without authority to preach because he is not ordained.[278] Ordination was not required, however, to preach at a Friday Eucharist

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[276] Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 282; translation modified. See also *CD*, 271 / *SKS*, 10:289.

[277] Although "discourses" is the engrained translation of *Taler* in Kierkegaard scholarship, it is worth recognizing that the connotations of this word can be counterproductive because they are weightier and more rarefied than those of the word "sermon." The humbler word "speeches" might be a preferable translation.

[278] Kierkegaard discusses this distinction frequently throughout his authorship. One concise exposition of it is found in a journal entry titled "The Difference between a Christian Discourse and a Sermon": "A Christian discourse deals to a certain extent with doubt—a sermon operates absolutely

service, and virtually everyone at the time referred to the speeches given there as sermons.[279] Nonetheless, Kierkegaard refuses the common nomenclature in order to underscore that within the context of this service his preaching is not an end in itself but is always oriented toward the sacrament to come. As he writes in the third of his discourses: "What we say here in the prescribed brief moment is, again, no sermon, and when we have said Amen, the divine service is not as usual essentially over, but then the essential begins. Our address therefore only wants to have you pause for a moment on the way to the altar, because today the divine service does not as usual center on the pulpit but on the altar."[280] The nature of these texts is thus intrinsically interstitial and proleptic. They are intended as nothing more than a brief "pause" in the movement from the confessional to the altar, an anticipation of a communion that is irreducibly beyond them. Since I doubt that the word "sermon" today implies the authority that Kierkegaard feared, and in order to convey the outward appearance of Kierkegaard's participation in the service, I use "discourse" and "sermon" interchangeably in this chapter. Yet Kierkegaard's rationale for preferring *Taler* to *Prædikener* reveals a crucial feature of his conception not only of these sermons but also of his writing in general. Perhaps all his texts are only pauses in a movement toward an end that they cannot contain.

B. The Aesthetic Setting of Vor Frue Kirke

The Eucharistic discourses that Kierkegaard preached are rooted not only in the Friday liturgy, but also in the aesthetics of Vor Frue Kirke ["Our Lady Church"]. This

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and solely on the basis of authority, that of Scripture and of Christ's apostles....A sermon presupposes a pastor [ordination]; a Christian discourse can be by a layman" (*JP*, 1:638 / *SKS*, 20:87).

[279] Cappelørn, "Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion," 280.

[280] *CD*, 271 / *SKS*, 10:289; translation modified.

church, which stands largely unchanged today in central Copenhagen, was constructed during Kierkegaard's lifetime. There had been a church at this location since the early Middle Ages, most notably a grandiose Gothic edifice constructed in the fourteenth century. But the British bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, six years before Kierkegaard's birth, burned the Gothic building to the ground, dealing a demoralizing blow to the Danish national psyche. The planning, construction, and progressive unveiling of a new cathedral spanned most of Kierkegaard's life. The new building was consecrated in 1829, but its most striking design elements, Bertel Thorvaldsen's white marble statues of Christ and the twelve apostles, were present then only as plaster casts. The marble *Christus* was placed above the altar in 1839, and the last of the twelve apostles was installed in 1848, the year when Kierkegaard published his first Eucharistic discourses.[281]

The construction of the new cathedral was a major event. The many debates about its architecture and sculptures could not have failed to make an impact on Kierkegaard, yet his journals manifest a curious, even conspicuous, silence on these topics. Roger Poole writes that Kierkegaard's journal is "only just less silent on the subject of Thorvaldsen than it is on the celebrated subject of his own mother."[282] As we will see, however, his Eucharistic discourses brim with implicit references to the aesthetics of Vor Frue Kirke and the public debates about their value. At the same time,

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[281] For the complicated chronology of the installation of Vor Frue Kirke's statues, see Margrethe Floryan, *Hvide Krist: Thorvaldsens Religiøse Motiver* (Copenhagen: Museet for Religiøs Kunst, 2008), 12-15; Anne-Mette Gravgaard and Eva Henschen, *On the Statue of Christ by Thorvaldsen* (Copenhagen: The Thorvaldsen Museum and the Church of Our Lady, 1997), 51-52; Peter Thudvad, *Kierkegaards København* (Copenhagen, Politiken, 2004), 433-434; and Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1993), 236.

[282] Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*, 245.

Kierkegaard's purpose is never to enter these debates directly, or to promote a particular aesthetic or theological judgment of Vor Frue Kirke. Rather, his goal is to shape how Christians relate to it, and, by extension, to all aesthetic efforts to depict Christ—from Thorvaldsen's statue, to sermons, to the Eucharist itself.

Vor Frue Kirke's exterior is not ostentatious. In the rear, its beige stone walls form a half-circle recalling familiar classical temple forms. The front entry is a stone porch supported by large columns. Above this rises a bell tower—the exterior's only infidelity to the classical style. Inside, the church is also neoclassical, but markedly more elegant. Broadly domed and full of light, the nave is flanked by a white colonnade high on either side; a series of archways separates this airy space from low-ceilinged side aisles. With its dignified oak pews, wide center aisle, and symmetrical arcades, the church bespeaks the triumph of reason and equipoise. But what arrests the spectator's gaze is Thorvaldsen's *Christus* above the altar. Calm, dignified, and gently inviting, the white marble statue stands above the words "Come to Me." This vision of the resurrected Christ is unabashedly idealized. Muscular yet gentle, stolid yet inviting, with only the faintest visible scars, it is an attempt to incarnate perfection itself. A late nineteenth-century historian described the work as "the most perfect statue of Christ in the world," and quotes Thorvaldsen as saying that the *Christus* is "the first of my works that I have ever felt satisfied with."[283] The statue has been copied around the world, and one of these reproductions has greatly surpassed the original's fame: the one that looms before a galactic backdrop in the Latter Day Saints Visitor Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. A Mormon Elder visiting Copenhagen in 1950 was apparently awestruck by the statue, and

[283] Fanny E. Coe, *Modern Europe*, The World and Its People, ed. Dunton Larkon, Book 5 (New York, Boston, and Chicago: Silver, Burdett, and Co., 1899), 125-126.

left resolved to install an enormous copy of it in Salt Lake City.[284] Thorvaldsen's statue has acquired special status in Mormonism, and reproductions of this reproduction adorn virtually all of the church's visitors centers, publications, and websites.

Thorvaldsen's *Christus* is the most dominating presence in Vor Frue Kirke, but it is part of a larger sculptural whole. Statues of Christ's twelve disciples, with Judas replaced by the apostle Paul, stand in rows between the arches on either side of the nave. (The arches were designed to house the statues, but Thorvaldsen defiantly created the figures to be too large to fit inside them.[285]) The giants of the faith tower over the congregation with dignity and calm. Some carry symbols of their authority or particular vocation—Peter a set of keys, Mathew and John their gospels, James a staff and hat. The others carry symbols of their martyrdom—Bartholomew a knife, Jude an axe, Andrew an x-shaped cross, and so forth. In a valuable study of these sculptures and their relation to Kierkegaard's work, Roger Poole highlights the incongruity between the figures' serene forms and the martyrological symbols that they hold. His basic thesis is that the statues can be interpreted as a conscious or unconscious inspiration for the new modes of indirect communication that Kierkegaard develops in his later writings.[286] Poole's analysis dovetails with my own in many ways, but I will argue that Kierkegaard is more wary of the serenity and idealism of these works than Poole assumes.

The new church building, filled with statues by Denmark's most famous living artist, set Copenhagen chattering. The most common complaint against it concerned its

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[284] Matthew O. Richardson, "The Christus Legacy." http://ldsliving.com/story/4910-the-ichristusi-legacy. Last accessed October 16, 2011.
[285] Tudvad, *Kierkegaards København*, 433.

[286] Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*, 22 and 232-261.

neoclassical style, which many felt looked more like a pagan temple than a Christian church. J. L. Heiberg, ever at the vanguard of cultural debate, acknowledged this aspect of the church in a poem:

> What kind of building is this?
> Is it a Christian church?
> When one sees the entryway, one finds the classical style.
> One does not know what the sides and the tower announce
> holy or profane.[287]

He goes on to express uncertainty not only about the style's appropriateness, but also about its coldness, an impression he finds "uncanny" [*uhyggelig*]:

> Yet step into the hall. Colossal, but abstract in its grandeur!
> All along the sides stand white figures in rows.
> What an uncanny abode, where spirit itself is petrified!
> Where the Spirit is made of stone, can the Word become bread?
> Fear I feel, but love is far off,
> No romantic spirit whispers its mystical sigh.
> The sun does not shine through colored windows, and you see
> No painted artworks, all is so white and so empty.[288]

Despite these reservations about Vor Frue Kirke's failure to stir the heart, Heiberg ultimately evaluates the new church positively. He concludes the poem by paying it the highest compliment that a Hegelian can give, saying that it embodies the spirit of the age. Reason, he writes, has transcended the unbridled emotion of Romanticism. The cool calm of the building's interior expresses "the triumph of the idea":

> See, paradise is here, but not in its playful color
> Or in emotion's power, only in its blessed tranquility.
> See, the classical style is boldly married with Romantic charm,
> The Form is Greek, but deeply marked with the Christian spirit.
> See, a genius has done—and this a genius always does—

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[287] Johann Ludvig Heiberg, "Frue Kirke" in *Poetiske Skrifter*, Volume 8 (Copenhagen: C. A. Riezels Vorlag, 1962), 164. The translations from the poem are my own, in consultation with those that George Pattison provides in *Poor Paris! Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 119.

[288] Heiberg, "Frue Kirke," 164.

> For the triumph of the idea, *the impossible*.[289]

For Heiberg, the new Vor Frue Kirke is the synthesis of reason and emotion, the classical and the Christian, triumphantly manifesting the apotheosis of spirit in plastic form.

Debate about the appropriateness of the new cathedral also took place in explicitly theological quarters. As George Pattison has shown, the new Vor Frue Kirke challenged prevailing Lutheran ideas about what a church building should be. Until the nineteenth century, Danish Lutheranism emphasized the Reformation understanding of the church as fundamentally a worshipping community rather than a physical building. It viewed grandiose buildings suspiciously, and generally kept churches locked outside of service hours, since only at these times were they seen to serve a function.[290] Pattison uncovers a variety of sermons and theological treatises from the time of Vor Frue Kirke's construction that manifest an evolving attitude toward church buildings. For example, the bishop who presided over the consecration of Vor Frue Kirke in 1829, Friedrich Münter, expressed this newly positive estimation of their value:

> The buildings that are to be the meeting-places of those who worship Him bear the stamp of their purpose in their dignity and beauty. Art can have no higher aim and no more noble use can be made of its rules and patterns, than when it brings its gift to help attune the mind to festivity and raise it above all things sensible and finite, to contemplation of the super-sensible and infinite. O, may this vaulted hall always make such an impression on those who with serious and moved hearts gather here to worship, and to find teaching, comfort and calm from religion's rich spring.[291]

Not only does the bishop describe Vor Frue Kirke as "bearing the stamp" of its divine purpose in its "dignity and beauty," but he also claims that "this vaulted hall" is capable

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[289] Heiberg, "Frue Kirke," 165.

[290] Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 110.

[291] Quoted in Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 116.

of attuning the mind "to contemplation of the super-sensible and infinite." Such a direct correlation between the aesthetics of church buildings and the worship that takes place within them is a major step beyond the older, more utilitarian Protestant view.

Jacob Peter Mynster, this bishop's successor and one of Kierkegaard's most famous interlocutors, took a more restrained, but also more Romantic, view of church architecture. Pattison shows that in his *Observations on the Doctrine of Christian Faith*, he defends the traditional Protestant view that, whatever the beauty of church walls, they "are of little worth, unless a congregation gathers within them."[292] Yet in other writings he amplifies the value that church buildings can have by describing them as places of refuge and solace from the tribulations of the world. In a prayer intended for the consecration of a new church building, he writes: "I hallow this place and separate it from the noise of the world and from all worldly affairs, that God's name may dwell in it, and that here shall be a house of God, here a foretaste of heaven."[293] Similarly, in a sermon, he describes humans' need for physical places of spiritual refuge:

> But there also come times in life when you yourself feel the need to gather your thoughts in quiet reflection, when you yourself must take hold of that in which you know others have found comfort and peace....Then God's House offers you its peaceful refuge, and the joyful and the troubled go in; go in yourself, that your heart may be warmed in gathering together with your brothers, yet without being disturbed by the world's noise.[294]

A church building in Mynster's view is a sanctuary from the burdens and trials and noise of the actual world. In this respect, its function is parallel to that of poetry and theater in Romanticism.

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[292] Quoted in Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 110.

[293] Quoted in Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 111.

[294] Quoted in Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 113.

Kierkegaard comments directly on his contemporaries' reaction to Vor Frue Kirke in only one place, an early journal entry in which he laments that the new church is treated as though it were nothing but a museum for the exhibition of Thorvaldsen's statues. He received the Eucharist in Vor Frue Kirke on August 9, 1839,[295] and then apparently ran home to scribble the following: "Do you really believe that the benediction that the pastor pronounces from the holy altar works just as powerfully on those who inquisitively walk around admiring the works of man (the statues) as it does on those who are gathered here in stillness to devote their attention to God?" He appends an asterisk to the word "inquisitively" and writes in the margin: "And this is something which often happens, particularly during the Eucharist."[296] It is not difficult to imagine Heiberg embodying such a purely aesthetic interest in the new church in Kierkegaard's mind.

Criticism of the spiritless chatter of Copenhagen's elites is a familiar theme in Kierkegaard's writings, but in Part Three of *Christian Discourses*, which immediately precedes the first set of Eucharistic discourses, he develops a more insidious critique of the reaction to Vor Frue Kirke. The opening paragraph of the discourse titled "Watch Your Step When You Enter the House of the Lord" paints a vivid portrait of this church even though it does not name it. At first, Kierkegaard seems to embrace Mynster's vision of a church building as a place of solace:

> How still, how secure everything is in God's house. To the one who enters it, it seems as if with a single step he had come to a distant place, infinitely far away from all the noise and clamor and loud talk, from the terrors of existence, from the storms of life, from scenes of dreadful events or the

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[295] Tudvad, *Kierkegaards København*, 434.

[296] *JP*, 3:3379 / *SKS*, 18:55 [EE:160]; translation modified.

> debilitating expectation of them. Wherever you look in that place, everything will make you secure and quiet. The lofty walls of the venerable building stand so firm; they watch so trustworthily over this safe refuge, under whose mighty dome you are free from every pressure. The beauty of this setting, its splendor, will make everything friendly for you, so inviting.[297]

This description of Vor Frue Kirke as a sanctuary from the "terrors of existence" is lovely. Moreover, it is important to remember that Kierkegaard's contemporaries faced more than metaphorical "noise," "clamor," "loud talk," and "dreadful events" (or at least "the debilitating expectation of them"). Kierkegaard published these lines in 1848, a year of bloody revolutions across Europe, which many in Denmark—not least Kierkegaard, the conservative royalist—feared would soon reach its shores. Kierkegaard acknowledges the comfort afforded by Vor Frue Kirke's order and tranquility, yet he goes on to describe it as the gravest of temptations. The following paragraph begins: "How quiet, how soothing—alas, and how much danger in this security!"[298]

Kierkegaard's criticism of finding rest in Vor Frue Kirke echoes his criticism of the Romantic view of the theater, which we have already encountered several times. He rejects the notion that going to church should be a means of escaping actuality, however comforting the reveries there may be. The world may seem to be full of terror, but his argument is that, from a spiritual perspective, everyday existence is not too agitated but too listless: "Ah, there is so much in the ordinary course of life that will pull a person to sleep, teach him to say 'peace and no danger.' Therefore we go to God's house to be awakened from sleep and pulled out of the spell."[299] Too often, he continues, we instead

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[297] CD, 163 / *SKS*, 10:175.

[298] *CD*, 163 / *SKS*, 10:176.

[299] *CD*, 165 / *SKS*, 10:177.

go to church "for tranquilization."[300] He insists that our goal in going to church should be the very opposite. He warns that "the one who flees here from the terror outside is making a mistake—flees to something still more terrible!"[301] Kierkegaard's language recalls Hebrews' admonition that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."[302] He goes on to make clear that the purpose of going to church is nothing less than to encounter the living Christ.

Such encounter is the one essential purpose of going to church in Kierkegaard's view. Both in this discourse and in the Eucharistic discourses that follow it, he refers to "communion" or "fellowship" [*Samfund*] with Christ as the end toward which every aspect of the church service should be directed. He makes this point clearest in the closing lines of his last Eucharistic discourse: "This is why the Supper is called a communion [*Samfund*] with him. It is not only in memory of him, it is not only as a pledge that you have communion with him, but it is the communion, this communion that you are to strive to preserve in your daily life."[303] He means "fellowship" or "communion" here in the fullest possible sense: as immediate, personal relationship, even union, with Christ. Recalling the language of Galatians 2, he describes this relationship in his first Eucharistic discourse as follows: "You are really to live in and

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[300] *CD*, 165 / *SKS*, 10:176.

[301] *CD*, 173 / *SKS*, 10:185.

[302] Hebrews 10:31.

[303] *WA*, 188 / *SKS*, 12:302; translation modified. See also *CD*, 251, 258, 260, 261 / *SKS*, 10:265, 271, 273, 274.

together with him; he is to be and become your life, so that you do not live to yourself, no longer live yourself, but Christ lives in you."[304]

Understanding Kierkegaard's treatment of communion requires attending carefully to his language. In English, to say that the purpose of Holy Communion is to find "communion" with Christ is redundant, but Kierkegaard's Danish enables him to make a subtle distinction. As I explain in this chapter's first footnote, the Danish word for what English-speaking Lutherans call "Holy Communion" is *Altergangen,* literally, "the going to the altar"; to receive it is *at gaae til Alters*, "to go the altar." Our English names the presumed *effect* of the sacrament, whereas the Danish names the outward action that anticipates or "stages" it. Kierkegaard uses the Danish idioms to insist upon a distinction between communion with the living Christ and the outward eating and drinking. Whereas the latter is visible, representable, and nameable, the former is inward, hidden, and ineffable. Communion with Christ could not be more central to his interpretation of the sacrament, yet he envisions it so robustly that no object or event could contain it. This communion is an encounter with a paradox that cannot be reduced to a static image or idea. It addresses us personally and demands a response, making aesthetic or reflective distance impossible.

The communion with Christ that Kierkegaard describes as the purpose of going to the altar parallels exactly what Johannes Climacus means by "contemporaneity" [*Samtidighed*] in *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Both *Samtidighed* and *Samfund* are immediate personal relationships that are indifferent to outer appearances. Both confront the individual with contradiction and thus require

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[304] *CD*, 261 / *SKS*, 10:274.

existential choice. Both are of ultimate importance, yet both are opaque to language, thought, and objective experience. In the same way that Johannes Climacus insists that historical contemporaneity with Christ presents no essential advantage to being spiritually contemporaneous with him through faith, so too Kierkegaard denies that merely "going to the altar" is the same as finding "communion" [*Samfund*] with Christ.

Finding communion or contemporaneity with the living Christ is the one and only purpose of "going to the altar" in Kierkegaard's view. In "Watch Your Step When You Go to the House of the Lord," his goal is to strip away all other motives for receiving the Eucharist. He describes Part Three of *Christian Discourses* in his journal as a "temple cleansing celebration" to prepare for that "quietest and most intimate of all worship services—the Eucharist on Fridays."[305] The moneychangers that he tries to cleanse from Vor Frue Kirke are those peddling a one-sided, graspable Christ. Arguing that we meet Christ only ever as contradiction, he insists that the words "Come to Me," emblazoned above the altar in Vor Frue Kirke, should be interpreted as both the most rigorous of demands and the most gracious of invitations. Meeting Christ requires becoming conscious of one's sin in order to relate to him as one's Savior. Christian preaching must thus constantly express the doubleness of Christ's being and of the Christian message in general. Any sermon that allows one or the other to gain the upper hand counsels either delusion or despair:

> The discourse is indeed false that continually, and never in any other way than invitingly, enticingly, attractively, wants to speak about the visit to God's house, because seen from the other side, it is terrifying. But that discourse is also false that finally ends by frightening people away from coming to the house of the Lord, because from the other side it is blessed; one day in God's house is better than a thousand anywhere else. This is why it is

[305] *JP*, 5:6121 / *SKS*, 20:336.

> a difficult matter to steer rightly, and this is why a person very seldom succeeds in doing it, and always in frailty. It is easy to win people by enticing; it is also easy to frighten them away by repelling. But, if possible, with a fervent inwardness that no one could resist, to invite them to come, and in addition with a terror that could teach even the bravest to shudder, to cry out, 'Take care!'—indeed, that is difficult.[306]

The preaching appropriate for those seeking communion with Christ is that which simultaneously entices and repulses, comforts and terrifies. Kierkegaard acknowledges that to invite irresistibly by crying out "take care!" is "a difficult matter to steer rightly." This is, of course, a colossal understatement. Kierkegaard certainly believes that many preachers and perhaps church architects could do a better job of expressing Christianity's dialectical tension, but in the end, the constant expression of paradox that he requires is an impossibility for even the most gifted rhetorician or artist. Going to the altar is about meeting Christ immediately present there, but neither Thorvaldsen's *Christus* nor Kierkegaard's own sermons nor any other human representation can make this happen. Contemporaneity with Christ forever escapes the approximations and accidents of our finite means.

Thus, even though this discourse offers a certain amount of practical advice regarding homiletics and church design, its central point is more personal and existential: "Watch Your Step When You Go to the House of the Lord"! Addressing any and all who would enter a church, Kierkegaard describes how they should relate to the aesthetics of the space, particularly the representations of Christ, so that they do not "tranquilize" but "awaken." His vision of what it would mean to encounter Christ is anything but soothing. Consider this description of what it would mean to "call him forth":

> The figure of him, our Lord Jesus Christ, must be called forth, not in such a way as the artist finds time and takes his time to portray it, not in such a way

[306] *CD*, 175 / *SKS*, 10:186.

> that it is taken out of the environment of horror and set forth as an object for tranquil contemplation. No, he must be brought to mind at the moment of danger and horror, when the tranquil spectator would rather stay at home, since it would have aroused suspicion if anyone had looked worshipfully or merely lovingly at him, when there was nothing to see except this "See what a man," when there was not even time to look at him because the horror averted one's eyes and fastened them fixedly on oneself. Moreover, Christ's suffering is not to be brought to mind as a past event—oh, save your sympathy! No, when this horror is portrayed, it is something present, and you are present, and I, at something present, and as—accomplices in guilt![307]

Kierkegaard announces the inevitable failure of all aesthetic representations of Christ in no uncertain terms. He insists that his living presence belongs to a fundamentally different order from that of "tranquil contemplation." Indeed, in Kierkegaard's analysis, there is "not even time to look at [Christ]" because to see him is to be forced to interrogate oneself. Yet if this passage contains an implicit critique of Thorvaldsen's *Christus*, it is not suggesting that even the most gruesome southern Italian crucifix could achieve the goal of calling Christ forth. Nothing objective, visible, or graspable—from statues to preaching to bread and wine—can in itself render the living Christ present. Communion with him is a personal relationship that eludes all objectivity. "See what a man"—looking at Christ must implicate *me*, so that I see him at once as my innocent victim and my savior.

On a purely formal level, one could thus say that Kierkegaard locates encounter with Christ not in objective presentations of him, but in subjective relations to him. But do human subjects have any more power to achieve communion with Christ than a sculptor does to incarnate him? Is Kierkegaard's vision of communion as contemporaneity even comprehensible, much less achievable? Given the terror and guilt that belong to this communion, who in their right mind would *want* to find it? The

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[307] *CD*, 173-174 / *SKS*, 10:185.

Eucharistic discourses to which we now turn are oriented entirely toward this communion, but they do not pretend to talk about it directly. Instead, they locate themselves in the midst of the Friday Eucharistic service, as brief "pauses" on the way to the altar. They do not claim to make Christ present in this interstitial space. Rather, they instruct the listener again and again to *look* at the admittedly inadequate images of him within it. They acknowledge that the command *Ecce homo!* is an impossible injunction, but they point again and again to Thorvaldsen's statue: "See, he stretches out his arms";[308] "He opens his arms to all, you see it on him";[309] "Behold, everything has become new....At the altar, the Savior opens his arms."[310] Kierkegaard wants his listeners to gaze at Thorvaldsen's statue, as he wants them to enter Vor Frue Kirke's peaceful sanctuary and to attend to his words there. But he does not want them to see the statue or any of the other aesthetic appearances as "perfect" or "satisfying" ends in themselves. He wants his listeners to look beyond them in desire.

II. Staging Communion

Let us now turn to Kierkegaard's Eucharistic discourses themselves. How do these sermons seek to prepare their listeners for communion with Christ, even as they recognize that they are powerless to produce it? In the remainder of this chapter, I will study the first three of these sermons. Discourses Two and Three meditate on classic themes in Lutheran sacramental theology: the dialectic of sin and forgiveness and the

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[308] *CD*, 266 / *SKS*, 10:282.

[309] *CD*, 288 / *SKS*, 10:308.

[310] *WA*, 184 / *SKS*, 12:298.

modality of Christ's presence in the meal. But Discourse One, which is dedicated to the very un-Lutheran theme of longing, reframes these themes in a radically new light.

A. Longing and Intensified Longing

> "I have longed with all my heart to [*epithumia epethumēsa*; *haver hierteligen længtes efter*] eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15).[311]

Kierkegaard takes these words from Luke's account of the Last Supper as the text for his first Eucharistic discourse. They are words that we frequently gloss over in our rush to the more familiar Words of Institution. They certainly do not figure prominently in many Eucharistic theologies. Yet Kierkegaard frames the entire sermon around the Savior's longing to share this meal with his disciples—and the reciprocal longing that his contemporary disciples should bring to the Lord's table. "Is it not true that heartfelt longing belongs essentially to the Supper?" he asks near the beginning of the discourse.[312] He describes Luke's words as "the introductory words to the institution of the Supper's Holy Meal," which provide "for every single individual the true devout introduction or entrance: to come with heartfelt longing."[313] Cappelørn has argued that Kierkegaard places this sermon first in his collection of Eucharistic Discourses—even though the two that follow it are the ones that he actually delivered—because he means for it to be "the portal to the entire collection" of Eucharistic discourses, describing the "fundamental religious feeling" that Kierkegaard associates with the Lord's Supper.[314] Longing is the

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[311] *CD*, 251 / *SKS*, 10:265. When I quote Kierkegaard's biblical texts, I use the Hongs' translation of his Danish citations. When necessary, I cite the original Greek and/or the words of the 1819 Danish translation of the Bible that Kierkegaard used.

[312] *CD*, 252; *SKS*, 10:266; translation modified.

[313] *CD*, 252; *SKS*, 10:266; translation modified.

lens, I will suggest here, through which he means for us to interpret even the most traditional themes of forgiveness and sacramental presence.

Kierkegaard begins this sermon by telling his imagined listeners that they find themselves in Vor Frue Kirke that morning because "you felt the longing to go to the altar [i.e., to receive the Eucharist], the heartfelt longing with which you came here today."[315] He writes that this desire is by nature ungraspable and elusive. He has no interest in developing an abstract theory of it, for his purpose is to encourage the listener to seize hold of longing and "use" it, as a means of drawing closer to God. He writes: "The wind blows where it will; you are aware of its whispering, but no one knows whence it comes or whither it goes. So also with longing, the longing for God and the eternal, the longing for our Savior and Redeemer. Comprehend it you cannot, nor should you; indeed, you dare not even want to attempt it—but you are to use the longing."[316] This refusal to produce a speculative theory of desire distinguishes Kierkegaard sharply from Nygren, who delights in taxonomies of it. Moreover, the practical "use" that Kierkegaard counsels his reader to make of desire contradicts Nygren's theory even more flagrantly. Following a tradition in Lutheran theology stretching back to Luther himself, Nygren aligns human longing with futile striving and works righteousness. Kierkegaard, however, describes it as a gift from God, part of the workings of grace. As he writes in his opening prayer, "Father in heaven, longing is your gift; no one can give it to himself;

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[314] Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "Longing for Reconciliation with God: A Fundamental Theme in 'Friday Communion Discourses,' Fourth Part of *Christian Discourses*," trans. K. Brian Søderquist, in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2007*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, K. Brian Søderquist (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 318-319.

[315] *CD*, 253 / *SKS*, 10:267; translation modified.

[316] *CD*, 253 / *SKS*, 10:267; translation modified.

if it is not given, no one can purchase it, even if he were to sell everything."[317] Later on, he asserts that "every prompting of the spirit, every pull of the soul, every fervent stirring of the heart, every holy state of mind, every devout longing" is a gift from God "in a far deeper sense than food and clothing, not only because it is God who gives them but because God gives himself in these gifts!"[318] The assertion that spiritual desire is a gift of grace is radical enough in a Lutheran context—subverting Nygren's entire architecture of binary oppositions. But the statement that "God gives himself" in desire is more radical still. Kierkegaard does not elaborate on this enigmatic phrase here, but what he means becomes clearer at the end of the discourse.

In the first section of this sermon, Kierkegaard's exhortation to his listeners is to use the spiritual longing that they feel, however mysterious or even dangerous it may seem. On the most basic level, "using" longing means refusing to repress or ignore it, even though this is often the more prudent course in the midst of the world's pressures. In the opening prayer, he asks:

> When longing grasps hold of us, oh, that we may also grasp hold of the longing; when it wants to carry us away, that we may also surrender ourselves; when you are close to us in the call, that we might also keep close to you in our calling to you; when in the longing you offer us the highest, that we may purchase its opportune moment, hold it fast, sanctify it in the quiet hours by earnest thoughts, by devout resolves, so that it might become the strong but also the well-tested, heartfelt longing that is required of those who worthily want to partake of the Supper's holy meal.[319]

Appropriately using longing means allowing it to grow. Even as Kierkegaard insists that desire is a gift of grace, he calls upon his listener to cooperate in cultivating it: "Just as

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[317] *CD*, 251 / *SKS*, 10:265.

[318] *CD*, 253 / *SKS*, 10:267.

[319] *CD*, 251 / *SKS*, 10:265; translation modified.

longing has torn me away from what so easily entangles one in a spell, so by earnest thoughts will I also cooperate so that I may tear myself completely away from what still might hold me back. By holy resolutions I will strive to hold myself fast in what the earnest thoughts make me understand."[320] Kierkegaard believes that Christians are called to imitate not only Christ's outward mode of life but also his inward longing to share the Eucharistic meal.

