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Lacan's Love for Socrates

The analyst's desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it. There only may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live.¹

That's how, long ago, the innate desire of human beings for each other started. It draws the two halves of our original nature back together and tries to make one out of two and to heal the wound in human nature. Each of us is a matching half of a human being, because we've been cut in half like flatfish, making two out of one, and each of us is looking for his own matching half.²

Love is the core vocabulary for Lacanian psychoanalysis but it is also one of the greatest sources of confusion both within and outside Lacanian theorisation. Lacan picks up love where the philosophers left off and in so doing, is tantalised by philosophy's project to *think* love but as a category of the unconscious. There is something sublime about love which resonates but which cannot be captured purely by language; of course, we don't love everyone, neither do we fall in love with just anyone. Love does not necessarily come into existence simply because we articulate love for another subject, object or chosen cause. Certainly love can throw the subject-of-language into crisis but in doing so retains a dignity of its own beyond language.

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¹ Jacques Lacan (1973), *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, Norton and Norton, New York 1981, p. 276.

² Plato, *The Symposium*, Penguin, London, p. 29.

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The main problem with love is not only that it exists beyond language but also, because of its inherent unsayability, it is something which can throw us into chaos. Furthermore and in spite of its problematic transmission within language, love retains an agency of transformation. When we can say to our beloved 'I love you', this is always insufficient to completely capture the despair and terror of vulnerability as well as the comfort and realisation of love. As a result, we think of love conversely; if we did not love and declare love, many choices would not become apparent and insights not yielded. In spite of its strange obfuscation and eclipsing of language, love tends to make life more intelligible, even more grounded. Perhaps love is what Nietzsche calls the root of our metaphysical needs in that it allows us a vision in which desire, morality and what constitutes a good life are ordered. Lacan, however, is not interested in such visions, notwithstanding that in reality throughout his life he passionately loved many women. For the Lacanian subject love has a different function and role; love invites the subject of language into being, into a transference where it plays out as a transformational dynamic precisely *because* of the limits of language. Arguably, the singularity of love sets up the confrontation with the limits of language. Although love is a metaphysical need, it is also one which the Lacanian subject relies on as enabling a certain aphoristic discourse which is, as Badiou contends, a procedure towards truth. Although language might not survive love, it is where we must start because in declaring love, we are also declaring lack.

There is a metaphorical saying, 'we are all slaves to love' which perfectly captures the Lacanian position on love. To fully understand this, the obvious reference to Hegel is helpful. From the little fragments he wrote about love in the late 1790's, it is clear that Hegel locates love in the beyond, a "separateness beyond separation".³ This is why later on he privileges Christianity as the religion of love in which the beyond comes down to earth, so to speak. That love is partially beyond language is the Hegelian crux Lacan seizes upon and takes a bit further. Love manifests as the external sublime object allowing for the emergence of consciousness as one who loves. But for Lacan there is more to be uncovered in the dialectic of love; neither the lover nor the beloved can completely ex-

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³ Todd McGowan wonderfully explicates Hegel's love and its inauguration as a reevaluation of Christianity in 'Hegel in Love', *Can Philosophy Love?: Reflections and Encounters*, Rowman and Littlefield, London 2017. In a later chapter of the same volume, 'Love and the Apparatus: On a Hegelian Fragment', George Tsagdis pays close attention to how the Hegelian stakes love as fulfilling the law.

ternalise themselves to one another. To this extent they are both castrated and this is where, for Lacan, love emanates. In loving we volunteer ourselves to a sublime idea which cannot be fully articulated but which nevertheless promises that everything might well change for us.

Although Lacan never says as much, it appears that love possesses an emancipatory quality; certainly in the clinic it is the kernel of transference. But to get to this hidden point, we need to think about what Lacan himself says about love through his reading of *The Symposium* in which love is really put to work as a category, a permutation, a life force, a pleasure and an instinct. Love is really worth struggling to think through: if we are slaves to love, then *The Symposium* suggests that we are also slaves to thinking about love as a category which we can never master. Perhaps here is the very *jouissance* of thinking which itself becomes the desire from which a love of thinking springs. Lacan calls this “an apparatus of *jouissance*”, that is, it is not enough to be desired by our lover, but in addition the other “must hold the place of the cause of desire.”⁵

In Seminar VIII, *Atopia of Eros*, Lacan continues his reading of *The Symposium* as a way of handling the complexities of love in terms of analytic transference. Lacan takes seriously Agathon's claim which side-line's philosophy's ability to address love; “the god [of love] is so skilled a poet that... Everyone becomes a poet”.⁶ From here Lacan quickly moves on to insist that in matters of love we need to back the unconscious more fully, claiming that we never really recognise love but instead only the definable traces it leaves which cannot altogether be articulated. Here love as an inner (or pure) sense is also, in a way, externally constituted. Lacan refers to this extimacy of love in terms of its signifying effects, these being recognition (in the Hegelian sense) and function (as in psychoanalytic transference). It is through its signifying effects that we grasp love.

