

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

*The*  
**Seducer's**  
*Diary*



WITH A FOREWORD BY  
JOHN UPDIKE

With a foreword by John Updike

# The Seducer's Diary

## SØREN KIERKEGAARD

Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong

"In the vast literature of love, *The Seducer's Diary* is an intricate curiosity—a feverishly intellectual attempt to reconstruct an erotic failure as a pedagogic success, a wound masked as a boast," observes John Updike in his foreword to Søren Kierkegaard's narrative. This work, a chapter from Kierkegaard's first major volume, *Either/Or*, springs from his relationship with his fiancée, Regine Olsen. Kierkegaard fell in love with the young woman, ten years his junior, proposed to her, but then broke off their engagement a year later. This event affected Kierkegaard profoundly. Olsen became a muse for him, and a flood of volumes resulted. His attempt to set right, in writing, what he feels was a mistake in his relationship with Olsen taught him the secret of "indirect communication." *The Seducer's Diary*, then, becomes Kierkegaard's attempt to portray himself as a scoundrel and thus make their break easier for her.

Matters of marriage, the ethical versus the aesthetic, dread, and, increasingly, the severities of Christianity are pondered by Kierkegaard in this intense work.

The text is from Howard V. Hong's and Edna H. Hong's standard English translation of *The Writings of Kierkegaard*. The foreword by John Updike was specifically commissioned for this volume.

Cover illustration: Jackson Pollock, *Black Pouring Over Color*. Oil on specially prepared canvas panel, c. 1946–1947. Courtesy Jason McCoy, Inc., New York.

Cover design by Donald Hatch

PRINCETON PAPERBACKS

134-030-6 0-69



9 780691 017372

5123



\$12.95

*THE SEDUCER'S DIARY*

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*Søren Kierkegaard*

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, N.J.

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# *The Seducer's Diary*

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY  
HOWARD V. HONG AND  
EDNA H. HONG

WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY  
JOHN UPDIKE

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*The Seducer's Diary* was originally published in  
*Either/Or*, Part I, copyright © 1987 by Howard V. Hong  
The foreword is © 1997 by John Updike  
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,  
Princeton, New Jersey 08540  
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press,  
Chichester, West Sussex

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Kierkegaard, Søren, 1813–1855.

[*Forførerens dagbog*. English]

The seducer's diary / by Søren Kierkegaard ; edited  
and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong ; with a  
new foreword by John Updike.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-691-01737-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Hong, Howard Vincent, 1912– . II. Hong, Edna Hatlestad,  
1913– . III. Title.

PT8142.F6E5 1997

198'.9—dc21 97-10671

This book has been composed in Palatino  
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Guidelines of the Council on Library Resources

