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«Strong as Death is Love»: *Eros and Education at the End of Time*

«Fuerte como la muerte es el amor»: *Eros y Educación en el Fin del Tiempo*

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Abstract: This essay is an extended reflection on the relationship between death and love expressed in a fragment from Song of Songs 8:6: «Strong as death is love». The passage will be analyzed through a Jewish, Greek Orthodox, and Roman Catholic exegesis and literary reflection. In particular, the essay describes the role of a particular form of love (*eros*) within a particular form of education (education at the end of time). While *eros* has frequently been ignored or resigned to a purely sexualized role, we will look closely at Augustine's eulogy of his mother, Monica, in the *Confessions*, suggesting that perhaps the most visceral expression of *eros* is to be found in the phenomenology of death. We will also draw on the phenomenological manifestation of death by looking to the rich description of dying provided by Leo Tolstoy in his novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.

Together these investigations of *eros* and education yield a «curriculum of death», which draws on the reconceptualist notion of curriculum. Our claim is that this curriculum of death offers a sense of urgency and seriousness found lacking in schools today, where death abounds, but is rarely if ever addressed in a *humanistic* way. This final methodological emphasis on the humanities elucidates more directly and critically the role of research for a curriculum of death within the dominance of social science in the field of education.

Keywords: love; death; education.

Resumen: Este ensayo es una extensa reflexión sobre la relación entre muerte y amor expresado en un fragmento del Cantar de los Cantares 8:6: «Fuerte como la muerte es el amor». El pasaje se mirará a través de una exégesis judía, ortodoxa y católica y mediante una reflexión literaria. Esta reflexión pretende describir el papel de una forma particular de amor (*eros*) dentro de una forma particular de la educación (educación en el final de los tiempos). Si bien el *eros* con mayor frecuencia ha sido ignorado o renunciado a un papel puramente sexualizado, vamos a mirar de cerca el elogio de su madre, Mónica de Agustín, en las Confesiones de sugerir que tal vez la expresión más visceral del *eros* se encuentra en la fenomenología de la muerte. También vamos a aprovechar la manifestación fenomenológica de la muerte, al mirar a la rica descripción de morir proporcionada por León Tolstoi en su novela, *La muerte de Iván Ilich*. En conjunto, estas investigaciones del *eros* y la educación deben producir un «curriculum de la muerte», que se basa en la noción reconceptualizada del plan de estudios. Nuestra pretensión es que este plan de estudios de la muerte ofrece una sensación de urgencia y la gravedad resultaron deficientes en las escuelas hoy en día, donde abunda la muerte, pero es rara vez o

nunca ha abordado de forma humanista. Este énfasis metodológico final sobre las humanidades hablará más directa y críticamente sobre el papel de la investigación para un programa de estudios de la muerte en el **ámbito** de las ciencias sociales y dentro del campo de la educación.

Palabras clave: amor; muerte; educación.

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«Death, thou shalt die»

John Donne, *Death be Not Proud*

«Hast away, my Beloved»

Song of Songs 8:14

כל המתרגם פסוק כצורתו הרי זה בור

«Whoever translates a verse as it appears [without inquiring into its true meaning] is an ignoramus»

Kiddushin 49a

1. Introduction

Central to human history is time. At the heart of the education of the human person is death. There is a phenomenological relationship between time and death – the time of death, the hour of death – that is historical and educational even in the simplest sense of instilling a lasting and formative memory. And surely few would object to the universal fact that we will all die and are in some real sense dying, and that this shared condition can be the site of education. This can be most closely understood through a personalistic approach, a social and cultural approach would simply multiply its more intimate effects. The phenomenological link is not all there is to history and time or education and death, but the tapestry woven by these intertwined realities marks a universal point of recognition.

Chronological time is suspended to make room for the phenomenological time of death. Schools, jobs, and most other institutional things and places make room for death within their calendars and daily routines. The flag flies at half-mast. The institutional and industrial machine is justified to pause or stop when death is nearby. Closer still is the time that is suspended for the one who is dying and dies – this may be the death of living or the literal death of dying. Even more dramatic is the temporal suspension for those who bereave and mourn their beloved in the wake of death. At the far end of this suspended sense of temporality is the terminus we find in the longing of the living for their dead, a close relative to the longing of the dying for life and the longing of the human imagination for immortality. At this point where lovers die to join their beloved, where Juliet prays to her dagger, it is *here* where we find the phenomenological

end of time: the wounds that remain and teach for generations, the study that cries and consoles, forgotten memory that can never be forgotten.

