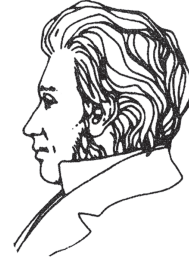


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VIRGINS, MOTHERS, HERMAPHRODITES

Katalin Nun. *Women of the Danish Golden Age (Literature, Theater and the Emancipation of Women)*

Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen, 2013. Pp. 180.

Reviewed by Andras Nagy

Traditionally, men mainly told history and yet the muse of historiography was the female Calliope. The same was true for other fields, such as poetry and theater, where female muses were needed to fuel the creativity of men. However, this trend started to change with modernity and it further developed at the beginning of the 19th century, the time period Katalin Nun introduces in her book. In particular, Nun focuses on the pinnacle of Danish culture, the Golden Age. It was a unique historical moment that gave birth to several geniuses of European significance, like N.F.S. Grundtvig, H. C. Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard, and included many more of enormous local significance, like J.L. Heiberg, J.P. Mynster and H.S. Martensen, without whom none of the above mentioned giants could have ever achieved their greatness.

Yet, there is another basic factor that conditioned the birth of these geniuses, from their concrete coming to life to their upbringing, including their learning of the mother tongue and finding comfort in the love and in the protection of those beings that connect them to the family, to the society, to the world they enter. Without substantial and unconditional feminine assistance, devotion and sometimes even sacrifice none of them would be around – it is just as obvious as it is easy to forget.

Somewhat later in life, starting with adolescence and the hormones demanding their rights, the presence, the influence and the inspiration of the 'weaker sex' on men becomes not only apparent but often documented as well, first in the life and then in the works of the above mentioned geniuses. For instance, *First Love* is not only a play written by Scribe and commented on by Kierkegaard, Heiberg and others but also their chance to explore the other half of humanity and by that, ourselves.

Nun's decision to focus on women in the Danish Golden Age is perfect, as women were significantly present in different segments of the society and of the cultural life at that time, and yet their emancipation was still a generation away. In this work, Nun demonstrates the possibilities and the controversies in the life and works of three emblematic women. First, she introduces the successful writer Thomasine Gyllembourg, who used masculine pseudonym as incognito for her novels. Second, Nun discusses the virtuoso of borrowed female identities Johanne Luise Heiberg, who became the leading actress of the Royal Theater and an idol for her public, rejecting however the emancipation of her own sex. Finally, she turns to the young writer Mathilde Fibiger, who argued for women's emancipation in her fiction and created great controversies with her progressive views on a woman's place in a male dominated society and the possibility of maintaining one's feminine identity and even dignity within it.

Nun's knowledge of her protagonists is impressive. A tremendous amount of historical research, archival revelations and the critical use of secondary literature form the basis of the seven chapters that comprise this volume (some chapters were written and presented as 'case-studies' before). This research is complimented by a great amount of empathy as well, which results from her multifaceted activity as a scholar. She is often in the background of significant intellectual ventures, like initiating and editing books, reading and correcting layouts, creating designs, providing footnotes for others and humbly remaining behind the scenes when assisting with stage productions. Nun also has a professional background in writing, as an earlier expert of children's literature,

and a subject expertise in Kierkegaard, as a researcher at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Copenhagen in different fields and for a variety of assignments.

Nun's familiarity with Kierkegaard enriches her work. Kierkegaard is substantially referred to in it, as he reflected upon each of the three protagonists and personally addressed two of them—insofar as their works served as wonderful 'excuses' to express his deepest concerns and revelations and greatly contributed to his interpretation of them as well.

Besides the indirect and theoretical connection with Kierkegaard, there is a more concrete and a very personal one between the three ladies: the intellectual focal point of the time, Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Heiberg was the son of the novelist Gyllembourg, the husband of the talented young actress Johanne Luise (at the time called Pätges) and finally the mentor of the literary figure Fibiger (and with such a devotion that may go beyond aesthetic appreciation). These women greatly shaped the character, the experiences and the thinking of the most important and most influential figure in Copenhagen of the time, even if not the most talented one.

In addition to the life and thought of Heiberg himself, the women also impacted the literary saloon called the 'Heiberg Factory.' The saloon formed the cultural life of the Danish capital, as writers, thinkers, artists and intellectuals attended it. Yet, despite the fact that these attendees were mainly from the 'stronger sex,' neither saloons nor theaters can be properly pictured without a female presence. This presence greatly contributed to the attraction of the cultural institutions. It was also determinative of the Danish Golden Age in general, albeit indirectly. Women comprised a significant portion of the reading public—being the receptive audience of the writers and thinkers. It is worth noting that dramas, novels, poems, stories, operas and ballets mainly represented women, even if from a masculine angle but in a great variety of roles.