The question of love is for Lacan twofold: firstly a matter of discovering what knowledge of love one does have consists of and how this knowledge substan-

⁴ Jacques Lacan, (1972–73), *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. B. Fink, Norton and Norton Company, London and New York 1998, p. 55.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, (1966), *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. B. Fink, Norton and Norton Company, New York 2002, p. 691.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, (1960–61), *Seminar VIII. Transference*, trans. B. Fink, Polity, Cambridge 2015, p. 37.

tiate the object of one's will; secondly a matter of putting love to work as in a psychoanalytic praxis. We approach love in the same way as we enter the clinic, knowing that we know nothing. Yet at the same time at the back of our minds is the Socratic inquiry: how might what little I do know about love substantiate my own will towards it?; how can I put to the test what I think I know about love? Of course, by putting love on the couch, Lacan is not fully subscribing to Socrates' position that there is nothing to know, when he says, "Truth is nothing but what knowledge can learn that it knows merely by putting its ignorance to work."⁷

Nevertheless Lacan takes seriously the idea that *The Symposium* is much more than mythical opinion. Its focus on Eros as central to our relationship with the many different aspects of love: desire for wholeness, virtue, sexual pleasure, beauty, loyalty, violence, temperance, the divine, care, justice, nature, poetry, music and so on, provides a vivid background to Lacan's understanding of the illusive nature of love, its effects and its *jouissance*. However Lacan is not seduced by *The Symposium's* different presentations of love as rationally comprehensible and predictable. For example, in the case of courtly love, he sees through signifiers such as a loyalty and faithfulness as no more than symbolic investment in the masquerade of love:

In the final analysis, the 'person' always has to do with the master's discourse. Courtly love, is for man – in relation to whom the lady is entirely, and in the most servile sense of the word, a subject – the only way to elegantly pull off the absence of the sexual relationship.⁸

The Symposium begins with Agathon eagerly awaiting the arrival of Socrates who is standing outside to contemplate while dinner is served. When Socrates eventually comes inside Agathon *wills* a particular transference from him,

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⁷ Jacques Lacan, (1961), "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious", *Écrits*, p. 675.

⁸ Lacan, (1972–73), *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 69. However, further in *Encore* Lacan says that "the invention of courtly love is not at all the fruit of what people are historically used to symbolising with the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis'. There wasn't the slightest synthesis afterward, of course – in fact, there never is. Courtly love shone as brightly as a meteor in history and afterward we witnessed the return of all the bric-a-brac of a supposed renaissance of stale antiquities", p. 86.

“Come and lie down beside me, Socrates, so that, by contact with you, I can share the piece of wisdom that came to you in the porch...”⁹ Socrates finds this remark somewhat ridiculous, as if wisdom could in fact be transmitted by touch! It here becomes apparent that Agathon’s signifier, the possession of wisdom, is not wholly shared by Socrates, who places more importance on the materiality of speaking as signification because this is where transmission results from transference.¹⁰ Thus any dialogue about love in which love is perhaps revealed, is itself to will a “the change of discourse”,¹¹ one in which love can indeed be realised through words, touch, myth and so on.

Lacan’s interest in *The Symposium* (particularly in Seminar VIII on *Transference*) is largely oriented towards the discussion between Socrates and Alcibiades; it is here that love as a psychoanalytic question and praxis is pivoted. What attracts Lacan’s attention is how *agalma* (*objet petit a*) is inserted into (psychoanalytic) discourse. At the end of the evening, after the speeches, a drunken Alcibiades arrives and insists on revealing to those present that Socrates is both the most precious and most treacherous of humans. In Lacan’s account, Socrates’ response to Alcibiades and then to Agathon not only exposes the differing natures of desire and love, but also questions the source of Socrates’ wisdom as being the idea of wisdom *per se*. Thus it seems to Lacan that love springs from Socratic unconscious desire as a desiring presence:

Socrates: When you say you desire what you’ve already got, ask yourself whether you mean that you want what you’ve got now to go on being there in the future...

[Agathon said that he would.]

Socrates: What someone is doing in these cases is loving something that isn’t available to him and which he doesn’t have, namely the continued presence in the future of the things he has now.

Agathon: Certainly.

⁹ Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 6.

¹⁰ Perhaps Agathon is more *in touch* with reality than Socrates realised. Certainly, later on, Descartes noted that touch provided ‘a sense of reality’, and made us feel in contact with the external world.

¹¹ Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 22.