The sermon goes on to outline a kind of contemplative exercise for the cultivation of longing for God. The first step that Kierkegaard models in this exercise is to call to mind the transience and suffering of finite existence, so as to stir a craving for something beyond it. He describes this process as follows:

> So I will call to mind how uncertain everything is, that a person is thrown out at birth into the world and from that moment lies out upon the depths of thousands of fathoms....I will remind myself that never has anyone been so fortunate that he could not become unfortunate, and never anyone so unfortunate that he could not become more unfortunate! I will remind myself that even if I should succeed in having all my desires [*Ønsker*] fulfilled, in having them erected in one building—that still no one, no one, will be able to guarantee to me that the whole building will not at the very same moment collapse upon me.[321]

He continues in this vein for pages. Using specific examples, he highlights the cruel uncertainties of life to such an extent that he can give the impression of wanting to produce despair. Again and again, he returns to our myriad finite desires and the way in which even their satisfaction can lead to despondency rather than bliss. Giving credence to the textbooks' description of him as the "first existentialist," he writes that death is life's only certainty, and that all human beings are essentially alone.

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[320] *CD*, 254 / *SKS*, 10:268.

[321] *CD*, 255-256 / *SKS*, 10:269; translation modified.

The next step in the "contemplative exercise" that he models is to recognize that such sober awareness of human finitude is in itself a longing for communion [*Samfund*] with God. Kierkegaard describes the emergence of this longing as follows: "The more you surrendered to these thoughts, the more the longing for the eternal conquered in you, the longing for communion [*Samfundet*] with God through your Redeemer, and you said: I long with all my heart for this supper. Oh, there is indeed, only one friend, one trustworthy friend in heaven and on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ."[322] The longing that Kierkegaard elicits points ineluctably to our need for a Savior. At first glance, the trajectory of this meditation can seem commonplace: ponder all of life's problems so that you turn to Jesus. What makes the exercise original is the nature of the communion with Christ that is its object. The "cure," at first glance, seems even worse than the "disease."

Kierkegaard continues the exercise, not by trumpeting the comforts and satisfactions of turning to Christ, but by renewing his cultivation of longing. He encourages the reader to continue the imaginative work of calling to mind the suffering and injustice of the world. "I will remind myself what I have heard about all atrocities people have committed against people, enemy against enemy, alas, and friend against friend, about the violence and murder and bloodthirstiness and bestial cruelty, about all the innocently and yet so cruelly shed blood that cries to high heaven."[323] This evocation of innocent suffering is ultimately oriented toward Christ, the supreme victim among the world's horrors. Kierkegaard asks his reader to imagine themselves as his contemporaries. The images he conjures are far from pleasant: "I will bear in mind how

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[322] *CD*, 257-258 / *SKS*, 10:271.

[323] *CD*, 258 / *SKS*, 10:272.

he was mocked, and how everyone was received with great applause when he could think up a new insult, how there was no longer any mention, to say nothing of thought, of his innocence, of his holiness, how the only mitigating words that were spoken were the commiserating words: See what a man!"[324] He crescendos in this *ecce homo* vein, imagining contemporaneity with Christ more and more personally: "Suppose that I had lived at the time of that dreadful episode, suppose I had been present in 'the crowd' that insulted him and spat upon him!....I certainly would have taken part in the mockery—in order to save my life I would have screamed with the others, 'His blood be on me.'"[325] Kierkegaard is putting into practice the vision of communion as contemporaneity that he outlined more theoretically in Part Three.

It is important to recognize, however, that when Kierkegaard speaks in this first person way, he is not by any means claiming to have succeeded in actually making himself contemporaneous with Christ through his imaginative powers. Nor is he expecting that his sermon will have the power to transfer such contemporaneity directly to those who read it. What he does hope is that these efforts to imagine contemporaneity, even though they ultimately fail, will incite renewed longing for communion with the Savior. He thus concludes the contemplative exercise with a second description of this longing, which uses many of the same words as the first one: "This is how you talked with yourself. And the more you surrendered to these thoughts, the more the longing for communion with him, the Holy One, conquered in you, and you said to yourself: I long with all my heart for this supper; I long for communion with him, away from this evil

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[324] *CD*, 259 / *SKS*, 10:272.

[325] *CD*, 259-260 / *SKS*, 10:273.

world where sin prevails!"[326] Seen as a whole, the meditation thus follows a counter-intuitive course. First, Kierkegaard incites longing for the Savior by calling to mind the vicissitudes of existence. He then encourages his readers to meditate on the Savior, but in such a way that the meditation only intensifies the longing.

The purpose of Kierkegaard's contemplative exercise is to elicit a longing whose phenomenology is different from any finite economy of lack, attainment, and satisfaction. This longing is like the "metaphysical" desire that Emmanuel Levinas describes, in which "the desired does not fulfill the desire, but deepens it."[327] Kierkegaard signals that the longing for Christ functions this way in the sermon's opening prayer. He writes: "We pray that those who are gathered here today may come to the Lord's table with heartfelt longing, and that when they leave it they may go with intensified longing for him, our Savior and Redeemer."[328] He concludes the sermon with a paragraph that highlights the uniqueness of the longing for the Savior by contrasting it with a finite, yet nonetheless heartfelt, longing for a deceased friend. He draws out this contrast in detail:

> I long with all my heart for this supper, for this supper that is in his remembrance. But when someone has participated with heartfelt longing in the Lord's Supper, is the longing then stilled, does the longing diminish as he departs from it? See, if someone dear to you has died, it will certainly happen that again and again the longing to remember him will awaken in you. Then you perhaps go to his grave; and just as he now lies sunk in the bosom of the earth, so you sink your soul into the recollection of him. The longing is thereby somewhat satisfied. Life once again exercises its power over you; and even if you faithfully continue to recall the departed one and often long for him, it still cannot mean that you should live more and more apart from life in order to live in the grave with the departed one, so that the longing for him would intensify each time you visited his grave. Surely you yourself

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[326] *CD*, 260 / *SKS*, 10:273.

[327] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphoso Lingus (Pittsburg: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 33.

[328] *CD*, 251 / *SKS*, 10:265.

> would admit that if this happened to a person, there still would be, however much we honor his loyalty to the dead, something morbid in his sorrow [*Sorg*]. No, you understand that your paths are essentially separated, that you belong to life and to the claims life has upon you; you understand that longing should not increase with the years so that you more and more become a co-tenant of the grave. Oh, but the longing for communion [*Samfundet*] with your Savior and Redeemer should increase every time you remember him. He is not one who is dead and departed but one who is living. Indeed, you are really to live in and together with him; he is to be and become your life, so that you do not live to yourself, no longer live yourself, but Christ lives in you. Therefore, just as heartfelt longing belongs to worthy remembrance, so in turn it belongs to heartfelt longing that the longing is increased through remembrance, so only that one went worthily to the Lord's table who went there with heartfelt longing and went from there with increased heartfelt longing.[329]

Unlike all earthly desire, even the most ardent longing to reunite with a deceased loved one, the desire for communion with Christ does not dissipate as Christ becomes more present to us. If a finite grief grew stronger with the passage of time, there would be "something morbid" about it. But the desire for Christ has a different phenomenology. In the first place, recollection of Christ is not accessible and graspable in the way that the memory of a deceased friend is. We may be able truly to "sink [our] soul into the recollection" of a human friend, but Christ's nature resists being summoned in a single image or idea. Divine and human, savior and victim, he eludes comprehension even in death. Moreover, in the second place, the desire for Christ is a desire for "one who is living." Kierkegaard writes that to desire communion with him is to desire to share his life: "You are really to live in and together with him; he is to be and become your life, so that you do not live to yourself, no longer live yourself, but Christ lives in you." This vision of communion almost takes the form of mystical union; it is anything but a static state suddenly achieved. It does not happen through aesthetic appreciation or knowledge

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[329] *CD*, 261 / *SKS*, 10:274-275; translation modified.

or reflection, for these are modes of relating to a thing rather than to a person. We meet Christ, Kierkegaard suggests, in our very longing for him.

Kierkegaard returns to the theme that "God gives himself" in the gift of longing near the end of this sermon. Comparing the longing that he hopes to have elicited to the "godly sorrow" that will be the central theme of Discourse Two, he makes a claim that is as provocative as it is brief: "In the longing itself the eternal *is*, just as God *is* in the sorrowing [*Sorg*] that is *after* [*efter*] him."[330] God *is* in the longing that is for him. This statement makes plain the misguidedness of seeking God as an object—whether a metaphysical idea, a statue, or a piece of bread. God *is not* in this way. We find God instead in the dynamism of desire—in our experience of a longing that admits of no satisfaction or end.

B. Sorrowing over Sin, Sorrowing after God

After Discourse One's meditation on longing, Discourse Two turns to the most traditional of themes in Lutheran sacramental theology, sin and forgiveness. The centrality of this dialectic in Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper is apparent in his explanation of its benefits in his *Small Catechism*:

> *What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?*
>
> The words, "Given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.[331]

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[330] *CD*, 260 / *SKS*, 10:273.

[331] *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Second Edition, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 328.

For Luther and most of the subsequent Lutheran tradition, forgiveness of sins is the primary and essential benefit offered in the Lord's Supper. It is the one from which all others flow, for "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." As we have already seen, Kierkegaard by no means minimizes these themes. But he transforms them by framing them within the larger context of infinite longing. By doing this, does he imply that the desire for forgiveness and reconciliation can never be satisfied? Does his insistence that the longing for Christ should become more and more intense amount to a cruel counsel of despair?

Although a superficial reading of Discourse One might suggest that the answer to these questions is Yes, Discourse Two affirms the forgiveness of sins in resounding, unambiguous terms. The sermon centers around the biblical text that Thorvaldsen's statue is meant to illustrate: "Come here to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).[332] Kierkegaard interprets the language of "laboring" and being "burdened" as describing repentant sorrow over one's sin, and he assures the anguished listener again and again that that Christ offers rest. How does this assurance relate to Discourse One's description of infinite longing?

Whereas the central theme of Discourse One is *Længsel* [longing], the central theme of Discourse Two is *Sorg* [sorrow]. Unfortunately, it is difficult to perceive this major terminological shift in the Hong translations, since they render both words indiscriminately as "longing." In a note, the Hongs explain that they are "synonymous."[333] While they are right to see both terms as forms of desire, they obscure

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[332] *CD*, 262 / *SKS*, 10:279.

[333] *CD*, 452n.27.

the distinguishing characteristics of each of these forms by equating them. Kierkegaard uses *Sorg* to name a desire specific to the context of sin and forgiveness, whereas he uses *Længsel* to speak more generically of the human longing for the divine. Although one would not realize this based on the Hong translation, the word *Længsel* never appears in Discourse Two, despite its prominence in Discourse One.[334] Moreover, in Discourse One, the word *Sorg* is used only once in the context of desire for God—in the sentence I cited at the end of the last section, where Kierkegaard suggests that *Sorg* is parallel, but not identical, to *Længsel*.[335]

As Cappelørn has shown, Kierkegaard uses the language of *Sorg efter* to evoke a specific biblical passage: Paul's reference to "godly grief" in II Corinthians 7.[336] In a now-lost "stern letter" written between the letters I and II Corinthians, Paul apparently reprimanded the Corinthians for their moral failings. Then, in II Corinthians, he writes that he is proud of the "godly grief" that his words stirred in them:

> Even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief [*elupēthēte gar kata theon*; *bleve bedrøvede efter Gud*], so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.[337]

"Godly grief" here is a kind of longing or desire: to acknowledge one's errors, change one's ways, and find forgiveness. Kierkegaard views such "sorrow" as vital to meeting

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[334] Kierkegaard does use the verb *at længes* once in the second discourse, but this is in an earthly context: "the weary old man longs for [*længes efter*] rest" (*CD*, 265 / *SKS*, 10:281).

[335] Kierkegaard also uses *Sorg* in a more ordinary sense in Discourse One to describe longing for a deceased friend. He distinguishes such finite sorrow, which diminishes with the passage of time, from infinite longing for Christ, which grows more intense (*CD*, 261 / *SKS*, 10:274).

[336] Cappelørn, "Longing for Reconciliation with God," 329-330.

[337] II Corinthians 7:8-10 in the NRSV.

Christ at the altar. Because Christ is present always as paradox, Kierkegaard hears the words "Come to me" not only as an invitation but also as a requirement. Accepting the invitation, he maintains, requires acknowledging how far short of the requirement one falls. Kierkegaard emphasizes both aspects of meeting Christ in the following passage. Here, he explicitly treats sorrow over sin as a kind of desire, and promises its satisfaction through Christ:

> The invitation, then, does not wish to be taken in vain in a worldly way. Therefore it contains a *requirement*; it requires that the invited person labor and be burdened in the more profound sense. There is a sorrowing after [*Sorg efter*] God; it pertains to nothing earthly and temporal, not to your external conditions, not to your future; it is after God. The person who is carrying this sorrow silently, humbly in his heart—that person is laboring. And there is a heavy burden; no worldly power can lay it on your shoulders, but neither can any human being take it away any more than you can—it is guilt and the consciousness of guilt, or even heavier, sin and the consciousness of sin. The one who bears this burden—alas, yes, he is burdened, extremely burdened, but yet he is also burdened in the very way the Gospel's invitation requires it....But just as the Gospel through its invitation requires, *so also does it declare the promise: 'I will give you rest for your soul*.' Rest! This is what the exhausted laborer, the fatigued traveler, desires [*ønsker*]; and the old sailor who is tossed about on the sea seeks rest; and the weary old man longs for [*længes efter*] rest; and the sick one who lies restless on his bed and does not find an alleviating position craves [*begjerer*] rest; and the doubter who does not find a foothold in the ocean of thoughts craves [*begjerer*] rest. Ah, but only the penitent properly understands what it is to pray for rest for the soul, rest in the one and only thought in which there is rest for a penitent, that there is forgiveness; rest in the one and only declaration that can reassure a penitent, that he is forgiven; rest on the one and only ground that can support a penitent, that atonement has been made.[338]

To the penitent's craving for forgiveness—a desire more ardent than even the most acute worldly desires—Kierkegaard promises rest through Christ: "atonement has been made," "there is forgiveness." But is the satisfaction of *this* desire a renunciation of the never-ending intensification of the longing described in Discourse One?

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[338] *CD*, 264 / *SKS*, 10:281; translation modified.

Why the answer to this question is No can be seen from two complementary perspectives. In the first place, one should interpret godly sorrow and its satisfaction in Discourse Two as initial steps in a larger, indeed never-ending, process—longing's journey toward God. From this perspective, Kierkegaard affirms the rest afforded by the forgiveness of sins, but he views it as a beginning rather than an end. All too often, Lutheranism has presented the cancelation of one's debts to God—or in forensic language, the declaration of one's innocence before God—as the ultimate goal of the Christian life. Such a view, I would suggest, is a major source of the complacency that Kierkegaard criticizes in Danish Lutheranism. What do Christians have to strive for if finding forgiveness is their ultimate telos and the entire forgiveness of all their sins is announced every Sunday? Without disparaging the importance of penitence and forgiveness, Kierkegaard suggests that God's fundamental concern is neither accounting nor forensics, but genuine communion with human beings. In his article on the role of longing in Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Lord's Supper, Niels Jørgen Cappelørn emphasizes sin and forgiveness as objects of longing, yet adds the following "essential supplement" to his "hamartiological" interpretation of it:

> In addition to a hamartiologically determined longing, there is also a longing determined by the doctrine of creation. This has its source in the fact that human beings, created in God's image, have the eternal within them. This eternity has been attacked by sin, and yet it has not been completely eradicated, but continues to express itself in human beings' fundamental longing, a longing for the eternal and for God.
>
> ....As *source*, the inward longing for God is an internal, perhaps dormant, perhaps wakened, perhaps even passionately burning but unquenchable craving in human beings that prompts them to seek out and toward God. It is...the instinct for God which, as a remnant of the divine image, has become *active* in the divinely created person after the fall. As *manifestation*, the inward longing for God is a need for atonement, an urge to be freed from the bonds of sin, and a desire to be reunited with and bound to God. When this desire is met by Christ's atoning satisfaction, it redeems not just from sin, death, and temporality, but also completely redeems the longing

> for God and leads 'reconcilingly' back to God and 'reunitingly' forth to God.[339]

By locating the longing for communion with God in the doctrine of creation as well as the doctrine of sin, Cappelørn envisions the sacrament as oriented not only to reconciliation but also to reunification with God. He presents Kierkegaard's Eucharistic theology within an Irenaean[340] framework that implies that the reconciliation offered in the forgiveness of sins is the beginning of a lifelong movement toward communion with God. Seen from this perspective, Kierkegaard's affinities with Schleiermacher, as well as his deep mystical sensibilities, become clear.

But one could also interpret the relationship between *Sorg* and *Længsel* through a more traditionally Lutheran lens. Perhaps the forgiveness of sins that Kierkegaard affirms is less a preliminary station in longing's journey toward communion than the very engine by which longing is generated. In this way of interpreting what Kierkegaard is saying, forgiveness fires heartfelt longing by constituting each individual as an unresolved dichotomy: a forgiven saint, yet a continuing sinner. Such an interpretation recalls Luther's description of the forgiven Christian as *simul iustus et peccator*, "simultaneously saint and sinner." Triumphalistic forms of Lutheranism always emphasize the former over the latter, but Kierkegaard encourages the Christian to inhabit the paradoxical tension between the two states. He assures penitents of the forgiveness of sin, but he does not see this satisfaction as a negation of finitude and fallenness. Rather, forgiveness as he envisions it catches the penitent up into the very dialectical

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[339] Cappelørn, "Longing for Reconciliation with God," 333.

[340] Cappelørn makes a compelling argument that Kierkegaard's understanding of creation and the fall is Iranaean in character in his article "Gudbilledlighed og Syndefald: Aspekter af Grundvigs og Kierkegaards Menneskesyn på Baggrund af Irenæus" in *Grundtvig-Studier* 55 (2004): 134-178.

contradictoriness of Christ and the Christian message. The pathos of inhabiting this paradox takes the form of ever-greater longing for communion with God.

C. "Where He Is, There Is the Altar"

Just as a superficial reading of Kierkegaard's Eucharistic discourses could lead one to believe that his emphasis on infinite longing is a denial of the forgiveness of sins, so too it could lead one to assume that it is a denial of Christ's real presence in the meal. After all, how can the true presence of Christ not satisfy even our most ardent desire for communion with him? In Discourse Three, Kierkegaard affirms in no uncertain terms that Christ "is himself personally present" in the Eucharist.[341] At the same time, however, he refuses to engage in the traditional theological debates about the modality of this presence. Indeed, what he means by "presence" disrupts all static and objective conceptions of the word. Paradoxical as the incarnation itself, Christ's presence in the meal is, in Kierkegaard's analysis, essentially un-presentable. Without in any way diminishing its reality, he denies that it is accessible to objective observation or reflection. Although it can be tempting to interpret Kierkegaard's view of the Eucharist along Zwinglian lines as "merely symbolic," it is better read it in the context of Luther's *pro me* sacramental theology. Luther famously resists developing abstract theories of Christ's presence—whether the metaphysics of transubstantiation or the semiotics of symbolism. Yet his affirmation of Christ's presence "in, with, and under," the bread and wine is as full-throated as it is unexplained. What matters for Luther is to cling to Christ's promise to be present "for you" in the bread and wine, rather than to give an

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[341] *CD*, 272 / *SKS*, 10:290.

abstract account of sacramental presence in general.[342] In 1847, Kierkegaard writes in his journal that he had "never really read anything by Luther" but reports delight to have discovered that "the category 'for you' (subjectivity, inwardness)...is Luther's own."[343] This discovery prompted him to undertake a regular devotional reading of Luther's sermons.[344]

Kierkegaard begins Discourse Three by focusing not on the perennially disputed question of the modality of Christ's presence, but on the much less discussed issue of how Christians should present themselves at the altar. Characteristically, he emphasizes the inward earnestness required of each individual who would receive the sacrament. He begins by praising the Friday Eucharist service as uniquely suited to cultivating such subjectivity. On a Friday, he writes, no one is compelled to attend church by obligation or custom; each attends solely because of inward desire. This stirring, like all subjective realities in Kierkegaard's view, is essentially hidden. He says that when you see someone walking down the street on a Sunday morning, you instinctively assume that he or she is going to church, since that is what one is expected to do on a Sunday morning. On a Friday, however, walking down the street implies no such thing. Each individual

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[342] A particularly vivid expression of this *pro me* interpretation of Christ's presence can be found in Luther's treatise against Zwingli "That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body,' etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics" in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 67-68. Luther refutes Zwingli's claim that Christ's body cannot be literally present in the Eucharist because it is seated at the right hand of the Father with the seemingly absurd assertion that Christ's body is ubiquitous because it is divine. However, Luther immediately insists that he has no interest in such a theory for its own sake: "Even if Christ's body is everywhere, you do not therefore immediately eat or drink or touch him....It is one thing if God is present, and another if he is present for you. He is there for you when he adds his Word and binds himself, saying, 'Here you are to find me'" (68).

[343] *JP*, 3:2463 / *SKS*, 20:274 [NB3:61].

[344] *JP*, 3:2465 and note 206 / *SKS*, 20:357 [NB4:153].

goes to the altar "secretly, as a stranger, in the midst of all those many people."[345] Only by presenting oneself earnestly and unmasked at the altar is one prepared to meet the living Christ. Such spiritual transparency can only happen in hiddenness; no external observer can judge whether it takes place. In fact, given Kierkegaard's frequent uses of pseudonymity and masks, one might ask whether such self-transparency is almost as elusive an object of desire as Christ himself.

How can Kierkegaard write about Christ's presence at all if it can never become an object? His sermon centers around a text that is not frequently associated with the Lord's Supper: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).[346] What Kierkegaard likes about this passage is that it depicts communion not as a static event, but a dynamic movement of encounter and relation stretched over three distinct moments: hearing Christ's voice, being known by him, and following him outside the church walls. Kierkegaard affirms the reality of Christ's presence in each of these moments, yet the radical nature of this affirmation imposes an iconoclastic tone on his treatment of them. Each is beyond representation; none admits of being "experienced" in the ordinary objective sense.

In the first stage of this movement, "my sheep hear my voice," Kierkegaard describes Christ as manifesting his living presence through personal address. He writes that just as the Christian must approach the altar as a single individual, Christ is present there by addressing each one individually. In this personal encounter, Kierkegaard claims, there is no external mediation. The most pious human words, even those of the pastor at the altar, are not the voice of the living Christ. In a passage that I have already

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[345] *CD*, 269-270 / *SKS*, 10:289.

[346] *CD*, 269 / *SKS*, 10:288.

quoted in part, Kierkegaard describes how this direct address is different from human preaching:

> Today it is very particularly, is simply and solely *his* voice that is to be heard. Everything otherwise done here is only for the purpose of concentrating the attention of the mind on this, that it is *his* voice to be heard. Today no sermon is preached. A confessional address is not a sermon; it does not want to instruct you or impress upon you the old familiar doctrines: it only wants to have you pause on the way to the altar so that through the speaker's voice you yourself confess privately and secretly before God. From a confessional address you are not to learn what it means to confess; it would also be too late; but through it you make your confession before God. What we say here in the prescribed brief moment [i.e., in this Eucharistic discourse] is, again, no sermon, and when we have said Amen, the divine service is not as usual essentially over, but then the essential begins. Our address therefore only wants to have you pause for a moment on the way to the altar, because today the divine service does not as usual center on the pulpit but on the altar. And at the altar the point above all is to hear *his* voice. Certainly a sermon should also bear witness to him, proclaim his word and his teaching, but a sermon is still not *his* voice. At the altar, however, it is *his* voice you are to hear. If another human being said to you what is said at the altar, if all people would join together in saying it to you—if you do not hear *his* voice, then you would go to the altar in vain.[347]

Kierkegaard asserts in this passage that neither a confession discourse nor a Eucharistic discourse communicates Christ's personal relationship to his followers in the sacrament. Both of these human modes of address have the same modest goal: to encourage the listener to "pause for a moment on the way to the altar" in preparation for a far greater, essentially non-textual, address. This unrepresentable event is the very centerpiece of sacrament, for if you "do not hear *his* voice, then you would receive the Eucharist in vain." Kierkegaard continues in the passage to underscore both the centrality of Christ's voice to the sacrament and its foreignness to the order of objective experience:

> When there at the altar every word by the Lord's servant is said accurately as handed down from the fathers, when you listen accurately to every word so that not the least escapes you, not one jot or tittle—if you do not hear *his* voice, hear that it is he who is saying it, then you would go to the altar in

[347] *CD*, 270-271 / *SKS*, 10:289-290; translation modified.

> vain. If you, believing, appropriate every word that is said, if you earnestly decide to take it to heart and to order your life in accord with it—if you do not hear *his* voice, then you would go to the altar in vain. It must be *his* voice you hear when he says: Come here, all you who labor and are burdened—therefore his voice that invites you. And it must be his voice you hear when he says: This is my body. At the altar there is no speaking about him; there it is he who is speaking—if not, then you are not at the altar.[348]

Even the most pious and proper externals—from doctrine, to liturgy, to belief itself—fall away as inessential to the sacrament's heart, which is being directly addressed by Christ. But what *does* it mean to "hear his voice"? It is tempting to interpret Kierkegaard as promulgating a new theory of Christ's sacramental presence centered around the spoken word: Christ presented "acoustically," rather than "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. Yet such an interpretation would miss the way in which Kierkegaard is exploding the very category of presence. He does not believe that we encounter Christ's presence any more through our ears than we do through our eyes or our reason. We do not meet him as we meet worldly objects: through a distinction between the knowing subject and the object known. We meet Christ by collapsing this distance, and living in relationship with him through longing. As the Luke text of Discourse One should remind us, Christ addresses us in desire before we can even begin to desire communion with him.

In this relationship, Christ "knows his own" as they truly are. This second moment in Kierkegaard's text enables him to flesh out further what Christ's presence means. He explains how Christ "knows" his followers as follows:

> [Christ] is himself personally present, and he knows those who are his own. He knows you, whoever you are, known by many or unknown by all; if you are his own, he knows you. Oh, what earnestness of eternity to be known by him. Oh, what blessed comfort to be known by him. Yes, even if you fled to the uttermost parts of the world, he knows you; even if you hid in the bottomless pit, he knows you—but there is no reason to flee, no reason to

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[348] *CD*, 271 / *SKS*, 10:290; translation modified.

> seek a hiding place, because the blessedness is precisely this, that he knows you. Yet no third party can know whether he knows you; this you must know with him and with yourself—but if he does not know you, then neither are you his own.[349]

To be in relationship with Christ is to be known by him, not as one appears to the world in one's myriad masks, but as one really is. Such knowledge is beyond what is possible in human relationships. It is the "earnestness of eternity" and the "blessed comfort" that can only be found in a relationship with Christ. But even as Christ knows his own not as they *appear*, but as they *are* in inwardness and truth, so too his knowledge is not on display: "no third party can know whether he knows you." Christ's knowing, it seems, explodes human knowing as much as his presence explodes human conceptions of presence. Far from being an action or effort, being known by Christ is pure passivity, the cessation of our misguided efforts to prove and document and explain his presence, so as to relate to him only in longing.

The third moment in Kierkegaard's presentation of the Eucharist, "They follow him," carries the iconoclasm implicit in the first two moments to the extreme. Kierkegaard asserts that communion with Christ involves not only hearing his voice and being known by him at the altar, but also following him away from it. Kierkegaard's transformation of the concept of Christ's "presence" becomes clearest here. He reduces static conceptions of it to the absurd: "Oh, do not forget that where he is, there is the altar, that his altar is neither on Moriah nor Gerizim, nor any physical *there*, but that it is there where he is. If this were not so, then you of course would have to remain at the altar, take up residence there, never budge from the spot, but such superstition is not

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[349] *CD*, 272 / *SKS*, 10:290-291.

Christianity."[350] Rather than demanding that we "take up residence" at the altar, communing with Christ means following him outside the church doors, to seek relationship with him in all times and places. Thus, even the Eucharist is not an end in itself, but the impetus of a desire for constant communion. In the closing paragraph of this sermon, Kierkegaard writes:

> Today is not a holy day; today there is divine service on a weekday—oh, but a Christian's life is a divine service every day! It is not as if everything were settled by someone's going to the altar on rare occasions; no, the task is to remain at the altar when you leave the altar. Today everything we said was only for the purpose of concentrating your attention on the altar. But when you leave here, remember that the event is not finished—oh no, it is just begun.[351]

To meet Christ at the altar is to be called to seek communion with him not merely in the tranquility of Vor Frue Kirke's beautiful sanctuary but in the meanest places of the everyday. Kierkegaard's conclusion to this sermon thus fleshes out what he means by the "intensified longing" that he believes the sacrament should incite. He is not encouraging his readers to become obsessed with going to church. Rather, going to church and meeting Christ at the altar should incite an ever-greater longing to commune with him outside the church walls, in the challenges, sorrows, and joys of actual existence.

The discourses that we have considered in this chapter consist in a seemingly endless succession of deferrals and denials. No sooner does Kierkegaard summon his listeners into the quiet intimacy of Vor Frue Kirke than he insists that, whatever its appearances, it should not be a place of peace and tranquility but of terror and awakening. Then, he goes on to undermine the status of the sermons he preaches from its pulpit by

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[350] *CD*, 274 / *SKS*, 10:291-292; translation modified.

[351] *CD*, 274 / *SKS*, 10:292; translation modified.

maintaining that they are not ends in themselves but only brief "pauses" on the way to the altar. He claims that the Friday service centers exclusively there, but soon denies that merely "going to the altar" is the same as communing with Christ. The voice of the minister there is not the voice of Christ, he insists. The altar where Christ is to be found is no physical *there*. The Eucharist itself is a beginning rather than an end. No sooner does Kierkegaard summon his readers into church, than he shows them out the door unsatisfied.

Why, then, should we go to church at all? Perhaps we should simply try to relate to Christ as the stereotypes about Kierkegaard's late writings would suggest that he believes one should: alone, outside of church, in the inwardness of pure spirit. Yet even if Kierkegaard's iconoclasm in these discourses can sometimes tempt such a conclusion, his point is just the opposite. Escaping human constructions of Christ is as impossible as grasping his presence through them. Even though the church walls that we build inevitably fail to satisfy our desire for communion, they can, at their best, incite it. Paradox of paradoxes, it is precisely in such *unsatisfied* longing that Kierkegaard claims we meet Christ.