Early scholarship in this field often ignored women as independent and significant actors. As Katalin Nun argues, the women were referenced in connection with their male counterparts, the first and foremost being Kierkegaard. For instance, Kierkegaard's book review on Thomasine Gyllembourg's *Two Ages* became a point of reference for several scholars, yet few of them were familiar with the original book (that was never translated into English). The mother of J.L. Heiberg (then the wife of a Swedish aristocrat Carl Frederik Gyllembourg-Ehrensverd for whom she left the exiled Andreas Heiberg when their son was not yet 8 years old) was not only talented, but she could have become successful for her writings had she not hid behind a male pseudonym. Indeed, she is referred as 'he' throughout Kierkegaard's review, though her real identity was hardly a secret.

Katalin Nun has an intimate familiarity with Gyllembourg's other novels. Gyllembourg wrote 24 between 1827 and 1845, plus many stories and some plays. The protagonist in these works is usually a woman, of middle class origin and often young, as the Bildungsromans of the time required. In *Two Ages*, the plot compares two time periods, the first being that of the (French) revolution and the second being the then present time, the 1840s. For her, true passion dominated the first age and lukewarm reflection determined the second. For instance, at the end of the 18th century an illegitimate child is born as a result of the total loving devotion, while in the second age simple and frivolous flirting substitutes love and lovers are kept to compensate the emptiness of feelings. Comparing the ages, the author describes the seemingly insignificant events of the flow of life, an introduction to the joys and sorrows of daily routine. In fact, the earlier work that made Gyllembourg's name and fame, 'Everyday Life Stories' (1828), was a seemingly simple chronicle of daily life written from a woman's angle. Since nothing was insignificant in this respect, Claudeine, the protagonist of *Two Ages*, 'has an exceptional talent for arranging the ideal form of everyday life' as Katalin Nun emphasizes based on her knowledge of intimate details. This ability was also characteristic of the author herself, providing harmony in a world not necessarily designed for that.

The novels also played an important role in the development and refinement of the Danish language, so as to articulate the phenomena of modernization. At this time, language had to be adequate for use in contemporary philosophy, aesthetics and sciences in general. As Katalin Nun mentions, Kierkegaard's dissertation was only the third one to receive no less than the royal permit to be written in Danish. Language served as the frame for thinking and expression, both in radical transition in that time. The women's share in this process was determinant, even if not properly recognized, due to their often indirect participation in the cultural activities.

The start of their active contribution was represented by Thomasine Gyllembourg and in another field by her daughter-in-law, Fru Heiberg. Kierkegaard reflected on both women during important moments of his life. His review of Gyllembourg's novel was written when he seems to have concluded his authorship, expecting his premature death at the age of 33. A final text was in demand for Kierkegaard, as Katalin Nun masterfully proves in her philologically based analysis, and so his interpretation of the novel largely contains his final and harsh judgment on his age in general. Using his earlier terminology in the analysis of *Two Ages*, in many respects he was 'reading into' the novel what he wanted to express both philosophically and aesthetically, in the frames of his life and of his writings.

The female novelist greatly appreciated this analysis by her younger contemporary, as he was more appreciative of her work than other critics were. She understood that the book served as a brilliant excuse for Kierkegaard to further elaborate his ideas. 'My work appears to me a simple romance from which a poet has taken the subject and wrought a drama,' as she put it in her thank-you letter to Kierkegaard. Yet, the metaphor refers to more. 'Drama' is hardly accidental in this context, as Kierkegaard regularly and willfully confronts dramatically opposing ideas and convictions both in the pseudonymous authorship and also individual works. The focus is hardly on a final conclusion, but rather on the process of re-presenting ideas in their complexity, facing conflicting views in the dynamics provided by the dramaturgy of thinking.

Drama was in a different sense the 'moving space' for Johanne Luise Heiberg. An unusual beauty, a tormented soul and later a national institution, she provides another example for the kind of extraordinary role a woman could play in the Danish Golden Age. To understand her personality and influence, however, a thorough understanding is needed of the social and cultural background of theater life in the first half of the 19th century in Copenhagen, which is what Nun brings. Different documents and historical sources are the basis of her interpretation, many of which surfaced in the recent philological work executed by the Kierkegaard Research Centre. Nun emphasizes the role and work of major playwrights of the time, from Hertz to Kotzebue inspired by German romanticism. The other important trend was that of the French vaudevilles, which determined the aesthetic views of Johann Ludvig Heiberg and became a leading genre for his plays. As a playwright, translator, dramaturge and director of the Royal Theater, he had an overwhelming influence, similarly to the acting of Johanne Luise who was the best in comedies and in vaudevilles.