Socrates: So this and every other case of desire is desire for what isn't available and actually there. Desire and love are directed at what you don't have, what isn't there, and what you need.¹²

What *The Symposium* shows us is that there exist *loves* and *desires* in all their multiplicity, but although love is unsayable it is nevertheless demonstrative as a praxis, as an activity, whereas desire occupies the spaces in between such activity. Lacan maintains that no single conscious discourse, explanation or method can be a metalanguage of love. Instead there is a truth of the body that speaks a language of the Real, a language of symptoms (manifesting as the *objet a*) and love (manifesting as ideals):

I have never said that the unconscious was an assemblage of words, but that the unconscious is precisely structured. I don't think here there is such an English word but it is necessary to have the term, as we are talking about structure and the unconscious is structured as a language. What does this mean? Properly speaking this is a redundancy because 'structured' and 'as a language' for me means exactly the same thing. Structured means my speech, my lexicon, which is exactly the same as a language. And that is not all. Which language? Rather than myself it was my pupils that took a great deal of trouble to give that question a different meaning, and to search for the formula of a reduced language. What are the minimum conditions ...? There were also some philosophers ... who have found since then that it was not a question of an 'under' language or of 'another' language, not myth for instance or phonemes, but language. It is extraordinary the pains that each took to change the place of the question. Myths, for instance, do not take place in our consideration precisely because they are also structured as a language ... There is only one sort of language; concrete language ... that people talk.¹³

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To describe the palpable effect made by speech that materializes not only via the body, but in writing, thinking, desiring, and loving, Lacan initially employs the

¹² Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 43–44.

¹³ In E. Ragland-Sullivan, *The Limits of Discourse Structure: The Hysteric and the Analyst*, *Prose Studies*, 1989, pp. 32–49. Also, Jacques Lacan, "Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever", *Lacanian Ink*. www.lacan.com/hotel.htm. Originally published in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, R. Macksey and E. Donato [eds.], Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1970.

word *écrit* and only later develops his concept of the *objet a* as that which drives and materializes language.

The Symposium's the first speaker Phaedrus claims that because "Love is the most ancient of the gods"¹⁴, love is also "the source of our greatest benefits."¹⁵ Actions on behalf of love rather than words are what define it; even if this entails self-sacrifice, love is the "most effective in enabling human beings to acquire courage and happiness, both in life and death."¹⁶ That love is divine in origin, elevating it into something enigmatic, mystical, even ineffable, is nothing new; humans have always done this and will no doubt continue to do so.

The second speaker, Pausanias, suggests that discourse on love as a "single thing"¹⁷ wrongly assumes that one can *know* love as an entity in itself, because there are different sorts of love, the heavenly which focuses on virtue and wisdom, and the common which is merely self-seeking gratification as a pathway to sex, wealth or power. What matters most is that the love affair is rightly conducted, meaning towards the flourishing of thought. Here the interest for Lacan is how Pausanias's two loves are always in contention.

While Aristophanes in suppressing his amusement, suffers a bout of hiccups, Eryximachus widens the concepts of right and wrong love beyond mutual human responses, to include the entire range of human endeavour: medicine, cooking, athletics, agriculture, music and so on, concluding that although love has total power it is *right* love whose "nature is expressed in good actions marked by self-control and justice" which is "the source of all our happiness."¹⁸ Aristophanes then cures his hiccups by sneezing, commenting "it makes me wonder whether it is the 'well-ordered' part of my body that wants the kind of noises and tickles that make up a sneeze".¹⁹ Lacan seizes upon this comic interruption, asking what can we glean from such joking about hiccups, because for Lacan what the body produces emanates from the unconscious and therefore speaks what the voice cannot; even the comic or fictional are expressions at

¹⁴ Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the Real of the body. For him Aristophanes' laughter and hiccups in response to Eryximachus' grandiose invoking of right love as a universal principal in nature from which happiness emanates, demonstrates how the body obstructs rhetoric, acting as a stumbling block to its meaning.

In his very different account of love, Aristophanes focuses on differentiation, describing how Zeus punished humans for trying to invade heaven by cutting them in half but then taking pity on them by moving their genitals around to enable the halves to have sex and thus fulfil their desire to be together, to become one instead of two. In this way love "is the name for desire and the pursuit of wholeness".²⁰ Lacan greatly admires this differentiation, noting in Seminar VIII Aristophanes' profound insight and later in *The Four Fundamental Concepts* where he speaks of the irony of the unconscious (driven by the libido) finding itself on the opposite side to love. Why is this ironic? Precisely because as Lacan reminds us again and again, we are subjects characterized by lack and loss. We can never be whole subjects in our speech, bodies, fictions, or sexualities. As individuals we try to compensate for a niggling sense of something missing in the relation between sex and love. But these two are not the other for each other, as Lacan observes, that there is no sexual relationship [*ca ne va pas entre les hommes et les femmes*] was intuited centuries ago by Socrates. Moreover, for Lacan, Aristophanes' focus on differentiation in the sexes strongly suggests the lack on which this myth is founded. Poking fun at himself and at the same time taking the injunction that *there is no sexual relationship* seriously, Lacan says in the *Four Fundamental Concepts*:

Children, there is treasure buried here. I have given them [my listeners] the plough share [sic] and the plough, namely that the unconscious was made out of language, and at one point in time ... three very good pieces of work have resulted from it. But we must now say – You can only find the treasure in the way I tell you. There is something comical about this way. This is absolutely essential in understanding any of Plato's dialogues, and especially when one is dealing with *The Symposium*. This dialogue is even, one might say, a practical joke. The starting-point [of the joke] is Aristophanes' fable. This fable is a defiance to the centuries, for it traverses them without anyone trying to do better. I shall try... Aristophanes' myth pictures the pursuit of the complement for us in a moving,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

and misleading way, by articulating that it is the other, one's sexual other half, that the living being seeks in love. To this mythical representation of the mystery of love, analytic experience substitutes the search by the subject, not of the sexual complement, but of the part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being, and that he is no longer immortal.²¹

Lacan's attention to desire maintains an ethical stance and traces both as a manifestation of the body as well as how, as an effect of the *Id*, it must be constituted so as to appear but without necessarily regulating the subject. Thus the *Id* (although for the most part hidden and notwithstanding its domestication by the super-ego) remains a powerful drive because it motivates and propels the subject. In this regard Lacan states that the function of the *Id* is "to save appearances" and is moreover a topology which defines images of desire, one which "signifies nothing [other] than wanting to reduce to forms that are supposedly perfect..."²² Lacan is here reading Freud's anguish of identification robustly: the subject struggles with inserting itself into the relationship between its identification with the object of love and the very concept of identification which itself contradicts identification with the love-object. The upshot of this is that in order to identify with the love object, that is, to preserve its appearance, one also needs to remain individuated from it. We could conclude that according to Freud, the destiny of love is no more than a libidinal catharsis in which the love-object is a projection of the ego, a narcissistic echo-chamber. Love is imposed on *objet a* through recognition of the thing itself, for example, beauty, and further, such recognition relies on participation with, for example, the notion that beautiful things are an actuality, a consolidation of love.

Lacan uses the sparring match between Socrates and Alcibiades at the end of *The Symposium* to illustrate the function of the *agalma* (*objet petit a*) within transference. *Agalma* is the term Alcibiades used to comprehend the hidden and tantalising object he believed to be enclosed in the depths of Socrates' body. Alcibiades thought this was a mysterious gem whose preciousness he had first savoured as a young man during a privileged moment of revelation and which now provided the spark for his infatuation, serving to justify his

²¹ Jacques Lacan, (1973), *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 197–198.

²² Jacques Lacan, (1960–61). *Seminar VIII. Transference*, trans. C. Gallagher, Unedited French Typescript, p. 87.

eulogy of Socrates' attractiveness. *Agalma* is not the same as desire but rather the hidden 'thing' from which desire springs. In Seminar VIII Lacan claims that the part played by *agalma* in the emergence of transference must be at least as important as that of supposed knowledge of it. During the course of the seminar he abandons the metaphor of *agalma*, eventually turning to love as the hidden thing in transference.

Socrates can be understood as the first to put love on the couch, under scrutiny, under analysis. Love assumes an image of itself and for Lacan, it is the subject who is more than willing to take up this image. In contrast with Lacan's linking of love with imbecility, everyone praises love as something to which we should be beholden because it seems to offer us truth. Lacan maintains that to inhabit the space of tragedy is also to occupy the space of concealment and lack. He cites Oedipus as an example of this topology, as "the locus of this fundamental conjecture"²³ insofar as the tragedy of Oedipus is his somewhat risible lack of recognition. Such a tragi-comedic dialectic is often played out in love, for the study of which Lacan uses *The Symposium* as an episteme. Here, for Lacan love is elevated to the conscious position of a Socratic science, to "the dignity of something absolute or the position of absolute dignity".²⁴

However, it is a dignity which is bestowed not only upon love, but also upon philosophy, the task of thinking. For Badiou, philosophy produces no truths, which he claims come from elsewhere, for example from the condition of love. The task of philosophy is to think the condition itself as a way to grasp how and why it is, for the present, relevant. Badiou promotes such a condition as eventual, and perhaps sometimes it is or at least we want it to be. In recognising Socrates' intellectual courage in stepping away from the hold of traditions and customs, we too might say 'I don't know and moreover, I admit that I don't even know enough about this thing which drives me.' We might then ask, what is Lacan's desire for Socrates?