In the Eucharistic discourse on which I will focus in the next chapter, Kierkegaard meditates on a Gospel narrative of Christ eating dinner at a Pharisee's house. In this story, Christ is very much "on display," yet Kierkegaard directs his reader to look just beneath him—at the sinful woman weeping at his feet. The "picture" of this sinful woman, he writes, "is more inciting than all rhetorical incitements when it is a matter of accepting that invitation that leads to the altar."[352] What is it about this woman that

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[352] *WA*, 144 / *SKS*, 11:280; translation modified.

makes her so worthy of our gaze? And how does the picture of her that Kierkegaard paints relate to the marble statues already in Vor Frue Kirke? How might gazing at this disruptive, perhaps unwelcome, image help draw us nearer to Christ?

CHAPTER THREE

"The Woman Who Was a Sinner": A New Statue in Vor Frue Kirke

"*Synderinden,*" "The Sinful Woman," or, as she is more commonly referred to in English, "The Woman Who Was a Sinner": these titles conjure one of the New Testament's most arresting characters and vivid scenes.[353] Luke 7:36-50 tells a story about Jesus, to be sure, but the woman who places herself at his feet steals the show. Jesus is eating dinner in the home of a Pharisee, when a "woman in the city, who was a sinner" bursts in uninvited.[354] She lies down at Christ's feet: weeping, bathing his feet with her tears, drying them with her flowing hair, and anointing them with luxurious perfume. By conventional standards, the scene is not merely distasteful but shameful. An outcast enters where she is unwelcome, and makes herself the center of attention with an untoward sensual display. The description of her as being "in" or "of" the city heightens the sense of reproach: she has been seen throughout a long history of interpretation as a scarlet woman, of unchecked *eros*, probably a prostitute.[355] If nothing else, her extravagant sensuality is uncomfortable, embarrassing. This story is frequently

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[353] The word *Synderinden*, which is the Danish title of this Eucharistic discourse, means literally "The Sinful Woman"; it is the word "The Sinner" in the feminine form. The Hongs render it as "The Woman Who Was a Sinner," which is justified since this is a more habitual way of referring to her in English and since Kierkegaard uses this locution to describe her at several points himself: for example, "My listener, this woman [*Qvinde*] was a sinner [*en Synderinde*]" [WA, 142 / *SKS*, 11:278]. Throughout this chapter I refer to her interchangeably as the Sinful Woman and the Woman Who Was a Sinner, allowing the capital letters to underscore Kierkegaard's point that these generic titles are her only name.

[354] Luke 7:37.

[355] There is much dispute among biblical scholars about how the phrase *en tē polei* should be interpreted. See, for example, François Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50* in *Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 293-294 and Joseph A. Fitmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1-9* in *Anchor Bible Series* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981), 688-689.

read in church, but if we really allow ourselves to visualize it, we may well recoil with the Pharisees.

Kierkegaard's Friday Eucharistic discourse "The Woman Who Was a Sinner" invokes an unlikely stage setting for its representation of this disruptive scene: Vor Frue Kirke, Copenhagen's neoclassical temple. As we will see, Kierkegaard invites the reader to imagine this drama unfolding in the midst of the church aesthetics that we described in the last chapter—the dignified statues of Christ and his disciples, the calm and orderly air. Kierkegaard never refers to Vor Frue Kirke directly, but since Friday Eucharist services took place nowhere else in Copenhagen, the original readers of this staged sermon would have known to imagine themselves as listening to Kierkegaard preach within this space. The text derives from an 1849 collection of Eucharistic discourses that follows the collection in *Christian Discourses* that we considered in the last chapter. Its three sermons meditate on three biblical characters, who are named in its title: *"The High Priest," "The Tax Collector," "The Woman Who Was a Sinner."* In the next chapter, I will consider the first of these characters in some detail. Here, I focus on the Sinful Woman— a character who clearly fascinates Kierkegaard, given that he refers to her numerous times throughout his authorship.[356]

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[356] Kierkegaard first evokes this scene in the 1843 upbuilding discourse "Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins" (*EUD*, 75-77 / *SKS*, 5:84-85). He alludes to it again in the passage from *Philosophical Fragments* that we studied in the Prologue (*PF*, 33 / *SKS*, 4:239). After publishing the Eucharistic discourse that we are considering in this chapter, he returns to the scene again in an 1850 upbuilding discourse that bears the same title (WA, 145-160 / *SKS*, 12:257-273). As we will see in Chapter Four, he also devotes the first sermon in his 1851 collection of Eucharistic discourses to a verse from this pericope, even though he does not mention the Sinful Woman there. Sylvia Walsh helpfully sorts through these texts in "Prototypes of Piety: The Woman Who Was a Sinner and Mary Magdalene" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary:* Without Authority, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 313.

In this sermon, he strives to recreate the scene of the Pharisees' disrupted feast in an extraordinarily theatrical way. Rich in evocative detail, the text fashions with its words a kind of tableau that it asks the reader to contemplate. As we will see, Kierkegaard describes the character of the Sinful Woman as a "picture" that Jesus asks the Pharisees to look at—an aestheticized interruption of actuality, rather than a straightforward representation of it. Moreover, Kierkegaard suggests that what this picture represents is the woman leaving behind one persona, the one imposed upon her by her sin and the Pharisees' contemptuous gaze, and—like the ideal actress—assuming a new character: that of a beloved and welcome child of God. I will begin this chapter by analyzing why Kierkegaard lavishes such sustained attention on this particular biblical scene, presenting it as an image of Christian faith itself. I will then argue that his use of this scene's aesthetics to promote ever deeper contemplation and ever more intense desire recalls many of the features of Aesthete A's analysis of the play *The First Love*. The presence of these theatrical qualities in a sermon meant to be preached just before the Eucharist is startling. Should a sermon at this solemn moment not be a rejection of the theater's fictionality and aestheticism? How could contemplating such a scene serve as preparation for the Eucharist? I will conclude that Kierkegaard wants contemplating the Sinful Woman's theatrical transformation to promote ongoing transformations in Christians today as they participate in the endless repetitions of Eucharistic performance.

I. Staging a Biblical Story

Unsettling as Kierkegaard's sermon is meant to be, the character of the Woman Who Was a Sinner is instantly familiar—the subject of hundreds of years of Christian art, preaching, and exegesis. The familiarity of this scene owes much to the fact that all four

gospels tell stories of a woman anointing Christ, which easily blur together. The congruencies and conflicts between these stories have provided endless fodder for commentators seeking to untangle or align them. But Kierkegaard is not interested in either of these projects; he focuses exclusively on the story as told by Luke. It is worth asking why he hones in on this particular staging of a woman's anointing of Christ.

Mark, Matthew, and John all tell their stories of Christ's anointing as prefaces to his suffering and death. In these stories, the woman's act is said to prepare for and prefigure his burial. Luke's version is unique in that it is located in the midst of Christ's ministry, rather than being specifically tied to his passion. Luke's version is also particularly rich in evocative detail—even as it preserves a total silence about the woman's name, where she is coming from, and where she is going. Luke tells us nothing more about the woman's identity than that she is a "sinner" and "of the city." In contrast, John names the woman in his story as Mary of Bethany—one of Christ's intimate followers and the sister of Martha.[357] In his tale about the two sisters, Mary anoints Jesus with costly nard in preparation for his burial, and Judas objects to the exorbitant cost of this gesture. Mary and Martha are characters in Luke's gospel as well; his story about them is quite famous. In Luke 10, Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to him teach, while Martha busies herself with her "many tasks"—eventually objecting to the fact that her sister is not helping her.[358] The anointment stories told by Mark and Matthew are the simplest and most straightforward. Both describe an unnamed woman at Bethany

[357] John 12:1-8.

[358] Luke 10:38-41.

pouring oil over Jesus' head, provoking the disciples to object to the gesture's cost.[359] Neither Mark nor Matthew nor John describes the woman who anoints Jesus as a sinner.

Although Luke's story does not give the Sinful Woman a name, it is the source of tradition's subsequent identification of the character with Mary Magdalene. Luke writes at the beginning of the following chapter that "Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out" was among Jesus' companions as he traveled throughout Galilee.[360] Note that even here there is no basis for describing Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute. This tradition depends upon two interpretive leaps: first, the conflation of Mary with the unnamed woman of chapter 7; second, the assumption that the phrase "of the city" refers to this ignominy specifically.[361] Readers concerned to produce unanimity among the biblical narratives have gone so far as to take the third step of saying that Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene are one and the same. Gregory the Great declared the unity of these three biblical characters in the sixth century, and this position remains normative in Roman Catholicism.[362] Much contemporary feminist

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[359] Mark 14:3-9; Matthew 26:6-13.

[360] Luke 8:1-2.

[361] See Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 4-32 for helpful analysis of the information that is and is not conveyed in the Gospel narratives.

[362] Preaching on this story from Luke 7, Gregory writes: "This woman whom Luke calls a sinner, John names Mary [i.e., Mary of Bethany]. I believe that she is the same Mary of whom Mark says that seven demons had been cast out [i.e., Mary Magdalene]." Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 269. Gregory goes on in this sermon to reinforce the tradition of seeing the woman's sin as promiscuous sexuality and prostitution. Speaking of the perfume with which she anointed Jesus, he writes: "It is evident, my friends, that a woman who had earlier been eager for actions which are not allowed had used the ointment as a scent for her own body. What she had earlier used disgracefully for herself she now laudably offered to the Lord" (269-270).

biblical scholarship has been devoted to untangling these biblical women in order to reclaim their leadership roles in the early church.[363]

In his Eucharistic discourse, Kierkegaard does not attempt either historico-critical scholarship or pious harmonization of the gospel narratives. He sticks entirely to recreating Luke's story, leaving its central character unnamed. He interprets her display of penitence and love as a visual embodiment of the Christian faith. He takes as his text Luke 7:47: "Therefore I say to you, her many sins are forgiven her, because she loved much."[364] Of the four gospel stories of a woman anointing Christ, only Luke's describes her as "loving much." The phrase suggests not only love, but also its gradations and growth—its potential to increase and be inflamed. Kierkegaard's chosen verse thus figures the woman's love as desire. Matthew and Mark have Jesus praise the woman as performing a "good service"— language that suggests dispassionate self-sacrifice. In Luke's gospel, Jesus expands upon his description of the woman as "loving much" by telling a brief parable of two debtors, one owing 50 denarii and the other 100. If the creditor cancels both debts, Jesus asks, "which of them will love him more?"[365] Luke's telling of the story emphasizes that Christ wishes not merely to be loved, but to be loved passionately, to be loved more and more.

From the beginning to the end of this sermon, Kierkegaard makes clear that his purpose in recreating the scene of the Sinful Woman is to incite her longing for Christ in

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[363] See, for example, Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983).

[364] *WA*, 137 / *SKS*, 11:273.

[365] Luke 7:41-42.

his readers. He opens with the following prayer: "We pray to you first about one thing: help us so that we might love you much, increase our love [*Kjærligheden*], inflame it, purify it."[366] His closing paragraph commends the scene as an "incitement" of desire—both for Christ and for the Eucharist. He writes that the image of the woman is "far from a forbidding picture," that it is "more inciting than all rhetorical incitements when it is a matter of accepting that invitation that leads to the altar."[367] Kierkegaard's goal is to incite a spiritual *eros* through his evocation of this scene, and he apparently views its sensual aspects as advancing rather than opposing this goal. Precisely in order to spark religious longing, he highlights the aesthetic details that Luke includes: the woman's long hair, her alabaster jar of oil or perfume, her kisses, her tears.

II. Imaging Faith

The fact that Kierkegaard's chosen version of this story is located in the midst of Christ's ministry, rather than being linked to his impending death, allows him to interpret the woman's desire as an image of Christian faith in general. To have faith in Christ, Kierkegaard is saying, is to share in both her penitence and her love for Christ, and both of these take the form of desire. As we saw in the last chapter, Kierkegaard sees penitential "sorrow" as a specific form of longing for God. He returns again and again to the words of Luke 7:47—"her many sins are forgiven her, because she loved much"—as expressing the ongoing dialectic of Christian faith. The first dimension of the verse—the woman's penitence and the forgiveness she receives—is the more commonly preached, and Kierkegaard certainly believes that it is a crucial element of this story. But he insists

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[366] *WA*, 137 / *SKS*, 11:273.

[367] *WA*, 144; *SKS*, 11:280; translation modified.

that it should not be treated separately from the woman's love for Christ. He argues that the story's emphasis on the magnitude of the woman's sin intrinsically implies the greatness of the love with which she responds to its forgiveness. The more one is forgiven, he is saying, the more one loves, and the more one loves, the more one is forgiven. The dialectical tension is continuous and unresolved. To reduce Christian faith to either of these two elements alone is to ossify and distort it. Inhabited together, they cast faith as a form of restless desire.

The characterization of faith that Kierkegaard promotes in this sermon is controversial within a Lutheran context. To describe faith as a form of longing has seemed to many Lutheran theologians to diminish the "grace alone" message, making faith seem like a human striving or work. Is faith not exclusively a gift from God, which human beings receive in passivity? Kierkegaard does not dispute this fundamental Lutheran premise, but he believes that faith takes the form of desire precisely because its source is Christ, whose being is paradoxical through and through. In the following description of the Sinful Woman, he answers traditional Lutheran concerns about longing by radicalizing Lutheranism's Christocentric emphasis on grace:

> You may turn it however you wish and still say basically the same thing. You can consider her blessed because her many sins are forgiven, and you can consider her blessed because she loved much—basically you are saying the same thing—if you note well that the one she loved much was specifically Christ, and if you also do not forget that Christ is grace and the giver of grace.[368]

Grace is as paradoxical as Christ himself, Kierkegaard is saying. Although the story of the Sinful Woman cannot hope to give a complete and final representation of this paradox, it can nonetheless provide a provocative intimation of it: a vivid scene of a

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[368] *WA*, 143 / *SKS*, 11:279.

sinner welcome at the feet of God. Rather than striving to exhaust or encapsulate what grace is, Kierkegaard wants to inspire ever greater longing to appropriate it. He sees faith not as a finished accomplishment, but as the beginning of a life of longing. He insists that the forgiveness of which traditional Lutheranism is very comfortable speaking should be seen as inciting an ever greater desire for Christ, and that the desire for Christ of which it is typically so suspicious emerges from this forgiveness and inspires ever greater penitence.

To appreciate how provocative the picture of faith that Kierkegaard finds in the story of the Sinful Woman is in his Lutheran context, let us contrast it briefly to the account of faith developed by Anders Nygren in *Agape and Eros*. Though it comes nearly a century later, Nygren's Lutheran "orthodoxy" is an extreme illustration of the sort of theology that Kierkegaard is rejecting. As we saw in the Introduction, Nygren's vision of grace (*agape* as he prefers to call it) is supremely undialectical. Nygren takes pains to insist that it is "by no means self-contradictory," but "a quite simple and clear and easily comprehensible idea."[369] In *Agape and Eros*, his defense of this objectively accessible conception of grace leads him to an astounding and revealing result, which is buried in his exegesis of the writings of Paul. Even he is reticent to promote this conclusion too loudly, but it is worth considering here because it is the honest outcome of an unusually tenacious defense of grace as a directly communicable doctrine.

The consequence that Nygren *wants* to derive from his theology of *agape* is, of course, the condemnation of all *eros* as a means of relating to God. But as he analyzes Paul's letters he finds himself compelled to go further. He eventually suggests that

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[369] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: S. P. C. K., 1957), 204.

Christians should not be said to *love* God at all—even with a love described as *agape*. Faith, he concludes, replaces love as the proper mode in which human beings should relate to God. Nygren recognizes the overwhelming biblical evidence against this conclusion—above all Jesus' own statement that the commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" is the greatest of all the commandments[370]—but he is undeterred. He sees Paul as reaching a unique summit of theological insight: "a height in the history of the idea of Agape to which scarcely anyone has since been able to follow him."[371] This is how he describes it:

> In point of fact, Paul was bound to drop the idea of man's Agape towards God: that was simply a necessary consequence of his whole conception of Agape. If Agape is a love as absolutely spontaneous and entirely unmotivated as the love manifested in the Cross of Jesus, then it is plain that the word Agape can no longer fittingly be used to denote man's attitude to God. In relation to God, man is never spontaneous; he is not an independent centre of activity....Man's devotion to God must therefore be given another name: not *agape* but *pistis*.[372]

Nygren's English translator feels compelled to point out that Paul uses the verb *agapao* no less than four times to describe how human beings should relate to God. But Nygren's logic is all-consuming: only God can love with *agape*; Christians can at best be the passive recipients of this love through faith. Authentic love for God is impossible, whether as *eros* or *agape*. When Christians love their neighbors as themselves, he later explains, they are merely the "tubes" through which God's *agape* flows to the world.[373] In faith, Christians receive grace in an instant, once and for all; they receive it as a

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[370] Matthew 22:37; cf. Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 124-125.

[371] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 125.

[372] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 125-126.

[373] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 735.

directly accessible gift from God. There is no room here for the inflammation of faith or growth in grace. Rather than being a passion through which we love God more and more, faith ends up looking as though it were controlled by a divine on/off switch. Even Nygren seems stunned that his vision of faith ultimately supplants love for God.[374]

Kierkegaard's meditation on the character of the Sinful Woman embodies a vastly different way of conceiving and communicating the Lutheran message. The story is fundamentally a story about grace, but his interpretation of it assumes that because Christ is the source of grace, it eludes all objective representation. What the story *does* represent is the Sinful Woman's *appropriation* of grace, and this takes the form of ever greater longing rather than final satisfaction. It is not a meritorious work, but a response to the paradox of Christ. Kierkegaard does not seek to find in the story of the Sinful Woman a set of objective truths about doctrine or history or ethical life—the sort of results that Christians' so often seek when they read the Bible. Instead, his goal is to restage the story's tableau. He invites his readers to lose themselves in this aesthetic image as they might lose themselves in a play—to become swept up in the woman's longing. Consider the way in which he recreates the story in the following evocative paragraph:

> "She sits at his feet, anoints them with the ointment, wipes them with the hair of her head, kisses them—and weeps." She says nothing and therefore is not what she says, but she is what she does not say, or what she does not say is what she is. She *is* the symbol, like a picture. She has forgotten speech and language and the restlessness of thoughts, has forgotten what is even greater restlessness, this self, has forgotten herself—she, the lost woman, who is now lost in her Savior, who, lost in him, rests at his feet—like a picture. It is

[374] Nygren tries to salvage the idea of love for God by saying that faith includes within itself an idea of love for God as purely passive devotion, without any spontaneity or activity. But, as he himself is forced to acknowledge, it is difficult to conceive of this dimension of faith as "love" at all: it is neither *eros* nor *agape*. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 127.

> almost as if the Savior himself momentarily looked at her and the situation that way, as if she were not an actual person but a picture. Presumably in order to make the application more impressive to those present, he does not speak *to* her; he does not say, "Your many sins are forgiven you, because you loved much." He speaks *about* her; he says: Her many sins are forgiven her, because she loved much. Although she is present, it is almost as if she were absent; it is almost as if he changed her into a picture, a parable. It is almost as if he said, "Simon, I have something to tell you. There was once a woman. She was a sinner. When the Son of Man was at a feast one day in the house of a Pharisee, she, too, came in. The Pharisees mocked her and judged her, that she was a sinner. But she sat at his feet, anointed them with ointment, wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and wept. Simon, I want to tell you something: her many sins were forgiven her, because she loved much." It is almost like a story, a sacred story, a parable—and yet at the same moment the same thing was actually taking place on the spot.[375]

To a certain mode of theological thinking, Kierkegaard's analysis of this story seems to squander virtually all of its riches. Again and again, he deflects our attention away from the aspects of it that we typically assume to be most consequential. This is, after all, a story about Christ teaching religious elites, yet Kierkegaard follows Luke in pointing the reader's attention away from him and his teaching, toward the outcast woman weeping at his feet. Do not be distracted, Kierkegaard seems to be saying, by the presence of religious leaders or even Christ himself: look at this woman instead. Unlike Christ, she never says a word. Kierkegaard underscores her silence: she has "forgotten speech and language and the restlessness of thoughts," such that "she is what she does not say," and "what she does not say is what she is." Whatever is to be gleaned from the contemplation of this scene will not be found by looking directly at Christ or hearing him pronounce an objective statement of theological truth. Kierkegaard argues that even the bodily presence of the Sinful Woman to whom he directs our attention is not an immediately accessible actuality. He encourages the reader to see her "not as an actual

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[375] *WA*, 141-142 / *SKS*, 11:277-278; translation modified.

person but as a picture." The scene is more valuable, he suggests, as a staged image than as straightforward history. He argues that Christ encourages the Pharisees to look at what is happening before them in just this way. Even though "the same thing was actually taking place on the spot," he encourages those he is with to see what is happening as "a story, a sacred story, a parable." Kierkegaard takes a story narrated as history, and presents it as actuality's interruption by a constructed aesthetic artifact.[376]

Christ speaks in this story, to be sure, but what he says is indirect on several levels. Kierkegaard notes that he does not speak *to* the woman but *about* her—to the onlooking Pharisees. This is a story about Christ bestowing grace upon a sinner, but this takes place without any direct pronouncement. Christ finally addresses the woman directly in the very last verse of the pericope, but even then he tells her *about* the grace

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376 Kierkegaard's interpretation of this story must be recognized as a double-edged sword from a feminist point of view. On the one hand, Kierkegaard gives enormous prominence to this female character, glorifying her as an image of Christian faith and asking his readers to put themselves in her place. Yet on the other hand, he comes close to evacuating any historical referent from this scene, ignoring the lived reality of this follower of Christ. Being transformed into a mere aesthetic object for other people's contemplation has not historically been a particularly liberating position for women, to say the least.

Within the larger context of what I am calling "staging" in Kierkegaard's authorship, I do think that his portrayal of this scene has the potential to be edifying and liberating. Nonetheless, I think that historically oriented analysis of this woman and the many others described in the New Testament and non-canonical early Christian literature is indispensible to theology today. The history of the women who were prominent among Christ's followers must be told, as must the early church's rapid silencing of them. In her book *In Memory of Her*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza uses historical-critical scholarship to bring to prominence the unnamed woman who anoints Christ in Mark's gospel—the woman of whom Christ says that "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mark 14:9). Reconstructing memories such as this one is vital for the contemporary church. To do so, however, is to approach the text with different questions in mind than those that Kierkegaard asks in this sermon. These questions are just as important, since they concern the liberating consequences of grace, rather than the means by which grace can be communicated. I see the two approaches as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Indeed, if the theme of "staging" that I am tracking in Kierkegaard means anything, it means that no one way of approaching the Bible should be seen as exhaustive—neither Kierkegaard's, nor any other. Those approaches to the Bible that present themselves as definitive are the ones that become the most toxic.

that he has *already* bestowed upon her: "Your faith *has* saved you; go in peace."[377] For most of the story, Christ speaks instead to the Pharisees, who must go from conceiving themselves as all-important actors in the scene to mere spectators. Christ neither condemns nor forgives them, but speaks to them *about* the picture unfolding before their eyes. One can readily imagine the sort of thing that Kierkegaard is describing taking place in a theater: suddenly, in the midst of a scene, the actors freeze in a *tableau vivant*; one actor steps aside, winks at the audience, and starts interpreting what is taking place. In order to do this, Christ imagines yet another scene, telling the Pharisees the parable of the creditor with the two debtors. When Kierkegaard restages these scenes in his writing, he is inviting his readers to contemplate a picture within a picture within a picture—a staged scene of Christ teaching spectators about a staged scene through a staged scene. Kierkegaard suggests that the communication of grace happens precisely within these halls of mirrors where the eye can find no rest. The pictures within pictures and scenes within scenes draw spectators into ever deeper contemplation—and into their dramas.

The way in which Luke's tableau functions pedagogically is emblematic for Kierkegaard of the way in which Christ teaches. Kierkegaard suggests that the picture of the Sinful Woman works like one of Christ's "parables"—indeed, like any "sacred story." This claim illumines not only his interpretation of Luke 7, but also his interpretation of Bible stories as such. Kierkegaard writes that when Christ directs the Pharisees' attention to the scene of the woman lying at his feet, it is as though he were telling them a parable, saying to their leader, "Simon, I have something to tell you. There was once a woman. She was a sinner...." He is saying both that this embodied tableaux can be verbally

[377] Luke 7:50; emphasis added.

evoked, and that Christ's verbal teachings should be interpreted as staged scenes rather than as objective pronouncements about doctrine or ethics. Kierkegaard goes on to describe the image of the Sinful Woman as an "eternal picture" that is "indispensible to the Savior" and his teaching.[378] This picture is indispensible because its aesthetic form is not mere ornamentation gilding a set of transparent theological propositions, but the means of communication of grace itself.

III. Theatrical and Eucharistic Transformations

What is it that makes this particular picture so captivating in Kierkegaard's analysis? His answer to this question is, on a formal level, similar to Aesthete A's analysis of the power of *The First Love*. Not only does his presentation of the Sinful Woman employ some of the same dramaturgical techniques as Aesthete A praises in the play, but his understanding of this story also revolves around a transformation in the Sinful Woman that is best described as theatrical. Like an ideal actress, the Sinful Woman leaves behind one identity and throws herself completely into another. By commending her story as an image of Christian faith, and inviting his readers to enter into it, Kierkegaard portrays the life of faith as one of ongoing transformation and becoming. He envisions liturgy, preaching, and theology as presenting series of scenes and characters—to inhabit any of which should only increase our desire for further transformation.

Both the story of the Sinful Woman and the play *The First Love* are at their core performances of unresolved contradiction. As we saw, the Aesthete describes all the characters and situations in *The First Love* as defined by their internal conflicts.

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[378] *WA*, 143 / *SKS*, 11:279.

Emmeline is defined by contradiction most of all, specifically that between the ardency of her passion and the vacuity of its object. Kierkegaard writes that the more one contemplates characters like her, "the dizzier one becomes, and yet one cannot stop staring into [them]."[379] Similarly, throughout his analysis of the Sinful Woman, Kierkegaard highlights the numerous contradictions that structure the scene and its central character. The most fundamental of these is the paradox of grace itself: the woman is a sinner, yet she is welcomed by God. Kierkegaard highlights the paradoxical nature of the woman's presence in this situation when he writes:

> There are indeed opposites that are in mortal combat with each other, or for the one of the opposites it is like the most frightful annihilation to come near the other. For example, when one is a sinner, man or woman, to come near to the Holy One, to become disclosed before him, that is, in the light of holiness. Ah, the night does not flee more terror-stricken before the day, which wants to annihilate it.[380]

Kierkegaard writes here that this scene is as unthinkable as the conjoining of night and day. The Sinful Woman should flee in terror from the presence of God, but instead she lies down vulnerably and lovingly at Christ's feet. Who could comprehend a picture of God in the same frame as the lowliest of sinners? Who could avoid being fascinated by it? The image is provocative precisely because it eludes our conceptual mastery.

Over the course of his exegesis of this story, Kierkegaard highlights many secondary contradictions that derive from this fundamental one. For example, he notes that although this is a scene of confession, the confession that takes place is extraordinarily public, seeming to go against the very nature of confession itself. Authentic confession is difficult enough within the darkness and privacy of a

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[379] *EO*, 1:263 / *SKS*, 2:255-256.

[380] *WA*, 137 / *SKS*, 11:274.

confessional box, he writes, but it is virtually unimaginable when one is on display in a hostile environment like this one.[381] This sinner makes her confession not before the compassionate, but before the self-righteous and the proud.[382] She does so in a setting where she is guaranteed to be unwelcome. Although she occupies the lowest of social stations, she enters a "feast" [*Gjestebud*] given by religious authorities.[383] She knows that the Pharisees will interpret her presence as shameful both because she is a sinner and because she is a woman. They will consider it to be "vanity, disgusting vanity, especially for a woman, to thrust herself forward with her sin."[384] Yet she chooses to undergo the ordeal knowing what is in store for her. This is a particularly shocking contradiction in Kierkegaard's view: "She herself devised the torture, she herself was the cruel one."[385]

The contradiction between the Sinful Woman's presence and her external surroundings is great, but Kierkegaard also interprets her very being as paradox. The woman is a sinner, he reminds the reader again and again, yet in the story she assumes an entirely new character, recalling the transformations of identity essential to theater itself. Kierkegaard describes her as "forgetting herself" and even "hating herself"— leaving behind the sinful identity imposed on her by her sin and the Pharisees' contemptuous

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[381] *WA*, 139 / *SKS*, 11:275-276.

[382] *WA*, 138 / *SKS*, 11:274.

[383] *WA*, 138 / *SKS*, 11:275. The Hongs translate the word *Gjestebud* as "dinner," but "feast" is both more literal and more relevant to Kierkgaard's point, in that he underscores the dignified and celebratory aspects of the event. Karen Blixen's famous Danish novel *Babette's Feast* uses this word in its title: *Babettes Gæstebud*.

[384] *WA*, 138 / *SKS*, 11:274.

[385] *WA*, 139 / *SKS*, 11:276.

gaze.[386] Her love for Christ gives her a new identity, for "the true expression of loving much is just to forget oneself completely."[387] She becomes the picture that Christ makes of her; she throws herself completely into her role. "The test in which this woman is tested," Kierkegaard writes, is "to love her Savior more than her sin."[388] She passes this test with flying colors: "She sits weeping at his feet: she has forgotten herself completely, forgotten every disturbing thought in her own inner being, is perfectly calm, or is calmed like the sick baby that is calmed at its mother's breast, where it cries itself out and forgets itself."[389] The woman continues to weep, but her "blessed tears of self-forgetfulness" no longer even "remind her anymore of what she is weeping over."[390] Grace in this scene means not only that the woman's sins are forgiven in an abstract sense, but that, like an actress stepping onto a stage, she leaves behind her original identity and becomes someone new.

Kierkegaard restages this scene in order to spark similar transformations in his readers. He wants them to imitate in their own lives what they see happening in this tableau. Recall that in his preface to his review of *The First Love*, Aesthete A describes himself as imitating the dramas of this play in his life. He recounts how his experience comes to mirror the lives of Charles and Emmeline. He mimics both Emmeline's passion for first love, and ultimately her disappointment in it. Recall, further, that the identities of Charles and Emmeline are themselves shaped through the imitation of other

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[386] E.g., *WA*, 139-140 / *SKS*, 11:276-277.

[387] *WA*, 140 / *SKS*, 11:277.

[388] *WA*, 143 / *SKS*, 11:279.

[389] *WA*, 140 / *SKS*, 11:276.