The artistic identity of Fru Heiberg developed in a lively dialectic with the views and practice of her husband, following the classicistic theater tradition. She played 250 roles between 1826 and 1864, as Nun highlights, on the most important stage in Scandinavia with great success. While husband and wife are jointly referred to in the title of the chapter as 'Heibergs,' later their opinions, tastes and theatrical practices developed in different directions. The husband's rejection of Ibsen, Bjørnson and modernity in general was corrected later by Johann Ludvig's widow, who was by then the stage manager of the theater. Her appreciation and support of them made a major impact on European drama.

Their influence was also different, that of the writer and that of the actress. Magazines and books were only sold in the hundreds at a time when thousands of people attended the Royal Theater. Reading needs efforts and

concentration, meanwhile the charm of theater requires only openness and silence. Before the appearance of mass culture, the stage served as the main venue for representing social behavior, expressing feelings and passions. These portrayals determined the public's views on the identity, the possibilities and the liberties of women, both performed and discussed in reviews. Fru Heiberg became a 'mediator of Danish literature and language,' as Nun characterizes her mission, yet beyond that she also taught her audience to appreciate the charismatic, strong and reflective woman.

Besides the 'magic', hard work was also needed for her success. Fru Heiberg was not only aware of it, but expressed it clearly. To properly describe her views and activity, Nun refers to Fru Heiberg's plays, articles and major autobiographical work, which reveal her relationship to important figures of her time and express her views on acting as well. In this way, it is a unique document for understanding the background of the age that later seemed golden. Nun also compares Fru Heiberg's views and practices with the other leading actress of the time, Anna Nielsen. Nielsen was Fru Heiberg's rival, offering an alternative for the charismatic and powerful woman—both in her features and in her acting style.

Acting is not only a mortal form of art, but an extremely short lived one that exists only until the curtain falls. Fru Heiberg's immortality is due to her multifaceted influence on generations and her enchanted contemporaries of international fame, like Kierkegaard not to say the least. Kierkegaard's comments and elaborations on her acting are often done in an aesthetic and sometimes a philosophic context. While these interpretations are in different parts of his authorship, they are always appreciative.

Take his *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, for example. It is a masterful comparative analysis of Fru Heiberg's performance as Juliet from Shakespeare's tragedy first in her teens and then again in her thirties. In the 1828 performance, Fru Heiberg qua Juliet goes to the pastor for her confirmation, whereas in the performance nearly twenty years later (when Fru Heiberg could have been a grandmother) the once tragedy takes a happy turn as Juliet conceives a child on the wedding night. Nun emphasizes that Kierkegaard prefers the aging virgin to the young one, as the acceleration of the play's emotions and the accumulation of passions and experiences can be only faked by a teenager but never lived through. For the older woman, her recollection helps to play the role of being a teenager. Meanwhile for the essential part of the play, all of her knowledge and experience is needed, neither of which a youngster could ever obtain. Kierkegaard's views are very similar to those of Fru Heiberg, the very actress. She greatly appreciated her admirer's the 'little article,' which was published under the pseudonym 'Inter et Inter' without mentioning either her or his own name. Kierkegaard's staggering empathy for acting and for theater was and is surprisingly apt for someone who had never entered the stage, especially given his understanding of how anxiety plays the lead and then how the weight turns into lightness. In particular, Kierkegaard's appreciation of Shakespeare reinforced Fru Heiberg's, since for him the 'language of passion' was spoken fluently by the British bard and can be compared only to the Old Testament. The characters are real human beings, who dare to hate, to love to sin.

Passion seems to be the link between Gyllembourg's novel and Fru Heiberg's acting, while a different type of passion is present in the work of the third woman represented in Nun's *Women of the Danish Golden Age*, Mathilde Fibiger. Fibiger seems to have been an 'outcast' of the Copenhagen cultural elite, as she was a revolutionary thinker who fictionalized the situation of women during her time. Her debut novel, *Clara Raphael: Twelve Letters*, is just as radical and thought provoking as it is relatively early, especially when compared to the norms and habits of the society at the time. As Katalin Nun explains, *Clara Raphael* created quite the controversy regarding the issue of women's emancipation.

Heiberg understood its importance when both publishing it and providing it with a significant preface. He appreciated the talent of the author as well. His views, however, on gender equality seem to have been more conservative than one would think given his actual assistance of the author. He became trapped between bourgeois conservatism and abstract idealism. Besides, his relationship to the young and talented woman remained a disturbing secret, as Nun refers to it, one that was expressed by his silence during the heated debate about the book and its author. That is, even though he was writing intimate letters to her and probably received similar ones. Fibiger made history in virtue of her book, but she never married or produced any other writing that could be compared to the epistolary novel. Rather, later she worked as the first female telegrapher and then died young. She also provoked anger from Gyllembourg, who criticized her son for being intoxicated 'on bad wine.' In fact, Fru Heiberg omitted her late husband's preface to Fibiger's novel from the collected edition of his works.

