

The Dialectic of the *Real Erotic* and of Eroticism in Kierkegaard's *Seducer's Diary*

Guillermine de Lacoste

The perception of the erotic proffered in the past few years by thinkers such as Angela Carter, Audre Lorde, and Simone de Beauvoir (as recently interpreted by Debra Bergoffen), has enabled us and future Kierkegaard scholars to view *The Seducer's Diary* and the figures of Cordelia and Johannes with a bold new look that clearly discerns, in that work, the *real erotic* from its perversion, eroticism.¹ This look reveals that Johannes's subtle manipulation of Cordelia's emotions and feelings (the *real erotic* in bud), as well as his honing of reflection in her – in order to transform them/it into eroticism – for his own gratification and mastery, is an attempted perversion of the *real erotic*. However, in a dialectical swing, it brings about the opposite, the partial blossoming of *the real erotic* in Cordelia.

In our androcentric western culture, the erotic is commonly regarded as that which tends to arouse one's sexual desire. As such it is linked to the licentious and to the pornographic – with their imperviousness to feelings and to reciprocity, and their inherent manipulation and reification of the other. This is exactly the way Johannes views the erotic – word which is constantly on his lips throughout the Diary, and which he confounds with love. He is obviously speaking about eroticism. However, the first meaning of the erotic given by both the Larousse and the Merriam-Webster dictionaries, and also that ascribed to it by Lorde, Beauvoir, Bergoffen and Carter, is that it is about Eros, that is a self-filling love having both a sensuous quality and an aspiration towards the transcendent.

Beauvoir's notions of the ambiguity of the erotic and of the risking of our vulnerability through the gifting of ourselves, both part of what Bergoffen calls her »muted voice,« well explicate this first meaning. Beauvoir terms the erotic »ambiguous« because it blurs the separation which our Cartesian consciousness has created between our minds and our bodies, ourselves and the other. And this blurring creates a temporary milieu for intimacy and/or reciprocity between ourselves and the other, or ourselves and reality. The risking of our vulnerability through our gifting of self to the other, which Bergoffen calls »the generosity of the erotic,« complements the ambiguity of the *real erotic*. It involves both »the gift that lets [the other] be« and a receptivity to their feelings.²

Lorde's insistence that the basis of this *real erotic* consists of feelings deep within ourselves – feelings which are the very fabric of the self – but which are all too often torn to shreds by »male models of power,« is critical. According to her, it is essential to recognize these feelings through a deep reflection and to consciously begin to live them. They can then become the source of real power and freedom.³ Lorde goes on to say that the erotic is one with the spiritual (which involves deep feeling),⁴ and that it is diametrically opposed to pornography which is the abuse of feeling. The *real erotic* leads to joy, in our lives, especially when we share a pursuit we enjoy (whatever it be – writing an essay, dancing, or »playing quoits«), with someone we love. For such a sharing forms a link between the two who share. As such, the real erotic is the self-fulfilling »yes within ourselves.«⁵

Beauvoir, Bergoffen and Carter all agree that for a flourishing of the *real erotic* to take place (1) there must exist an immediacy or spontaneity of feeling between the two partners, (2) the loved one must be present concretely to the lover, and not be made into an abstraction or a manipulable object; (3) both partners must abandon themselves to each other and take the risk of intimacy; (4) each partner must both give and receive in order to reach reciprocity.⁶

It is with this ideal in mind that, in their works, these three writers each independently criticize Sade for perverting the *real erotic* and practicing a full-fledged eroticism. These criticisms concur that there existed no spontaneity of feeling whatsoever in the Marquis de Sade vis à vis his victims. Carter and Bergoffen ascribe this to the intellectuality of his pleasures⁷ or to the rational ordering of his universe.⁸ It is Carter who points out that in his »elaborately choreographed masks of abstraction, of alienation,«⁹ Sade never acknowledged the concrete presence of the other

who always remained the object, never the subject. Beauvoir also writes that his autism never let Sade acknowledge the other's presence.¹⁰ She insists on Sade's »radical affective isolationism,« on his utter resistance to abandon of self to the other: »Never in his stories does voluptuousness become self-forgetfulness, swooning or abandon,« she writes. »He does not lose himself in his body (or in that of the other), even for an instant.«¹¹ His is a maniacal passion, a frantic search for pleasure achieved by sadistic or masochistic means, which totally refuses the risk of intimacy.¹² Carter writes likewise that there is as little room for intimacy in Sade's antics »as upon a football field.«¹³ And both Bergoffen and Carter agree that there is not in Sade a single sign of feeling for his victims, and therefore any reciprocity between he and them. For he must at all costs retain mastery, remain the sovereign subject, the subject of power.¹⁴