In this essay, we explore this sense of time in relation to death to provide a description that gives way to a concept of *eros* most radically present in the death of time itself, i.e, the end of time that occurs when death is present. The result of this concept will be a phenomenological description of education at the end of time, not so much a critique of education, as an attempt to memorialize education in a way that is, in the words of Augustine, «ever ancient, ever new» (2001, p. 238). Through this exploration rooted in religious, humanistic, and literary studies, we end by offering a proposal for a reconceptualist curriculum of death, where *eros* is present at the death bed in the terminus of dying and this end of time is likewise enchanted by the eternal degree and duration of erotic love. Whatever is missing in education today, yesterday, and tomorrow, surely includes this.

Those familiar with a Freudian psychoanalytic reading of education, most rigorously and insightfully found in the works of Deborah Britzman, will be familiar with this route of reasoning. However, in this case, ours will not be primarily be an issue of consciousness in the psychological or psychoanalytic sense, but, instead, an examination of the intentionality of consciousness as a necessary condition for the possibility of phenomenological time. In this particular sense, we consider this to be work mixed between a folk phenomenology (see: Rocha, 2015) and philosophy of history, specifically focused on the temporality of *eros* in the experience of death (as opposed to the «death drive») as a way to suggest a humanistic (as opposed to social scientific) way to study and respond to the classic reconceptualist question of curriculum, What knowledge is of most worth?

A few words about the progression of our principal sources and thematic content: We begin with overtly religious sources (Jewish, Greek Orthodox, and Roman Catholic) commenting on Hebrew poetics in *Song of Songs*. These sources begin to investigate a revisionist understanding of love as *eros* in traditions more known to regard love as *agape*. This preference for *agape* over *eros*, is familiar to pedagogical discussions that often, and for good reason, feel uncomfortable advocating for *eros* in classroom teaching or schooling. Nonetheless, our reconceptualizing of *eros* would show a more constructive route. This theological distinction of love as *eros* and/or *agape*, rooted in ancient Israel¹, will then take a more concrete form in the prose of book nine of Augustine's *Confessions*, where Augustine memorializes and eulogizes his mother, Monica. It is here where the

¹ We would like to note that the Hellenistic distinction between *agape* and *eros*, as shall be discussed later, is here read *into* the Hebrew tradition. Given the difficulty of disentangling Hellenistic influence from Jewish thought and the unquestioned relevance of Hellenism for the Christian sources, we find that the distinction is applied appropriately but not necessarily.

question of death arrives most fully, and provides a more ample view of the unique *eros* present in the mourning of the beloved. Here, again, the narrative of *eros* is revised: whereas the *Confessions* are popularly seen as a castigation and renunciation of sexual, artistic, and even pedagogical *eros*, we point to the simultaneous *eros* of the death of the beloved in a description of the affective effect of this passage in a pedagogical encounter.

Finally we move from ancient religious sources to the more contemporary, yet still deeply religious, fiction of Leo Tolstoy in his moving novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Here the interiority of the *eros* of death reaches its apex. From there forward we offer a short speculative rendition of the possible implications of a humanistic understanding of a curriculum of death for education.

2. Song of Songs 8:4

שימני כחותם על לבך כחותם על זורעך כי עזה כמות אהבה קשה כשואל קנאה רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתי

According to Jewish tradition, *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs) was written by Solomon upon the completion of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple), when (as it is written in the *Zohar*) «all the spheres, upper and lower, were completed with one wholeness» (*Shir HaShirim*, p. 68). A song is no trivial thing; in fact, Jewish tradition also tells us that only ten true songs have ever been sung. *Shir Hashirim* is not only one of those songs, but the song of songs (i.e. the most supreme of songs), and Rabbi Akiva refers to it even as the holy of holies (*Shir HaShirim*, p. 68).

Despite the high praise, the contents of *Shir Hashirim* are controversial for the overt sexuality in describing the relationship between lovers. Study of the text, Jewish scholars warn, must be performed with caution and a desire to seek the true meanings behind the allegory while still carefully preserving and honouring the vehicle of the allegory.² The overarching allegory is that of the lovers, taken to symbolize the love between God and Israel (i.e. the Jewish people) through the concrete relatability of the (nearly) comparable love between two people. Why is *Shir Hashirim* the song of songs? One *Midrash* notes that in other songs, God praises Israel or Israel praises Him. *Shir Hashirim* is unique in scripture for holding the reciprocal expressions of love between both (*Shir HaShirim*, p. 68).