Nun skillfully creates the context both for Fibiger's novel and the debate surrounding it. She provides a vivid picture of the author and of her interpreters. One of these interpreters was Kierkegaard, even though he only reviewed the novel for himself—fragments of it were found in his unpublished papers. His sarcastic remarks are just as surprising as is the lack of references concerning the real substance of *Clara Raphael*. With that being said, he obviously had followed the debate closely. He had a low opinion about the talents of women and rejected the emancipatory efforts of his time as 'diabolic'. Earlier, Kierkegaard had made fun of Heiberg's invitation of women to attend his lectures on Hegel and he even compared women to Jews to suggest that they lack certain intellectual qualities.

Yet, Kierkegaard's silence is most striking when compared to his immense empathy for women in many of his writings and his psychological understanding of their position in some of the pseudonymous works. He was even a virtuoso of heterosexual eroticism in literature. It is also important to recall another telling silence in Kierkegaard's life: any mention of his mother. Kierkegaard's mother had been the maidservant for the home of his deeply religious and fatally melancholic father. She conceived Kierkegaard before she and his father were married and before the year of mourning had passed for the first wife. These factors may help explain some of the ambiguities Kierkegaard further develops in his oeuvre regarding women, comments indicative of his experiences from birth to adolescences and yet deeply buried in him due to the fact they were never reflected openly in any of his works.

The closing chapters of *Women in the Danish Golden Age* are also important because Nun follows different reflections on Fibiger's book with a thorough discussion of Martensen's views of the emancipation of women in the context of his *Christian Ethics*. She provides a complex and in-depth historical analysis of the society based on its religious tradition and practice, which was challenged at that time by many aspects of modernization—the least the women's emancipation. The widely conservative attitude of the theologians appealed to the natural differences between sexes. They conclusively considered emancipation as a threat to marriage, because they believed that women leaving their traditional role in life would contradict the laws of nature. For Martensen, women who play a man's role are 'hermaphrodites', a striking image that refers probably more to the bishop's disturbed fantasy than to the changes already latent in society at that time.

Nun goes on to describe the steps emancipation took from the time of the Golden Age until the end of the 19th century. She includes references to John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, a breakthrough treatise commenting upon the ill fate of half of our race. Yet, the more radical and controversial views of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are not mentioned in this context, even though the workers' movement had a vision of women as emancipated and Marx considered the male-female relationship as a basic anthropological reflection on our

very identity (in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* from 1844). With that being said, what was yet to come would ultimately undermine the credibility of Kierkegaard's German and British contemporaries.

By the close of the work, Nun reveals the import of the idea of emancipation from the Golden Age, thereby providing a historical context for the events and developments of today's Danish society. In Katalin Nun's hands, the past seems to be our contemporary by the way she reveals its mechanism.

The Discourses on Wonder:

Foundations of Kierkegaard's Metaphilosophy and Political Theory

Robert Wyllie

Introduction

In December 1841, Schelling's much-anticipated lectures on a positive philosophy of revelation began to disappoint Kierkegaard, who had hoped that they would supplant negative, "presuppositionless" Hegelianism with a "positive" philosophical system that started with wonder.¹ Plato and Aristotle shared the view that wonder motivated philosophical inquiry. But rather than reviving the classical philosophical method, Schelling's lectures seemed to devolve into haphazard mythological digressions—and not just to Kierkegaard.² An unhappy Kierkegaard would later claim (in the guise of Vigilius Haufniensis), "it was less clear to me what he really meant by positive philosophy, except insofar as it became evident that it was the philosophy that he himself wished to provide."³ After Schelling's failure to articulate a coherent positive philosophy, Kierkegaard set out to write a negative, satirical account of modern philosophy.

In the unfinished and unpublished *Johannes Climacus* (1842), Kierkegaard distinguishes ancient philosophy, which begins with wonder, from modern philosophy, which begins with doubt.⁴ Climacus, a precocious young philosophy student, cannot understand how the discipline could possibly begin with doubt.⁵ What exactly was doubted in the first place? Climacus does not consider doubt of ordinary language, cultural practices, scientific theorems, or anything outside of "pure philosophy." Kierkegaard makes Climacus seem almost comically naïve: "The more Johannes thought about this matter, the more obvious it became to him that [doubt] was not the way into philosophy, because that thesis destroyed the very connection."⁶ Then, Climacus recalls an alternative to doubt, wonder: "To the best of his knowledge, the Greeks taught that philosophy begins with wonder [*Forundring*]."⁷

Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion seems to entertain the ancient view that philosophy proceeds by wondering (*Beundring*) that is stimulated by some object of wonder (*Vidunder*). In resignation and desperate hope, the

¹ Schelling does favorably reference this Platonic/Aristotelian metaphilosophical view of wonder in his lecture of January 3, 1842. Komm. til SKS 4, 280, 7 / KW II 373.

² Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 330-332.

³ SKS 4, 363 / KW VIII 21n.

⁴ SKS 15, 38 / KW VII 145.

⁵ Hegelian abstraction about consciousness elevating itself to thinking is singled out (KW VII 150). This comes from two Danish Hegelians, Peter Michael Stilling and the famous Johan Ludvig Heiberg (KW VII 327 n13-15). For Climacus, they seem to wave away doubt with meaningless abstractions (KW VII 164).

⁶ SKS 15, 46 / KW VII 155.

⁷ SKS 15, 38 / KW VII 145.

knight of faith in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) is struck by wonder.⁸ Likewise, the poet composing a tale of royal love in *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) is suddenly wonderstruck.⁹ Between the purely human effort of resignation and faith, Kierkegaard often interpolates an experience of wonder.¹⁰ It is first mentioned in *Repetition* (1843), when Constantin Constantinus describes the knight of resignation: “Humanly speaking, his love cannot be realized. He has now come to the border of the wondrous [*det Vidunderliges Grændse*].”¹¹

Wonder—which refers both to a passion and the phenomena that elicit passionate wonder—is an important recurring theme in Kierkegaard’s authorship.¹² Unfortunately, English translations render this term in various ways—wonder, marvel, miracle, and even prodigy¹³—that obscure the meaning that Kierkegaard invests in *Beundring*, *Vidunder*, and other cognates of *Under*. As a result, the concept can be overlooked by readers of English translations.¹⁴ Kierkegaard uses wonder most plainly as a metaphilosophical concept, the sticking point in his own *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*.

Although wonder plays a role in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous philosophical works, it is chiefly his non-pseudonymous discourses that comment upon, critique, and even deconstruct philosophical wonder. In *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1843), *Two Upbuilding Discourses* (1844), and *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (1845), Kierkegaard explores where wonder leads to, and interpolates himself in an ancient argument between Plato and Aristotle. These texts help clarify Kierkegaard’s self-understanding of his own “untimely” classical philosophical project.¹⁵

Wonder as a Passion

The wonder [*Vidunderet*] is first mentioned in *Fear and Trembling*, where it is a vague and inexplicable occurrence. It is a change in an internal state, not a visible or audible phenomenon. Johannes de Silentio describes the perplexing case of the knight of faith versus the knight of resignation. The ‘more wonderful’ knight of faith “does exactly the same as the other knight [of infinite resignation] did: he infinitely renounces the love that is the substance of his life, he is reconciled in pain. But then the wonder happens [*men da skeer Vidunderet*], he makes one movement even more wonderful [*forunderligere*] than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her—by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible.”¹⁶

The wonder manifests itself independently as a transformative change in internal state. The internal change is “absurd” insofar as one cannot account for how the phenomenon of wonder manifests itself (i.e., via this or that

⁸ SKS 4, 136 / KW VI 41.

⁹ SKS 4, 242 / KW VII 36.

¹⁰ Wonder plays the pivotal role in the “double movement” of Kierkegaardian faith; it is the condition that makes it possible to move from resignation. For the concept of a “double movement,” see Roe Fremstedal, “Kierkegaard’s Double Movement of Faith and Kant’s Moral Faith,” *Religious Studies* 48:2 (2012), 199-220.

¹¹ SKS 4, 55 / KW VI 185.

¹² See Robert Wyllie, “Wonder” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception, and Resources* Vol. 15, Tome VI, eds. Steven Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 259-265.

¹³ See, for example, KW VIII, 12 / SKS 4, 320; Preface VII, 39 / SKS 4, 501.

¹⁴ For instance, Julia Watkin’s otherwise excellent dictionary of Kierkegaardian terms includes an entry for the game “wonder stool” but not wonder. Cf. Julia Watkin, *The A to Z of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

¹⁵ Like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard is a devoted student of the classics who recovers the philosophical concerns of the ancient Greeks. Nietzsche’s own ‘untimely meditations’ begin with a harangue against the “unphilosophical admirers of *nil admirari*... [who] seek to understand everything historically.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

¹⁶ SKS 4, 141 / KW VI 46. Translation modified.

Kantian category of intuition). *How* one perceives the wonder is inexplicable; it falls outside human beings' normal categories of intuition, or understanding. Abrahamic faith comes from this a divine activity, the unique experience beyond the understanding, or "the one and only wonder."¹⁷

If the wonder now seems like special revelation, Johannes de Silentio emphasizes it is a passion that anyone, even—in fact, especially—the humblest individuals can feel. Kierkegaard approvingly cites Lessing's dictum that passion is egalitarian, manifest the same way to queens and peasants alike. Johannes de Silentio insists, "Faith is a wonder [*et Vidunder*], and yet no human being is excluded from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is a passion."¹⁸ A tension between "the wonder" as divine manifestation and "wonder" as a human passion remains (for now). Kierkegaard uses the same word to blur the lines of the sharp and longstanding theological controversy over whether God or humans "make the first move" in the economy of salvation.