We do not agree with Henning Fenger's interpretation of Kierkegaard's relationship to Regine Olsen, according to which most of the above criticisms of Sade also apply to Kierkegaard himself.¹⁵ But we will show throughout this paper that these criticisms well apply to Johannes as he attempts to pervert the *real erotic* in Cordelia. In the process we will discover that unlike the other seduced women discussed in *Either/Or*, Elvira or Margaret, Cordelia is far from being a hapless victim.

Our stance concerning Cordelia's non-victimization runs counter to both traditional and feminist interpretations. According to Bradley Dewey for example, each of the seven interpreters of *The Seducer's Diary* whom he discusses views Cordelia as a victim.¹⁶ And even an avant-garde feminist such as Wanda Warren Berry is adamant about Cordelia's victimization. She refers to Cordelia's letters at the beginning of the Diary as a proof that Cordelia is »totally vulnerable to« and »totally dependent upon« Johannes.¹⁷ We ascertain that although Johannes has the intention of making her »a victim of his eroticism,« his sophisticated method of seduction »backfires on him.«¹⁸ For, she embodies the *real erotic* (in bud at first), and the (f)act of Johannes's tutoring her in reflection creates a lively dialectic between this erotic and his eroticism throughout *The Seducer's Diary*, which culminates in the flowering of the *real erotic* which she embodies.¹⁹ Johannes's tutoring enables her, as she risks her vulnerability by abandoning herself to him, to become conscious of her deep feelings and to raise them to a higher level.

There is no doubt that Johannes himself is an extremely complex and sophisticated seducer. Like Don Juan and Faust (whose seductions of Elvira, Zerlina, and Margaret are recounted by Victor Eremita in »The

Immediate Stages of the Erotic,« and »Silhouettes«), he lives in the realm of sensuous immediacy with its basic category of the agreeable and the disagreeable, and its unconsciousness of the self as spirit (*KW* 14, 176; *SV1* 11, 155).²⁰ In the terms of Anti-Climacus, he has emasculated himself »in a spiritual sense« (*KW* 14, 33; *SV1* 11, 146). His heautocentric eroticism, similar to that of the other seducers, leads him to abuse the feelings of any young »girl« he is pursuing, impervious to reciprocity in his search for the perfect pleasure.

But unlike them he is in perfect control of his sensuous immediacy. At one point in the Diary – as Cordelia is sitting on his knees, entwined around him like a lovely flower – he remains as unperturbed as the sailor high on the lookout of the mast of his skiff which is »plunging prow first into the ocean... into the depth of the abyss« (*KW* 3, 325; *SV1* 1, 296; *KW* 3, 411; *SV1* 1, 378-379). This is because, as Mark C. Taylor has noted, in contrast to the other seducers, his primary tool in the seduction of Cordelia is reflection/reflectivity. He uses reflection to manipulate and control her. But he also hones reflection in her, so that her abandon will be a free one. The origins of this reflectivity being at once Cartesian and Hegelian, the dialectic of his eroticism and of Cordelia's *real erotic* which ensues is rather complex.

Cordelia herself has always been placed (along with the other seduced women of *Either/Or*) on the level of pure immediacy (described by Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness unto Death* as despair over the earthly) in which one is passively swayed by circumstances (*KW* 14, 50-60; *SV1* 11, 161-172). The new perception of the erotic proffered by Bergoffen/Beauvoir and Lorde has enabled us to view Cordelia in a new light: she is grounded in the kind of immediacy described by Anti-Climacus in his discussion on the universality of despair, that of »a womanly youthfulness that is perfect peace and harmony and joy« (*KW* 14, 25; *SV1* 11, 139).