[390] *WA*, 140 / *SKS*, 11:276.

characters: those in the Romantic novels read to them by their Aunt Judith. The cousins model themselves and their love story on *Paul et Virginie*. Aesthete A imitates Charles and Emmeline just as they imitate these characters. In a similar fashion, Kierkegaard wants his reader to assume the persona of the Sinful Woman just as she assumes a new character through Christ. He describes her as a "guide," in whose path the reader should follow—an "incitement" that can spur Christians to "accept that invitation that leads to the altar."[391] He wants Christians to imitate her penitence, her boldness to put herself at Christ's feet, and her ardent longing. Just as she becomes someone new through Christ, so too will they.

Kierkegaard's sermon does not describe this tableau as a scene from the past. It attempts to bring it to life in the present. This aspect of the text mirrors the second type of mimesis that we identified in Aesthete's A's treatment of *The First Love*. In his preface to his review, he figures his text itself as a mimesis of the play's performance of contradiction. As we saw, he renders his text a stage—on which poetic "inspiration" is conjoined with mundane "occasions."[392] In the same way, the text of Kierkegaard's Eucharistic discourse becomes a stage for the representation of Luke's *tableau vivant*. By locating itself implicitly but unmistakably in Vor Frue Kirke, Kierkegaard reproduces for his readers the shock of the woman's presence at the Pharisees' feast. It is difficult to imagine a place where the image of the Sinful Woman would be more disruptive than in this neo-classical temple. Indelicate, improper, even slightly salacious, this scene could

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[391] *WA*, 144 / *SKS*, 11:280; translation modified.

[392] *EO*, 1:233-240 / *SKS*, 2:227-233.

not contrast more sharply with the serenity, harmony, and rationalism of Vor Frue Kirke's aesthetics.

In effect, Kierkegaard asks his readers to imagine what the church would look like if a statue of the Sinful Woman—weeping and impassioned—were to be placed at the feet of Thorvaldsen's *Christus*. Even apart from the assumed sinfulness of this figure, her mere presence as a woman would be disruptive in Vor Frue Kirke. The church's name translates as "Church of Our Lady," yet its reference to Mary is a vestige of medieval Catholicism that has left no other marks upon this church. There are no depictions of Mary, or any human women, anywhere in Vor Frue Kirke—only the muscular figures of the apostles and the resurrected Christ. The space does contain one feminine form, however. This form is entirely other-worldly: a feminine angel, who holds the church's baptismal font. She kneels, interestingly enough, about twenty feet in front of the statue of Christ, in the middle of the church's choir, facing the congregation. Innocence incarnate, she has giant wings on her back and a laurel wreath in her hair. What would the church look like, Kierkegaard is asking, if she were to lose her wings and her purity, turn her back to the congregation, and lavish kisses and tears upon the feet of Christ? Would this scene be welcome in the church? Would most of Kierkegaard's Golden Age contemporaries not recoil in disgust? Whereas Heiberg saw vaudeville as a school of cultivation and good taste, this scene would explode all propriety and refinement.

For Kierkegaard, the disruptiveness of this image is precisely the point. When his readers are shocked by it, they must acknowledge their tendency to be modern-day Pharisees. But to the extent that they do so and repent, they have the opportunity to

become something else. When they go to the altar to receive the Eucharist, they will kneel at the feet of the *Christus*—putting themselves quite literally in the place of the Woman Who Was a Sinner. Kierkegaard hopes that contemplating the tableau he paints in this Eucharistic discourse will inspire them to assume not only her posture but also her longing. In effect, he is asking his readers to do precisely what the theater asks actors to do: put themselves in a story, and act out a character. Yet he wants his readers to go further than actors in a play. He does not want this transformation to be limited to the brief hour or theatrical or liturgical performance—after which participants merely revert to their old identities and ways. He wants it to be a true transformation, in which one does not ultimately revert to one's original identity.

But even as he wants the transformations of Eucharistic performance to be genuine, does he want them to be final? In the chapter to follow, I will argue that Kierkegaard conceives of Eucharistic practice as opening a lifetime of becoming driven by infinite desire. To assume even the character of the Sinful Woman is but one way station along this path. To enter the scenes within scenes and pictures within pictures that Kierkegaard constructs is to be called to a life of endless becoming in the image of Christ. In the next chapter, I will analyze Kierkegaard's remaining Eucharistic discourses in dialogue with a second in-depth study of the theater: his pseudonymous celebration of farce in the book *Repetition*. Through this comparison, I will argue that he presents the Eucharist as a site where identities are even more fluid and transformation even more possible than in the theater. A life informed by Eucharistic practice, he suggests, is a never-ending process of pouring oneself out with Christ—putting oneself in the place of every neighbor through love.

CHAPTER FOUR

Becoming Another:
From the Farce Theater to the Feet of Christ

In "The Woman Who Was a Sinner," Kierkegaard fashions from words a new and most likely unwelcome "statue" amidst Vor Frue Kirke's marble elegance. As we saw in the last chapter, he claims to know virtually nothing about the woman "herself": neither her name, nor her backstory, nor what happens to her after she encounters Jesus. All that matters to him is her title: she *was* a sinful woman, and she *becomes* a welcome lover of Christ. The generic nature of Kierkegaard's portrayal is woefully inadequate as history, yet its purpose is not to provide an objective account of her, but to incite readers to put themselves in her place. Kierkegaard invites his readers to *become* her, even as she becomes another through Christ. As we have seen, Copenhagen's Vor Frue Kirke provides the ideal stage setting in which to solicit those who go to the altar to enter this tableau. Kierkegaard locates his Eucharistic discourses amidst this aesthetic and ritual setting in order to promote the continuation of the transposition of identities that he sees in the story of the Sinful Woman and in the Eucharist itself. At the altar, an outcast woman becomes a welcome guest, and Christians take her place at Christ's feet. A minister says the words "this is my body," and Christ's body and blood become bread and wine.

Substitution, transposition, repetition—these are not unfamiliar themes in Christian theology. Doctrines such as "substitutionary atonement" and "transubstantiation" (along with other ways of explaining Christ's Eucharistic presence) are pillars of the dogmatic tradition. The Eucharistic discourses from 1849 and 1851 that we will consider here make the obvious connections to these doctrines. Yet I will argue

in this chapter that they do so in order to repurpose the substitutionary language—subverting abstract metaphysical conceptions of it. Kierkegaard shows no interest in the questions asked by theories of atonement and Eucharistic presence: how Christ's substitution in our place resolves a conflict between God's justice and mercy; how bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. If metaphysical answers to these questions are at best the inquisitive speculations of curious theological minds, they can quickly become toxic when considered as the centerpiece of Christian faith. To speak of Christ's death as a substitute for the penalty that humans owe to God because of their sin poses a raft of ethical and theological problems that have been troubling since the time of Peter Abelard and are especially so today. A doctrine such as transubstantiation may appear more innocuous in our context, yet it is worth remembering how burdensome figures such as Martin Luther found it as a belief required for full participation in the mass. In the Eucharistic discourses that we will consider in this chapter, Kierkegaard makes the substitution of identities—specifically Christ's substitution of himself in the place of human beings—the centerpiece of the Eucharistic drama, yet he does so in a fundamentally different way from traditional dogmatic theology. For him substitution is not a means of explaining a unique metaphysical event, such as the payment of the penalty that humans owe to God or the mechanism of Eucharistic presence. Rather, substitutionary events such as the incarnation and the Eucharist open ongoing processes of becoming that Kierkegaard believes Christians can enter in the here and now.

The roots of Kierkegaard's reflection on the theme of putting oneself in the place of another stretch back to his early pseudonymous work *Repetition*, published in 1843 on the same day as *Fear and Trembling* (and meant to be read together with it). To be sure,

the Eucharistic discourses never refer to this book, and the knotty term "repetition" [*Gjentagelsen*] largely drops out of Kierkegaard's writings after this early text. My wager in this chapter, however, is that this book can nonetheless shed light on the possibilities of transposition and becoming that Kierkegaard describes in the Eucharistic discourses, if only by way of contrast. *Repetition* describes a series of attempts at personal transformation, all of which ultimately fail. This failure signals the inadequacy of the characters' aesthetic mode of existence and points indirectly to the religious. The one place where a glimmer of the transformation that they are seeking appears is, curiously enough, in a theater: a farce theater, the lowest of low-brow aesthetic arenas in the nineteenth century. Just as Aesthete A in *Either/Or* is passionate about vaudeville, so too Constantine Constantius, the author of *Repetition*, is passionate about farce. As we will see, he loves the way that farce plays solicit spectators to put themselves in the place of their characters. Although identification with these characters is all too fleeting, it nonetheless prefigures the capacity for becoming another that I will argue is essential to Kierkegaard's meditations on the Eucharist.

I argue in this chapter not only that Constantine's analysis of farce anticipates Kierkegaard's meditations on the Eucharist, but also that these meditations on the Eucharist can provide a paradigm for interpreting his writings as a whole. "Whatever philosophy or theology there is in Kierkegaard is sacramentally transmitted in, with, and under the poetry," writes Louis Mackey in his seminal 1971 book.[393] Through my study of Kierkegaard's 1849 and 1851 Eucharistic discourses, I will suggest that Mackey's statement about the sacramental nature of Kierkegaard's writings is true in a more

[393] Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), xi.

concrete sense than he himself may have imagined. As we will see, Kierkegaard tries to bring his authorship to a close with *Two Discourses at the Eucharist on Fridays*, asserting that it "seeks here its decisive place of rest, at the foot of the altar."[394] He looks back upon his writing career both in the Preface to this volume and in *On My Work as an Author*, which he publishes on the same day. What does it mean that Kierkegaard presents his Eucharistic discourses as the culmination of his writing career? What does his variegated and polyphonous authorship look like through the lens of Eucharistic becoming? Can these texts really bring closure to his writing—any more than they would wish to bring sacramental repetition to an end?

I. Becoming Another in the Farce Theater

To begin, let us temporarily leave behind the churchly context of the Eucharistic discourses in order to reenter the aesthetic and theatrical sphere. Kierkegaard's 1843 book *Repetition*, attributed to the author Constantine Constantius, explores the question of whether assuming a new identity, becoming someone new, is possible. Is who we are forever fixed, or can we, like the Sinful Woman, become someone new by losing ourselves in desire?

Such a goal is one crucial sense (among many) in which Constantine means the term "repetition." As the name Constantine Constantius suggests, the very concept of repetition is intrinsically diffuse—splintering, doubling, and "repeating" itself *ad infinium*. In this chapter, I focus on just this one strand of its meaning: repetition as repeating *oneself*, being personally transformed. Still, it is vital to bear in mind that the most important aspect of the concept of repetition is that it can never be arrested or fixed

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[394] *WA*, 165 / *SKS*, 12:281.

in a unitary defenition. Not only does Constantine use *Gjentagelsen* in numerous senses besides personal transformation, but the term also implies—significantly for my argument in this chapter—that processes of becoming can never truly be arrested or completed. I speak throughout this chapter of transformations of *identity*, yet I do so in order to call into question the very notion of identities as inborn, fixed, and immutable. As we will see, Constantine describes the pleasure of the theater, for both actors and spectators, as the ability to assume a new persona for a time. Yet the experience of all the characters in *Repetition* is that, much as they would like to, they cannot finally escape who they are, they cannot truly become someone new. The question the book poses is whether faith might open new possibilities for becoming that go beyond the all-too-temporary transformations of the farce theater. I see the Eucharistic discourses that we will consider in this chapter as taking up precisely this question.

More than one character in *Repetition* desires personal transformation, but the Young Man whom Constantine describes throughout the book seeks it most ardently. Having once been passionately in love with a girl,[395] he suddenly feels himself unable to continue the relationship; he simply is not the sort of person, he concludes, who could be happy in marriage. (The book's narrative is, of course, a transparent repetition of Kierkegaard's own unhappy drama with Regine Olsen—a subject to which I will return in Chapter Five.) The Young Man longs to become the sort of person capable of marriage, the sort of person who could actually continue the love affair he began. In his series of plaintive letters to Constantine in the second part of the book, he proclaims in

[395] The asymmetrical titles of the "Young Man" and the "girl" do not reflect a model of gender relations that many of us would want to endorse today. Rather than trying to clean up *Repetiton*'s language, however, I employ it as it is, allowing its problems to be manifest.

increasingly religious terms his desire for a "thunderstorm" that will transform him in this way. Such a thunderstorm never comes, but a simpler form of repetition does: the girl becomes engaged to someone else, releasing him from his obsession with her and with the question of whether he has wronged her. The Young Man can thus embrace who he has been all along: a Romantic poet, too driven by ethereal longing to be able to commit himself to any actual person. Constantine, commenting on this story in retrospect, explains that the Young Man experiences "aesthetic" repetition, but not the "religious" repetition that he initially sought.[396] The Young Man becomes "[him]self again"; he does not become someone *new*.[397] Such a religious repetition is "too transcendent," Constantine writes, for both the Young Man and himself.[398]

Although the assumption of a genuinely new character eludes the Young Man, Constantine's experiences with farce theater in Berlin provide a glimpse of the repetition that he seeks. His stories about the theater ultimately describe a *failure* of religious repetition, but they nonetheless intimate what this repetition would be. As we have seen several times in this dissertation already, for Kierkegaard the lowliest aesthetic mediums often provide the best glimpses of the religious sphere.

A. The Genre of German Farce

Like Aesthete A's analysis of "The First Love," Constantine's analysis of farce brings to the fore a popular nineteenth-century theatrical genre that has largely disappeared today. *Comédie-vaudeville* and farce were similar in many ways. Indeed,

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[396] *R*, 228-229 / *SKS*, 4:94-95.

[397] *R*, 220 / *SKS*, 4:87.

[398] *R*, 186 / *SKS*, 4:57.

many of the farces performed in Germany—including *Der Talisman*, the farce that Constantine discusses in detail—were translations and reworkings of French vaudeville plays. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the connotations of the two genres were different to Danish readers. J. L. Heiberg, who so influenced Danish taste in general and Kierkegaard's taste in particular, placed the two genres on opposite ends of his Hegelian hierarchy of the dramatic arts. As we saw, he described vaudeville as the pinnacle of dramatic sophistication: the objective embodiment of the spirit of his age, a synthesis of popular appeal with rarefied good taste. Farce, on the other hand, he saw as irredeemably vulgar. In one essay, he notes that the word farce tends to have a double meaning: it represents not only a specific genre of theater, but also a pejorative judgment of any failed play.[399] The latter meaning clearly colors Heiberg's interpretation of the former, for he sees it even at its best as the most rudimentary of the dramatic arts, defined by its "burlesque" elements.[400] His view is doubtless informed by a tendency to find sophistication in all things French and boorishness in all things German.

German farce developed in Vienna in the early nineteenth century, drawing on the tradition of French vaudeville. The foremost figure in its history is the Austrian playwright Johann Nestroy, who not only penned the most famous farces but was also their star actor in Vienna. The humor in these plays is not exactly scandalizing for contemporary readers. Historians of the genre do note, however, that actors often

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[399] J. L. Heiberg, *Om Vaudevillen, som dramatisk Digtart, og dens Betydning paa den danske Skueplads. En dramaturgisk Undersøgelse* in *J. L. Heibergs Samlede Skrifter: Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 6 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1861 [1826]), 57-58. Since the time of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard has clearly lost his desire to ingratiate himself to Heiberg; *Repetition* is more of a direct provocation. It should come as no surprise that Heiberg's review of it is considerably more critical than his review of *Either/Or*. For a translation of a large portion of the text, see *R*, 281n.14.

[400] Heiberg, *Om Vaudevillen* in *Heibergs Samledge Skrifter*, 59.

amplified the play's slapstick and innuendo beyond what was written in the script.[401] One historian describes the plays as full of "comic mixups, funny disguises, slapstick, clownish asides (often with sexual overtones), show-stopping comic songs, etc."[402] Heiberg was not alone in his judgment that the plays were an undignified and even immoral influence. An early twentieth-century German theater historian echoes Heiberg's judgment of the genre in this condemnation of Nestroy's work: "Even in Raimund's day a talented but unscrupulous author had arisen in Johann Nestroy who now for thirty years ruled the stage of Vienna's suburbs and made it a wrestling place for sharp satire, bold parody, frivolous sensuality, and the greatest absurdities."[403] Later in the same book, he offers the follow summary judgment of Nestroy's farces: "The[ir] exclusive purpose of diverting their unassuming public and of touching their emotions by the cheapest possible means, as well as blind local favoritism and the arbitrariness of individual favorite actors, had in the long run a completely destructive influence."[404] This historian shares Heiberg's view of farce as lascivious and corrupting. The genre's "frivolous sensuality" and "cheaply emotional" nature clearly offended refined sensibilities. Like theatrical Pharisees, critics such as Heiberg and this one declare farce to be an unwelcome guest in the world of serious art.

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401 W. E. Yates, *Nestroy and his Critics* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 14**.**

402 Robert Harrison and Katharina Wilson, *Three Viennese Comedies by Johann Nepomuk Nestory* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1986), 3.

403 Georg Witkowski, *The German Drama of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. L. E. Horning (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 35.

404 Witkowski, *The German Drama of the Nineteenth Century*, 55.

Constantine is fully aware of how unsophisticated farce appears to most "cultivated" readers, writing that it "generally moves on the lower levels of society."[405] He is proud to say that "a proper theater public" generally does not know what to make of it.[406] He writes that spectators from the upper echelons of society usually have no idea whether they "should be amused or blasé" when they encounter farce.[407] Constantine finds such people to be extremely "boring" company in which to watch these plays.[408] He prefers to locate himself in the cheap seats—surrounded by the masses' "cheers and shrieks of laughter,"[409] which he describes as "a purely lyrical outburst of their feeling of well-being."[410]

Constantine is by no means unsophisticated in aesthetic matters. He recognizes that farce plots are silly—the characters thin, the humor unrefined. What he loves is the way that farce affects its spectators—eliciting unique responses and interpretations from every person who sees it. Aesthete A speaks of the responses that vaudeville elicits, but Constantine goes further, describing the effects of farce as particularly personal and unpredictable. The way in which a farce affects a spectator is determined more by his or her nature than by any elements intrinsic to the play. In Constantine's view, this goes a long way to explaining the genre's unpopularity among cultural elites. They want their

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[405] *R*, 159 / *SKS*, 4:34.

[406] *R*, 159 / *SKS*, 4:34.

[407] *R*, 168 / *SKS*, 4:43.

[408] *R*, 169 / *SKS*, 4:43.

[409] *R*, 159 / *SKS*, 4:34.

[410] *R*, 159 / *SKS*, 4:34.

reactions to be prescribed for them, according to Constantine. He describes cultivated people's aversion to farce as follows:

> A proper theater public generally has a certain restricted earnestness; it wishes to be—or at least fancies that it is—ennobled and educated in the theater. It wishes to have had—or at least fancies that it has had—a rare artistic enjoyment; it wishes, as soon as it has read the poster, to be able to know in advance what is going to happen that evening. Such unanimity cannot be found at a farce, for the same farce can produce very different impressions, and, strangely enough, it may so happen that the one time it made the least impression it was performed best. Thus a person cannot rely on his neighbor and the man across the street and statements in the newspaper to determine whether he has enjoyed himself or not. The individual has to decide that matter for himself, and as yet, scant success has attended any reviewer's prescription of an etiquette for seeing a farce: here it is impossible to establish a *bon ton*.[411]

The very features of farce that make Constantine passionate about it are the bane of the bourgeoisie. While Constantine relishes the unpredictability of how a farce will strike him, he notes that the "restricted earnestness" of the cultivated elites makes them averse to becoming active in this way. They would rather have their reactions dictated to them by critical judgment, public consensus, newspaper reviews, and marketing. Constantine explains that in farce plays, "the amusement consists largely in the viewer's self-relating to the farce, something he himself must risk."[412] He finds the risk to be thrilling, but the cultivated find it frightening. He argues that it is the unwashed crowds, who lose themselves in the pleasures of the play, who are the truly earnest theater-goers.

What exactly does Constantine mean by describing farce as affecting and implicating its spectators? He writes that the pure and spontaneous enjoyment that can be found in farce comes from recognizing oneself in the characters on stage, seeing oneself "doubled" or "repeated" in the plays. The farce theater provides the opportunity for

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[411] *R*, 159-160 / *SKS*, 4:35.

[412] *R*, 160 / *SKS*, 4:35.

spectators to try on new identities and see new possibilities of who they can become. For example, Constantine writes that a spectator may "discover himself" in the character of a "robber captain."[413] As the spectator looks on from the gallery, he "recognize[s] himself in this reflected image, the robber's masculine form, his quick and yet penetrating glance, the autograph of passion in the lines of his face."[414] In the darkened theater, for a rollicking hour, the spectator is offered the opportunity to try on a multitude of new identities. Constantine describes this as the "magic of the theater," in which a spectator can be "swept along into that artificial actuality in order like a double to see and hear himself and to split himself up into every possible variation of himself, and nevertheless in such a way that every variation is still himself."[415] What makes farce theater so fun is that "becoming" all these characters—splitting oneself up into a million variations of oneself in the "artificial actuality" of the stage—is obvious fiction. The characters on stage are as superficial as the plots are silly; soon enough the lights will rise and the shadow drama will end. Farce enables one to bracket reality for a moment and enter an alternate world "as light and transitory as shadows, as the effervescence of words without an echo."[416] Here the possibilities of who one can become are limitless. This is the joy of farce—and also the risk.

Constantine makes a number of specific comments about how farce should be viewed and staged in order to produce this transportive effect. Emphasizing that

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[413] *R*, 156 / *SKS*, 4:31.

[414] *R*, 156; *SKS*, 4:31; translation modified.

[415] *R*, 154 / *SKS*, 4:30.

[416] *R*, 156 / *SKS*, 4:31; I cite Marilyn Piety's translation of this difficult line. *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M. G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2009), 25.

watching farce should be a personal, individual experience, he recommends that the visitor eschew the prime seats on the main level and head straight for the first balcony, where "one can be quite sure of getting a box all to oneself."[417] Analogously, he writes that no farce production should have too many outstanding actors. Two or three "genius" actors are needed for a farce, but beyond that the supporting cast should be forgettable.[418] The lead actors should be distinguished not by their cultivation but by their passion. Constantine describes these actors in terms that curiously recall *Fear and Trembling*'s characterization of the "knight of faith": they should, he writes, "have the courage to venture what the individual makes bold to do only when alone, what the mentally deranged do in the presence of everybody, what the genius knows how to do with the authority of genius, certain of laughter."[419] Farce actors must be daring individuals, who throw themselves with abandon into the characters they incarnate, becoming, we might say, knights of the comic." They must be driven by a passion exceeding all calculation and reason. Constantine writes that they "are not so much reflective artists who have studied laughter as they are lyricists who themselves plunged into the abyss of laughter and now let its volcanic power hurl them on stage."[420] Their genius is their contagious enthusiasm for incarnating new personas: "The instant they hear the stage manager's bell they are transformed and, like a thoroughbred Arabian horse, they begin to snort and

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[417] *R*, 165 / *SKS*, 4:40.

[418] *R*, 161 / *SKS*, 4:36.

[419] *R*, 161 / *SKS*, 4:36.

[420] *R*, 161 / *SKS*, 4:36.

puff."[421] Constantine calls upon spectators to allow this passion to infect them as they look on from the gallery.

According to Constantine, no great depth or nuance should be sought in farce characters. They are stock characters, and there is no need for the actors to try to make them something more. He writes that while serious theater requires that characters be "a concrete creation thoroughgoingly portrayed in ideality," farce demands that character portrayal happen "through that abstract category 'in general.'"[422] The point of farce is not for the viewer to contemplate realistic characters from a safe distance, but to assume the generic identities depicted. Constantine writes that in order to portray the characters abstractly, actors should feel free to manifest any personal idiosyncrasies that they would normally try to minimize on stage. It is wonderful, he writes, when the actors in farce are "bowlegged or knock-kneed, overgrown or stunted" because such purely "accidental concretion" establishes that they are representing an abstract type.[423] This abstraction "sets the imagination in motion,"[424] encouraging spectators to fill in the remaining details and assume the generic identity for themselves.

Constantine elaborates on his preference for abstract, under-developed characters through an analogy to painting. He mentions his peculiar fondness for "Nürnberg prints"—kitschy, brightly colored, mass-produced landscapes sold by the dozens in the early nineteenth century.[425] These scenes depict "a rural area in general," making use of

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[421] *R*, 161 / *SKS*, 4:36.

[422] *R*, 163 / *SKS*, 4:37.

[423] *R*, 162, 163 / *SKS*, 4:36, 37.

[424] *R*, 162 / *SKS*, 4:37.

[425] *R*, 158 / *SKS*, 4:33. See *SKS*, K, 4:33.

the "accidental concretion" of a haystack or a distant horse.[426] Even though such kitschy abstractions can never be serious art, Constantine writes that they can "produce an indescribable effect."[427] Rather than being particularly commendable in themselves, they spur the individual's imagination into high gear. Such a painting's "whole effect depends upon the observer's mood."[428] Farce actors, he writes, should affect spectators in the same way.[429]

B. Der Talisman

Constantine describes one farce production in particular in *Repetition*—the play that he attends on his return visit to Berlin. It is *Der Talisman*, the most famous of Nestroy's farces;[430] Constantine presents it as emblematic of farce as such. Not only is this play ideally suited to allowing the spectator to put herself in the place of its characters, but its plot describes the central character as trying on one new identity after another. What happens in this play thus dramatizes the very impact of farce upon its spectators that Constantine describes. It is, as it were, a farce about the effects of farce itself.

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[426] *R*, 158 / *SKS*, 4:33.

[427] *R*, 158 / *SKS*, 4:33.

[428] *R*, 158 / *SKS*, 4:33.

[429] It is worth noting how un-Hegelian Constantine's love of abstraction is. For Hegel, the most dialectically developed concept is also the most concrete, since its determinations are no longer latent but explicit. When Constantine praises the abstractness of farce theater and Nürnberg prints, it is as if he is telling readers that the most sophisticated mode of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to be found in "Sense Certainty."

[430] Johann Nestroy, *Komödien 1838-1845* (Frankfurt: Insel Vorlag, 1970). Two English translations are currently available. They can be found in *Three Viennese Comedies by Johann Nepomuk Nestroy*, trans. Robert Harrison and Katharina Wilson (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1986) and *Three Comedies by Johann Nestroy*, trans. Max Knight and Joseph Fabry (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1967).

Der Talisman is the story of a certain young man named Titus. When the audience first meets him, he is a destitute "unemployed barber" and jack of all trades—rejected by his family and ignored by polite society. The unlikely source of all his misfortunes is his red hair. Early nineteenth-century Austrian society apparently harbored a very real prejudice against redheads. The other characters in the play condemn him with a number of epithets associated with red hair at the time: it is hideously ugly, it signals untrustworthiness, it is a mark of the devil, and so forth. In the play's first scene, Titus meets another hapless redhead named Salome, whose lowly occupation in life is goose-herding. Romance between the two unfortunates seems inevitable, but circumstances quickly conspire to allow Titus to break the bonds imposed on him by his red hair. When a local wig-maker is caught in the path of an onrushing horse, Titus rescues this stranger from being trampled. As an expression of gratitude, the wig-maker offers him a flowing wig of midnight-black hair. He promises Titus that the wig will be a "talisman" for him—a supernatural omen of good fortune.

So the wig proves to be. Virtually as soon as Titus slips it on, he begins to climb the social ladder at the local aristocratic estate. This wig proves to be only the first in a series of wigs and disguises. His hair goes from black to blond to gray, and he is given a series of uniforms that enable him to advance from being the estate's gardener, to its game-keeper, to the personal secretary to the local noblewoman. Soon he is charming aristocrats at poetry-themed soirées with his golden tongue. His former identity as a redhead becomes a distant memory. Assuming these elevated roles proves as simple as disguising the color of his hair.

It is not difficult to imagine the occasions for slapstick that this story presents. As Titus impresses one aristocrat after another with his good looks and intelligence, the viewer knows all along that he is just a redhead underneath his wig. Confusions of identity and double *entendres* multiply as Titus trades one wig for another. He must invent increasingly extravagant stories to account for his friends' disparate memories of his appearance and their universal ignorance of his past.

The climax of the play is when Titus's wealthy uncle—a traveling beer salesman—arrives on the scene. Although he has previously disowned Titus because of his red hair, he learns that his hair has gone gray, and he plans to rewrite his will so that Titus inherits his fortune. A widow on the estate now clamors for Titus's hand in marriage, confident that she will become a wealthy woman through him. But just as the uncle is rewriting his will, the lowly Salome returns on stage. The goose-herding redhead knows nothing of Titus's transformations. In her naiveté, she teases him about wearing a wig. In the blink of an eye, his disguise is ruined: once again he is known for who he is. At this point, the women of the estate, who are now more fixated on Titus's inheritance than they are concerned with his red hair, try to contrive one last fiction to explain away what has happened and persuade the uncle that Titus's hair really is gray. But Titus will have no more ruses and disguises. Only Salome, he concludes, loves him for who he really is, red hair and all. So the play ends where it began: the two redheads unite, content with their lowly station. Titus gives up on becoming someone else; he accepts his red hair, and lives simply and happily ever after with his goose-herding bride.

C. Becoming Titus?

The appeal of this play is easy to grasp. It provides a wealth of characters for spectators to laugh at and identify with—snooty aristocrats, money-hungry widows, a prescient wig-weaver, and so on. Beyond this supporting cast, the central figure of the play is the living affirmation that, at least for a time, becoming someone new is possible. Titus performs the assuming alien identities that Constantine describes as the essential pleasure of farce. His existence affirms that in the theatrical world identities are not fixed but fluid: to become another is as simple as slipping on a wig. Yet at the same time the story of Titus is a cautionary tale about the limits of the possibilities of becoming. However many wigs he tries on, his hair is always red beneath them. He is able to slip into a series of new identities, but eventually he must recognize that none of them is really his own. After his dissimulative romp up the social ladder, Titus must return to who he really is. The lights of the farce theater return, and the spectators file out into life's responsibilities. Much as *Der Talisman* delights in the possibilities of theatrical becoming, it also insists that one will always return to who one really is. But is it possible to assume a new character in such a way that one does not eventually return to one's original self? This is this sort of transformation that the characters in *Repetition* desire most dearly. Both Constantine and the Young Man long for becoming someone new in the way that Titus cannot.