For Lacan, the articulation of his desire for Socrates is the platform from which his topology of Socratic love springs. Lacan calls this an *atopia* of desire which is captured in transference: "Through analytic discourse, the subject manifests

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

himself in his gap, namely, in that which causes his desire.”²⁵ This is notably an imprecise discourse in a number of ways, yet it does provide a central point from which desire pivots the subject, the *place* of desire from which love might spring.²⁶ Lacan claims that the dialectic between love and desire is purely propositional because once it is introduced into the complexity of transference via enunciation, then desire becomes a desire for discourse. If I want the Other, what does the Other want, and do I want the same as my chosen Other? Here the disjuncture between the self and the Other provides an intersubjective relation which entangles the subject who does not want to lose either selfhood or Other. For Lacan, however, the dialectic of love and desire is guaranteed to continue because there is a third presence, the fantasy of the fullness of love, which constitute the fragments of desire punctuating love. Such a mythological suturing of desire with love is the very essence of love. This permeates *The Symposium* in which Socrates is both the love-object and the desired one. Here love is a struggle towards recognition embracing contradiction. This is what constitutes the fiction of love and provides Lacan with a strategy enabling the insight that an intersubjective relationship is necessarily never equal, because for love to endure it must be complicit in securing a fantasy third presence, namely that of desire.

For Lacan, the analyst's desire for insight begins with questions posed by another (the Other) concerning the fundamental fantasy and its effects. What mark does the analyst bear when delving into desire? The typology of desire is, for Lacan, the desire of the analyst who is distinctive for the analysand in standing in for the latter's *objet a*. This is the starting point from where the toleration of love as a discourse can be seriously considered as part of the clinic, in that the clinic brings to it the additional idea of Socratic love in which both the analyst and analysand love another beyond themselves. What remains in the clinic is the analytic love emerging from transference, which is distinctive from amorous love in producing knowledge of *jouissance*. Whereas for the Greeks, love is a signifying discourse between the gods and humanity, in the clinic it is one between consciousnesses and unconsciousnesses of both analyst and analysand. This is a tricky situation as Bruce Fink points out:

²⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 11.

²⁶ This is even though Lacan says in *Encore* that “there is no genesis except on the basis of discourse”, p. 11.

In most instances, we do not even want to know our own unconscious ‘conditions of love’ – that is, what makes us tick, what makes us love one person instead of another, or what makes us love in one particular way rather than in another – we wish to ignore all of that. Some people worry that if they knew the unconscious determinants of their love, their love would dissipate; if they realised they had fallen in love with someone because of that person’s similarities to a parent, they might stop loving him or her. Love, in such cases, does its job: it conveys its message without revealing to consciousness anything that is unconscious.²⁷

This is both the miracle and the frustration of love in which we all participate and in which there is a dialectical distinction between amorous and transference love. For the analysand, the analyst is not just another subject but one who, in standing in for the *objet a* is positioned to enforce the analysand’s acceptance of castration. The will to fall in love is always already there and the analysand knows full well that that it is exactly what the analyst will keep at bay. This poignant aspect of transference is the unavoidable result of perverse love in the praxis of psychoanalysis, where the analysand submits to misery in the quest of handling the symptom. Inevitable resultant alienation is noted by Freud when he remarks that when the patient is confronted with the analyst not returning love, the analysand becomes disenchanted and tempted to end analysis as a procedure which is failing to give love a go. This indicates an altogether different level of love.

In order to understand the role of the transference relation in the efficacy of the psychoanalytic clinic we should return to the concluding lines of Freud’s *The Dynamics of Transference*:

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It is undeniable that the control of the transference phenomena offers the greatest difficulties to the psychoanalyst, but one should not forget that it is precisely these phenomena which pay us the invaluable service of rendering actual and manifest the patient’s hidden and forgotten love impulses – after all, it is impossible to liquidate someone in *absentia* or in *effigie*.²⁸

²⁷ Bruce Fink, *Lacan on Love*, Wiley and Sons, New Jersey 2015, p. 176.

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, (1911–1913), *The Dynamics of Transference*, *Freud – Complete Works*, Compiled by Ivan Smith. Wec. 9 December 2019, p. 2464. https://wee.valas.fr/1;G/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf.

Love is always unrealised in the sense that it is never fully realised. In the clinic this is all the more poignant because it is contained within transference between just two people. In this way transference love transcends ontology and attends instead to the unconscious as part of the clinical setting. In transference love becomes not a position either analyst or analysand is a subject- supposed-to-know (about love), but rather one where love sustains transference in recognising the character and function of the symptom. This is the framework in which one's Otherness is contended with, the position of the analyst and precisely from where love can emerge, as Lacan observes:

The analyst's desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it. There only may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law.²⁹

Transference is a procedure into love, but it is also one in which love is realised. This is the Socratic-psychoanalytic nature of love; that it manifests as a dialectic within the clinic, which has an effect. Thus transference involves a shift in discourse through its introduction of a signifier from outside of clinic, which is nevertheless intrinsic to it. In this way the structure of love is found within that of the clinic. *The Symposium* allows us to ponder the nature of love both within and outside the clinic. Love is to some extent self-evident; we say we know love because we encounter it, but does this mean we really know *about* it? We simply appreciate it, taking it for granted as something that happens to us. Socrates and his interlocutors consider love in its many manifestations as operative of something else; virtue, nature, beauty, sex and so on, purported within a context of the sexed subject. This is both the treachery and dignity of love, it always appears as a possibility yet it remains a problem which we have a responsibility to handle. This is more than just love's manifestation between moments of desire, in that love also presents as something that must be accomplished. To talk about love, one at the very least must have experienced it. As Freud notes, love seems so illogical and against reason that it is difficult to translate into analytical discourse, whether this is an intellectual question or transference in