The passage discussed here (quoted in the original Hebrew above) is the expression of love from Israel to God, followed by God's response in love. The commentaries teach us, among other things,³ that the expression of love in this

² Indeed, reading any translation of the text exponentially increases risk of poor interpretation, as does a reading without sufficient context of the Jewish tradition, as all Jewish texts are pedagogical.

³ Again, there are a multitude of interpretations and traditions related to the text and this is merely a tiny glimpse provided through our inadequate words.

passage, specifically, can be understood in two reciprocal ways. On the one hand, Rashi argues that Israel's love for God is as strong and as *intense* as death, and that death and others of the greatest trials are endured for the sake of God's love (*Shir HaShirim*, p. 95). On the other, Rashi also asserts that it is a plea to God not to forget Israel (*Shir HaShirim*, p. 94) and to return that love («place me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm»), particularly (as noted by Alshich) through the manifestation of love in action (*Shir HaShirim*, p. 95). *Eros* is present in the intensity of that love from each side, in the yearning toward an eternity contained also in death, comparable to death.

These commentaries do not nearly exhaust the hermeneutic potential of this passage, and this excess, this inexhaustibility, is itself a sign of the *eros* proper to biblical literature and literature in general. However, it is worth scanning other interpretations in two other religious traditions, derivative in each case, from the original Judaic source: Orthodox and Roman Catholic. What they should show is how the presence of *eros* in relation to death in this particular passage may hold a key for a notion of *eros* that is not reducible to the sexual analogy – indeed, the comparison of love and death points to an even more erotic expression of *eros* from the grave.

Christos Yannaras examines the passage in his poetic collection, *Variations on the Song of Songs*. His approach is oblique. The chosen translation of a portion of the passage is the phrase «Love is strong as death. / Jealousy is as cruel as the grave» (Yannaras, 2005, p. 19). He explores this in his fifth chapter, themed and titled «Intervallum», which refers to an *interval*, an expression of musical attunement. An interval is the difference between two musical notes, which points to a relationship of art. In Yannaras' case, the interval in this passage is between love and death. His reading of the passage is dialectical, but trends toward an antagonism rooted in the relation of love to death and the resistance that it produces. He writes, «Lovers taste life within the limitations of time, subject to decay, condemned to death» (Yannaras, 2005, p. 20). Love, for Yannaras, intimates a possibility of overcoming this relation. «Love confirms immortality – could it only be an illusion?» (Yannaras, 2005, p. 20).

What is most noteworthy in this analysis is that Yannaras's Orthodox tradition speaks of love univocally, similar to the Hebrew approach we find in *Song of Songs*. He does not make distinctions between forms of love and yet he clearly speaks of love in erotic terms. Love, much like the allegory in *Song of Songs*, is at once universal and particular. He writes his variation on the interval of the passage from *Song of Songs* in terms that are also openly Freudian – «certainly the Freudian linking of love with death is neither arbitrary nor a poetic metaphor» (Yannaras, 2005, p. 23) – but ultimately he seeks a relation in the interval between

life and death that love interrupts and destroys: «A total relationship, a universal immediacy, a mingling of souls and bodies productive of life. A double-edged universality of need and relation, of self-seeking and self-offering» (Yannaras, 2005, p. 29). This is not so much an analysis of consciousness as it is the struggle for what might be beyond it.

Moving from East to West, from Greek to Latin – and ultimately German – ecclesial sources, we find a unique link in the commentary offered by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (*God is Love*). Benedict begins with a terminological analysis of love (whereas Yannaras begins with variations on *Song of Songs*) that leads him to consider the language of *Song of Songs*, especially its distinctive terminology of love as both *eros* (*dodim*) and *agape* (*ahabà*) (Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 21). *Agape* is not only the most common term used in Hebrew (אהבה)⁴ and Christian scripture, it is also the preferred form of love from the four loves of Plato's *Symposium* in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Indeed, it is this preference for *agape* that Nietzsche famously attacks, as the genealogical sin committed against *eros*, resulting in the inversion of values that weakened the human will to power and contributed to the development of *ressentiment*. Benedict addresses Nietzsche's critique directly and asserts that far from alienating *eros*, Christianity (and, by extension for Nietzsche, Judaism) embraces and perfects it. He writes, «Did Christianity destroy *eros*? ... Far from rejecting or 'poisoning' *eros*, they heal it and restore it to its true grandeur» (Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 16). This assertion may be rejected with respect to its objective claim; however, it directly reveals the radical degree to which Benedict seeks to recover and restore a robust notion of *eros* within the Christian understanding of love.