Constantine's experiences as a spectator in the Königstädter Theater closely parallel Titus's story. On his first visit to Berlin, his trips to the theater are rapturous and transporting. He loses himself temporarily in the plays, describing his experiences in quasi-religious terms. He compares the experience of watching the play from within the cavernous hall to Jonah's experience inside the belly of the whale: "The vast space of the

theater changed into the belly of the whale in which Jonah sat; the noise in the gallery was like the motion of the monster's viscera."[431] This analogy is not gratuitous. From inside the whale, Jonah sings a psalm of praise to God.[432] Constantine's experience inspires a similar hymn, couched in the pagan language of Romanticism. He writes:

> My unforgettable nursemaid, you fleeting nymph who lived in the brook that ran past my father's farm and always helpfully shared our childish games, even if you just took care of yourself! You, my faithful comforter, who preserved your innocent purity over the years, you who did not age as I grew older, you quiet nymph to whom I turned once again, weary of people, weary of myself, so weary that I needed an eternity to rest up, so melancholy that I needed an eternity to forget. You did not deny me what men want to deny me by making eternity just as busy and even more appalling than time. Then I lay at your side and vanished from myself in the immensity of the sky above and forgot myself in your soothing murmur! You, my happier self, you fleeting life that lives in the brook running past my father's farm, where I lie stretched out as if my body were an abandoned hiking stick, but I am rescued and released in the plaintive purling!—Thus did I lie in my theater box, discarded like a swimmer's clothing, stretched out by the stream of laughter and unrestraint and applause that ceaselessly foamed by me. I could see nothing but the expanse of the theater, hear nothing but the noise in which I resided. Only at intervals did I raise up, look at Beckmann, and laugh so hard that I sank back again in exhaustion alongside the foaming stream.[433]

This hymn of rapture describes how the farce transports Constantine back to a younger and happier version of himself—playing in "innocent purity" by a "brook running past [his] father's farm." Once he would stretch himself upon its banks, "like an abandoned hiking stick," listening to its burbling and gazing at the sky. He writes that in these moments he "vanished from [him]self" and "forgot [him]self." Now, from his solitary perch in the balcony of the farce theater, Constantine becomes this child again, "stretched out by the stream of laughter and unrestraint and applause that ceaselessly foamed by

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[431] *R*, 166 / *SKS*, 4:40.

[432] Jonah 2.

[433] *R*, 166 / *SKS*, 4:40-41.

[him]." If for a moment he begins to return to reality, he needs only take a look at Beckman, a virtuosic actor with contagious passion, to put himself in the place of his younger self again.

This experience of temporarily assuming the identity of his younger and more innocent self is what Constantine wants to repeat when he returns to Berlin to test his theory of repetition. But such repetition proves impossible. Just as Titus must eventually face the reality of his red hair, so too Constantine must face the reality that he is no longer young. He writes that when he returned to the Königstädter Theater to see *Der Talisman* performed, "Beckmann could not make me laugh. I endured it for half an hour and then left the theater thinking: There is no repetition at all."[434] Of the many failures of repetition that Constantine describes in the first part of *Repetition*, this is probably the most disheartening to him. How could the pleasure of farce desert him? Should an art form as trivial as farce not at least be among life's secure pleasures? He is veritably indignant about his failure to repeat his enjoyment:

> This made a deep impression on me. I am not so very young, am not altogether ignorant of life, and long before my previous trip to Berlin I had cured myself of calculating on the basis of uncertainties. I did believe, however, that the enjoyment I had known in that theater would be of a more durable nature, precisely because a person must have learned to let himself be trimmed by existence in many ways and yet learned to manage somehow until he actually got a sense of life—but then life also ought to be all the more secure. Should life be even more deceitful than a bankrupt! He still gives 50 percent or 30 percent, at least something. After all, the least one can ask for is the comic—should not even that be capable of repetition![435]

Constantine makes a pair of seemingly reasonable assumptions here: first, that as one grows more mature, and thus more capable of sustaining life's slings and arrows, one's

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[434] *R*, 169 / *SKS*, 4:43.

[435] *R*, 169 / *SKS*, 4:43.

pleasures will become more reliable; second, that the most secure of all of life's pleasures should be its most trivial. Yet neither assumption proves to be correct. Constantine must face the anti-Hegelian point that development and growth involve not only synthetic accretion but also loss. What he loses here is his capacity to become his youngest and most innocent self. No longer can he take one look at Beckman and be instantly transported back to his childhood stream.

The youthfulness that Constantine longs to reclaim on his repeat visit to Berlin is not just one identity among many, but a metaphor for the very capacity to become another. Youth for Constantine means not being locked in a single actualized identity, but having multiple possibilities of who one can become. He writes that young people have a natural connection to farce because their identities are not yet fixed, but fluid. They thus instinctively recognize themselves in the characters on stage:

> There is probably no young person with any imagination who has not at some time been captivated by the magic of the theater and wished to be swept along into that constructed actuality in order to see and hear himself like a double and to split himself up into every possible variation of himself. Naturally, it is at a very young age that such a desire expresses itself. Only the imagination is awake to its dream about personality; everything else is fast asleep....The personality is not yet discovered; its energy announces itself only in the passion of possibility.[436]

The young may not yet have discovered who they are, but Constantine values their "passion of possibility." He portrays the actualization of mature selfhood as involving a tragic loss of this capacity for possibility and becoming. Nonetheless, he believes that a second experience of farce is possible, a willful reclaiming of this youthful capacity. Such reclaimed youth is not unlike Paul Ricoeur's notion of "second naiveté"—or what Bob Dylan sings about in "My Back Pages": "Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm

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[436] *R*, 154 / *SKS*, 4:30.

younger than that now." Constantine describes what it is like for a mature person to relate youthfully to farce as follows:

> Even though this element [of pure possibility] in the individual's life vanishes, it is nevertheless reproduced at a more mature age when the soul has integrated itself in earnest. Although art many not be sufficiently earnest for the individual then, he can still occasionally have the desire to return to that first state and resume it in a mood. He desires the comic effect and wants a relation to the theatrical performance that generates the comic. Since tragedy, high comedy [*Comedien*], and light comedy [*Lystspillet*] fail to please him precisely because of their perfection, he turns to farce.[437]

Such a second enjoyment of farce is chosen rather than merely spontaneous. The mature person must deliberately bracket her cultivation and seriousness in order to give herself over to farce's pleasure. Like an adult who is fascinated by Nürnberg prints, such a spectator discovers youthful possibility anew.

To choose to inhabit such youthfulness is not simply to allow oneself to be silly for a time. Indeed, in *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio uses the preservation of youth in the midst of maturity as a metaphor for religious faith itself. He writes: "Abraham had faith, and therefore he was young, for he who always hopes for the best grows old and is deceived by life, and he who is always prepared for the worst grows old prematurely, but he who has faith—he preserves an eternal youth."[438] Given de Silentio's presentation of faith as inevitably filled with fear and trembling, the analogy between youth and faith signals that—even within the farce theater—becoming young again is an extraordinarily difficult task. It is not easy to leave behind the identity that one has worked to construct for oneself, however flawed one knows it to be, in order to open oneself to the possibility of becoming someone new. Fixed identities offer security,

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[437] *R*, 157 / *SKS*, 4:33; translation modified.

[438] *FT*, 18 / *SKS*, 4:115.

whereas fluidity necessarily involves risk. On his second visit to Berlin, Constantine cannot find such youthful fluidity even in the farce theater. Only faith, *Repetition* suggests, can reanimate this capacity, yet this is beyond Constantine's purview entirely.

II. Writing Repetition

Constantine devotes the second half of the book to his imagined relationship to a character that he eventually admits is his own literary creation. Not coincidentally, the character bears the name of the Young Man. Unable to become young again in the farce theater, Constantine now writes a relationship with youth. Yet like Constantine himself, the Young Man ultimately repeats Titus's story.

The story of the Young Man is that he falls passionately in love with a girl, but almost immediately becomes "an old man in regard to the entire relationship."[439] He cannot *repeat* his youthful passion but only *recollect* it as something past—as an old man would from the distant comfort of an easy chair. Constantine explains that the Young Man is unable to continue to love the girl in actuality because he assumes the identity of a poet; becoming this character makes him unable to become anything else. The stereotypical Romantic, he sees himself as beset with a longing so powerful that no actual human being could satisfy it. Constantine describes him as wandering about reciting a verse by Poul Martin Møller:

> Then comes a dream from my early youth
> To my easy chair.
> I get a deep longing for you,
> you sun of women.[440]

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[439] *R*, 136 / *SKS*, 4:14.

[440] *R*, 136 / *SKS*, 4:13; translation modified.

Constantine explains that the Young Man's identification with these poetic lines reveals that the girl has become a mere idea to him—a dream from his youth about an idealized "sun of women," rather than a real person of flesh and blood. As Constantine writes, "I am completely convinced that he does not know the girl at all, although he has been attached to her and she probably has never been out of his thoughts since then. She is the Girl—period."[441] The poetic identity that the Young Man assumes does not enable him to assume further identities, as youth does. Rather, it traps him in recollection, locking him into itself so that he cannot become another, especially a person capable of marriage. Constantine's judgment of the Young Man's self-enclosure is harsh. He says that the Young Man relates to the girl not as someone authentically other, but merely "as the border of his being." "Such a relationship," he continues, "is not erotic."[442] To lose the youthful capacity for becoming is the same as to lose the capacity for desire. Like Kierkegaard's critique of the German Romantics in *The Concept of Irony*, Constantine's critique of the Young Man is not that he desires too much but that he desires too little. His transformation into a poet closes off future becoming and further intensification of *eros*.

For most of the book, the Young Man's enclosure within his identity as poet is not absolute. His attachment to the girl, or at least his sense that he has wronged her, continues to haunt him. He longs more and more ardently to be transformed into the sort of person who could actually love her. He knows how radical such a transformation would be: "What will be the effect of this thunderstorm?" he asks. "It will make me fit

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[441] *R*, 185 / *SKS*, 4:56; translation modified.

[442] *R*, 185 / *SKS*, 4:56.

to be a husband. It will shatter my whole personality—I am prepared. It will render me almost unrecognizable to myself."[443] The Young Man wants to become someone new, without ultimately reverting to his old, original self. He seeks what the Sinful Woman achieves when she forgets herself completely out of love for Christ.

Eventually the Young Man gets news that amounts to a kind of "thunderstorm"—but not the kind that he was seeking. Rather than giving him a new identity, it confirms him once and for all in his identity as a poet. He learns that the girl is engaged to someone else, and this news releases him from his lingering attachment and guilt. Just as Titus ultimately accepts that he has red hair and cannot change it, so too the Young Man ultimately accepts that he is a poet and will never love the Girl. "I am myself again," he proclaims jubilantly to Constantine.[444] His lyrical words in his final letter to Constantine make clear that he has once and for all sealed his identity as a Romantic poet by severing all ties with actuality:

> The beaker of inebriation is again offered to me, and already I am inhaling its fragrance, already I am aware of its bubbling music—but first a libation to her who saved a soul who sat in the solitude of despair: Praised be feminine generosity! Three cheers for the flight of thought, three cheers for the perils of life in service to the idea, three cheers for the hardships of battle, three cheers for the festive jubilation of victory, three cheers for the dance in the vortex of the infinite, three cheers for the cresting waves that hide me in the abyss, three cheers for the cresting waves that fling me above the stars.[445]

There is no mention here of the girl—even as an idealized type. What the Young Man praises is "feminine generosity," "the flight of thought," and "service to the idea." He is a poet once and for all.

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[443] *R*, 214 / *SKS*, 4:81.

[444] *R*, 220 / *SKS*, 4:87.

[445] *R*, 221-222 / *SKS*, 4:88.

What is Constantine's purpose in presenting this character? Why does he write himself into a relationship with him? If one considers these questions solely in terms of what Constantine himself gains by writing, it is difficult to find a satisfactory answer, since the Young Man seems merely to reproduce his failings. Like Titus and Constantine, the Young Man is open to transformation for a time, but eventually becomes locked in a single identity, as his age and maturity advance. All of these characters crave a form of repetition that they cannot achieve. But perhaps, like farce, *Repetition* is valuable less for its intrinsic features, than for the ways in which they can affect its readers. The book does not end with the conclusion of the correspondence between Constantine and the Young Man, but with a letter addressed to "Mr. X, Esq., the real reader of this book."[446] Speaking in a different sort of authorial voice from the one he uses elsewhere in the text, Constantine writes that "I now try to help you, dear reader, by once again taking another role."[447] What might this letter signal about his authorial purpose?

"*My dear reader!*" the letter begins. "Forgive me for addressing you so familiarly but we are, after all, *unter uns*. Although you are indeed fictional, you are by no means a plurality to me but only one, and therefore we are just you and I."[448] One remarkable feature of this letter is its description of the "true" or "dear" reader of the book as a character or identity that readers must work to assume—rather than being a natural state created by making it to the end. Such a character is purely "fictional" as far

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[446] *R*, 223 / *SKS*, 4:89.

[447] *R*, 228 / *SKS*, 4:94.

[448] *R*, 225 / *SKS*, 4:91.

as Constantine is concerned. Just as he asserts that mature farce spectators must work to achieve a youthful enjoyment of the play, so too he claims that becoming a true reader of *Repetition* is a task at which would-be readers must strive. In the opening paragraphs of the letter, Constantine writes that he expects such genuine readers to be few:

> If it is assumed that anyone who reads a book for one or another superficial reason unrelated to the book is not a genuine reader, then there perhaps are not many genuine readers left even for authors with a large reading public. Who in our day thinks of wasting any time on the curious idea that it is an art to be a good reader, not to mention spending time to become that?[449]

Constantine goes on to enumerate many different types of people who will read the book for the wrong reasons.[450] Comparing himself to Clement of Alexandria, who wrote "in such a way that the heretics are unable to understand it," he says that he is certain that none of these readers will like his book.[451]

To become a genuine reader of *Repetition* according to Constantine is to cease contemplating its characters from a safe distance and to be drawn into their stories. It means throwing oneself into their personas as farce actors throw themselves into the

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[449] *R*, 225 / *SKS*, 4:91.

[450] Constantine writes this paragraph with rapier wit: "An inquisitive female reader who reads the end of every book she finds on her bedside table to see if the lovers get each other will be disappointed, for surely the two lovers do get each other, but my friend, who also is indeed a male, gets no one. A concerned family man will perhaps fear that his son will go the same way as my friend and therefore think the book leaves a jarring impression, inasmuch as it is not a ready-made uniform that fits every musketeer. —A temporary genius will perhaps find that the exception creates too many difficulties for himself and takes the matter too seriously. –A convivial family friend will look in vain for a transfiguration of parlor trivialities or a glorification of tea-time gossip. –A vigorous champion of actuality will perhaps think the whole thing revolves around nothing. –An experienced matchmaking woman will consider the book a failure, since her main interest would be to find out what a girl must be like 'to make such a man happy,' for she satisfies herself in a way very pleasant to her that there must be, or at least must have been, such a girl. –His Reverence will assert that there is too much philosophy in the book; his Right Reverence's mental eye will seek in vain for what the congregation, especially in our day, needs so very much, the genuinely speculative. –My dear reader, we certainly may speak this way about these matters *unter uns*, for you no doubt realize that I do not believe all these opinions will actually be advanced, since the book will not have many readers." (*R*, 225-226 / *SKS*, 91-92)

[451] *R*, 226 / *SKS*, 4:91.

characters they play. Indeed, Constantine suggests that the genuine reader will seek through the book a more radical transformation than its characters are able to achieve themselves—the "religious repetition" that eludes them all. Although he describes the Young Man as the book's absolute focus—"every move I have made is merely to throw light on him"[452]—he also insists that the Young Man's identity as a poet is merely a "transition" to the way of life he means to encourage. He commends the Young Man as an "exception" to the passionless norms of bourgeois propriety, but he nonetheless sees his value only as a "transition to the truly aristocratic exceptions," which are "the religious exceptions."[453] The Young Man can shed light on these exceptions by way of negative contrast, but he is not one himself. If he were religious, Constantine explains, the Young Man would not attribute his inability to marry to his poetic identity but rather to the identity given him by his "God-relationship."[454] Then, like the knight of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, he would accept the consequences of having this character, wherever they lead—"even though this obligation would have strange results."[455] The possibilities of who he would then become would be unpredictable and limitless. He would be a person determined exclusively by his relationship to God, whose life would be as incomprehensible as Abraham's.

Constantine does not claim to be able to represent in prose what such a character would look like, and he does not claim to be able to embody such an existence himself. But if *Repetition* is like the genre of farce that it describes, then its characters and stories

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[452] *R*, 228 / *SKS*, 4:94.

[453] *R*, 228 / *SKS*, 4:93.

[454] *R*, 230 / *SKS*, 4:95.

[455] *R*, 230 / *SKS*, 4:95.

considered in themselves should be the least of readers' concerns. "Genuine" readers will ask who they might become by reading about them. They will enter its drama—and take it further. What possibilities might open if it points them out of the farce theater and toward Vor Frue Kirke's Friday Eucharistic liturgy?

III. Christ's Substitution in Our Place

To become another, not for a moment of make-believe, as one slips on a wig or into a daydream, but in actual existence: this is the kind of repetition that *Repetition*'s characters desire but cannot find. The Sinful Woman, however, achieves just this. According to Kierkegaard's Eucharistic discourse, she "forgets herself completely" and becomes "lost in her Savior"—confident that the identity that matters is the one given to her by Christ, not the one imposed on her by the Pharisees' contemptuous gaze. Her transformation is truer than that of even the most virtuosic farce actress. At the same time, however, I will argue that this transformation should not be understood merely as trading one fixed identity for another. Instead, it should be understood as inculcating a capacity for never-ending becoming through identification with others—the youthfulness that Johannes de Silentio suggests is the essence of faith itself.

This woman is only one of three characters discussed in Kierkegaard's 1849 collection of Eucharistic discourses. They are named together in the collection's title: *"The High Priest," "The Tax Collector," "The Woman Who Was a Sinner."* The second character functions similarly to that of the Sinful Woman. Like her, the Tax Collector is a prototype that Kierkegaard calls Christians to imitate and become. Instead of modeling the boldness of faith, he models penitential humility. In contrast, the character of High Priest functions on a fundamentally different level because he is the character of Christ

himself. Kierkegaard bases the sermon on Hebrews 4:15: "We have not a high priest who is unable to have sympathy with our weaknesses, but one who has been tested in all things in the same way, yet without sin."[456] For Kierkegaard this verse describes God's assumption of a human identity—God putting Godself in the place of a human being. God assumed a human character not by putting on a disguise, as docetists once suggested, but by actually *becoming* human. Moreover, this assumption of a human identity was not limited to the idiosyncrasies of Jesus' particular personality, but involved Christ putting himself in the place of each and every human being. Throughout the sermon, Kierkegaard repeats again and again the refrain that "Christ put himself completely in your place." He writes, for example: "He was God and became man—in this way he put himself in your place."[457]

The theme of Christological substitution lends itself readily, of course, to boilerplate Protestant atonement theology. In a passage near the end of the sermon, Kierkegaard seems to embrace this: "What is the Redeemer but a substitute who puts himself completely in your place and in mine?" he asks.[458] Pressing the penal metaphor, he continues: "When punitive justice here in the world or in judgment in the next seeks the place where I, a sinner, stand with all my guilt, with my many sins—it does not find me. I no longer stand in that place; I have left it and someone else stands in my place, someone who puts himself completely in my place."[459] Lines like these scarcely need

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[456] *WA*, 115 / *SKS*, 11:251.

[457] *WA*, 116 / *SKS*, 11:253.

[458] *WA*, 123 / *SKS*, 11:258.

[459] *WA*, 123 / *SKS*, 11:258-259.

expounding because their theology is so familiar: on the cross, Christ substituted himself for sinful human beings, paying the penalty we rightly owe to God.

But I will argue that such passages do not express Kierkegaard's primary focus either in this sermon or in those that follow it. If they did, these texts would hardly be worth mentioning because their point would be both prosaic and insupportable. Whether the dominant metaphor of penal atonement theology is a courtroom scene (the innocent Christ allowing himself to be declared guilty in our place), an accountant's ledger (Christ paying the debts we owe to God), or retributive suffering (Christ enduring the lashes and death we deserve), its problems are glaring. What sort of God would require the crucifixion of an innocent victim to appease his sense of justice? What sort of loving Father would demand the torture and death of his only Son? How could divine justice be satisfied by a supreme injustice? How could divine mercy be so constrained? I wish to argue here that even as Kierkegaard exploits the pivotal role of substitution in traditional dogmatics, he does so in order to subvert and repurpose it. Rather than describing Christ's substitution in our place as a one-time event that changes how *God* sees human beings, he presents it as the beginning of an ongoing process through which *we* can be transformed. The conception of Christological substitution that he presents in this sermon and those that follow it is exactly the "religious repetition" for which the characters in *Repetition* long. By assuming a human character, Christ opens the possibility of ongoing substitutionary becoming that is centered in Eucharistic practice and fired by infinite longing.

Although Kierkegaard uses the language of substitutionary atonement briefly near the end of this sermon, this is by no means his central concern in the text. Rather, the

greater part of the sermon focuses on the human experience of suffering, the isolation intrinsic to it, and the empathy that Christ is able to provide because he put himself in the place of each and every human being. Kierkegaard begins by describing what he calls "the universal lament of sufferers," which he expresses as follows: "You do not understand me, oh, you do not understand me; you are not putting yourself in my place."[460] Intrinsic to the experience of suffering, he suggests, is the sense that despite one's friends' best efforts, they cannot empathize with what one is undergoing because they cannot put themselves in one's place. To suffer is to experience one's identity as a solitary-confinement prison. The Young Man in *Repetition* expresses just this complaint in his anguished letters to Constantine: "There is no one who understands me. My pain and my suffering are nameless, even as I myself am nameless."[461] Kierkegaard sees such despair over the possibility of empathy as justified from a human perspective. But he insists that the Gospel tells another story: "Whoever you are, [Christ] is able to put himself completely in your place."[462] He describes Christ as having descended to the depths of human suffering, becoming "the human being who of all, unconditionally all, has suffered the most."[463] Because Christ undertook our sufferings to such a degree that no human being could possibly comfort *him*, he became the universally available "Comforter."[464] Christ offers empathy to all who suffer, even though such empathy is impossible from a strictly human point of view.

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[460] *WA*, 115 / *SKS*, 11:252.

[461] *R*, 203 / *SKS*, 4:71.

[462] *WA*, 121 / *SKS*, 11:256.

[463] *WA*, 117 / *SKS*, 11:253.

[464] *WA*, 119 / *SKS*, 11:255.

In the concluding lines of the sermon, Kierkegaard no longer speaks of Christ's substitution in our place as a past event. He shifts his focus from the incarnation to the transpositions of identity that it makes possible in the present. He suggests that just as God assumes an alien identity in Christ, so too can we:

> Whoever you are, O sinner, as we all are, [Christ] puts himself completely in your place! Now you go to the altar; the bread is handed to you and then the wine, his holy body and blood, once again as an eternal pledge that by his suffering and death he put himself also in your place, so that you, behind him saved, the judgment past, may enter into life, where once again he has prepared a place for you."[465]

Kierkegaard is addressing the reader at the threshold of sacramental repetition: "Now you go to the altar." In this Eucharistic moment, he says, Christ puts himself in the place of bread and wine, "once again as an eternal pledge that by his suffering and death he put himself also in your place." In doing so, he writes, Christ invites his followers to "enter into life, where once again he has prepared a place for you." By assuming the lowliest of human identities, Christ invites us to assume a heavenly character. Unlike traditional theologies of atonement, Kierkegaard is not suggesting that any of these transpositions affects God. Rather, he is saying that they multiply in the here and now, changing *us*. God becomes human, Christ becomes bread and wine, the Comfortless One becomes our Comforter, the inconsolable find empathy, and sinners become children of God. These repetitions continue in the sermons that follow this one in the 1849 collection. The Tax Collector becomes a paragon of Christian life, the Sinful Woman becomes a welcome guest, and Christians put themselves in her place as they kneel at the feet of Christ.

IV. Becoming Christ

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[465] *WA*, 123-124 / *SKS*, 11:259; translation modified.

Kierkegaard develops these substitutionary themes even further in his final collection of Eucharistic discourses, *Two Discourses at the Eucharist on Fridays*, published in 1851. He presents this book as the closure not only of his Eucharistic discourses, but also of his entire writing career. As he writes in the Preface to this slim volume, "An authorship that began with *Either/Or* and advanced step by step seeks here its decisive place of rest, at the foot of the altar."[466] What is the "rest" of which he speaks here? Could it bring an end to the fluidity of identities that he has been describing? To answer these questions, I will treat the elements of *Two Discourses* in reverse order, beginning with the second sermon, then discussing the first, and finally considering the Preface in greater detail.

A. Christ as "Cover"

In the latter of the *Two Discourses*, Kierkegaard returns to the theme of Christ's "substitution in our place" that he discusses in "The High Priest." The sermon revolves around a text from I Peter 4:8: "Love will hide a multitude of sins."[467] It presents Christ's capacity to "hide" or "cover" human sins as a further specification of what it means for him to "put himself in our place." The Danish verb *at skjule* and its noun form *Skjul* can be translated either as "to hide"/"hiding place" or "to cover"/"cover." Again and again throughout the sermon, Kierkegaard encourages the reader to take this language "literally."[468] It is almost as if he conceives of Christ's self-giving as taking the form of a physical wig with which Christ, like the wigs of Titus, can cover our shame.

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[466] *WA*, 165 / *SKS*, 12:281.

[467] *WA*, 181 / *SKS*, 12:293.

[468] *WA*, 184, 185, 185, 185, 186 / *SKS*, 12: 298, 299, 299, 299, 300.

Christ joins himself to us in such a way, he writes, that he provides a literal "hiding place" or "cover" for our sins. He insists that this it is not a metaphor, or a doctrine, or an expression of sympathy: "It is not a few grounds of comfort that he gives you; it is not a doctrine he communicates to you—no, he gives you himself."[469] Kierkegaard explains what this literal hiding place means in the Eucharistic context when he writes: "Jesus Christ covers your sin with his *holy body*, just as when one person places himself in front of another person and covers him so completely with his body that no one, no one, can see the person hidden behind him."[470] Christ's "substitution in our place" is Christ literally giving us his body in order to hide our sinful selves.

Traditional theologies of substitutionary atonement would be quite comfortable speaking of Christ as "hiding" human sin. They would speak of Christ as hiding it, specifically, from God the Father. But Kierkegaard never describes this "cover" as concealing anything from God. Instead, he says that it hides our sin and shame from us, from our own anguished consciences. "Deep within every human being there is a secret-sharer," he writes, who makes it impossible for anyone to "hide his sins from himself."[471] However much we try to silence this voice of conscience, it always succeeds in communicating its insistent message: you are a sinner, you are not worthy of God, you will never be anything else. To experience the reproaches of this voice is, Kierkegaard writes, to experience a "craving" [*Trang*] for a "hiding place," so that one can leave one's guilt behind and become someone new.[472] This craving is analogous to the craving that

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[469] *WA*, 187 / *SKS*, 12:300-301.

[470] *WA*, 185 / *SKS*, 12:299.

[471] *WA*, 182 / *SKS*, 12:297-298.

[472] *WA*, 183-184 / *SKS*, 12:298; translation modified.

the Young Man expresses for a thunderstorm, which will replace his poetic identity with one capable of marriage. Kierkegaard expresses the desire to escape the pangs of one's own conscience as follows:

> Would that there were a place of refuge to which I could flee—far away from myself! Would that there were a hiding place where I am so hidden that not even the consciousness of sin can find me! Would that there were a border, however narrow, if it still makes a separation between me and my sin! Would that on the other side of a chasmic abyss there were a spot, however little, where I can stand, while the consciousness of my sin must remain on this side. Would that there were a forgiveness, a forgiveness that does not increase my sense of guilt but truly takes the guilt from me, also the consciousness of it. Would that there were oblivion![473]

Kierkegaard is thus not describing a craving for a hiding place from pitiless divine wrath. He is not saying that Christ hides our sin by placing an enormous obstacle in front of the peering eyes of God the Father. He is describing a yearning to "flee far away from myself," so that my self-condemnation can cease and there can be "a separation between me and my sin." He speaks of wanting to forget his sinful self to the point of "oblivion," so that he might become the sort of person he wishes to be. His argument is that Christ gives himself to us in such a way that he hides our sins from *us*. To receive such a gift is to be transformed. Augustine famously writes in his *Confessions* that even when he wandered far from God, "you were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me."[474] Kierkegaard portrays the way in which Christ redeems us in similar terms. In the Eucharist, Christ becomes more intimate to us than our sin by giving us his very body and blood for food and drink. To summarize

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[473] *WA*, 184 / *SKS*, 12: 298.

[474] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 43 [vi (11)].

Kierkegaard's substitutionary theology with a paraphrase of Athanasius, Christ becomes one with us so that we might become one with Christ.

In the closing lines of this concluding sermon, Kierkegaard for the first and only time in all the Eucharistic discourses uses the word "communion" [*Samfund*] to name the Lord's Supper. As we discussed in Chapter Two, he prefers the Danish idiom *at gaae til Alters* to refer to the act of receiving the Eucharist—naming the event's staging, rather than the event itself. Now, in these closing lines, he describes "this holy Supper" as a veritable "communion" with Christ, who provides the hiding place or cover over our sins. This passage is worth quoting at length. Kierkegaard concludes the sermon (and ostensibly his entire authorship) as follows:

> Devout listener, it is to the love that hides a multitude of sins that you come today, seeking it at the altar. From the servant of the church you have received the assurance of the gracious forgiveness of your sins. At the altar you receive the pledge of that. And not only that; you do not only receive this pledge in the same way as you receive from another person a pledge that he bears this feeling for or this attitude toward you. No, you receive the pledge as a pledge that you receive Christ himself. As you receive the pledge, you receive Christ himself. In and with the visible sign, he gives you himself as a cover over your sins. Since he is the Truth, you do not find out from him what truth is and now are left to yourself, but you remain in the Truth only be remaining in him; since he is the Way, you do not find out from him the way you are to go and now, left to yourself, must go your way, but only by remaining in him do you remain on the way; since he is the Life, you do not have life handed over by him and now must shift for yourself, but you have life only by remaining in him—in this way he is also the hiding place. Only by remaining in him, only by living yourself into him are you under cover, only then is there a cover over the multitude of your sins. This is why the Supper [*Nadveren*] is called a communion [*et Samfund*] with him; it is not only in memory of him, it is not only as a pledge that you have communion with him, but it is the communion, this communion that you are to strive to preserve in your daily life by more and more living yourself out of yourself and living yourself into him, in his love, which hides a multitude of sins.[475]

[475] *WA*, 188 / *SKS*, 12:301-302; translation modified.