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²⁹ Jacques Lacan, (1973), *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 77.

the clinic.³⁰ Experiencing love enables one to think love as initially an ongoing existential crisis in which the sexed subject locates love as pivotal towards love as a truth. Love punctuates the clinic, just as the *The Symposium's* expression of love in its many forms and especially the love for Socrates, is never far from the enunciation of love and desire. Thus we might even say that in the clinic the analyst plays the role of Socrates, that the question of love is never resolved, because of the subject's desire for the Other's love, as with Aristophanes' love for Socrates. Is it not the case that one enters the clinic hoping that transference love will yield an insight into love, yet knowing full well this will be submission to another idealisation?

Regarding Badiou's 'scene of the two' as love's procedure into truth, perhaps it is in the truth of the clinic that Badiou's thesis is most poignant because although love is here literally contended with, the one thing the analysand can count on is that the analytical procedure will come to an end. Love in the clinic is precisely where two become one, because if this does not occur, transference will not take place. At the same time, in being confronted as ultimately illusive, love is undone; here the subject-supposed-to-know comes into being as love underpins the 'talking cure'. There is always a difference between the lover and the beloved, just as there is between the analyst and analysand. Realisation of such difference revealing the desire of the analyst to analyse and the analysand to receive the love of the analyst, both confirm and at the same time undo the sexual relation. Is this not the very struggle or question of love in any context? None of us as sexed beings are beyond love as an existential longing (that is, being in-existence with another) but we can traverse transference love and thereby give or receive the existential character of transformative, amorous love?

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According to Lacan is this not what Socrates points towards, that all manifestations of love are particularised by one thing – transference – which needs to be continually recreated? Moreover, is not Socrates, like the analyst, in the position of *agalma*? In pursuing the intention of *agalma*, does not the subject panic or at least become anxious that the love object will not return love? Is it here that we can love the subject only as a partial object? It seems as if Socrates knows this

³⁰ For Freud, the nature of love is perplexing and not compatible with logic. Freud has a scientific approach to love, which suggests that it is a defence mechanism giving love more structure within psychopathology.

as certainly as does the analyst. In the clinic the subject shifts between *agalma* and analysand (that is, the subject's realisation that the object is missing), both being necessary conditions for analytical transference to take place and sustain itself, as Jacques-Alain Miller explains:

This 'panic point' of the subject is the point, so says Lacan, at which the subject is 'effaced' [...] behind the signifier. This effacement should not be understood as an identification but as an erasure: it is the point at which he can no longer say anything about himself, at which he is reduced to silence. This is when he clasps onto the object of desire. It is the same object of the fantasy that is operative at the level of the unconscious where the subject has no possibility of designating himself, or where he is faced with his namelessness as a subject. This is when he turns to the fundamental fantasy, and it is in his relation to the object of desire that the truth of Being resides.³¹

In Seminar VIII Lacan contends with the impossibility of actualising the sublime *objet a* when he refers to Aristotle's concept of recognition as a reciprocity which, although circumscribed in the Symbolic, is still not a rational process:

What Aristotle evokes represents the possibility of a bond (*lien*) of love between two of these beings, can also, manifest the tension toward the Supreme Being, and be reversed in the way in which I expressed it—it is in their courage in bearing the intolerable relationship to the Supreme Being that friends, recognize and choose each other.³²

For Lacan, love is inscribed in the Real, an investable yet impenetrable location where love is realised. This dilemma presents both the comedy and the tragedy of love and this is exposed when Lacan takes seriously Agathon's revalorisation of love as *kedos*, a worthy relationship that, to some degree at least, invites desire as a necessary condition of love.

Socrates: Now try to tell me about love... Is Love love of nothing or something?

Agathon: Of something, undoubtedly!

³¹ J.-A. Miller, *Presentation of Book VI of the Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. Accessed from www.lacan.com/actuality/presentation-of-book-vi-of-the-seminar-of-jacques-lacan/.

³² Lacan, (1960), *Seminar XX: Encore*, p. 85.

Socrates: For the moment... keep to yourself and bear in mind what is *of*. But tell me this much: does Love desire what it is love of or not?

Agathon: Yes...

Socrates: When he desires and loves, does he have in his possession what he desires and loves or not?

Agathon: He doesn't – at least probably not...

Socrates: Think about it. Surely it is not just probable but necessary that desire is directed at something you need and that if you don't need something you don't desire it? I feel amazingly certain that it is necessary; what do you think?