More willing to analyze psychology than soteriology, Kierkegaard links wonder to anxiety and ultimately worship. The passion or sensation of wonder, regardless of what is wondered *at*, is what Kierkegaard will later call an ambivalence of fear and blessedness, and an invitation to worship.¹⁹ To complete the first movement of faith (infinite resignation) and to consider the second movement (realizing that one is nothing without God) is to be simultaneously gripped by anxiety. Johannes de Silentio describes this sensation as being blinded, "My eyes darken. Every time I want to make this movement, I almost faint; the very same moment I wonder absolutely [*beundrer jeg absolut*], I am seized with great anxiety."²⁰

Absolute Wonder

Wonder may inspire faith, but it has unique problems as a starting-point for philosophical thinking. Kierkegaard does not consider philosophy as a mere historical litany of what has astonished different persons over time. In the early 1842 sketch, Climacus frets, "If philosophy had begun with a positive principle, it would have been totally impossible to deduce this consequence with respect to the historical... A principle such as [wonder] cannot give rise to any historical consequence whatsoever..."²¹ One might wonder upon seeing a 3-D printer for the first time, or one's newborn child, or a Caravaggio painting. Objects of wonder vary across cultures, and also according to individual taste. Is there an "absolute" object of wonder, incomparable to every other wonderful thing?

If it is more than a catalog of history's astounding phenomena, philosophy requires an absolute object of wonder. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus compares two contenders: Platonic Forms and divine revelation. For Plato, ordinary wonder (*thauma*) connotes of perplexity or *aporia*.²² (Theaetetus, for example, is described as "lost in wonder" at the paradoxes of Socrates.)²³ But the "wondrous vision" of the Forms is a second, qualitatively different wonder that is not dispelled by knowledge.²⁴ In the *Phaedrus*, the Platonic lover recognizes a true

¹⁷ SKS 4, 136 / KW VI 41. Translation modified.

¹⁸ SKS 4, 159 / KW VI 67. Translation modified.

¹⁹ SKS 5, 399 / KW X 18.

²⁰ SKS 4, 142 / KW VI 48. Translation modified.

²¹ SKS 15, 38 / KW VII 145.

²² Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of the Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy*, 256.

²³ Plato, *Theaetetus* 155c-155d.

²⁴ *Symposium* 210e. Cf. *Republic* 500c-d., *Phaedrus* 251a-254a.

beauty in his beloved *that he has seen before*; it is both unparalleled and familiar.²⁵ In philosophical wonder, Plato thinks, one may attain unshakeable eternal knowledge that is absolutely wonderful.

For Kierkegaard, Socrates is paradigmatic of philosophical wonder, not doubt. In the *Apology*, Socrates claims to have begun philosophizing in wonderment at the Pythia's oracle that he was the wisest of all men.²⁶ Socrates does not doubt others' wisdom in the first place, but rather wonders how (and not if) he is the wiser than them. Kierkegaard is sensitive to irony here—Socrates may be putting the jurors of the *ekklesia*, rather than himself, in the position of impiously contravening the gods.²⁷ Even so, Kierkegaard does not regard Socrates' "absolutely negative" irony as presuppositionless, but as beginning in wonder.²⁸ And by bringing his interlocutors to *aporia*, Socrates instills in them the same initial sense of that wonder.

Kierkegaard privileges "the Socratic" in *Philosophical Fragments*, but he also takes the Aristotelian view, developed against Plato, that wonder *ends* where theoretical understanding begins. Aristotle concurs with Plato about the starting-point of philosophy: "It is through wonder that men originally begin, and still begin, to philosophize."²⁹ But since Aristotle jettisons the Forms, he thinks that to apprehend the cause of phenomena is to "escape" wonder or perplexity.³⁰ Kierkegaard is inclined to agree in *Johannes Climacus*: "Wonder is plainly an immediate category and involves no reflection upon itself. Doubt, on the other hand, is a reflection category."³¹

In two 1844 texts in particular, *The Concept of Anxiety* as well as *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard's fascination with 'theorizing the causes' of wonderful phenomena has an Aristotelian expression. To analyze the wonder, Climacus looks to *kinēsis* (Aristotle's term for modal change, which Kierkegaard learned from Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg) to describe the paradox of eternal knowledge coming to be in time. Vigilius Haufniensis suggests the Christian/Platonist dialectic; where Platonic *anamnesis* or recollection looks "backwards" to what one has known for all eternity, Christians find a paradox of eternity coming to be.³² In his idiosyncratic study of philosophical wonder, Henry Bugbee wonders if this is not an elusive absolute object of wonder concealed in Aristotle's thinking:

"One is tempted to suppose that Aristotle thought of philosophy as allaying the wonder in which it is initiated... In all of Aristotle's philosophy there seems to be but one prominent notion suggestive of a different version of the matter: With the notion of the unmoved mover philosophical reflection would eventuate in *an ultimate occasion for incorrigible wonder*."³³

Kierkegaard finds an ultimate occasion for wonder here, but it is not incorrigible. As Kierkegaard's discourses show, the unmoved mover ("the one and only wonder") can indeed be doubted.