Benedict XVI carefully constructs his argument against the common view that places the ideal love of *agape* (*amor benevolentiae*) above the «worldly» love of *eros* (*amor concupiscentiae*) in a direct fashion (Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 23). First he notes «[t]he two notions of love are often contrasted as 'ascending' love and 'descending' love», (Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 23) but insists «[y]et *eros* and *agape* – ascending and descending love – can never be completely separated» (Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 24). Then Benedict XVI continues: «The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized» (Benedict, XVI, 2006, p. 24). This harkens back to the more unitary discussion of love in Yannaras' variations and speaks as well to the necessary singularity of a phenomenological understanding of love. However, because of the traditional critics of *eros* on the one hand, and

⁴ It is important to note that the part of *Song of Songs* discussed here uses *ahaba*, not *dodim*. It is unclear whether Benedict acknowledges this or not since he does not speak specifically about the usages in the text.

the critics of Christianity on the other, Benedict engages the theme of love in *Song of Songs* through distinction and assertion before moving into dialectic.

His more dialectical treatment occurs in a meditation for Lent in 2007, shortly after the promulgation of *Deus Caritas Est*. Here his approach is less terminological and more theological. Invoking Dionysius the Areopagite, he describes the «mad *eros* of the cross», (Benedict XVI, 2007) where the love of God is not simply driven by the selflessness of *agape*, but also the unityseeking hunger of *eros*. Here, using the Christian cross as his referent, Benedict describes divine love in relation to humanity: «the revelation of God's *eros* toward man is, in reality, the supreme expression of his *agape*» (Benedict XVI, 2007).

We might find the traditional Christian order of love more familiar in the present pedagogical context, where love is often reduced to, or substituted for, «care» and *eros* is certainly ignored to avoid the scandal of thinking that the pedagogical relationship should ever be amorous and also, of course, to condemn the idea that it could or should ever be erotic. There is perhaps good reason for the implied scandal, since *eros* so often evokes abusive and exploitive relations between teachers and students, a risk we must surely face directly in any advocacy of erotic love for education. In the United States, where a Whiggish puritanism founded the compulsory school, this fear of *eros* is even more understandably present. Indeed, the quintessentially Christian Pauline preference for the love of *agape* over *eros* is not only a fact of biblical and religious scholarship, but also of educational theory, history, and practice. Therefore, Benedict's upheaval threatens not only the realm of the sacred but perhaps even more so the realm of secular relations.

Benedict's argument, when considered in light of his principal source, *Song of Songs*, renders a route to the *eros* that unifies the variations of love that arrives in the strength of death's embrace, an embrace strong enough to break the shackles of time itself. This may seem opposed to love, as we find in Yannaras' dialectical commentary, yet by looking closer through other sources, it is our claim that in death we find an articulate expression of *eros* that arrives not at the beginning nor *in media res*, but ushers in the end of time.

3. Eulogy for Monica

A hasty summary of Augustine's *Confessions* would place it among the more influential sources that chasten *eros* into *agape*. After all, Augustine famously disavows his promiscuous sexual life as sinful, along with other aspects such as his love of theatre and even his professorship in rhetoric. A quick rejoinder would be to point out that Augustine's *eros* is not replaced but is, instead,

redirected towards God⁵. There is a degree of truth in both of these claims: Augustine's attitude toward sex, the arts, and the Academy are deeply negative yet his imploring prayers to God display all the attributes of an *eros* redirected from human to divine love. However, this movement away from worldly things is positively Pauline and would seem to support the division that Benedict XVI rejects between *eros* and *agape*. However, there is another element of Augustine's *Confessions* that deserves recognition: death.