Kierkegaard describes the Lord's Supper here as a "communion with Christ" in literal, physical terms. The pledges of bread and wine are not assurances of a "feeling" or an "attitude," but pledges that we receive "Christ himself." In fact, the supper is "not only...a pledge" of communion, nor "only in memory of him," but "it *is* the communion" with Christ. To receive Holy Communion is to "receive Christ himself." This communion does not occur as an abstraction—through ideas, pledges, memories, or doctrine—but *is* the believer's unification with Christ. As a consequence, Kierkegaard emphasizes that this does not happen in a moment's ecstatic experience, which, once passed, leaves us to ourselves again. Trumpets of beatitude do not sound the moment one swallows the bread and the wine. Communion with Christ involves a lifetime of striving to "live yourself out of yourself and live yourself into him."

Assuming Christ's identity is thus the telos of Kierkegaard's conception of a Christian life grounded in Eucharistic practice. Such becoming is fundamentally different from the outcome of Titus's journey through wigs and disguises to the upper echelons of high society. The new identity granted by Christ is not merely a disguise, beneath which one's ignominious red hair always lies. It involves assuming a new character that transforms one's original self. Further, the new identity given through Christ does not put an end to substitutionary becoming but opens its ongoing possibility. It is the capacity for putting oneself in the place of another through empathetic love. In the sermon that we have been considering, Kierkegaard distinguishes between the way in which Christ covers our old identities from the way in which a mother hen would cover her chicks with her wings. Whereas the mother hen covers her chicks with a fixed barrier, Christ "hides with *his death*"—pouring himself out for the sake of the world by

putting himself in the place of each individual human being.[476] Far from being an ultimate resting place, Christoform identity is a calling to put oneself in the place of all who suffer. To live oneself into Christ means to pour oneself out with him. It means putting oneself in the place of each and every neighbor, as Christ does—empathizing with them and joining them in their suffering.

B. Inflaming Faith

The first of Kierkegaard's sermons in *Two Discourses* faces squarely the reality that all of us ultimately fail at this goal of "living into" Christ. Kierkegaard takes as his text a verse from the pericope of "The Woman Who Was a Sinner": "But one who is forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). Whereas the sermon discussed in Chapter Three focuses on the phrase, "her many sins are forgiven her, because she loved much," this sermon focuses on the converse proposition. Kierkegaard proposes that while the words inscribed at the feet of Thorvaldsen's *Christus*, "Come to me," are the perfect *invitation* to the sacrament, these words from Luke would make the ideal *dismissal* from it.[477] Provocative as this suggestion is, Kierkegaard believes that the reality is plain: most Christians, himself included, typically leave the altar loving little. "We shall not speak in such a way that the discourse leaves you ignorant of how things go in actuality," he writes.[478] We do not lose ourselves in love for Christ—experiencing it as a calling to put ourselves in the place of all who suffer, as he does. Kierkegaard writes that "if you could look into the hearts" of those who receive the Eucharist on any given occasion, "you

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[476] *WA*, 186 / *SKS*, 12:300.

[477] *WA*, 169 / *SKS*, 12:285-286.

[478] *WA*, 170 / *SKS*, 12:286.

would possibly see that basically there was not a single one who left it completely unburdened, and at times you might see someone who went away even more burdened, burdened by the thought that he probably had not been a worthy guest."[479] Kierkegaard's frank acknowledgment of this reality points to how he conceives the Christian life. He says that he wants his listeners neither to be "intoxicated in dreams"—such that they "imagine that everything was decided by this one time" of receiving the sacrament—nor to "give up" "in quiet despondency."[480] Rather, he wants to incite a "continuous striving" to live into communion with Christ.[481]

Kierkegaard sees his chosen verse as promoting such a striving in exemplary fashion. He describes it as consisting simultaneously in "words of judgment" and "words of comfort": the simultaneous proclamation of law and gospel.[482] As he recognizes, most of us typically hear it exclusively as law, and he certainly believes that it is important to hear it this way. Because the statement that "one who is forgiven little loves little" condemns our failure to lose ourselves in the love Christ offers, it prompts us to repentance. Kierkegaard returns to the theme of sorrow [*Sorg*] to explain how important such repentance is, portraying it again as a form of desire. He writes:

> There is a longing [*Længsel*] for God, a trust in God, a reliance upon, a hope in God, a love [*Kjerlighed*], a bold confidence—but what most surely finds [one] may still be the sorrowing [*Sorgen*] for God. Sorrowing for God—this is no fugitive mood that promptly disappears as one draws close to God; on the contrary, it may be deepest just when one draws close to God, just as the

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[479] *WA*, 170 / *SKS*, 12:286

[480] *WA*, 170-171 / *SKS*, 12:286.

[481] *WA*, 170 / *SKS*, 12:286.

[482] *WA*, 171 / *SKS*, 12:287.

> person sorrowing in this way is most fearful for himself the closer he comes to God.[483]

This penitential desire is vital to the "continuous striving" that Kierkegaard sees as the heart of the Christian life. Like his understanding of longing in general, this "sorrow" does not diminish "when one draws close to God" but "may be deepest" just at that moment. Rather than being merely a means to the end of finding forgiveness, it is a form of desire that incites further striving.

But even as Kierkegaard insists upon the importance of the repentance occasioned by hearing this verse as "words of judgment," he also wants his listeners to hear it as "words of comfort." This second interpretation places the emphasis not on the fact that we love *little*, but on the fact that we *love*. Kierkegaard insists that, to the extent that love for Christ is present, it can be inflamed and made more ardent, as earthly desire can. Christ is changeless in his willingness to receive our love as it grows. Kierkegaard uses one of his many parables about earthly desire to illustrate this point:

> Imagine a girl in love; in concern she confesses to herself how little she has loved until now—but now, she says to herself, I will become sheer love [*Kjerlighed*]. And she succeeds. These tears of sorrow [*Sorg*] she sheds over herself—these tears do not put out the fire; no, they are burning too brightly for that. No, these very tears make the fire flame up. But meanwhile the beloved has changed; he was no longer loving.[484]

The girl in this parable initially loves her suitor little. Then she repents with "tears of sorrow." These tears "make the fire flame up," so that she succeeds in becoming "sheer love." The tragedy is that, in this earthly situation, the patience of her suitor is finite. Before her sorrow bears fruit, he loses interest. But Kierkegaard assures his listener that

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[483] *WA*, 171 / *SKS*, 12:287.

[484] *WA*, 174 / *SKS*, 12:290; translation modified.

Christ is constant in his love for us, no matter how tepid our love is in return. Even as Kierkegaard encourages us to shed tears of sorrow over our lack of passion, he assures us that our love can grow—and that Christ will be there to receive it when it does.

The fact that Kierkegaard hears a gospel promise in this statement points to his vision of faith as taking the form of desire. In the following passage, he first describes the way love can grow, and then turns to asserting that this progressive inflammation describes the very nature of Christian faith. He writes:

> When you love much, you are forgiven much—and when you are forgiven much, you love much. See here the blessed recurrence of salvation in love! First you love much, and much is then forgiven you—and see, then love increases even more. This, that you have been forgiven so much, loves forth love once again, and you love much because you were forgiven much. Here love is like faith. Imagine one of those unfortunates whom Christ healed by a miracle. In order to be healed the person must believe—now he believes and is healed. Now he is healed—and now that he is saved, his faith is twice as strong.[485]

Living oneself into Christ through faith is not controlled by an on/off switch. Rather, it is a continual intensification of longing. To expect to leave the Eucharist with perfect faith is for Kierkegaard a fundamental misunderstanding of what faith is. As he writes in the first of the Eucharistic discourses, the best possible outcome of receiving the sacrament is a quickening of desire for communion with Christ.

C. The Foot of the Altar as "Place of Rest"?

So what should we make of Kierkegaard's claim in the Preface to *Two Discourses* that his authorship "seeks here its final resting place, at the foot of the altar"? The sermons that follow this statement certainly belie such a goal. But I wish to suggest that

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[485] *WA*, 176 / *SKS*, 12:291-292.

a close reading of the Preface itself suggests that Kierkegaard means the word "rest" here in a highly unconventional sense—if indeed he wants us to take him seriously at all.

In its entirety, the first paragraph of the Preface reads as follows:

> An authorship that began with *Either/Or* and advanced step by step seeks here its decisive place of rest, at the foot of the altar, where the author, personally most aware of his own imperfection and guilt, certainly does not call himself a truth-witness but only a singular kind of poet and thinker who, *without authority*, has had nothing new to bring but "has wanted once again to read through, if possible in a more inward way, the original text [*Urskrift*] of individual human existence-relationships, the old familiar text handed down from the fathers"—(see my postscript to *Concluding Postscript*).[486]

The lines quoted above have a valedictory, even somber, tone. Looking over his variegated authorship stretching back to *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard now purports to bring his writing to a close with this final set of Eucharistic discourses. The Preface goes on to include a wistful farewell to the Danish language—which Kierkegaard "with filial devotion and with almost feminine infatuation" is "proud to have the honor to write."[487] Kierkegaard publishes this slim volume on the same day as his pamphlet *On My Work as an Author*—connecting his effort to find rest at the foot of the altar with his effort to explain the meaning of his writings as a whole.

But note Kierkegaard's citation from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in the paragraph above. This gesture is in my view as ironic as any passage in *The Concept of Irony*. The *Postscript,* after all, claimed to bring Kierkegaard's writing career to a close five years and hundreds of thousands of words before. The lines Kierkegaard quotes in this Preface are from the "First and Last Explanation" appended to the *Postscript*, in which he shirks off the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, addresses the

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[486] *WA*, 165 / *SKS*, 12:281.

[487] *WA*, 166 / *SKS*, 12:281.

reader directly, and claims to take leave of writing once and for all. To judge it merely by its title, the *Postscript* presents itself as an afterthought—an "unscientific" supplement to *Philosophical Fragments*. And before the "First and Last Explanation," the book contains its own "Appendix." Then, in the P.P.P.P.S. from which he quotes here, Kierkegaard describes the entirety of his writing as an effort to read through "if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human-existence relationships, the old familiar texts handed down from the fathers." Any reader who finds this to be a transparent "first and last explanation" of Kierkegaard's intentions as an author has interpretive capacities far exceeding my own. What is this Ur-text to which he refers? Existence? Inwardness? The Bible? Whatever it is, it is enigmatic—an infinite well that must be plumbed again and again. Could his present rereading possibly exhaust it?

Perhaps readers of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* should have known not to take Kierkegaard at his word when he indicated that it would be the end to his work as an author. But readers of *Two Discourses* are without excuse. Sure enough, less than one month after publishing this "final" text, Kierkegaard releases a brand new book, *For Self Examination*. Then, after three years of silence, he reemerges again, writing in a radically new format and tone. Barbed polemic in pamphlets and newspapers—a place of rest indeed! By aligning his writing so closely with sacramental practice here, is Kierkegaard not suggesting that an end to Christian writing, and to the endlessly multiplying assumed authorial identities that it elicits, is as much a misplaced hope as leaving the altar with perfect faith? Might the endlessly repeated acts of reading and writing—and rereading and rewriting—be as edifying for Kierkegaard as the Eucharist itself?

Kierkegaard's authorship is a series of self-substitutions, assumed identities, and performed characters. About half of his works are pseudonymous, but every one presents fairy tales, parables, contrasting voices, and imagined tableaux. They are stages every bit as much as the Königstädter Theater was. But they seek a greater effect—which can only be described as sacramental. They want to transform their readers not in play-acting but in actuality. They want to incite a longing in their readers that makes them pour themselves out for others out of overflowing love for God.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sacramental Writing, Sacramental Living: *Eros* in Existence

Just as Kierkegaard's aesthetic writings gesture beyond themselves toward a religious sphere that they cannot contain, so too his Eucharistic discourses impel the reader outside Vor Frue Kirke's walls, toward a communion with Christ lived out amidst the everyday. His tableaux, ventriloquized voices, liturgical stage settings, and imagined sermons all use their constructed half-light to point beyond themselves toward the daylight of actuality. No text in Kierkegaard's authorship is more focused on this goal than *Works of Love*. Published in 1847, it is chronologically prior to the Eucharistic discourses, but it is thematically their natural successor. At least at first glance, it seems to be focused squarely on Christian living. It thus seems to slough off aestheticism and indirection in order to represent the Christian ideal directly. Even as all of Kierkegaard's stagings seem to point inevitably to *Works of Love*, it seems to reject their theatricality definitively.

It has also seemed to countless readers to be a renunciation of this dissertation's central theme of desire. No text in Kierkegaard's corpus has been read more doggedly through the lens of Anders Nygren's *agape*/*eros* dichotomy than *Works of Love*. In his influential study *Agape*, Gene Outka argues that the book can serve as a convenient "substitute for Nygren" because it develops his *eros*/*agape* opposition in more "specifically ethical" terms.[488] Like many readers, Outka sees the book as carrying Nygren's critique of spiritual *eros* further, applying it also to earthly relationships of desire. While theologians sympathetic to this view have praised the book for its

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[488] Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 2n.1.

uncompromising rigor, critics of the text have lamented its supposed hostility to embodied love.[489] Such critics often amplify this point by charging that the text's rejection of *eros* implies a renunciation of finite existence as such.[490] According to this view, the book either demands a love of God so all-consuming that it renders Christians indifferent to human beings, or a love of neighbor so self-sacrificial that it outlaws all delight in particularity.

As frequently interpreted, *Works of Love* thus presents a formidable challenge to the argument that I have been developing in this dissertation about the centrality of both theatricality and desire in Kierkegaard's work. In this chapter, I will consider this challenge to my thesis in conjunction with a parallel one that is perhaps even more imposing: the famous story of his broken engagement to Regine Olsen. I am well aware that for decades now "responsible" Kierkegaard scholarship has been defined by its attempt to bracket Kierkegaard's personal history in order to focus exclusively on his writings. To a large extent, I share this goal and the suspicion of psycho-biographical reductionism that underlies it. But I do not believe that this story can be separated from Kierkegaard's writings because, with only a few exceptions, his writings are the sources

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[489] A recent example of the first tendency is Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). A recent example of the second tendency is Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[490] T. W. Adorno provides a famous statement of this charge, arguing that in *Works of Love* "the overstraining of the transcendence of love threatens, at any given moment, to become transformed into the darkest hatred of man." "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 8 (1939-1940): 417. Martin Buber, whom I discuss in the body of the text below, provides an equally famous critique in "The Question to the Single One" in *Between Man and Man*, trans. Robert Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965) [1936].

Recent defenses of Kierkegaard against these critics can be found in M. Jamie Ferreira, "Other-Worldliness in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*," *Philosophical Investigations* 22:1 (1999); Sylvia Walsh, "Other-Worldliness in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*—A Response," *Philosophical Investigations* 22:1 (1999); and Robert L. Perkins, "Buber and Kierkegaard: A Philosophic Encounter" in *Martin Buber: A Centenary Volume* (Israel: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 1984).

that tell this story. His tale of unhappy love stands amidst the rarefied company of Romeo and Juliet and Abelard and Heloise because his own pen has placed it there. A few texts external to his authorship shed some light on his relationship to Regine—scattered mentions of it in the diaries of his contemporaries, interviews given by Regine Olsen-Schlegel as she slips into senescence at the turn of the twentieth century—but for the most part our images of this relationship derive from Kierkegaard's letters to Regine, his voluminous journal entries about it, and his thinly veiled renarrations of it in texts like "The Seducer's Diary" and *Repetition*. The broken engagement story does not provide an opportunity to interpret his writings in light of his life; rather, it is an instance of Kierkegaard transfiguring his life for the poetic and religious purposes of his writings. The broken engagement story is a tableau unveiled by his texts as much as the story of the king and the maiden or the sinful woman weeping at Christ's feet.[491]

The question is how we should interpret this story. At first glance, it seems only to lend credence to Kierkegaard's presumed hostility toward earthly desire. Can his decision to forsake marriage to Regine—and then renarrate this decision almost obsessively—signal anything else? Does the very "unreality" of his poeticized account not support the view that his philosophy is a rejection of actuality as such? Martin Buber draws both of these conclusions in a signal 1936 essay. Taking Kierkegaard's rejection of marriage to Regine as emblematic of his philosophy's core, he writes:

> Kierkegaard's thought circles around the fact that he essentially renounced an essential relationship to a definite person. He did not resign this casually, or in the relativity of the many experiences and decisions of life, or with the soul

[491] In 1849, Kierkegaard devotes an entire notebook to the theme of "My Relationship to 'Her.'" The subtitle that he gives to this notebook could scarcely provide a clearer warning against viewing its contents as objective history. Just below the title, he writes "*noget Digterisk*"—that is, "somewhat poeticized," or "something of a construction." *SKS*, 19:431 [NB15:1].

> alone, but essentially. The essential nature of the renunciation, its downright positive essentiality, is what he wants to express by saying, 'In defiance of the whole nineteenth century I cannot marry.' The renunciation becomes essential through its representing in concrete biography the renunciation of an essential relation to the world as that which hinders being alone before God.[492]

Buber, like countless of Kierkegaard's readers, sees his broken engagement as a microcosm of his philosophical outlook. He thus reads Kierkegaard's writings as an all-consuming renunciation of *eros*, genuine human relationships, and "anything which hinders being alone before God." The story of Søren and Regine is for him a kind of perverse morality tale: one that calls everyone to break off their attachments to the world for the sake of an other-worldly religiosity. Understandably, Buber protests loudly against this lesson.

The problem with Buber's critique is that it is directed against a highly distorted version of the story Kierkegaard tells. Unfortunately, I would wager that the vast majority of Kierkegaard's readers today would tell a similar version of this story. The standard but distorted version runs as follows: with a Promethean act of will, Kierkegaard in 1841 definitively ends his relationship to Regine Olsen—turning his back on worldly attractions once and for all in order to devote himself exclusively to celibacy, writing, and prayer. Among many of Kierkegaard's devotees, this tale has acquired the status of a hagiography—and it is equally as pious. It is, however, directly and overwhelming contradicted by Kierkegaard's journals.[493] To be sure, these texts recount

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[492] Buber, "The Question to the Single One," 58.

[493] English-language Kierkegaard scholarship greatly needs more comprehensive studies of Kierkegaard's journals than are presently available, particularly on the topic of his relationship to Regine. I am by no means able to offer such a comprehensive treatment here. Despite the six-volume heft of the Hong edition of the journals, it contains only approximately half of their contents. Even more problematically, these contents are cut out of their original contexts and catalogued according to a necessarily arbitrary thematic schema. Thankfully, a complete English translation of all of

his decision to end his engagement and to forbid himself from speaking to Regine in the future. But they also attest in no uncertain terms that he continues to long for her to the very end of his life. In fact, his entries about her become *more* frequent after their break-up, not less. Especially after she marries the government officer Fritz Schlegel in 1847—one month, incidentally, before the publication of *Works of Love*[494]—Kierkegaard catalogues his every encounter with her. These encounters are anything but infrequent. The two pass each other regularly on the street, sometimes as often as twice daily, each clearly seeking out the other in their daily walks. They also encounter each other regularly at church services in Vor Frue Kirke and other Copenhagen churches. In his journal, Kierkegaard's catalogues every glance, nod, and gesture that the lovers exchange, portraying them as electrically charged. He dissects these encounters with a zeal that many theologians would reserve for the Bible.[495]

Søren's obsession with Regine reaches its zenith in 1849 when he sends a letter to Fritz formally requesting permission to begin communicating directly with her again. At this point in the story, Kierkegaard the man becomes almost a caricature of Kierkegaard the author. His letter to Fritz contains a second sealed letter—the first of his proposed direct communications with Regine. He assures Fritz of his good faith, but he also insists that his communication to Regine be allowed to be truly direct: he asks Fritz to give her

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Kierkegaard's journals and papers is presently being prepared. This new edition, which is based on the recent Danish critical edition *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, will enable English-language readers for the first time to access these texts unabridged and in their original order and contexts. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, 11 projected volumes, gen. ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007-).

For the relatively narrow purposes of this chapter, I have relied largely on Joakim Garff's quotations and summaries of Kierkegaard's journal entries about his relationship to Regine in *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton Unviersity Press, 2005).

[494] Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, 484.

[495] See Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, especially 597-598.

the sealed letter only on the condition that he do so without reading it first and that he allow her to read it alone. Not surprisingly, Fritz returned the missive unopened. Since Kierkegaard immediately burned it, historians can only guess at its contents based on his many drafts in his journal.[496]

This incident was far from Kierkegaard's last effort to convey his enduring devotion to Regine. The one aspect of *Two Discourses at the Eucharist on Fridays* that we did not consider in the last chapter is its dedication. In it, Kierkegaard dedicates not just this volume, but also his entire authorship, "TO ONE UNNAMED, WHOSE NAME WILL ONE DAY BE NAMED."[497] Few of Kierkegaard's contemporaries would have failed to connect this gesture to Regine. But in case they missed the point, Kierkegaard left a document with his last will and testament identifying her as the one previously unnamed.[498] The will, moreover, named Regine his sole heir. Kierkegaard's obsession with Regine is fascinating, but it is important to recognize that despite the best efforts of historical research, the experiences and emotions behind it will always remain opaque. What is indisputable is that the more explicitly religious his writings become, the more insistently his desire for Regine intrudes upon them. These unhappy lovers do not have a physical or even spoken relationship, but they continue to have a relationship of stolen glances and wistful sighs. The text that he presents as the culmination of his career dedicates to her "WITH THIS LITTLE WORK, THE ENTIRE AUTHORSHIP, AS IT WAS FROM THE

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[496] See Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, 598-602.

[497] *WA*, 163 / *SKS*, 12:279.

[498] See Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, and Johnny Kondrup, *Written Images: Søren Kierkegaard's Journals, Notebooks, Booklets, Sheets, Scraps, and Slips of Paper*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 20-21.

BEGINNING."[499] He presents this sacramental text, like all of his writings, as emerging from and simultaneous with his experience of earthly desire.

In this chapter I will argue that far from demanding the renunciation of *eros*, *Works of Love* enjoins its readers to unite earthly passion with spiritual desire—in a manner that anticipates the dedication to *Two Discourses*. I will show, first, that the love for God that Kierkegaard commends throughout the text is best understood as taking the form of infinite *eros*, the ever-increasing passion that has been central to all the readings I have offered in this dissertation. I will then argue that, different as neighbor love is from earthly *eros*, Kierkegaard defines it as emerging always and only from desire for God. Finally, I will suggest that *Works of Love* portrays earthly *eros* as having the potential to coincide with and even incite Christian love of God and neighbor. I will conclude that the book exhorts Christians, not to renounce their earthly desires, but to inhabit them as stagings of Christian love.

Works of Love thus seeks, on my reading, a fundamentally different goal from many modern treatises on Christian ethics. Kierkegaard does not seek to prescribe a set of universal and objective Christian norms. He does not demand, for example, that his readers break off their engagements in imitation of him, or that they follow any specific rule. What he does strive to incite readers to do is to govern all their earthly interactions according to an inward, ever-increasing, and ultimately unrepresentable desire for God. He argues that foreseeing where this desire will lead within the concreteness and ambiguity of earthly life is impossible. He neither promotes the renunciation of finitude and its desires, nor absolutizes them as ultimate truth. Instead, as we will see, he

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[499] *WA*, 163 / *SKS*, 12:279.

construes these particularities and passions in theatrical terms—as stagings rather than as absolute ends. Far from negating the theatricality of Kierkegaard's earlier works, *Works of Love* characterizes all of existence as a form of theater—or, to use a religious metaphor instead of an aesthetic one, portrays actuality in sacramental terms, as a series of altars where human and divine love can coincide.

I. Hidden Love and Infinite Desire

It is not difficult to understand why so many English-speaking readers assume that *Works of Love* is one long polemic against the erotic. The Hong translation of the text is peppered with the phrase "erotic love," which Kierkegaard generally seems to be in the business of critiquing. Still, in order to approach the question of *eros* in *Works of Love* fairly, it is vital to recognize that he never once uses the words *erotisk* or *Eros* in the Danish text—not in a laudatory sense, and certainly not in a condemnatory sense. What he does tirelessly distinguish from Christian love is the Danish word *Elskov*, which I have translated throughout this dissertation as "romantic love." One might see my insistence upon this translation as making a distinction without a difference, since romantic love is obviously a form of erotic love. But I want to combat the implication, which the Hongs cultivate, that Christian love [*Kjerlighed*] is the antithesis of desire.[500] Any close reading of *Works of Love* must recognize that the fundamental opposition in the text is not between *Elskov* and *Kjerlighed* but between *Forkjerlighed* and *Kjerlighed*—that is, between preferential love and love itself. Romantic love is one type of preferential love,

[500] As I explained in the Introduction, several of the Hong translations contain footnotes stating that "*Elskov* and *Kjærlighed* correspond to 'eros' and 'agape'" (*EO*, 2:32n.39, *TDIO*, 43n.1, and *CD*, 116n.40). Although the Hong translation of *Works of Love* does not make this claim explicitly, it nonetheless cultivates the impression that the two paradigms correspond by putting *Elskov* and *Kjerlighed* insistently in brackets throughout the text—as though they constituted its fundamental antithesis—and by translating *Elskov* as "erotic love."

but this category also includes friendship and family relations. Kierkegaard privileges romantic love as an example of the potency of preference, but he does not maintain that it is qualitatively different from these other natural human experiences of love. He argues that all of them must be distinguished from works of Christian love *per se* because they are motivated by the attractive qualities of their objects, rather than by love for God.

The very similarity between the Danish words *Kjerlighed* and *Forkjerlighed* suggests that the distinction between preferential love and Christian love is not one of antipodal opposition. Might relationships of earthly love become sites where works of Christian love can be performed? Might our experiences of preference and passion somehow illumine what such works involve? To begin to approach these question, let us consider in this first section how Kierkegaard portrays the most fundamental of all works of love: a Christian's love for God. I will argue that he construes this relationship as ever-increasing, infinite desire. If this is the case, however, why does he eschew the language of *eros* in *Works of Love*?

The first point to recognize when speaking of love for God in *Works of Love* is that for Kierkegaard this amounts to speaking of love for love itself—since God, according to 1 John, is love.[501] From the Preface of the book forward, Kierkegaard makes one fundamental claim about love itself: that its essential nature is hidden and unknowable. He states bluntly in the Preface that Christian love as such is "*essentially* inexhaustible" and "*essentially* indescribable."[502] It must be believed in rather than

[501] *WL*, 3-4 / *SKS*, 9:12.

[502] *WL*, 3 / *SKS*, 9:11.

known,[503] and its essential hiddenness gives the book the focus named in its title. Precisely because the text consists in "*Christian deliberations*," it cannot be "about *love*," but only "about *works of love*."[504] Yet Kierkegaard goes on to explain that even love's works can never be definitively prescribed or objectively identified since they are expressions of love itself. He writes that it is "not as if hereby all its works were now added up and described" and not "as if even the particular work described were described once and for all, far from it, God be praised!"[505] If a work is grounded in love itself, then it necessarily shares in its secrecy and unrecognizability.

By characterizing love itself as essentially hidden, Kierkegaard could not diverge more sharply from the *agape*/*eros* paradigm that is often imputed to him. Recall that Nygren insists that *agape* is "a quite simple and clear and easily comprehensible idea"[506]—a graspable measuring stick by which all finite manifestations of love should be judged. The perspicuity of this ideal is what enables his account of it to culminate in a two-column chart—with the failings of *eros* listed on the left and the defining features of *agape* listed in direct opposition to them on the right.[507] Kierkegaard's approach to Christian love could not be more different. He frames his rhetorical project as caught within a double bind: he defines works of love as acts that are grounded in love itself, yet he insists that their all-important source is essentially hidden. Throughout this dissertation, we have encountered a number of similar double binds in Kierkegaard's

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[503] *WL*, 5 / *SKS*, 9:13-14.

[504] *WL*, 3 / *SKS*, 9:11.

[505] *WL*, 3 / *SKS*, 9:11.

[506] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 204.

[507] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 210.

authorship. *The Concept of Irony*, for example, devotes itself to a "concept" whose content is the negation of all objective appearance. It makes its case with "constant reference" to a figure whose life, according to Kierkegaard, consisted entirely in rendering himself unrepresentable through infinitely ironic negation. Similarly, the Jutland Pastor's sermon at the end of *Either/Or* starts from the presumption that in relation to God human beings are always in the wrong.

These double binds, as we have seen, inspire ever-increasing desire rather than the fatalism one might expect. Both of these earlier texts respond to the impossibility of adequately speaking about their intended object not with silence, but with an outpouring of imperfect but impassioned images. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard juxtaposes the many "nuances of misunderstanding" according to which Socrates has been misrepresented throughout history in order to incite a desire even more powerful than that of Alcibiades for this ever-elusive "eroticist."[508] In the same way, the Jutland Pastor claims that knowing oneself to be always in the wrong in relation to God is not "anesthetizing," but serves as a constant source of "edification," which "incites and inspires to action."[509] The double bind of *Works of Love* inspires a similar pathos. Kierkegaard figures Christians' relationship to the love that will forever elude their grasp as one of infinite desire. Instead of presenting the impossibility of representing love as a roadblock to performing works of love, he describes it as an incitement to continual striving to make it manifest within the world.

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[508] *CI*, 128 / *SKS*, 1:180 and *CI*, 12 / *SKS*, 1:71; translation modified.

[509] *EO*, 2:353 / *SKS*, 3:331 and *EO*, 2:339 / *SKS*, 3:320; translation modified.

In the first deliberation of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard suggests this ever-increasing yearning through a series of provocative metaphors. One of the most significant of these metaphors concerns a spring and a stream. Kierkegaard describes the spring as the source of all the waters of the stream, which flow "along many paths" from its single source. Yet he writes that unlike channels of water in the natural world, none of these paths can lead us back to God. He develops the metaphor as follows:

> Where does love come from, where does it have its origin and its source, where is the place it has its abode from which it flows? Yes, this place is hidden or is secret. There is a place in a person's innermost being; from this place flows the life of love, for 'from the heart flows life.' But you cannot see this place; however, deeply you penetrate, the origin eludes you in remoteness and hiddenness. Even when you have penetrated furthest in, the origin is always still a bit further in, like the source of the spring that is furthest away just when you are closest to it. From this place flows love along many paths, but along none of these paths can you force your way into its hidden origin. Just as God dwells in light from which flows every ray that illuminates the world, yet no one can force his way along these paths in order to see God, since the paths of light turn into darkness when one turns toward the light—so love dwells in hiding or is hidden in the innermost being.[510]

The first thing to notice about this imagery is that it makes clear that Kierkegaard believes that all expressions of love have a single source in God, in stark contrast to Nygren's Manichean bifurcation between *agape* and *eros*. But the second thing to notice is that even though he describes love's waters as flowing from one spring "along many paths," he insists that none of these paths can lead us back to their "hidden origin." Kierkegaard writes that the closer we draw to this divine source, the more insistently the current pushes back against us. Loving God will necessarily bear fruit in words and deeds, he believes, but these works of love will not manifest their divine origin directly. At their best, works of love will inspire others to desire God more and more, to seek out

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[510] *WL*, 8-9 / *SKS*, 9:16-17.

their hidden origin, even as their currents insistently push back. To love love is to desire it beyond all finite satisfactions.