Agathon: I think so too...³³

In the transference relationship, the analysand trusts that in his or her contention with lack the analyst is able to bridge the gap, the analyst providing a much needed counterpart to reveal both the fantasy of and desire for love. From this position Lacan deliberates the distinction between courtly and passionate love as a response to Robin's *Théorie platonicienne de l'Amour*³⁴, in which *Eros* is more tragic than comic. He then jokingly considers the trouble love brings to be a symptom of love's disorder, yet insofar as the discourse of love is a comedy transmitted by "someone who wishes to amuse"³⁵, the joke is on those who take love too seriously. Lacan observes that one cannot ignore the context of speaking about love because although somewhat peripheral, context orients the event of love whilst remaining basically disorienting in its function.

Although Lacan introduces his formula for love in Seminar V (1958): *love is to give what one does not have to someone who does not want it*, this famous aphorism is not elaborated upon until Seminar VIII. Here he draws upon Socrates' recounting of Diotima's meditation of love as a spirit mediating people and objects.³⁶ Here love is undertaken as neither wise nor beautiful, but rather as a desire for these attributes which can be achieved through physicality or the exchange of ideas.

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³³ Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 42.

³⁴ Léon Robin, *Théorie platonicienne de l'Amour*, Alcan, Paris 1908.

³⁵ Lacan, (1960), *Seminar VIII. Transference*, Unedited French Typescripts, p. 98.

³⁶ Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 45–47.

Diotoma recounts to Socrates the origin of love as follows. Love (Eros) is the son of Penia and Poros. Penia, the mother, represents poverty at both a material and subjective level. She is an orphan, destitute and without resources. Poros, the father, stands for the exact opposite – resourcefulness which harbours a kind of wit and cleverness. To celebrate the birth of Aphrodite, Poros joins the Gods at a party. Penia, being but a beggar does not enter the party but instead waits outside. When Poros becomes drunk and falls asleep she enters and takes sexual advantage of him. What especially piques Lacan's interest here is that Poros, the resourceful man, is the one who is desired by Penia, the impoverished woman. It is she who instigates the drunken copulation which leads to the birth of their son, Love. "This is what is at stake here", Lacan says "as the poor Aporia, by definition, by structure, has nothing to give above and beyond her constitutive lack or aporia" [her nothingness]. She gives her lack, what she does not have. For Lacan, this is the essence of loving – the key to love, to being able to love, is to accept one's lack and to give it away: "That is, one cannot love except by becoming a non-haver, even if one has".³⁷

In Lacanian terms the birth of love demonstrates the illusory nature of the Phallus and of castration in Symbolic relations. Here castration involves nothing more than the assumption that one lacks. 'Loving is to give what one does not have' means not only to locate and offer your castration to another subject but to also be willing to receive theirs. In this there is no support for love, it literally hangs on nothing.

In understanding Lacan's maxim, *loving is to give what one does not have to someone who does not want it*, we have to look at how Lacan distinguishes love from desire, a distinction which promises to bear the accurate representation of both one's lack as well as the lack of the beloved. Agathon's composition of love does not escape Lacan:

Love is a good composer in, broadly, every type of artistic production, because you can't give someone else what you don't have or teach someone what you don't know yourself.³⁸

³⁷ Lacan, *Seminar VIII. Transference*, Unedited French Typescripts, p. 13.

³⁸ Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 37.

Lacan further observes that Socrates' response to Alcibiades' love is not with reciprocated love, but by reflecting Alcibiades' image of desire back to him.³⁹ For Lacan, love and desire are "two words of love... with contrary accents... [which] fall under the key of the same definition".⁴⁰ This is exactly Socrates' position.

For Lacan, loving involves accurately representing the loved one's lack, rather than simply returning their love, hence the phrase, 'loving someone warts and all'. A reflection of our lack is not really what we would prefer to receive back from our lover, regardless of such reflection being a condition for love:

What we give in love, is essentially what we do not have and, when what we do not have returns to us, there is undoubtedly a regression and at the same time a revelation of the way in which we have failed the person (*manque a la personne*) in representing his lack.⁴¹

It is from his reading of *The Symposium* that Lacan invents the notion of the analyst's desire and of transference as interpretations of love which differ from Symbolic determinations. In this way, says Lacan, we are indebted to Socrates as the original analyst, who accepts the appearance of love to be a timeless and profound experience, a condition for knowing love, which is the essence of transference. This conception of love is implicitly linked to satisfaction, yet must also traverse cognition and rationality. On this *The Symposium* is clear: in order to release oneself from the power of an idea, one must have had an expe-

³⁹ Jacques Lacan, (1957–58), *Seminar V. Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. R. Grigg, Wiley, New Jersey 2017.

⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan, (1964–65). *Seminar XII. Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis*, trans. C. Gallagher, Unedited French typescripts 2014.