Augustine shows sorrow for several deaths in his *Confessions*, and perhaps it is worth looking at them as a whole at some point, but the attention and tone of his account of the death of Monica, his mother, is unrivaled, unique in quality and duration. Augustine eulogizes his mother through a long account of her entire life from childhood to marriage and adulthood to the final days before and after her death that occupies nearly the entirety of book nine. Throughout this account, Augustine's love is categorically different from what we see in his ascending prayers to God. His prayers to God continue; yet his love for Monica immanetizes his divine love and reveals a saint struggling, agonizing to experience the full erotic sorrow of tears. As Augustine tries to drive away his tears, in the same way he sought to drive out his sexual desires and other worldly things, he remarks, «I grieved with fresh grief for my grief, and was torn by a twofold sadness» (Augustine, 2001, p. 207). In this instance, Augustine's grief is for his mother, for himself, and this distance he feels is consoled not through argument or reason, nor through oblation or denial, but through submitting to the excessive pleasure of weeping. These are the words he gives to describe his experience of finally weeping for «the least part of an hour» (Augustine, 2001, p. 209):

I was destitute of her, and it was a pleasure to weep in your sight over her and for her, over myself and for myself. The tears that I held back, I gave leave to flow as much as they wanted, spreading them out where my heart could see them; and I found rest in them, for in them were your ears – not the ears of some man, who might look on my weeping with contempt (Augustine, 2001, p. 209).

Here we find unity in the *eros* of mourning, most significantly present where Augustine's earthly love for his deceased mother and his love for himself consoles him with the rest he reserves in book one for the eschatological end of time: «Our heart is restless till it finds its rest in you» (Augustine, 2001, p. 5). In other words, Augustine's heart finds God in the *eros* of his submission to weeping for his mother; this experience unifies his love and his heart finds rest in it.

5 This makes us think of the story about the Chafetz Chaim (a famous rabbi) who said at his son's funeral: «I try to serve God, but I am only a human being. No matter how much I love God, some of the love in my heart belongs to my children. Now my son is gone and, like that Jewish mother, I will take that love and give it all to God». This story shows that perhaps there is an even stronger argument to be made for *eros* and familial love, specifically, but the question of degree remains unanswered for future investigation.

This may sound rather detached from educational experiences, although we find it hard to imagine that grief and loss are ever so distant from anyone's life, but Rocha was awoken to the significance of this passage by witnessing its power in a pedagogical experience. In the Spring of 2011, Rocha taught an informal seminar on Augustine's *Confessions* at Wabash College. One of the common methods for studying the text was to read lengthy passages aloud, to *listen* to the words previously read in private before discussing them. For book nine, Rocha chose to read the full eulogy and midway through, before the arrival to Augustine's struggle to grieve, one of the students present began to weep intensely. After the reading was over, that student left the room in a mess of tears after explaining that the passage led him to grieve his treatment of his mother and the absence of his father, who passed away when the student was young. The sheer emotional impact was fraught with questions, then and now, but in the moment it was clear that there was something deeply erotic happening in that room. This was not the *eros* of sexual stimulation, but the arousal of consolation that only grief provides when facing and accepting the *eros* present in the death of one's beloved.

The educational impact and significance of this encounter is hopefully obvious and undeniable: Augustine learns how to grieve in a way that unifies *agape* and *eros* in the singular experience of love. How lacking and impoverished is an education that cannot sustain and teach these lessons of love and life and death, an education where we have no time or place to mourn. No wonder so much of the life of the school is deadening in a way that denies and rejects the *eros* confirmed in the face of death. What would a curriculum of death look and feel like in a classroom setting? What resources exist to responsibly yet authentically consider such questions? Surely Augustine's overtly religious approach might be rejected on secular grounds. However, one possibility would be to turn to literary sources, where this theme abounds plentifully. Perhaps there is no better example than Leo Tolstoy's novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, which we turn to now to complete the exegetical analysis.

4. «Death is finished»

Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* begins at the literal death – the bereavement announcement and funeral – of Ivan Ilyich. Here, unlike Augustine's passionate eulogy, the mood is cold and pragmatic. Co-workers consider who will take Ilyich's position; his widow asks his best friend about money. This opening provides a sharp contrast to the ending where, in Ilyich's final moments he gasps the Christological statement «It is finished!» (Tolstoy, 2009, p. 91) and declares the ultimate victory of life over death before taking his last breath.

The paradox of the cold opening when compared to the transcendent ending of the tale is a rich juxtaposition to consider at more length, but in this analysis the beginning matches the cautionary tone we hear in part two: «The past history of Ivan Ilyich's life was most simple and ordinary and most terrible» (Tolstoy, 2009, p. 47). The continuity of the pragmatic opening with this «terrible» statement becomes the droll rule and the final hour of Ilyich's life then serves as the exception that proves this rule. Like Augustine's *Confessions*, this story is one of a conversion, of a turning away from death towards life. Yet the vehicle for this conversion is more direct. Death itself brings about Ilyich's conversion, which yields the finale, «Death is finished!» And despite this emancipatory and redemptive ending, the pragmatic beginning puts the ending a bit out of joint, or, perhaps, it serves as mark of the radical interiority of the story.