Johannes gives us a revealing description of Cordelia as she is walking along a lake completely spontaneous in her immediacy, »preoccupied not with herself,« (which would have brought about a separation between self and other) but »within herself.« This inwardness, or oneness with herself, gives her »boundless peace and repose« (*KW* 3, 332; *SV1* 1, 303). Her spontaneity makes her so incredibly light that she could carry »herself away« (*KW* 3, 332; *SV1* 1, 303). Later on, he will comment on the facility with which she will be able to spring into the infinite (*KW* 3, 391-392; *SV1* 1, 359).

Since what she lacks in order to become a self is consciousness of self, Johannes's instruction in reflectivity may well be viewed as a boon to her. She certainly is far from being a passive disciple. Johannes comments that, at the outset, their relationship is that of »two good minds« (*KW* 3, 363; *SV1* 1, 332). He also notes that she has a forceful personality, that she is proudly independent »in relation to people,« and that she seeks »a freedom like that of the desert Arabs« (*KW* 3, 363, *SV1* 1, 332). She definitely has an »enormous claim« (*KW* 3, 360; *SV1* 1, 329). This is why he suggests that her ideal is probably not that of girls her age, a heroine of romance, but rather that of Joan of Arc, that is action allied with thought and feeling (*KW* 3, 345; *SV1* 1, 315).

Moreover, in terms of the factors which, according to Anti-Climacus, compose the self, she has the wherewithal with which to eventually reach the balance necessary for selfhood and freedom. Johannes remarks that she has a certain primitivity, by which he means that she has not been over-polished by society or is not overly well adapted to it, so as to be a socialite (*KW* 3, 333; *SV1* 1, 304). Like Anti-Climacus, he greatly appreciates this primitivity, for different reasons of course. For him, it has to do with the quality of Cordelia's eventual abandon to him; for Anti-Climacus, it means that one is not caught up in the finite but oriented toward the infinite (*KW* 14, 33; *SV1* 11, 146).

Johannes furthermore comments that Cordelia has passion and imagination – the very characteristics which, according to *The Sickness unto Death*, are the media of infinite possibility (*KW* 3, 343; *SV1* 1, 313). This means that Cordelia's situation is unlike that of a great many women whose roles are so controlled by society that they are »unable to breathe« (*KW* 14, 39; *SV1* 11, 152). Her passion, intertwined with the intensity and spirit, which Johannes also attributes to her, is at the core of the depth of feeling which, according to Audre Lorde, is precisely the basis for the *real erotic* (*KW* 3, 360; *SV1* 1, 329). And it is this *real erotic* which impels Johannes towards Cordelia, like a moth towards the light, because he has completely lost touch with his own deep feelings.²¹ When Johannes comments after his engagement to Cordelia that she has no notion whatever of the erotic, he is obviously speaking about his version of the erotic – that is eroticism.

It is in this light that we must decipher the statement Johannes makes concerning his ultimate aim in regards to Cordelia: his true enjoyment will depend on her being finally at such a point of erotic desire that she will beg him to accept her entirely free abandon because »she feels her

whole happiness in this« (*KW* 3, 342; *SV* 1, 312). It is the frantic aspect of this statement which is most striking: Johannes's attitude to Cordelia is definitely what Bergoffen has called – referring to Sade – that of »maniacal passion.«²²

Maniacal passion is apt to develop in persons who are at once Cartesian minds and sovereign Hegelian subjects. For, in Cartesian minds, the link between mind and body has been so sundered that there is no place for feeling or abandon to the other to take root. Thus, for these mind-bodies, sexual enjoyment depends entirely on the extreme abandon of someone in whom the link between mind and body is so tight that feeling, that is, desire to abandon oneself to another, becomes everything. In a sense, as in the case of Juliette Drouet, Victor Hugo's lifelong mistress, this is maniacal passion in reverse.²³ (This is partly what Johannes wants from Cordelia).

In Hegelian sovereign subjects, the active struggle of consciousnesses is paramount, and the desire to win, to have mastery over the other, is so great that they can never let go, never allow themselves to be receptive to the other. Because of this, they require the love of someone in whom there is little or no subjectivity, or consciousness of self as separate from the other – but great receptivity. In both instances, that of the Cartesian mind and that of the Hegelian sovereign subject, there is objectification and manipulative control of the one abandoning themselves or being receptive to the other.