This absolute wonder is presented in *Philosophical Fragments* amidst a love poem. The poet is describing a king's love for a maiden. The king does not want to overawe the maiden and compel her love, and so disguises himself

²⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 251a-254a.

²⁶ Plato, *Apology* 21a.

²⁷ SKS 1, 210 / KW II 160.

²⁸ SKS 1, 307 / KW II 271.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 982b.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983a14-15.

³¹ SKS 15, 38 / KW VII 145.

³² KW VIII 88.

³³ Henry Bugbee, *The Inward Morning* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 38. (Emphasis mine.) Bugbee will share his concerns that wonder, in Kierkegaardian inwardness, is unresponsive to the immanent or natural world. If this generalization is true, Kierkegaard's sense of wonder (in this respect) is more in keeping with the Platonic, rather than Aristotelian, tradition of wonder. Cf. *Ibid.* 95-96.

as a lowly servant. Poetic wonder at a Form of Beauty in which earthly beings participate suddenly shifts, causing the poet to undergo a profound internal change. The thin allegory between the royal love poem and the incarnation of Christ is lifted, and the poet suddenly “sees” how the eternal god might actualize the godhead—disguised—in time as a god-man. Climacus records his reaction:

“But then my soul is gripped by a new wonderment [*Forundring*]³⁴—indeed, it is filled with adoration, for it certainly would have been odd if it had been a human poem... Is not the whole thing wondrous [*vidunderlige*], does not this word come to my lips as a felicitously foreshadowing word, for do we not, as I in fact said and you yourself involuntarily say, stand here before the wonder [*Vidunderet*]?”³⁴

After introducing the wonder, at the end of Chapter II, Climacus himself will abruptly leap from poetry to the philosophy of the religious sphere.

Climacus’s philosophy of religion never gets a clear exposition, however. The subsequent chapters of *Philosophical Fragments* jumble the analytic concepts outlined in the first two chapters. One reads: “Faith itself is a wonder, and everything that is true of the paradox is also true of faith. But within this wonder everything is structured Socratically, yet in such a way that the wonder is never canceled—the wonder that the eternal condition is given in time.”³⁵ Kierkegaard’s jargon—*paradox, faith, wonder, condition*—is bewilderingly ambiguated, suggesting that Kierkegaardian faith has a paradoxical structure itself.³⁶ Kierkegaard intentionally obscures the philosophy of religion that Climacus develops, since the wonder is “only for faith.”³⁷ He explains his reticence in his non-pseudonymous discourses.

Wonder or Grace versus Doubt

Wonder does double duty as phenomenon and passion—“the wonder” and “wonder”—bringing Kierkegaard fretfully close to a theological controversy about the respective human and divine roles in salvation. Yet Kierkegaard wants to deploy wonder as an *explanans*, never a theological *explanandum*. His description of the wonder, however, unavoidably raises questions. Does God simply unveil divine wondrousness to some, and not others? Kierkegaard’s discourses provide some answers. In the course of *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1843), Kierkegaard emphasizes that faith is a gift from God while contemplating a passage from the First Letter of James: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1: 17-22). The perfection of the gift of faith is that God also gives the condition to receive faith.³⁸ Johannes Climacus will later confirm this is not only a perfection, but the wonder, “the wonder that the eternal condition is given in time.”³⁹

Monergism, the position that God alone effects salvation, is commonly associated with the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace and a tradition of predestinarianism stretching back to Augustine. Lee C. Barrett points out Kierkegaard’s alignment to the Augustinian emphasis on grace (as opposed to a Pelagian emphasis on works) keying his *pathos* of faith to gratitude for God’s grace.⁴⁰ Although one may appear to work towards salvation, Kierkegaard offers an illustration for why this may be illusory in the posthumously published *Judge for Yourself!*

³⁴ SKS 4, 242 / KW VII 36.

³⁵ KW VII 65.

³⁶ For the view that Kierkegaard’s definition of faith is paradoxical, see Robert Wyllie, “Kierkegaard’s Eyes of Faith: The Paradoxical Voluntarism of Climacus’s *Philosophical Fragments*,” *Res Philosophica* 90:4 (2013), 545-564.

³⁷ KW VII 93.