All externalities of the account of Ilyich's life and death, even the last spoken words of Ilyich – where he attempts to say «forgive» but instead utters «forgo» (Tolstoy, 2009, p. 90) – are «simple» in an absurd Kafkian sense. But the narrated psychology of the story leads Ilyich to an inner dialogue where, in the hour of his death, death is abolished through a conversion experience where he first realizes that he has not led a good life and then feels love and seeks forgiveness from his beloved, which frees him and vanquishes death itself. The *eros* of this story is paradoxical in nature (as most *eros* is) but remains clearer in its incapacity to be reduced to *agape* in the external details. The *eros* of the end of the story forces a basic enough set of questions which run along the decision to live or die, to love or hate, to admit to our shortcomings and seek the light or to remain in the prideful absurdity of the mundane. Indeed this story is not about a question so much as it is about a choice, a call to bring an end of death through the *eros* of love, a force as strong as death itself, often invisible in the exterior but powerfully present in the interiority of the person.

For many people across history this decision to live or die in this interior, qualitative sense is the chief existential aim of education. In *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, the jarring presence of death itself brings us to face this choice in a direct way, moved by the *eros* we also find in Augustine's mournful *Confessions* and which we hear in the analogy between love and death in *Song of Songs*. In the closing section to follow we propose how this literature we have considered here in brief might associate itself with a humanistic curriculum of death for education today, a sense of education that has the capacity to interrupt the very fabric of time with the interior demands of *eros*.

5. A Curriculum of Death

Any worthwhile curriculum must have the capacity to speak to as broad a range of human experience as possible, especially the poor and marginalized. Making reference to classic religious and literary texts on death may appear limited in scope for specifically oppressed populations. However, when we look concretely to experiences of oppression, it becomes clear that the presence of death, and even the threat of death, is often a basic fact of life for poor and endangered folks rather than something to be imagined from nowhere. When one's walk to school each day is itself dangerous, lined with graffiti memorializing those who have died, it follows that there is a need to consider death on daily basis in relation to schooling. In this case a heightened sense of mortality may be a dark existential gift, a gift that offers itself even in the negation of oppression itself. Among populations where funerals are common – and in the United States where gun violence has created the school into a perversely unique site of violence – the presence of death is too often sanitized away, which alludes again to the puritanical replacement of *eros* with *agape* we find in daily life. Indeed, perhaps the one thing spoken of less than love in today's urban school is death, for to speak of death is to arouse the language of love and evoke the erotic feelings of loss that are not only familiar, but perhaps *too* familiar for those who are most often ignored and forgotten. This is a tongue to which demographic data and «at risk» threats do not speak and cannot address. Relevance is irrelevant.

Considering this demand of relevance, what does the classic reconceptualist question of curriculum – «What knowledge is of most worth?» – have to say about love and death? Perhaps one answer is love and death itself or at least how to love and die well. At issue here is not the content of the response or the question, but its timing: the poetic wit of it all. After all, the nature of death is such that it is always perfectly timed to interrupt time itself. Only death can cancel a football game; but no one should simply raise death as a topic for polite discussion. Yet this interruption of time by death is not an abyss, it is not a suspension that leaves us with no consolation. For this we have story, song, and verse – the humanities, in other words – to console and explore and even explain. In the end of time brought on by death we find an erotic expression of love otherwise reserved for fantasies of sexual ecstasy, but in this case the criteria for erotic experience are broader and even more intense. This brings us then to a twofold suggestion: first, a curriculum of death is one that we cannot bring about by simply talking about death; second, in the absence of contemporary nihilism we turn to the humanities, to literature, song, and poetry, to philosophy and history and humanistic psychology, and more. To eternity and infinity and particularity. The fact is that we are dying.

This condition is universal and cannot be abstracted. Death exists between us. A phenomenological imperative is key, then, for a curriculum of death. This calls for a robust set of questions, choices, and demands that we find in the much-neglected humanistic study of education, in a field where social scientific hegemony is well established. The contemporary resources in this area are few by comparison, but the archive is vast and ancient, and for this reason historians and philosophers and poets and novelists of education – but above all *teachers* – have much work to do to immanetize education through the *eros* present in a curriculum of death, to usher in education at the end of time.

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