Johannes is both a Cartesian mind and a Hegelian sovereign subject. He is well aware that Cordelia, with her strong personality, will not be prone to maniacal passion in reverse, and will not therefore be easily persuaded to abandon herself so entirely that she loses her consciousness of self as separate from him. Moreover, he himself professes to be no ordinary seducer, such as the legendary Don Juan who was satisfied with any and every girl who was ready to abandon herself to him. Johannes insists that he is, rather, an aesthete, an eroticist, in search of a higher prize – that is, a completely conscious abandon on Cordelia's part (*KW* 3, 368; *SV* 1, 337). He must therefore mastermind another approach. He will temporarily infuse into Cordelia his version of the erotic or its (per)version. He will attempt to transform her *real erotic* into an eroticism exactly like his, masterfully temporarily creating within Cordelia herself, a psychological division similar to his own – pitting her mind against her sexual impulses and her consciousness against his.

After laboring to arouse eroticism in Cordelia by a series of conver-

sations and letters which are erotically couched, he flees from her in order to arouse eroticism within her.²⁴ She is thus beginning to be driven to him (by reason) of what he calls her »wild erotic impulses.« She is mastering the science of »appropriating the erotic« (or eroticism) of separating it from her feelings, and of using it as a weapon which she can hurl at him in order to captivate him (*KW* 3, 411; *SV1* 1, 379). She is thus learning to treat him as an object of desire instead of a subject of love.

For Johannes, the important thing is that Cordelia become aware of (his version of) the power of the erotic. This means that she should become conscious of her power and her mastery over him, of the fact that (at this point) she appears to be the victor. He (mistakenly) interprets the fact that her glance is becoming daring as the sign of the power of eroticism within her. He compares her to a Venus »influenced by a strong heartthrob of her love« (*KW* 3, 411; *SV1* 1, 378). And, because she believes she owes him nothing, Johannes hopes that »the proper play of freedom,« essential to his enjoyment will prevail.

He muses though that she could become a »Valkyrie.«²⁵ For, he is worried that if she is always feeling triumphant, the *real erotic* within her could become too diffuse, and »her deeper womanliness« could fail to hypostasize itself.²⁶ He has been banking all along on this hypostasization – which corresponds exactly to what Beauvoir/Bergoffen call the ambiguity of the erotic – to take hold of Cordelia at the moment of apotheosis of his manipulations. And when this happened, the separation between her mind and her *real erotic* impulses, between her consciousness and his, which he had worked to develop in her in order to arouse eroticism, would suddenly become blurred, so that she would abandon herself to him with a passion acquired in the course of her pursuit of him. But this could all derail unless Johannes now becomes especially careful in his planning of the twofold movement he has been using, the fanning and the cooling process, so that he can maintain in Cordelia both the triumphal aggression of her pursuit of him and her readiness to give in to her feelings, that is to abandon himself to him.

So far, Johannes has been playing what he calls »a game of liberation.« He has succeeded in »liberating« Cordelia by raising her consciousness from a level of unselfconscious immediacy and spontaneity. He has also made her aware that when it is allied with consciousness, what he calls »the erotic« can be a source of great power over/mastery over someone. He now thinks that the situation has evolved to the point at which

he is ready to undertake a »life and death struggle« with Cordelia. He views the struggle as »a war of conquest« to win Cordelia's total submission, similar to Hegel's struggle of the opposite consciousness of self, leading to domination by the master and the submission of the slave. And Johannes makes himself believe that, because he has »liberated« Cordelia, the struggle will be an equal and fair one, in other words, that they will both equally risk their consciousnesses. But this utter bad faith, typical of his androcentric mindset, lies in the fact that he is surreptitiously banking on her risking not her consciousness but her vulnerability through the gifting of herself. This latter risking is the fruit of the ambiguity of the *real erotic* within her, or the »hypostasization of her womanhood.« He fervently hopes it has not evanesced while he has been developing her consciousness in the hope of making her gifting a free one.