The third, and perhaps most important, thing to notice about the passage quoted above is the way in which Kierkegaard does not explicate the metaphor through transparent and objective prose, but through further metaphors. The inability of love's expressions to make love immediately manifest applies equally to this image for it. The metaphor of the spring and the stream yields further images concerning the heart's relation to the body and the sun's relation to its light. Kierkegaard writes that even though the heart is the source of the body's life, the moment one tries to open up the body and grasp the heart, it ceases to be life-giving. In the same way, the sun is the source of all the world's light, but if we look at it directly, it blinds us; its light is transformed into darkness. In the paragraph following the one quoted from above, Kierkegaard develops yet another metaphor—this one similar to that of the spring and the stream. But this water-image concerns a lake:

> Love's hidden life is in the innermost being unfathomable, and then in turn is in an unfathomable connectedness with all existence. Just as the quiet lake originates deep down in hidden springs no eye has seen, so also does a person's love originate even more deeply in God's love. If there were no gushing spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither the little lake nor a human being's love. Just as the quiet lake originates darkly in the deep spring, so a human being's love originates mysteriously in God's love. Just as the quiet lake invites you to contemplate it but by the reflected image of darkness prevents you from seeing it, so also the mysterious origin of love in God's love prevents you from seeing its ground. When you think you see it, you are deceived by a reflected image, as if that which only hides the deeper ground were the ground.[511]

A lake, Kierkegaard writes here, both invites contemplation of its source and obstructs us from seeing it. Its glimmering surface incites us to ponder the spring we know must be

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[511] *WL*, 9-10 / *SKS*, 9:17-18.

gushing at the bottom, and prevents us from seeing this source. We may think we see it in the images dancing across the surface, but in that case we are "deceived by a reflected image." The ever-shifting images are valuable to the extent that they incite our contemplation, but they deceive us if we confuse them with the thing itself that we are seeking. Kierkegaard believes that the same holds true in discussions of love and its works. No one theory or construct can capture love, or even account for all of its acts. When we speak of works of love, one metaphor multiplies into many, and even the most traditional theological prose reveals itself to be only a series of reflected images that conceal as much as they reveal. These images edify not when we believe them to represent the divine directly, but when they incite us to desire it more and more. *Works of Love* thus multiplies the images for love just as *The Concept of Irony* multiplies the many "nuances of misunderstanding" through which Socrates has been represented. Its goal is to make the reader into a lover of love—just as the goal of *The Concept of Irony* is to make the reader into an "eroticist" who yearns for Socrates.

The images of the spring and the lake are thus images of infinite desire. Like the infinite desire described by Levinas, this desire never finds the satisfaction that would bring it to an end, but grows more and more intense the closer it approaches to its object. In the last deliberation of the first series, Kierkegaard describes love as emerging not from a finite lack that needs to be filled, but from the very abundance of divine love. He writes: "Love has been called a need [*Savn*], but note well, such a need that the lover constantly wants [*savner*] what he possesses; a longing, but note well a longing constantly for that which the lover actually has—since otherwise it is indeed unhappy

love that is described."[512] When one's longing for something finite has the form of a lack, this longing is merely the all-too familiar situation of unhappy love; if this lack is filled, then the longing disappears. But Kierkegaard writes that in the infinite context of love for God, such a lack is a blessing, a form of abundance. Recall how one of the passages from the Preface that I quoted above concludes its assertion that the works of love can never be catalogued with the proclamation "God be praised!'"[513] Kierkegaard describes love for God as an "infinite debt"—one that grows greater and greater the more it is paid:

> Therefore we can say that *this is the distinctive characteristic of love; that the one who loves by giving, infinitely, runs into infinite debt*. But this is the relationship of the infinite, and love is infinite. By giving money, one surely does not run into debt; on the contrary, it is rather the recipient who runs into debt. When, however, the lover gives what is infinitely the highest that one person can give to another, his love, he himself runs into an infinite debt. What beautiful, what sacred modesty love brings along with it![514]

Kierkegaard's portrayal of love for God as infinite, insatiable desire is in my view the aspect of his thought that most anticipates the work of Emmanuel Levinas.[515] In the opening pages of *Totality and Infinity* he deploys a very similar image of a desire for "the *absolutely other*" that "cannot be satisfied" and thus "nourishes itself...with its hunger."[516]

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[512] *WL*, 175 / *SKS*, 9:175; translation modified.

[513] *WL*, 3 / *SKS*, 9:11.

[514] *WL*, 177 / *SKS*, 9:177.

[515] M. Jamie Ferreira provides detailed analyses of the two authors' treatments of this theme in *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's* Works of Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially 26-28. Her perceptive treatment of infinite desire in Kierkegaard's work has influenced the present study a great deal.

[516] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univeristy Press, 1969), 33, 34 [1961].

But why, then, does Kierkegaard never describe Christian love as *eros* in *Work of Love*? Why does he not name it more explicitly as infinite desire? In order to respond to these questions, it is important to consider the genre and intended audience of *Works of Love*. Kierkegaard's "edifying discourses" are a very specifically determined rhetorical form. Never once within these texts does he make use of what he considers to be philosophical or non-Danish terms. Nor does he cite philosophical authors or even academic theological debates. Terms that we consider today to be eminently "Kierkegaardian" such as "paradox," "reduplication," and "direct/indirect communication" are entirely missing from them. He uses such terms only in his pseudonymous writings, his journals, and his dissertation. He wants his edifying writings to be universal in their appeal, requiring no specialized knowledge.[517] In his discussions of love in *Works of Love*, therefore, Kierkegaard makes use primarily of biblical language and universally accessible imagery from the natural world.

In evaluating whether love for God in *Works of Love* should be described as a form of *eros*, the question, then, concerns the degree of authority that we should ascribe to the rhetoric of this text. If Kierkegaard does not use the word *eros* in the specific rhetorical context of this book, does that mean that we cannot do so when explicating it in another? In my view, Kierkegaard's insistence upon the essential indescribability of love means that no metaphor, concept, or doctrine about it can have ultimate authority. Just as the metaphor of the spring and the stream points to other metaphors, so too Kierkegaard's theological language should impel us to seek out new ways of formulating his insights. We should not elevate any of his rhetorical constructs—including his signed discourses

[517] I am grateful to Niels Jørgen Cappelørn for helping me to recognize this important point.

and deliberations—to the status of direct communication about the divine. Rather, we should learn to see them all as "reflected images" upon the surface of the lake. In the rhetorical context that I have constructed in this dissertation, I have found the terminology of infinite *eros* to be the most illuminating way of construing his purposes. But the very concept of insatiable desire implies its own provisionality. If all speech about the divine is but a "staging of desire," then even the vocabulary of "staging" and "desire" is but the same.

Kierkegaard opens the first deliberation of the second series of *Works of Love* with the provocative statement that "all human speech, even the divine speech of Holy Scripture, about the spiritual is essentially metaphorical."[518] He argues that no matter how direct or religious our speech about God may seem, what we say remains metaphor—at its best, pointing others toward love, without ever making it directly manifest. To understand the full implications of what he is saying, it is important to recognize that he is not using the word *metaforisk*, but *overført*, which literally means "transferred" or "carried-over." In Kierkegaard's view, all human language has its origin not in the rarefied realm of pure spirit and eternal truth, but in our natural condition of embodied existence and finite thought—what he calls "sensate-psychical experience."[519] We cannot apply our words directly to the spiritual because they are fundamentally inadequate to this realm. To speak about it, we must use our "already given words" in a transferred or carried-over or metaphorical way.[520] He goes so far as to say that if we

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[518] *WL*, 209 / *SKS*, 9:212.

[519] *WL*, 209 / *SKS*, 9:212.

[520] *WL*, 209 / *SKS*, 9:213.

"parade a noticeable difference" between Christian speech about love and natural speech about it, then "we rightly regard it as a sign of false spirituality."[521] In contrast, he writes, "the spirit's manner is the quiet, whispering secret of what is carried over [*det Overførte*]—for the person who has ears to hear."[522] Speaking Christianly about love thus means drawing on our images and experiences of earthly love, but using them in a "transferred" or "carried over" way. Such speech will always be ambiguous, double, and equivocal. We cannot hope to find one Archimedean explanation of love itself. Instead, we must learn to whisper quietly about it, aware of the inadequacy of all our images. Such whispers may nonetheless incite desire.

II. Love Redoubles: Love for God and Love for Neighbor

Fundamental as desire for God is among the works of love, Kierkegaard refuses to treat it in isolation from works of love directed toward existing human beings. One of his preferred ways of describing the way love expresses itself is as "redoubling" [*Fordoblelse*]—a relatively obscure Danish term that could be studied at length.[523] In its simplest sense, the term signals that, whether it manifests itself in words or in actions, love does so always in a double way. More concretely, this means that the command to

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[521] *WL*, 210 / *SKS*, 9:213.

[522] *WL*, 210 / *SKS*, 9:213; translation modified. In the very last sentence of the book's last deliberation, Kierkegaard returns to this point: "If, then, someone undertakes to praise love and is asked whether it is actually out of love on his part that he does it, the answer must be: 'No one else can decide this for certain; it is possible that it is vanity, pride—in short, something bad, but it is also possible that it is love" (*WL*, 374 / *SKS*, 9:367).

[523] More technical analysis of his use of this term than I will offer here can be found in Martin Andic, "Love's Redoubling and the Eternal Like for Like" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*: Works of Love, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999); Anthony Burgess, "Kierkegaard's Concept of Redoubling and Luther's *Simul Justus*" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary:* Works of Love, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999); and Gregor Malantschuk, "Begrebet Fordoblelse hos Søren Kierkegaard," *Kierkegaardiana* 2 (1957): 43-53.

love one's neighbor as oneself is not in competition with infinite desire for God, but is its natural and inevitable outpouring. Further, just as love for God redoubles in love for one's neighbor, love for neighbor amounts to a redoubling of one's love for oneself.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard uses the word *Fordoblelse* in a technical sense that he more or less constructs himself. Seeming to contradict the Preface's claim that love is "essentially indescribable," he applies this term to it directly: "love is a redoubling in itself."[524] Yet this description in fact serves to reinforce the point that love eludes representation. Just as Constantine Constantius uses the term "repetition" to evoke an iterative process that can never be arrested in a single definition, so too Kierkegaard uses the term "redoubling" to refer to love's antipathy to becoming static and self-identical. Although much scholarly effort has been expended to define the term precisely, its fundamental nature is to refuse singular definition. It should be considered alongside the many other iterations of doubleness in Kierkegaard's writings—not only repetition (*Gjentagelse*), but also double reflection (*Dobbelt-Reflexion*), reduplication (*Reduplication*), and duplexity (*Tvetydighed*).[525] The multiplicity of these terms suggests that they are attempting to name a relentless process of fracturing and abounding. In the following passage, Kierkegaard explains that calling love a "redoubling in itself" means that it rejects all "singleness":

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[524] *WL*, 182 / *SKS*, 9:182.

[525] In "Love's Redoubling," Martin Andic gives a complex argument distinguishing the meaning that Kierkegaard ascribes to "redoubling" and "reduplication." I find a number of aspects of his analysis helpful, but I resist his effort to fix the meaning of these terms so that they can be distinguished precisely from one another. In my view, Kierkegaard's preference for redoubling over reduplication in this text is due largely to the fact that the former is a Danish word, rather than a foreign philosophical one. Both "redoubling" and "reduplication" are about expressing one's belief in outward actions.

> But what, then, is able to take love out of its element? *As soon as love dwells on itself, it is out of its element*. What does dwelling on itself mean? It means that love itself becomes an object. But an *object* is always a dangerous matter when one is supposed to move forward; an *ob*ject is like a finite fixed point, like a boundary and a halting, a dangerous matter for infinitude. That is to say, love itself cannot *infinitely* become an object, nor is there any danger of that. *Infinitely* to be itself its object is to remain in infinitude and thus only to exist or to continue to exist, since love is a redoubling in itself, as different as the singleness [*Enkelthed*] of natural life is from the redoubling of the spirit.[526]

Love can never be self-identical—whether as a concept or a prescribed action. Its nature is to be constantly "mov[ing] forward." It must increase more and more. Describing it as "redoubling" is thus for Kierkegaard another way of ascribing it the character of infinite desire.

As I noted at the start of this chapter, *Works of Love* is frequently cast as promoting an "other-worldly" or "acosmic" ethic, which neglects the people and particularities of finitude. But interpreting the book in this way requires ignoring the doubleness that Kierkegaard asserts to be intrinsic to love itself. He argues consistently that to love God is to love the human beings of this world, and that to love another human being as oneself requires loving God. Each form of love, he believes, is inconceivable without the other. He writes: "When...the eternal is in a human being, this eternal redoubles [*fordobler sig*] in him in such a way that every moment it is in him, it is in him in a double mode: in an outward direction and in an inward direction back into itself, but in such a way that this is one and the same, since otherwise it is not redoubling."[527] Kierkegaard's conception of the intrinsic doubleness of love could not be more deeply rooted, of course, in the words of Jesus. When asked by the Pharisees to name the

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[526] *WL*, 182 / *SKS*, 9:182; translation modified to render *Enkelthed* as "singleness" rather than "particularity."

[527] *WL*, 280 / *SKS*, 9:278.

greatest of the commandments, he names not one, but two: to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love one's neighbor as oneself.[528]

In Kierkegaard's view, to promote either one of these loves without the other is to reduce love to something human, something graspable. The contradictoriness of love from a human point of view reflects its divine source. Love becomes manifest in the world in the same manner that God becomes manifest in Christ—as the paradoxical union of the earthly and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, the outward and the inward. To love in a Christian way means loving God and human beings at one and the same time. Echoing themes that we considered in the Eucharistic discourses, Kierkegaard writes that achieving "kinship" [*Slægtskab*] with God makes us like God in the way that we relate to others:

> Just as Christianity's joyful message is contained in the doctrine of humanity's inherent kinship with God, so is Christianity's task humanity's likeness with God. But God is Love, and therefore we can be like God only in loving, just as we also, according to the words of the apostle, can only be *God's co-workers*—in love. Insofar as you love the beloved, you are not like God, because for God there is no preference....Insofar as you love your friend, you are not like God, because for God there is no distinction. But when you love the neighbor, then you are like God.[529]

Loving God means entering into a kind of communion with the divine, such that we become God's "co-workers" in the world. The divine likeness is manifest both in the ambiguity inherent to works of love—the necessary uncertainty concerning their authenticity—and in the selflessness of their self-giving.

Thus just as Kierkegaard criticizes Romantic longing for promoting an escape from the world through art and irony, so too he condemns hyper-religiosity that seeks

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[528] Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28.

[529] *WL*, 62-63 / *SKS*, 9:69-70.

God in a distant heaven rather than in the midst of actual life. In the following paragraph, he argues that such a conception of love for God can only be a "delusion":

> The matter is quite simple. A person should begin with loving the unseen, God, because then he himself will learn what it is to love. But that he actually loves the unseen will be known by his loving the brother he sees. It is not the reverse, that the more he rejects those he sees, the more he loves the unseen, since in that case God is changed into an unreal something, a delusion. Such a thing can occur only either to a hypocrite or a deceiver, in order to find an escape, or to someone who misrepresents God, as if God were envious of himself and of being loved, instead of the blessed God's being merciful and therefore continually pointing away from himself, so to speak, and saying, 'If you want to love me, then love the people you see; what you do for them, you do for me.' God is too exalted to be able to receive a person's love directly, to say nothing of being able to take pleasure in what can please a fanatic. If someone says of the gift that could help his parents that it is corban, that is, intended for God, that is not well-pleasing to God. If you want to show that it is intended for God, then give it away, but with the thought of God. If you want to show that your life is intended to serve God, then let it serve people, yet continually with the thought of God. God does not have a share in existence in such a way that he asks for his share for himself; he asks for everything, but as you bring it to him you immediately receive, if I may put it this way, a notice designating where it should be delivered further, because God does not ask for anything for himself, although he asks for everything from you.[530]

It is delusional, Kierkegaard suggests here, to conceive of God as competing with human beings for love. Such a theology makes God our peer—as though God "were envious of himself and of being loved." As Kierkegaard explains, God "does not have a share of existence in such a way." God "asks for everything from you," but he does not do so in order to "ask for anything for himself." Since God is love itself, God is entirely unselfish—never hoarding human love, but always sending it back into the world.

Kierkegaard thus conceives neighbor love as a triadic relationship between a human being, God, and another human being. Christian love interrupts the immediacy of one-to-one relationships by adding God to them as a third term. The addition of God to

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[530] *WL*, 160-161 / *SKS*, 9:161.

the relationship serves as a continual incitement to love the other human being in a selfless way, in accordance with one's fellowship with God. Selfless love of human beings is typically contrasted to *eros*, but it is important to recognize that for Kierkegaard it is the natural outpouring of infinite desire. Kierkegaard describes love for one's neighbor as a "need," "craving," or "yearning" [*Trang*] incited by love for God.[531] In the following passage, he insists that unseen love for God always yearns to bear fruit that can be seen and felt in the world:

> Yet this hidden life of love is *recognizable by its fruits*—indeed, to be able to be known by its fruits is a need [*Trang*] in love. How beautiful it is that the same thing that signifies the utmost misery also signifies the greatest riches! Need [*Trang*], to have need [*at have Trang*], to be a needy person [*at være en Trængende*]—how reluctant a person is to have this said about him! Yet we are saying the utmost when we say of the poet, 'He has a need to write;' of the orator, 'He has a need to speak;' and of the young woman, 'She has a need to love.'...This is precisely the young woman's greatest riches, that she needs [*trænge til*] the beloved; and this is the pious person's greatest and truest riches, that he needs God....It is the same with love's recognizability by its fruits, which for that very reason, when the relationship is right, are said to press forward [*trænge frem*], whereby the riches are again signified. Indeed, if there could actually be a self-contradiction in love, it would have to be the greatest torment that love insisted on keeping love hidden, insisted on making it unrecognizable. Would that not be the same as if the plant, which sensed the exuberant life and blessing within it, did not dare let it become recognizable and were to keep it to itself as if the blessing were a curse, keep it, alas, as a secret in its explicable withering! Therefore it is not that way at all. Even if a particular, specific manifestation of love, even a main shoot, were out of love pressed back into painful concealment, the same life of love will find another expression for itself and still be recognizable by its fruits. O you quiet marytrs of unhappy romantic love [*Elskov*],what you suffered by having, out of love, to hide your love certainly remained a secret; it never became known, so great was your love that involved this sacrifice—yet your love [*Kjerlighed*] became known by its fruits![532]

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[531] Ferreira gives a particularly helpful analysis of Kierkegaard's use of the word *Trang* in *Love's Grateful Striving*, 21 and 26.

[532] *WL*, 10-11 / *SKS*, 9:19-20; translation modified.

Notice the way in which Kierkegaard compares Christian love's yearning to bear fruit to familiar truths about romantic love. He writes that just as a young woman "has a need" for her beloved, so too a Christian's love for God needs to express itself outwardly through service to human beings. He argues that to be forced to keep any love a secret is a torment—whether that love is earthly or spiritual. Ultimately, such desire cannot be repressed: a writer who has a "need to write" will find a way to do so; a plant cut back in one place will press forth even more vigorously in another. The yearning to love human beings springs forth irrepressibly from genuine love for God.

Yet even as universal love grows out of infinite desire, it is equally important to recognize that it takes a fundamentally different form from natural attraction. Kierkegaard sees preferential relationships as determined by the qualities in another person that make him or her attractive to us—sharp wit, hazel eyes, a shapely figure, or shared interests. But works of neighbor love are determined not by immediate attraction, but by willingness to follow Christ's command to love all equally people as oneself. Kierkegaard thus suggests that loving the neighbor amounts to "*loving the ugly*."[533] He does not mean that one's neighbor cannot be beautiful, but that the basis for loving her cannot be her attractiveness, but must be one's fellowship with God. This means that even though love for God is rightly described as a form of *eros*, this desire will lead us where no earthly desire would—toward ugliness, hardship, and suffering. Notice how in the following passage Kierkegaard describes Christ both as "seductive" and as confounding human expectations of where loving him will lead:

> This is the way Christianity came into the world; with Christianity came the divine explanation of what love is....Was it actually love [for Christ] to gather

[533] *WL*, 373 / *SKS*, 9:366.

> a few, simple people about himself, to win their devotion and love as no one's love had ever been won, to allow it for a time to seem as if now the prospect of fulfilling their proudest dream was opening—in order then to reconsider suddenly and change the plan, in order then, without being moved by their pleas and without taking the slightest account of them, to throw himself from this seductive height into the abyss of all dangers, in order then to give himself without resistance into the power of his enemies, in order in mockery and scorn to be nailed to the cross like a criminal while the world shouted with joy—was this actually love! Was it actually love to be separated from his disciples in this way, to hate them, to turn them like straying sheep out among ravenous wolves, whose bloodthirstiness he himself had just stirred against them—was this actually love![534]

Christ's selfless love contradicts everything we think we know about desire. It seduces, but not with worldly laurels and beauty. Instead, it pushes us to love the lowly and the unlovely. Kierkegaard insists that works of Christian love are always a source of "offense" within the world.[535] Being seduced by Christ involves what Kierkegaard calls a "double danger": not just the risk of suffering, but the likelihood that one will be ridiculed and even persecuted for subjecting oneself to it.[536] Like Christ himself, works of love invariably present a stumbling block to worldly wisdom.

Kierkegaard returns to the notion of redoubling in order to illumine further what such a way of life involves. Just as he argues that love for God "redoubles" into a love for human beings, so too he characterizes this form of love as a redoubling of *oneself*. Echoing themes central to my analysis of the Eucharistic discourses in the last chapter, he describes neighbor love as requiring one to put oneself in the place of another human being, so as to seek his or her interests rather than one's own. He takes the Aristotelian definition of a friend as "another self" as emblematic of human love in its natural state:

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[534] *WL*, 110-111 / *SKS*, 9:114-115.

[535] *WL*, 194-204 / *SKS*, 9:193-203.

[536] *WL*, 194-204 / *SKS*, 9:193-203.

when I love according to preference, I love the other because he or she is like me. The Christian category of the neighbor is precisely the opposite of the Aristotelian category, he suggests, because it is grounded in the alterity of the other. He writes: "The concept 'neighbor' is actually the redoubling of your own self; 'the neighbor' is what thinkers call 'the other,' that by which the selfishness of your own thought is to be tested."[537] To love another human being in a selfless way requires seeking what is good for her regardless of one's own interests. It requires redoubling oneself by putting oneself in her place. Kierkegaard explains that in a relationship between two human beings, "The more completely the distinction '*mine*' and '*yours*' disappears, the more perfect is the love."[538] Practicing works of love amounts to putting oneself in the place of every human being with whom one interacts. This aspect of neighbor love mirrors Kierkegaard's account of Christ's self-giving in the Eucharist. Like the sacrament, the command to love one's neighbor as oneself calls Christians to a lifetime of substitutionary becoming. On this and several other levels, Kierkegaard's vision of neighbor love involves a "redoubling" of the way Christ becomes manifest in the world.

III. Earthly *Eros*: A Controlled Element?

Yet emphasizing the selflessness of neighbor love in this way seems to suggest the very conclusion that I began this chapter by disputing—that earthly *eros* is the direct antithesis of commanded Christian love. On such a reading, acts of love may be grounded in an infinite desire for God, but this desire demands the renunciation of earthly attraction. Against this conclusion, I will argue in what follows that, even though

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[537] *WL*, 21 / *SKS*, 9:29.

[538] *WL*, 266 / *SKS*, 9:265.

Kierkegaard *distinguishes* neighbor love from preference, he does not *oppose* them as antithetical. To the contrary, I will show that he believes that preferential love and neighbor love can coincide. Because he refuses to circumscribe infinite desire, he insists that all human relationships can become sites for loving selflessly in Christ's image.

It must be acknowledged that there are ample resources in *Works of Love* to support the view that Kierkegaard is hostile to earthly *eros*. He does not hesitate to cite Christ's words that "whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."[539] He insists that "the praise of romantic love and friendship belongs to paganism" and that Christianity should not confuse such endeavors with its own.[540] Still, Kierkegaard does praise preferential love in a number of significant passages—not as an intrinsically Christian work, but still as "life's most beautiful happiness and...the greatest temporal good."[541] He speaks at length of the "longing for companionship" that is rooted in created human nature,[542] and he interprets the Gospel of John's story of Christ asking Peter three times "do you love me more than these" as demonstrating that Christ himself loved in a preferential way.[543] He goes so far as to write that "if in order to love the neighbor you would have to begin by giving up loving those for whom you have preference, the word 'neighbor' would be the greatest deception ever conceived."[544]

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[539] Luke 14:26; *WL*, 108 / *SKS*, 9:112.

[540] *WL*, 44 / *SKS*, 9:51; translation modified.

[541] *WL*, 267 / *SKS*, 9:266

[542] *WL*, 154 / *SKS*, 9:156.

[543] *WL*, 154-155 / *SKS*, 9:156-157. Jamie Ferreira gives a particularly helpful reading of this passage in *Love's Grateful Striving*, 103-104.

[544] *WL*, 61 / *SKS*, 68.

Rather than arguing that neighbor love should abolish preferential love, he asserts that neighbor love must be "preserved" within preferential relations so that they are "sanctified" by it.[545] Can these two competing attitudes be reconciled? Numerous scholars have answered No to this question. Such scholars either choose one emphasis at the expense of the other,[546] or simply conclude that *Works of Love* is "confused and incoherent."[547]

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[545] E.g., *WL*, 62 / *SKS*, 9:69-70.

[546] Amy Laura Hall's reading of *Works of Love* in *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* is a prime example of this tendency. She interprets the book as one long condemnation of *eros*—arguing in Lutheran terms that it consists exclusively in the statement of law rather than gospel. She casts her study as a rejection of any "positive depiction of *eros* redeemed, of desire taken up through God's grace, into the 'unity of love' that 'overcom[es] the dichotomy' between 'sensuous and spiritual love" (2). Because she sees the book as an unalloyed statement of law, she describes its sole purpose as to "shock" and "alienate" (13), to be "outrageously strenuous and intentionally discouraging" (12), and to shine "harsh light on the distinction between *eros* and *agape*" (1). Hall roots her analysis in a very widespread version of the Lutheran law/gospel paradigm—in which the terrors of the law's condemnations serve to guarantee the sweetness of the gospel's good news. She clearly relishes the masochism inherent to this rhetorical trope: "To the extent that we think we meet the law to love, we find that we fail. To the extent that we think we know the law to love, we find that we are ignorant. Simply put, we are both wicked and utterly confused, selfish and myopic" (24). And as to the scope of her condemnations of the erotic, she brooks no compromises. For her, *Works of Love* condemns not only orgies of *eros* unchecked but also "those relationships wherein we boldly suppose ourselves to be justifiably free," such as Christian marriage (14). The all-encompassing nature of her position is puzzling since she dedicates the book to her husband.

Hall sees herself as preserving the rigor of Kierkegaard's position in *Works of Love* against efforts to water it down. But in the end she draws on precisely the sort of law/gospel theology that Kierkegaard is critiquing. Instead of holding law and gospel constantly together, as a continual paradox structuring all Christian communication as indirect, Hall insists upon the utmost separation of the two. Only in this way, she believes, can grace be received in true "humility" (e.g., 13 and 19). Kierkegaard could not protest more loudly against this two-step conception of the law/gospel dialectic. He insists that when law and gospel are separated, the undiluted preaching of the law inevitably gives way to the undiluted preaching of the gospel, which offers a resting place for desire and in Kierkegaard's view inevitably leads to complacency. As we saw in Chapter Two, Kierkegaard insists that Christian preaching should hold law and gospel in constant tension—striving to express both in a single breath. He interprets the words "Come to me" above the altar in Vor Frue Kirke as simultaneously the most rigorous of demands and the most gracious of invitations *(CD*, 264 / *SKS*, 10:281), and he describes ideal Christian preaching as marked by both "a fervent inwardness that no one could resist" and "a terror that could teach even the bravest to shudder" (*CD*, 175 / *SKS*, 10:186). He laments in his Journal that Luther's own account of the law/gospel paradigm is "still not the teaching of Christ" because he "separates the two. First the law and then the gospel, which is sheer leniency, etc. This way Christianity becomes an optimism anticipating that we are to have an easy life in this world" (*JP*, 3:103 [2554] / *SKS*, 26:166 [NB32:67]). Even though Hall spares no effort in ratcheting up the rigor of *Works of Love*, her interpretation of it falls prey to the very Lutheran

In my view, however, such interpretations of the text are misguided because they deny the doubleness that is crucial to Kierkegaard's understanding of how love expresses itself. In the same way that neighbor love must coincide with rather than contradict love for God, so too it should coincide with rather than contradict earthly passion. Kierkegaard does not call the reader to renounce preferentiality, but to inhabit

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tendency that Kierkegaard is trying to escape: seeking to quiet desire rather than to incite it more and more.

[547] Sharon Krishek offers this indictment of *Works of Love* in her recent book *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (112). She cannot make sense of the way in which the text contains "some of Kierkegaard's fiercest denunciations of romantic love" alongside "a powerful affirmation of the need (and even the duty) to maintain a love of this kind" (15). Her intentionally provocative thesis is that *Works of Love*'s problematic account of love should be amended on the basis of the model of faith in *Fear and Trembling*. Interestingly the account of faith to which she turns contains its own version of doubleness, which she embraces. Abraham's "double movement" of faith consists both in "infinite resignation"—or the renunciation of the finite for the sake of the absolute—and the hope of "repetition"—that is, the trust that he will be able to receive the finite nonetheless. He is willing to follow God's command to sacrifice Isaac, but is nonetheless certain, in the face of the absurd, that God will give Isaac back to him again. Krishek argues that at its best romantic love manifests a similar doubleness. It both recognizes the finitude of the beloved, and devotes itself absolutely to him or her nonetheless. She writes that "faith-full love means to love the finite in an infinite way" (170) and that we should "love the finite not in a relative, restricted way but rather absolutely" (170). She argues that such a vision of romantic love is more affirming and coherent than that offered by *Works of Love*. She also argues that it is more "faithful to the inner harmony of Kierkegaard's own ideas" (139).