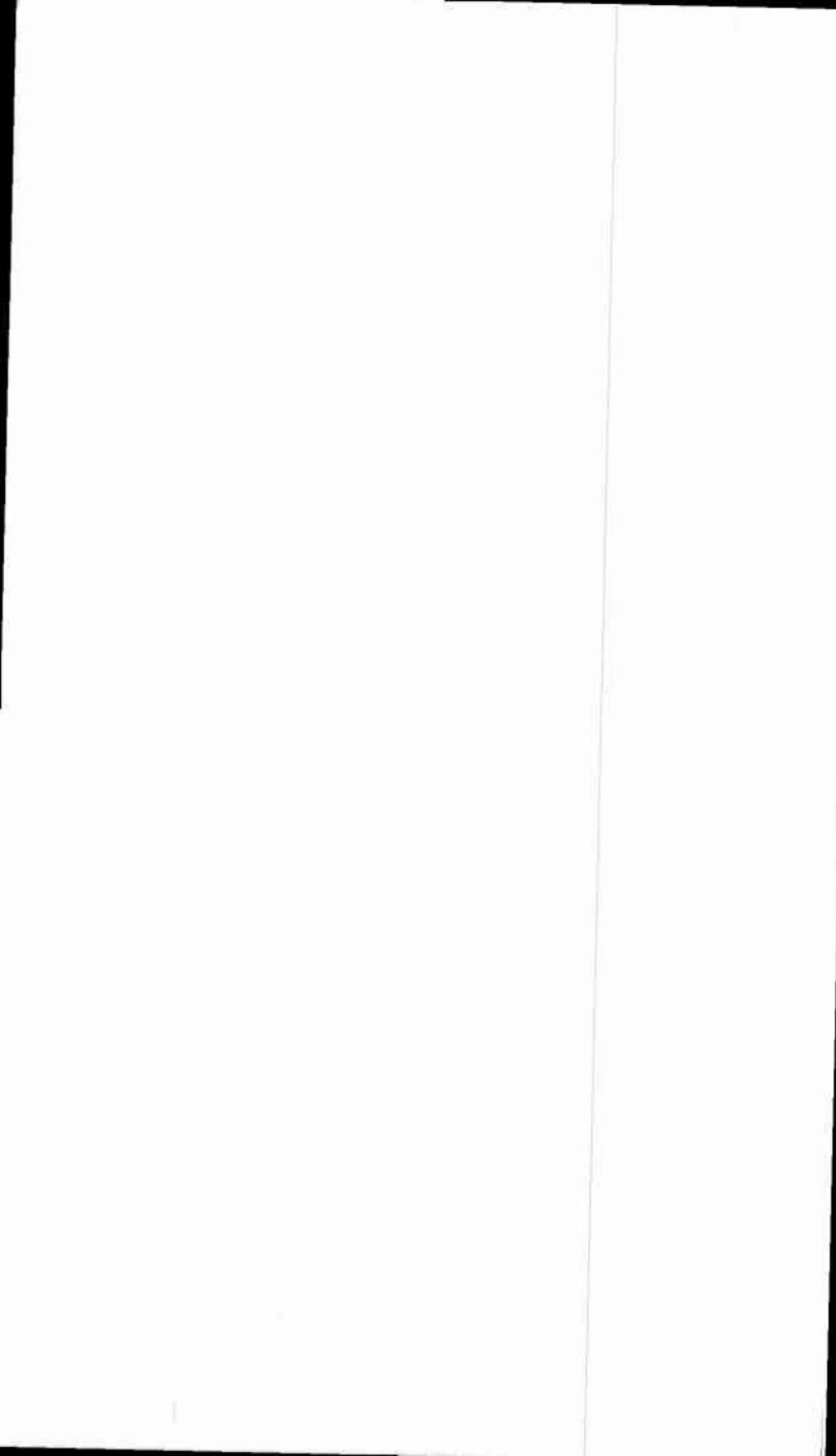
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## Foreword

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Søren Kierkegaard's method, dictated by his volatile and provocative temperament, resembles that of a fiction writer: he engages in multiple impersonations, assuming various poses and voices with an impartial vivacity. The method is, in one of his favorite words, *maieutic*—from the Greek term for midwifery—like that of his beloved model Socrates, who in his questioning style sought to elicit his auditors' ideas rather than impose his own. *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard's first major work, was a bulky, two-volume collection of papers ostensibly found by the editor, "Victor Eremita" ("Victor Hermit"), in the secret compartment of a writing desk to which he had been mysteriously attracted in the shop of a secondhand dealer. Some time after its acquisition, he tells us, he took a hatchet to a stuck drawer and discovered a trove of papers, evidently composed by two distinct authors. As arranged and published by Victor Eremita, the first volume consists of aphorisms, reflections, and essays by "A," a nameless young man who styles himself an aesthete, and the second volume of two long letters to this first writer, with some final words, composed by an older man, "B," who is named William and has been a judge. The last item in the first volume is a narrative, "The Seducer's Diary," which "A," deploying the same mock-scholarly documentary specifics as Victor Eremita offers in regard to the

whole, claims to have discovered and to be merely editing. The overall editor ironically complains that this complicates his own position, "since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle."

*Either/Or's* intricate, arch, and prolix medley, published in Copenhagen in February of 1843, made a significant stir and eventually required a second edition, to which Kierkegaard considered (but decided against) appending this postscript:

I hereby retract this book. It was a necessary deception in order, if possible, to deceive men into the religious, which has continually been my task all along. Maieutically it certainly has had its influence. Yet I do not need to retract it, for I have never claimed to be its author.

In dealing with an author so deceptive, so manifoldly removed in name from his own words, we need to insist that there were events of a sore personal nature behind so prodigiously luxuriant a smokescreen. In brief, Kierkegaard had, just before the surge of literary activity bound into *Either/Or*, broken off a year's engagement with a woman, Regine Olsen, ten years younger than himself. Externally, their engagement appeared a happy one, uniting two youngest children of prosperous Copenhagen households. Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard was a retired merchant, and Terkild Olsen a state councillor—an *Etatsraad*—and a high official in the Ministry of Finance. Young Kierkegaard, then a university student, first saw Regine when she was fourteen, in May of 1837, at a