But Johannes plans to use Cordelia's gifting for his own enjoyment, without any intention of returning that gifting, or for that matter any possibility on his part of doing so. For, he is psychologically, if not physically impotent, due to his utter lack of deep feeling. He thus appears to be defrauding Cordelia of the *real erotic*²⁷ and to be perverting it on the same four counts as Sade:²⁸ (1) he never experiences the spontaneity or immediacy of the *real erotic*; (2) Cordelia is never a presence for him but a manipulable object of enjoyment; (3) he is never able to abandon himself to Cordelia, and can never take the risk of real intimacy; (4) he refuses to let himself experience »the ambiguity of the erotic« which leads to the blurring of the separation between self and other, to receptivity to the other, and to the possibility of reciprocity.

Yet Johannes keeps insisting on calling Cordelia's gifting of herself »a submission,« as if it were the same thing as the risking of her consciousness in a »life and death struggle.« He refuses to admit that her risking of her vulnerability is of an entirely different order, for it is voluntary – not forced; a gifting – not a yielding. But he has been planning all along to profit from this very gifting. His psychological insight is as deep as his bad faith – for it is in risking her vulnerability that Cordelia is free.²⁹ If she had risked her sovereignty and then be forced to submit to him, her submission would have been that of a slave, not that of a free woman.

Furthermore, Johannes has the effrontery to write that when a »girl« has abandoned herself to a man through love, she is weak for »she has lost everything« (*KW* 3, 445; *SV1* 1, 412). This is the utmost sexism according to which a man's sexual conquest enhances his prestige (as Johannes has been boasting about himself throughout the Diary), but a

woman's virginity is the (w)hole without which she is nothing.³⁰ This attempt to marginalize the *real erotic* is an index of Johannes's final attempt at perverting the *real erotic* in Cordelia.

But, Johannes's perversion of the erotic in Cordelia is finally (un)successful, because of her real transformation, reached through his infusion of reflection into the real erotic she was living to begin with – leading to a deeper awareness on her part. It is this more conscious and therefore more powerful erotic, which he insightfully calls »reflected passion« (*KW* 3, 411; *SV1* 1, 378-379). He himself seems to have been aware in one of his prescient moments that Cordelia's gifting of herself would bring her to a higher consciousness. For, he writes sardonically but perspicaciously that, in relation to him, Cordelia must »zu Grunde gehen.« In a long footnote, Howard Johnson, the revising editor of the Anchor Book edition of *Either/Or*, explains that »the literal meaning of *zu Grunde gehen* is 'to sink, founder, go to ruin, perish.'³¹ But he goes on to explain that in his *Logic*, which Kierkegaard certainly knew well, Hegel »uses this expression in quite a special way,« for, »by developing itself, by becoming that which fundamentally and essentially it is, being can be said to have reached its ground. That is, it founders or disappears, but in the sense of it being taken up into a new and higher sphere.«³² And we certainly can say that, by gifting herself, Cordelia has reached her ground, that is to say, at once disappeared, as a consciousness struggling against another, but reached a higher consciousness – no doubt the joint fruit of her return to her first immediacy and her new consciousness. In the terminology of Anti-Climacus' *The Sickness unto Death*, we could say that since Cordelia's »womanly youthfulness that is perfect peace and harmony and joy« (*KW* 14, 25; *SV1* 11, 139), has been allied to reflection, she is on her way out of despair – towards becoming a self.

The new consciousness and the new power of the *real erotic* within Cordelia (which is the consequence of a self-transformation), place it at the opposite end of Johannes's eroticism, or his perversion of the erotic. Whereas it was through his calculations and/or his manipulations that Johannes was able to turn every event and every conversation with Cordelia into an eroticism which was separate from her to begin with, the *real erotic* colors all the aspects of one's life from within if we allow ourselves to feel it. Lorde compares it to the kernel of intense yellow in the plastic margarine packages during World War II, which when released colored all the white margarine in the package. »It heightens and sensi-

tivizes and strengthens all my experience,« she writes.³³ Cordelia's »deep passionateness« and her relating to Johannes »with all the longing of her entire being,« can be seen as a coloring of her life by the *real erotic* within her.