It is worth noting Owen Hewitson's (2016) interesting observation of Lacan's reading of Alcibiades: "Alcibiades' behaviour is, for Lacan, 'an attempt to make Socrates lose control, to show some emotional turmoil, and yield to direct corporal come-ons' (Seminar VIII, p. 24). Alcibiades loves Socrates, but Lacan notes how Socrates holds back from rising to Alcibiades' solicitations or declarations of love. Instead, Lacan says both in Seminar VIII and Seminar XXII that Socrates shows how, behind this love, is a desire on Alcibiades' part directed towards the host, Agathon (Seminar XII, 23rd June, 1965). In doing so, Socrates responds to Alcibiades' not with a reciprocated love, but to love with desire. He answers Alcibiades' love with a lack, denoted on the one hand by the lack of knowledge he professes of the nature of love, and on the other the metonymic deferral to Agathon." From: www.lacanonline.com/2016/06/what-does-lacan-say-about-love/

⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, (1962–63), *Seminar X. Anxiety*, J-A. Miller [ed.], Polity Press, Cambridge 2014.

rience of love. Freud later seizes upon this as recognition, which is particular to oneself through the love of another. We are stabilised and credible to one another as subjects when another subject acknowledges love for us. This acknowledgement is mediated and transformed by love into the encounter of love, a very different idea which includes both the body and desire. Love removes oneness in terms of its pragmatics because it requires at least two to embark on love; it further removes the oneness of demand because love encapsulates but is not dependent on desire. The oneness of love is simply not an inevitability, as Lacan points out in *Encore*:

In truth, we will see that we must turn things around, and instead of investigating a signifier (*un signifiant*), we must investigate the signifier One(Un), but we haven't reached that point yet...⁴²

That love is a desire for recognition is what is at stake in the struggle for love. Whereas love fantasises an ideal, desire not only gives rise to differences, but thrives on them.⁴³ In Lacan's reading of *The Symposium*, love and desire are a dialectic: love is comparable to desire in that both can never be satisfied yet both are based on an eagerness to be the object of another's love and desire.

In *The Symposium* Aristophanes offers a harmonious structure of love, a form of one-ness made of two. However a third term, *Eros* provides the intervention which in a loving experience one has to navigate. Lacan notes how Socrates parallels the task of philosophy with that of *Eros*, in the viability of their plurality and in philosophy's questioning of the notion that love is essentially a 'beautiful thing'. At the same time, prior to Socrates, five speakers shape the scope of thinking about love as *being with* another, an approach which entails satisfaction obtained from one's lover. Here *Eros* is the satisfaction rather than the mediator between lovers.

As Socrates points out, there is always detachment and asymmetry between the lover and beloved which maintain the love relationship and in this way inscribe love into the logic of what it means to be a speaking being, which is the desire to

⁴² Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 20.

⁴³ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London and New York 1996.

name love as *love*. In his dialogue with Socrates, Diotima calls into question the ability of words and names to account for the holistic nature of love.

Diotima: Do you think that this wish [to be happy] and this form of love are common to all human beings, and that everyone wants good things to be his own forever, or what is your view?

Socrates: Just that... it is common to everyone.

Diotima: In that case, Socrates... why don't we say that everyone is a lover, if everyone always loves the same things; why do we call some people lovers and not others?

Socrates: That's something I've wondered about too.

Diotima: It's nothing to wonder about... What we're doing is picking out one kind of love and applying to it the name ('love') that belongs to the whole class, while we use different names for other kinds of love.⁴⁴

Here Diotima exposes love's limit, its misuses, its half-sense, the missing bit which nevertheless seductively enslaves us in the love relationship. Everything we say about love is *mi-dire*, falling short because although we don't want to unduly credit love with virtue, we act as if it includes virtue as an essential part of its name. For Socrates, being always willing to submit to love as virtue may not necessarily elevate love but instead brings us into the realm of *mi-dire par excellence*, in that we need the destiny of love as the cause of our desire. No doubt Lacan finds the linking of love with virtue frustrating, yet he nevertheless names Socrates as *agalma*, framing him as something mythical, unreachable and beautiful; a hidden jewel within the seemingly not so beautiful. For Lacan, Socrates holds a wisdom of love, a connection to love which reaches towards some hidden attribute of its essence of which neither the lover nor the beloved is entirely sure, but nevertheless goes along with. This unsureness is hidden as Lacan observes: "What the one is missing is not what is hidden in the other. This is the whole problem of love."⁴⁵ At the same time, knowledge remains desirable, a knowledge of love even more so.

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⁴⁴ Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 51.

⁴⁵ "Ce qui manque à l'un n'est pas de ce qu'il y a, caché, dans l'autre. C'est là tout le problème de l'amour": Lacan, *Transference*, Polity Press 2015, pp. 39–40.

What do we find in Lacan's reading of *The Symposium*? The most intriguing thing is that force which constantly alludes dialogue. For Lacan this force is desire sustained in the gaps constituted by the primacy of the signifying nature of love. In so far as Socrates stands in for Lacan's *objet a*, we might conclude that *The Symposium* is the very first love letter – rewritten by Lacan in Seminar VIII – and the first psychoanalytic love practice for us all.