I commend Krishek's book as a constructive account of romantic love that takes its starting point in some of Kierkegaard's ideas. But I think it is severely misguided as an effort to be faithful to the views expressed in Kierkegaard's writings. Her argument about faith and love is the precise opposite of the one that I am making in this dissertation. Instead of arguing that romantic love can be a "reflected image" of faith, she argues that faith can be a template for romantic love. This reversal rests on two significant errors. First, it assumes that faith is a directly representable reality that can provide a template for something else. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, Kierkegaard insists that faith is intrinsically inward and hidden, such that it can only ever be imperfectly imaged or "staged." (Who knows this better than Johannes de Silentio?) Second, it suggests that romantic love should relate to its object as though it were the absolute, which is a claim that Kierkegaard would denounce as idolatrous. He condemns such a view explicitly in *Works of Love*, writing that "to love another person as God is to deceive oneself, and to allow another person to love one as God is to deceive this other person" (*WL*, 108 / *SKS*, 9:112). I will analyze his critique of this position more fully in the body of the text below. For now, I wish merely to express my doubt that even Johannes de Silentio would accept the conclusion that Krishek draws about romantic love modeling itself on faith. He reiterates again and again that it is Abraham's relationship to *God* that makes him unique—lifting him out of the universal and demanding that he do the unthinkable. If Abraham were willing to sacrifice Isaac because of his love for Sarah, would de Silentio regard him as anything other than a murderer? Would Krishek?

preferential relationships so that they become sites of selfless love. The fundamental target of his critique of preferential relationships is their natural tendency toward self-absolutization. Like Aesthete A in *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard argues in *Works of Love* that romantic love yearns to be "first love"—to believe itself to have found "the one." He writes that "romantic love is based on the drive that, transfigured into an inclination, has its highest, its unconditional, its only poetically unconditioned expression in this—there is but one and only one beloved in the whole world, and this one and only one time of romantic love is love, is everything; the second time is nothing."[548] Even in the context of friendship, he writes, we naturally seek a "best friend" among our many companions.[549] The reason that he critiques this self-absolutization so insistently is that he sees it as an unconscious, and thus especially pernicious, form of idolatry. Only God can be the legitimate object of absolute passion. The problematic tendency in earthly love is that it seeks to singularize itself as the highest possible expression of love, rather than striving to coexist with and express Christian love's higher calling.

Instead of demanding that Christians abandon preference for the sake of love for God, Kierkegaard exhorts them to unite their preferential loves with love for God. This means that we must learn to inhabit these relationships not as ends in themselves, but as part of a larger religious teleology. He argues that preferential love must be "dethroned":

> Anyone who insightfully and earnestly reflects on this matter will readily see that the issue must be posed in this way: shall romantic love [*Elskov*] and friendship be the highest love [*Kjerlighed*] or shall this love be dethroned? Romantic love and friendship are related to passion, but all passion, whether

[548] *WL*, 49 / *SKS*, 9:56; translation modified.

[549] *WL*, 51 / *SKS*, 9:57-58.

> it attacks or defends itself, fights in one way only, either/or: "Either I exist and am the highest, or I do not exist at all, either all or nothing."[550]

Although preferential love naturally presents itself as an all-or-nothing choice, Kierkegaard believes that Christians can inhabit it in a way that refuses this dichotomy. He suggests that when preferential love is united with love for God, it can be seen as an intrinsic good—even though it is not an ultimate good. He proposes the following test by which preferential relationships should be judged: "As soon as a love-relationship does not lead me to God, and as soon as I in the love-relationship do not lead the other to God, then the love, even if it were the highest bliss and delight of human affection, even if it were the supreme good of the lovers' earthly life, is still not true love."[551] Christians must thus evaluate their earthly relationships not on purely selfish grounds, but on the religious grounds of whether they obstruct or deepen both parties' relationship with God.

Kierkegaard apparently felt that his engagement to Regine failed this test. But he is far from suggesting that his personal experience constitutes a universal rule. In many and perhaps most cases he believes that it is possible for finite relationships to coexist with love for God. He exhorts his reader to "love the beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let love for the neighbor be the sanctifying element in your union's covenant with God. Love your friend honestly and devotedly, but let love for the neighbor be what you learn from each other in your friendship's confidential relationship with God!"[552] In a similar vein, he explains that "the Christian may very well marry, may very well love his wife, especially in the way he ought to love her, may very well have a friend and love his

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[550] *WL*, 45 / *SKS*, 9:52.

[551] *WL*, 120 / *SKS*, 9:124.

[552] *WL*, 62 / *SKS*, 9:69.

native land; but yet in all this there must be a basic understanding between himself and God in the essentially Christian, and this is Christianity."[553] His fundamental claim is that love for God must come to govern all our earthly loves—govern, not replace them. Even in Kierkegaard's own singular experience, subjecting his love for Regine to religious "control" may have prevented him from marrying her, but it by no means supplanted his desire for her.

Kierkegaard thus argues that we should govern our preferential relationships by Christian love for God and neighbor, rather than trying to escape from them. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to imagine how a human being, however pious, could free herself from preferentiality altogether. Jamie Ferreira has written that a human existence devoid of special relationships is inconceivable: "There is no instant at which we are only the abstract determinant 'human being'; we are always in some kind of special relation, even if it is only the relation of being someone's child."[554] Even the most rigorous monasticism does not release its adherents from earthly erotic desire—to say nothing of the bonds of friendship and family. Kierkegaard believes that such bonds can provide arenas for loving one's neighbor as oneself as much as the road to Jerusalem upon which the Good Samaritan came to the stranger's aid. In the same way that he calls for ordinary human words to be "transferred" or "carried over" so that they express a religious message, so too he exhorts his readers to live out their desires in the world in such a way that they draw them and others closer to God.

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[553] *WL*, 145 / *SKS*, 9:146.

[554] Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 92.

But it is easy to imagine a possible objection to the account of "sanctified" *eros* that I have just developed. Is Kierkegaard suddenly adopting the perspective of Judge William, which I criticized so heavily in Chapter One? Does his conception of the potential simultaneity of earthly *eros* and Christian love not echo William's vision of first love's sanctification through Christian marriage? There is no question that certain aspects of *Either/Or* II prefigure Kierkegaard's position in *Works of Love*. William's fundamental claim is, after all, that "marriage is the transfiguration of first love and not its annihilation, its friend and not its enemy."[555] He defines "a religiously developed person" as one who "makes a practice of referring everything to God, of permeating and saturating every finite relation with the thought of God and thereby consecrating and ennobling it."[556] His conception of first love as "caught up in a higher concentricity" through Christian marriage anticipates Kierkegaard's ideal of earthly love "transferred" or "carried over" to the religious sphere.

Yet real as these similarities are, they hide a crucial difference between the perspectives of the two books. While each suggests that religious love should regulate, control, govern, or sanctify earthly *eros*, only *Works of Love* figures this love for God as infinite desire. As we saw in Chapter One, Judge William describes both marriage and Christian faith as the *satisfaction* of human yearning. He construes marriage as a universal duty, which he is happy to report he has fulfilled. He goes so far as to portray his own marriage as the living incarnation of the absolute. As the soporific tone of his writing makes clear, he views Christianity as the quieting of yearning rather than its

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[555] *EO*, 2:31 / *SKS*, 3:39.

[556] *EO*, 2:43 / *SKS*, 3:50.

incitement. Someone who marries becomes in his view "a true victor" who "solves the great riddle" of existence by uniting the temporal with the eternal.[557] In stark contrast, Kierkegaard's conception of love for God as infinite desire subverts any effort to see a single work of love as a satisfaction of the Christian task of loving. He insists that neither Christian love nor its works admits of objective representation, and that no marriage, friendship, or act of charity could ever hope to make God's love objectively manifest. He figures all such works as, at their best, increasing our infinite debt to God.

There is a precise analogy between the Christian love that *Works of Love* asserts should govern Christian existence and the irony that Kierkegaard describes as a "controlled element" or "mastered moment" in the closing pages of *The Concept of Irony*. As I argued in the Introduction, Kierkegaard's suggestion that infinite irony should be "controlled" or "mastered" may well be the most ironic claim in the whole book. For the "controlling element" that he asserts should make irony a "mastered moment" is, in this text as well, a relationship to God of infinite desire. Such a relationship is the ultimate loss of control; it involves being mastered by an all-consuming passion for another. Kierkegaard's assertion in *Works of Love* that our relationships of earthly love should be governed by love for God functions in the same way. Far from yielding a set of definable rules and limits, Christian love overwhelms our pretensions to theological and ethical mastery. It makes prescribing a set of universally applicable norms impossible. Judge William has no qualms about describing marriage as a universally incumbent duty, but Kierkegaard believes that because works of love emerge from infinite desire for God, they can never be specified with certainty. The question of whether a given relationship

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[557] *EO*, 2:138 / *SKS*, 3:137.

impedes or inflames desire for God can only be answered by those within it—and even they can probably not answer it with certainty.

Kierkegaard's vision of a life "controlled" by Christian desire thus turns out to be not only a rigorous exhortation to works of love, but also a radical affirmation of Christian freedom. Recalling Luther's conception of the law as revealing only the *deus absconditus*, he argues that even norms derived from scripture are but a "shadow" or "silhouette" of love itself.[558] He cites Hebrews' statement that "the law has only a shadow of the good things to come"[559] in order to assert that objective law is always intrinsically "indefinite," since it must be fulfilled amidst the complexities of actual life.[560] At its best, he writes, the law functions like an artist's preparatory sketch; it is not the work of art itself. "There is only one power that can carry out the work for which the Law is the sketch," he writes, "namely love."[561] Because this love takes the form of infinite desire, it overwhelms law's certainties and circumscriptions. Like Christ in the story of the Sinful Woman, it welcomes those excluded from its feast by religious people who confuse mere shadows with things to come.

IV. All the World's a Stage

Even in the light of this expansive conception of Christian freedom, however, it may still seem as though *Works of Love* merely tolerates earthly *eros*, rather than finding intrinsic value in it from a Christian point of view. But if this is the case, why does Kierkegaard return again and again throughout his authorship to his longing for Regine—

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[558] *WL*, 104 / *SKS*, 9:108.

[559] Hebrews 10:1; cf. Colossians 2:17.

[560] *WL*, 104 / *SKS*, 9:108.

[561] *WL*, 104 / *SKS*, 9:108.

especially when his writings become most explicitly religious? Why do his texts depict scene after scene of finite desire? As we have seen, *Works of Love* does not hesitate to use images and metaphors drawn from earthly love. But I will argue in this concluding section that the book goes beyond mining the aesthetics of *eros* for merely rhetorical purposes. I will show that it encourages us to interpret our lived experiences of desire as potential stagings of Christian love. In other words, it encourages us to view actuality itself in theatrical terms—as a stage whose scenes and characters should point us beyond themselves toward infinite desire for God.

In the deliberation "*You* Shall Love Your Neighbor," Kierkegaard gives a remarkable account of what it means to experience our earthly erotic relationships in this way. Using the theater as a metaphor for existence itself, he invites the reader to "look at the world that lies before you in all its variegated multifariousness" as one would look "at a play."[562] His argument is that we should learn to see the particularities of actuality and the desires that they incite as pointing beyond themselves toward something more. At first glance, his point is primarily negative, as he unmasks the deficiency of the finite in contrast to the eternal. He laments the way in which individual particularities can captivate us with a "magical spell" similar to that of the theater, causing us to mistake their allure for what is of eternal importance. He writes that we must learn to recognize that even though every human being "represents something particular," he or she is "essentially...something else," that is, a child of God and a neighbor whom God calls us to love. He continues:

> It is just as in the play....When the curtain falls on the stage, then the one who played the king and the one who played the beggar etc. are all alike; all are

[562] WL, 86 / *SKS*, 9:92.

> one and the same—actors. When at death the curtain falls on the stage of actuality..., then they, too, are all one, they are human beings. All of them are what they essentially were, what you did not see because of the dissimilarity that you saw—they are human beings.[563]

Kierkegaard's criticism of actuality, particularity, and earthly desire here is pointed. He argues that treating them as ends in themselves is as misguided as mistaking a king or a beggar on a stage for such a person in real life.

But we would severely misread Kierkegaard's use of this metaphor if we interpreted it only in negative terms. He does not believe that the theater *only* conceals. To the contrary, he argues that theatrical enchantment, if experienced and understood in the right way, can draw us closer to the eternal. Let us not forget that the author comparing earthly existence to a play is himself a passionate devotee of the theater. Far from saying that we should strive to leave the theater and its costumes behind—a goal that he believes is impossible to achieve in any event— he is saying that we can learn to inhabit them so that they draw us closer to an ultimate truth that they can never contain. We should become the best possible actors within actuality's theater without forgetting that we are in a play. This means that we should continue to wear our costumes, but in a way that they "hang loosely" upon us.[564] We should, Kierkegaard writes, "take care to have the outer garment's cords loosely tied and, above all, free of tight knots so that in the moment of transformation the garment can come off easily."[565] We should inhabit

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[563] WL, 87 / *SKS*, 9:92.

[564] *WL*, 88 / *SKS*, 9:93.

[565] *WL*, 87 / *SKS*, 9:92.

our earthly desires with "expectant solemnity," so that they point us toward the eternal rather than blocking it out.[566] He continues:

> Christianity has not wanted to storm forth to abolish dissimilarity, neither the dissimilarity of distinction nor of lowliness: nor has it wished to effect in a worldly way a compromise among dissimilarities; but it wants the dissimilarity to hang loosely on the individual, as loosely as the cape the king casts off in order to show who he is, as loosely as the ragged costume in which a supranatural being has disguised himself. In other words, when the dissimilarity hangs loosely in this way, then in each individual there continually glimmers that essentially other, which is common to all, the eternal resemblance, the likeness.[567]

In this passage, Kierkegaard provocatively compares the particularities of finite existence to the earthly nature of Christ himself. Recalling the fairy tale of the king and the maiden with which this dissertation began, he suggests that our earthly relationships of preference and passion are analogous to "the ragged costume in which a supranatural being has disguised himself." If this analogy holds, then these relationships are as vital to our existence as Christ's earthly nature was to his incarnate life. For either Kierkegaard is a docetist heretic, or he is saying that this "disguise" is essential to what it means to be human. The problem lies not in the costume, but in treating it as though it were ultimate reality. It lies in securing the knots, rather than wearing it loosely so that it can be slipped off when eternity dawns. So long as finitude endures, Kierkegaard believes that our costumes have value in themselves. They are not the eternal—but they can manifest "glimmers" of it. Like the reflected images on the surface of a lake, these glimmers do not furnish objective knowledge of the "essentially other." But for those who contemplate them with theatrical passion, they can incite desire for it. Just as in his

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[566] *WL*, 88 / *SKS*, 9:93.

[567] *WL*, 88 / *SKS*, 9:93.

interpretation of Luke 7 Kierkegaard imagines Christ framing the Sinful Woman as an "eternal picture" that interrupts the actuality of the Pharisees' feast, so too he argues that we should learn to see all of earthly existence as a series of endlessly refracted tableaux—pictures within pictures within pictures that both captivate our gaze and impel us beyond themselves.

Kierkegaard argues in *Works of Love* that we need not seek these glimmers only in writing or art or liturgy—though they can certainly be present in these places. He suggests that the lived relationships of our finite existence—especially the intimate ones in which we take the most delight—can image infinite desire. In the following passage, notice how he figures both earthly love and Christian love as passions, and insists that the strength of each needs to be preserved:

> *Romantic love and friendship are preferential love and the passion of preferential love; Christian love is self-denial's love*, for which this *shall* vouches. To deprive these passions of their strength is the confusion. But preferential love's most passionate boundlessness in excluding means to love only one single person; self denial's boundlessness in giving itself means not to exclude a single one.[568]

Far from saying that earthly *eros* is the antithesis of Christian love, he argues here that the one passion can illumine the other. He goes on to note that the dissipation of faith's passion tends to coincide with the dissipation of romantic *eros*. He criticizes not only the tepidness of faith characteristic of established Christianity but also the blasé attitude toward romantic love characteristic of post-Romantic poets such as Eugène Scribe. Echoing the sentiments of Aesthete A in *Either/Or*, he laments that "the poets have given up the passion of romantic love, they yield, they slacken the tension of passion; they scale down (by adding on) and are of the opinion that a person can, in the sense of romantic

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[568] *WL*, 52 / *SKS*, 9:59.

love, love many times, so that there will be more beloveds."[569] In the same way, he argues, "Christian love yields, slackens the tension of eternity, scales down, and is of the opinion that when a great many are loved, then it is Christian love."[570] The two passions move in opposite directions, but Kierkegaard believes that each is strongest when concurrent with the other. For if worldliness has not sapped our desire even for the finite, then this desire can be an image of and incitement to love for God and neighbor. He writes that the command to love one's neighbor as oneself can helpfully be rephrased, "love your neighbor as you love the beloved."[571]

Throughout both his journals and his published writings, Kierkegaard presents his relationship to Regine Olsen-Schlegel as a kind of theater whose dramas can incite both him and his readers to ever greater love for God and neighbor. To be sure, this play has a singular and arduous plot. Kierkegaard ends his engagement to her while retaining an ardent desire for her, and his lifelong obsession with her would doubtless receive a clinical diagnosis today. Yet if *Works of Love* teaches us anything about how we should regard this story, it is that we should not confuse the particularities of its plot with the ultimate reality toward which they may draw us. Kierkegaard argues in this book that whatever characters and scenes we find ourselves called to perform, we must learn to do so in a double way: embracing our roles, yet allowing them to point us beyond themselves.

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[569] *WL*, 50 / *SKS*, 9:57.

[570] WL, 50 / *SKS*, 9:57.

[571] WL, 57 / *SKS*, 9:64.

Consider again Kierkegaard's dedication to *Two Discourses*. Does it not embody such doubleness? Every word of it could be applied as much to God as to Regine Olsen-Schlegel: "TO ONE UNNAMED, WHOSE NAME WILL ONE DAY BE NAMED, IS DEDICATED, WITH THIS LITTLE WORK, THE ENTIRE AUTHORSHIP, AS IT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING." Does Kierkegaard not dedicate his entire writing career to a God whom he knows he can never adequately name? Does he not believe that this God *will* nonetheless one day be named—when stage costumes slip off and theatrical half-light is consumed in eternal dawn? If the reading of *Works of Love* that I have offered in this chapter is correct, then we need not choose between the one reference and the other. Their simultaneity is the point. In one of his many journal entries pondering the form that this dedication should take, Kierkegaard writes:

> The dedication to Regine Schlegel, if there can be such a thing during my *lifetime*, could very well be used in the front of a small collection of Friday discourses but essentially belongs to the writings on my work as an author. Inasmuch as I step so decisively into the character [*Charakteren*] of the religious, which I have wanted from the beginning, at this moment *she* is the only important one, since my relationship to her is a *God*-relationship.[572]

Just as Kierkegaard believes that his love for Regine can only be valid when it is joined with love for God, so too he insists that he can express his love for God only in the midst of his love for the finite—specifically, this particular object of his desire. The more Kierkegaard "steps into a religious character," the more "*she* is the only important one." The more he relates to this woman of flesh and blood, the deeper his "God-relationship" becomes.

So, at least, Kierkegaard stages his relationship to Regine. The point of this staging is not to unveil the truth of how and why the relationship affected him as it did;

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[572] *WA*, S, 271 / *SKS*, 22:274 [NB13:4].

this is necessarily a matter of the hidden inwardness of his heart. Nor is it to promote this relationship as a template for other people's lives; their relationships must be governed by the inwardness of their own hearts' desires. What Kierkegaard does seek to do is to use this staging to inflame a desire for God that will govern both his heart and those of his readers—and, in doing so, point them to ever new theaters that will inflame it more and more.

Like that of a vaudeville play. Or a king in love with a lowly maiden. Or a Eucharistic gift that incites our desire to return to the altar anew.

EPILOGUE

Renewing Theology: Kierkegaard Beyond Barth

In the midst of his treatment of Christian love in Volume IV.2 of the *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth pauses for a brief discussion of *Works of Love*. Barth is, without question, the most influential theological voice of the twentieth century, and Kierkegaard is frequently said to anticipate and influence his work. But Barth is quite critical of *Works of Love* in the *Church Dogmatics*—sharply distinguishing his own theological paradigm from Kierkegaard's. His criticisms suggest that, far from anticipating the dominant mode of twentieth-century theology, Kierkegaard poses a radical and enduring challenge to it. The aspects of Kierkegaard's writing that Barth criticizes are the very features of it that have been central to this dissertation. In my judgment, they remain subversive in the context of mainstream theology today—whether or not it describes itself as "Barthian."

Negative as Barth's evaluation of *Works of Love* is, his analysis is perceptive in that it clearly identifies the features of the book that most diverge from his own theological outlook. His central criticism concerns the book's refusal to speak directly about love. Barth recognizes that duality, contradiction, and paradox structure Kierkegaard's writing, and he criticizes it for this reason. He regrets that the book never proclaims Christian truth in final, univocal, and objective terms, but always treats it as bound up with earthly ways of loving. He laments how rarely in *Works of Love* "we come across profound and beautiful reflections on the Christian love which is so

relentlessly marked off from its opposite!"[573] He wonders why the book never proclaims what Barth calls "the conquest of *eros* by *agape*."[574] He warns that "if Christian love does not make this declaration to the non-Christian," then "it is not Christian love" because it "stops where the love of God, from which it derives, does not stop."[575] Barth goes so far as to speculate, in a parenthesis that is meant to be damning, that the doubleness and equivocality of the book's rhetoric may in fact reflect "the *eros* by which we think we can lay hold of *agape*!"[576] While he praises the "merciless severity" of Kierkegaard's critique of earthly love, he nonetheless worries that the driving force of Kierkegaard's writing may well be a kind of spiritual desire, since he never directly depicts Christian love itself. For Barth, theology is not about inciting desire, but satisfying it—or negating it altogether. "The man who loves as a Christian," he writes, is "already at the goal which the man who loves erotically—poor dupe—wants to reach but never can or will reach in erotic love."[577] Barth understands the task of theology as proclaiming the truth about God as seen from the vantage point of eschatological victory. In contrast, Kierkegaard insists that theology written by finite human beings always emerges from the theatrical half-light of finitude.

Barth distinguishes himself from Kierkegaard even more directly in a short essay from 1963 titled "Kierkegaard and the Theologians." His basic thesis in this piece is that while reading Kierkegaard can be a valuable "school" for theologians to pass through, it

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[573] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 747.

[574] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 751.

[575] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 748-749.

[576] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 747-748.

[577] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 751.

is vital that "they work themselves out of him again."[578] In Barth's analysis here, Kierkegaard's writing is problematic because it is constantly in a "state of suspension," in which one seeks "neither to stand up nor to lie down."[579] Rather than proclaiming the truth about God in objective terms, Kierkegaard speaks with endless equivocality and indirection and irony. Barth condemns Kierkegaard's work for manifesting a "seriousness that never allows [one] to be really serious" and "a smile that can never be laughter."[580] Barth's own theology, in contrast, has "no more use for irony." It is thus able "to become really serious and also burst into peals of laughter."[581] To graduate with Barth from Kierkegaard's school is "to learn to walk."[582] And walking with Barth means striding beyond irony, theatricality, and desire.

Ironically enough, however, Barth flirts with the possibility of readmitting desire for God into theology less than fifty pages after his discussion of Kierkegaard in the *Church Dogmatics*. This flirtation takes place in a small-print excursus responding to Anders Nygren's analysis of Paul. Barth has read his Nygren carefully, and he knows that Nygren's antithesis between *agape* and *eros* culminates in the suppression of the theme of love for God altogether.[583] In response, Barth suddenly and somewhat

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[578] Karl Barth, "Kierkegaard and the Theologians," in *Fragments Grave and Gay*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (London: Collins, 1971), 102.

[579] Barth, "Kierkegaard and the Theologians," 103.

[580] Barth, "Kierkegaard and the Theologians," 103.

[581] Barth, "Kierkegaard and the Theologians," 104.

[582] Barth, "Kierkegaard and the Theologians," 104.

[583] Barth recognizes this danger and even laments that he himself succumbed to it in early writings such as the *Romans* commentary. He writes: "In his bitter fight for *agape* against *eros* A. Nygren has even decreed that there can be no question of a spontaneous love of man for God, and that in the first part of the twofold command there is in the Synoptics a lack of clarity in this respect which is happily overcome in Paul. Since in my earlier period I myself made some direct and indirect contribution to

embarrassedly, finds himself of two minds. Even as he continues to warn against a transformation of Christian faith into "its erotico-religious opposite,"[584] he is sufficiently committed to the principle of biblical theology to feel that he must resist the suppression of the idea of love for God. He acknowledges that "the biblical witness to love for God and for Jesus is much too strong and explicit to permit us conscientiously to regard the concept merely as an alternative for 'obedience,' or 'love for one's neighbor,' thus evading its true meaning."[585] He goes on to cite Luke 7's story of the Sinful Woman—along with other gospel stories of women anointing Christ—as paramount examples of such love. He acknowledges that even though what the Sinful Woman does is "wholly superfluous, an act of sheer extravagance," Jesus sees it as "a good act which belongs to the history of salvation."[586] Barth affirms that the love for God that the Sinful Woman embodies is indispensible to the life of faith. But he attempts no definition of this love. It does not fit his ideal of *agape*—and he refuses to call it *eros*.

Yet, as if to acknowledge this point by implication, he goes on in this excursus to praise forms of mysticism and pietism for which *eros* is, in his own analysis, central. Rather than accusing such forms of spirituality of idolatry, as he usually does, he writes here that "older Mystics, Pietists, and Romantics" had a point in "bringing and breaking and pouring out their alabaster boxes of ointment, and raising their corresponding hymns

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this attitude, I think it only right briefly to state my present views on the matter." Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 795.

[584] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 795.

[585] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 796.

[586] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 797.

of devotion."[587] He cites a few such hymns familiar to his German readers—and frankly acknowledges that "a good deal of this smacks of religious eroticism."[588] Yet his conclusion is shocking: "How arid would be our hymn-books if we were to purge out all elements of this kind! And how deficient would be our preaching and teaching and pastoral work if there were no conscious utterance along these lines!" He concludes with a remarkable paraphrase of Luther's exhortation to "sin boldly": "If a choice has to be made, is it not better to say a little too much and occasionally to slip up?"[589]

Barth reigns himself in in the closing paragraph of the excursus. He assures the reader that "we do not need to choose" between a pure *agape* ideal and passionate love for God. He writes that it is possible to have both without "slipping into the sphere of religious eroticism."[590] Yet the reader searches in vain in either the small or the large print of the *Church Dogmatics* for a perspicuous explanation of what such a love for God would be. The best Barth can do is to admonish theologians to speak about God "with the measure of sober passion or passionate soberness which corresponds on the one hand to the fire which burns at this centre and on the other to its holiness and purity."[591] The excursus concluded and the large print resumed, Barth then returns resolutely to the theme of obedience to God's commands.[592]

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[587] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 797-798.

[588] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 798.

[589] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 798.

[590] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 798.

[591] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 798.

[592] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, 798-799.

There is no question that the large-print Barth is the one who wins out in the vast majority of his texts. Among his theological inheritors, the insistence that objectively stated doctrine is the only legitimate form of theological discourse is even more pronounced. Yet it is worth recognizing that, in this brief excursus at least, even Barth edges tentatively toward embracing the desire for God that is at the heart of Kierkegaard's project as a religious author. So conceived, infinite desire calls into question the dogmatism that has become characteristic of "orthodox" Christian theology in modernity. It inspires the singing of hymns and the breaking of alabastar boxes, along with an infinite array of other theological stagings. Instead of seeking to negate or even satisfy desire, Kierkegaard uses such images and rhetorical forms to elicit it more and more. The question that theologians who read Kierkegaard's work today must answer is whether they will take it as an incitement to further stagings of desire—or whether they, like Barth, will regard it merely as a curious excursus, which ultimately distracts from the "serious" work of traditional dogmatics.

What would it mean to take seriously the deeply theological motivations for Kierkegaard's highly unconventional theological rhetoric? In my view, the texts studied in this dissertation undermine any essential distinction between the "religious" writing performed by "poets" like Kierkegaard and the "theological" writing performed by dogmatic theologians like Barth. As I see it, the latter is but a subspecies of the former. All theological writing should strive to affect, implicate, and transform its readers, rather than merely state putatively direct truths about God. Instead of apologizing for its passionate nature, theology should take the elicitation of desire as its fundamental goal. This does not mean that classes in Systematic Theology should be cancelled or that we

should abandon the work of articulating the ancient doctrines of the faith in our contemporary context. Quite to the contrary, what it means is that theology is alive when its doctrines function dynamically rather than statically, as beginnings rather than as ends. If conceived and executed in this way, even the most technical doctrinal disquisitions can become alabaster jars poured out for the sake of inciting ever-increasing desire for God and ever-more compassionate love for human beings. Yet at the same time, if this is the goal of all theological writing, then theology should embrace whatever rhetorical forms can most effectively contribute to this end—however aesthetic and seemingly impious they may seem. Like Kierkegaard's subversive image of the Sinful Woman weeping at the feet of Vor Frue Kirke's stately marble *Christus*, theology should strive to topple the barriers we impose on God's love, extend its reach beyond even our best efforts to express it, and help us meet it in longing.

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CI	*The Concept of Irony; Schelling Lecture Notes*
EO, 1	*Either/Or*, I
EO, 2	*Either/Or*, II
EUD	*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*
FT	*Fear and Trembling; Repetition*
R	*Fear and Trembling; Repetition*
PF	*Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus*
TDIU	*Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*
CUP	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to* Philosophical Fragments
WL	*Works of Love*
CD	*Christian Discourse; The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*
WA	*Without Authority: The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air; Two Ethical-Religious Essays; Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays; An Upbuilding Discourse; Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*
PC	*Practice in Christianity*
FSE	*For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!*
JY	*For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!*
PV	*The Point of View: On My Work as an Author; The Point of View for My Work as an Author; Armed Neutrality*
BA	*The Book on Adler*

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