Likewise, the power of the *real erotic* contrasts deeply with the power over or mastery which Johannes tried to teach Cordelia as he involved her in his artificial play of freedom or struggle of consciousnesses – based on the perversion of the erotic. For this power over is actually a manipulation of the other's feelings, with the prospect of an eventual enjoyment at the other's expense. The power of the *real erotic* on the other hand depends on being in touch with our deepest feelings and on openly sharing them in a common pursuit with someone we love. This leads to great joy shared by the two partners. The game of quoits which Cordelia plays with Johannes at a garden party, towards the end of the Diary, is a perfect example of this power and of Johannes's reaction to it. When Cordelia learns about the beautiful custom of exchanging the rings, she is elated – »a hightened energy inflamed her« (*KW* 3, 433; *SVI* 1, 400) – because she foresees the possibility of sharing a meaningful pursuit with Johannes, giving it a higher significance and thus reaching joy together with him. But when she tosses the rings in the air with an audacious look, crying out »Long live love!« Johannes cannot stand this *real erotic* power which, like Lorde's self-fulfilling »yes within ourselves,« has a bold and almost insolent aspect.³⁴ He must control it, curb Cordelia's elation, and gain power over her by forcing her to go on playing, while acting cavalierly as if he had not noticed anything.

In the light of the above discussion of Cordelia's »real transformation,« it is not too surprising (the surprise is that the suggestion comes from Johannes himself who says he has learned it from Cordelia), that there exists a natural link between the *real erotic* and the spiritual in *The Seducer's Diary*. This link belies the binary separation between them which, according to A in the »Immediate Stages of the Erotic,« Christianity has made.³⁵ Although it is but another way that he has found to approach and manipulate Cordelia's *real erotic*, Johannes's awareness (surely prompted by Kierkegaard himself who might well have said that he had learned it from Regine) that Cordelia has easy access to the infinite by a leap, is insightful. According to him, whereas a masculine leap effected through reflection is clumsy, calculated and finally inadequate (because of the separation between reflection and the infinite), the feminine leap is »a gliding through the path of the imagination and the heart«

(*KW* 3, 391; *SV1* 1, 359). Going beyond Johannes's sexist distinction here (which is perplexingly in reverse) and the facetiousness of his approach, we can (nevertheless) view what he terms »the feminine leap« as a deeper awareness of feeling, a natural continuation as well as a transformation of the *real erotic* into spirit.³⁶

Johannes's marginalization of the *real erotic*, of Cordelia's abandon, which he had frantically desired and obtained, is the fruit of an androcentric mindset.³⁷ We saw however, that the *real erotic* which existed in Cordelia to begin with was not jeopardized by Johannes's attempted perversion of it. Rather, as was evident from a number of scenes towards the end of the Diary, Johannes's assiduous development of Cordelia's reflectivity/consciousness deepened this *real erotic*. In spite of Johannes's refusal/inability to reciprocate, thus impeding an ideal flourishing of the *real erotic* between them and of the great suffering she must consequently have endured, we can envisage Cordelia as having undergone an initial self-transformation and, in Anti-Climacus' terminology, being en-abled to become a »self« – that is to begin to realize herself authentically as a human being.

Notes

1. Angela Carter, *The Sadian Woman, the Ideology of Pornography*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.
Audre Lorde, »Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power« in *Sister Outsider*, Freedom, CA, The Crossing Press, 1984. Debra Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997.
2. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 24-26, 29-30, 58, 180.
3. We will see at the end of this essay that the power which flows from a blossoming of the *real erotic* through deep reflection is at the opposite of the power over or mastery which is the result of winning the Hegelian struggle of consciousnesses.
4. Lorde, »Uses of the Erotic,« p. 57.
5. Lorde, »Uses of the Erotic,« p. 57.
6. Note that in spite of the emphasis on immediacy or spontaneity of feelings, on intimacy, on the gifting of self and on reciprocity in the *real erotic* we are discussing, we are not equating it with the feminine and making it paradigmatic. This would be inappropriate and a mistake both from the point of view of feminism and from Kierkegaard's own perspective (see Céline Léon, »The (In)Appropriateness of Using the Feminine as Paradigm. The Case of Kierkegaard« in *Philosophy Today*, vol. 44, 4, 2000, pp. 339-346.) Sylvia Walsh has shown that in his *Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard construes the erotic as the characteristic of a male interpreter who, as a passionate lover, lovingly assists the phenomena to emerge and insists on reciprocity between them (see Sylvia Walsh, »Kierkegaard's Erotic Hermeneutics as a Proto-Feminist Alternative to Hegelian, Nietzschean, and Derridean Deconstructive Hermeneutics,« paper delivered at the S. Olaf Conference, Northfield, MN, USA, June 2001.) The *real erotic* is, then, neither feminine nor masculine. Suzanne Lilar views Jean-Paul Sartre, who was as adept in the field of eroticism as Johannes, as eventually moving towards the erotic in his writings and in his life. (Suzanne Lilar, *A propos de Sartre et de l'amour*, Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1967.) And there are certainly examples in literature and in life of women who have practiced eroticism. La Marquise de Merteuil in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is a case in point. (Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1987.) In a recent book, Pierre de Lagarde finds her so representative of eroticism's perversion that he titles his chapter on perverse love »Madame de Merteuil ou l'amours pervers.« She is even more devoid of feelings than Johannes, thrives on the manipulation of others' feelings and emotions, and prizes mastery over others more than actual gratification in sexual encounters. (Pierre de Lagarde, *L'Amour dans tous ses états*, Paris, Mallard, 2001, pp. 205-225).
7. Carter, *The Sadian Woman*, p. 18.
8. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 123.
9. Carter, *The Sadian Woman*, p. 146.
10. Simone de Beauvoir, »Faut-il brûler Sade?« in *Privilèges, Les Essais, LXXXVI*, Paris, Gallimard, 1955, p. 35.
11. Beauvoir, »Faut-il brûler Sade?« p. 34.
12. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 121.
13. Carter, *The Sadian Woman*, p. 146.
14. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 122. Carter, *The Sadian Woman*, p. 141.

15. Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and their Origin. Studies in Kierkegaardian Papers and Letters*, Trans. George C. Schoolfield, New Haven & London, Yale U. Press, 1980, pp. 204-211.
16. Bradley Dewey, »Seven Seducers: a Typology of Interpretations of the Aesthetic Stage in Kierkegaard's 'Seducer's Diary'« in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or*, ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1995, pp. 159-199.
17. Wanda Warren Berry, »The Heterosexual Imagination and Aesthetic Existence in Kierkegaard's Either/Or, Part I« in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. by Céline Léon and Sylvia Walsh, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, (thereafter FISK) p. 36. We aver that, like an introduction to a book written before the book itself is written, these letters are questionable as a characterization of Cordelia. It is A, the editor of the Diary, who places them at the beginning of the Diary in order to influence our reading of the Diary's seduction stories. But, just as ideas take on an existence of their own as the book is being written, so as the Diary evolves, Cordelia takes on an incredible existence of her own – which sometimes stuns Johannes himself. We find throughout the Diary a strong resemblance between Cordelia Wahl and Regine Olsen – who was a strong woman with a will of her own in spite of the fact that she abandoned herself completely to Kierkegaard, or maybe in that very act. Yet she was resilient enough to marry her first suitor, Fritz Schlegel, a few years after Kierkegaard broke his engagement to her.
18. Clarification by Sylvia Walsh (e-mail to Guillermine de Lacoste, April 5, 2001). Walsh continues: »The irony of love he sought to teach her is turned back on him in the end.« Whether or not »he is successful in having his way with her« (as Walsh subtly says it) is a hotly debated question among Kierkegaard scholars (Walsh e-mail; Dewey, »Seven Seducers,« p. 160-162). But it is not of essential importance in the dialectic of the *real erotic* and eroticism which we are discussing here.
19. Because of Johannes's tutoring in reflection, Sylvia Walsh calls Cordelia »Johannes's protégée« (Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, p. 91.) More daringly, Jane Duran suggests that Kierkegaard's model of reflectivity in *The Seducer's Diary* might serve as a model for the reflectivity of the Christ figure and the Disciple in *Philosophical Fragments*: »the Disciple is placed in a relationship with respect to the Christ that mirrors in an odd way the relationship of Cordelia to the seducer,« she writes. (Jane Duran, »The Kierkegaardian Feminist« in *FISK*, pp. 249-267.
20. *Kierkegaard's Writings*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, vols. 1-25, 1978-1998 (here and thereafter cited in abbreviation by volume number: *KW* 14), p. 176; Søren Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker*, edited by A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg and H.O. Lange, vol. I-XIV, Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, Copenhagen 1901-1906 (here and thereafter cited in abbreviation by volume number: *SV* 11), p. 155.
21. He much resembles Jean-Paul Sartre who, as he explains to Beauvoir in the 1974 Interviews, had so developed his rationality in the process of achieving the translucidity he sought that he had lost contact with his affectivity or immediacy. He thus felt the need to constantly seduce young women – so that through their sensibility (the *real erotic*) – he could reclaim his own affectivity/immediacy. As he told Beauvoir, he needed »to dip his intelligence into a sensibility.« (Simone de Beauvoir, *La Cérémonie des Adieux* suivi de *Entretiens avec Jean-Paul Sartre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1981, p. 382).

22. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 118.
23. Surprisingly, Lilar lauds the Hugo/Drouet liaison, Drouet's desire to abandon herself so entirely to Hugo that she let herself be imprisoned by him. He never allowed her to leave the house alone or see anyone else but him. Lilar even qualifies as superb the following lines of Drouet to Hugo: »It is you that I adore in God and God that I adore in you« (Suzanne Lilar, *Aspects of Love in Western Civilization*, Trans. Jonathan Griffin, New York, McGraw Hill, 1965, p. 192).
24. In his Diary, he speaks of the sweet poison of his letters (some thirty of them) in which he writes such things as »my love consumes me« (*KW* 3, 407; *SV1* 1, 375), or »is an embrace a struggle?« (*KW* 3, 419; *SV1* 1, 387).
25. He is referring to the god Odin's maidens who chose which heroes would be slain in battle and be brought to his hall, in German mythology.
26. He uses the word »hypostasize« which in theological parlance applies to the whole personality of Christ, as distinguished from his human and divine nature, to refer to the reintegration of Cordelia's mind and sexual impulses into a whole person again.
27. Johannes himself says, after he has used the underhanded method of dealing with Cordelia for a while on a purely intellectual level: »I am cheating her of the essentially erotic« (*KW* 3, 424; *SV1* 1, 391). He is referring of course to his own notion of the erotic, that is eroticism.
28. Cf. the four characteristics of the *real erotic* discussed at the beginning of this paper.
29. If one gives oneself freely, one's freedom is not lost, especially if one's consciousness has been raised.
30. The sexist Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* would say that she is nothing but an empty w(hole).
31. Howard Johnson, Revising editor of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, vol. 1, trans. David Swanson and Lillian Swanson, Garden City, New York, Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., 1959, p. 457.
32. Johnson, Rev. ed. of Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, p. 457.
33. Lorde, »Uses of the Erotic,« p. 57.
34. As Lilar writes: »Real eros is bold, insolent, knowing,« like Hélène's look in Rubens's »Fur Coat« (Lilar, *Aspects of Love in Western Civilization*, p. 27).
35. Berry, »The Heterosexual Imagination« in *FISK*, p. 45. Lorde wrote on this subject: »We have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened aspect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing« (Lorde, »Uses of the Erotic,« p. 56).
36. This claim counters interpretations of Kierkegaard which, as Leslie Howe suggests, view woman's love identified with the erotic as lacking spirit and being »incapable of effecting a true religious relation« (Leslie Howe, »Kierkegaard and the Feminine Self« in *FISK*, pp. 217-249).
37. In his *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard refutes androcentrisms such as that of Johannes by viewing them from a religious point of view. He declares there that the one seduced, whom he calls »the true lover,« touches the realm of the infinite which is not directly visible to the finite eyes of the seducer/deceiver. The seducer is able to marginalize the lover's gift of self and bask in the »self-satisfaction« of having deceived the lover and »of not loving in return« because he has no »view of love in itself« in which the only deception possible is to deceive oneself, that is not to abandon oneself to the other (*KW* 14, 241, 237; *SV1* 9, 230, 227).