³⁸ SKS 5, 139 / KW V 136.

³⁹ SKS 4 267 / KW VII 65.

⁴⁰ Lee C. Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections Between Kierkegaard and Augustine* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 258-273.

(1851). He describes “little Ludwig” pushing his baby carriage beneath his mother, who is the real motive force behind the carriage, but whom he cannot see without craning his neck or turning around.⁴¹ Even if it appears that we are saving ourselves with Pelagian exertion, God in fact saves us. The wonder—an experience where grace is overwhelmingly manifest—is where Kierkegaard places his emphasis on the divine role in human salvation.⁴²

But for Kierkegaard grace is not irresistible; not every individual who receives the condition, and experiences the wonder, forever remains secure in faith. The wonder can be resisted by doubt. (Denying irresistible grace seems to align Kierkegaard with the Arminian rather than the Calvinist position on election.)⁴³ But for Kierkegaard grace is resisted in a particular way—through doubt. Doubt insists that the entire experience lies within the understanding, thus annihilating wonder. Heidegger explains the conundrum of the Aristotelian view where theoretical understanding eliminates wonder: wonder calls for explanation, but explanation destroys wonder.⁴⁴ Doubt reflects upon the wonderful experience, destroying its immediacy. Johannes Climacus defines belief as a “sense for coming into existence.”⁴⁵ In doubt, one loses the sense that the eternal wonder is even now coming into existence; one loses contemporaneity with grace.

Kierkegaard’s polemic against doubt may appear to dogmatically circumscribe philosophy. Philosophical reflection, like all reflection, includes doubt. But he has forbidden doubt from analyzing the wonder, and set the wonder apart from the understanding. Kierkegaard warns, “the condition is itself a perfection, so it is essential that it be kept as such, that it not be divided and fragmented so that it has only a half meaning, and also that it not be garbled. While the eyes of faith, then, steadfastly continue to be set on that which is above, quietly see heaven open, the apostle would now allow, indeed encourage, the single individual to use doubt in the right way, not to doubt what stands firm but to doubt that which in itself is transitory, which will more and more vanish, to doubt himself, his own capacity and competence, so that it becomes an incapacity that is discarded more and more.”⁴⁶

But one will notice that Kierkegaard is not closing the door on philosophical reflection, but only insisting that doubt be used “in the right way.” Kierkegaard thinks, not unreasonably, that one should reflect first upon the capabilities of human cognition *before* assessing the plausibility of the wondrous intuition.

What Kierkegaard cannot do is “use doubt” against the wonder, analyzing or confusing the wonder. This is why the analytic philosophy of religion in *Philosophical Fragments* must ultimately be scuttled. If the wonder could be understood, it would no longer inspire wonder (or it might inspire wonder at its cleverness). So once Climacus introduces the concept of faith in Chapter IV, these apparent distinctions disappear in a jumbled heap. Neat philosophically distinct terms are identified with each other, one after another. Faith is a wonder.⁴⁷

⁴¹ KW XXI 25.

⁴² This is despite the disavowals of predestination in Kierkegaard’s journals. Cf. JP 3 3548, JP 3 3550, JP 4 4551.

⁴³ Timothy Jackson, “Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will,” *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 235-256.

⁴⁴ Heidegger writes, “While wonder must venture out into the extreme unusualness of everything, it is at the same time cast wholly on itself, knowing that it is incapable of penetrating the unusualness by way of explanation, since that would precisely be to destroy it.” Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Questions of Philosophy*, trans. Rojcewicz and Schuwer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 144.

⁴⁵ SKS 4, 283 / KW VII 84

⁴⁶ SKS 5, 139-40 / KW V 137.

⁴⁷ SKS 4, 261, 267 / KW VII 61, 65

Skeptical philosophy may employ doubt, for Kierkegaard, so long as it *first* properly determines the limits of human understanding. Kierkegaard's exhortation to "use doubt in the right way" in *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1843) is a propaedeutic to *Philosophical Fragments*, where Climacus uses doubt in the right way to determine where the senses cannot lead. Doubt properly establishes the limits of the understanding, making room for faith. The single individual can look heavenward with the "eyes of faith," while simultaneously doubting that there is a rational basis to refute this wonderful intuition.

What happens when doubt is used to analyze the wonder, and bring it within the understanding? The same upbuilding discourse of 1843 appears to inveigh even against describing the object of faith as a wonder. Kierkegaard equates wonder to a proof [*en Beviisning*] or an identifying sign [*Kjendetegn*]:

"How should such an identifying sign be constituted...? Should it be a sign, a wonder [*et Tegn, et Vidunder*]? Is not wonder [*Vidunderet*] the alchemy of doubt, with which it is never combined? Should it be an experience? Is not doubt the very unrest that makes the life of experience unstable so that it never finds peace or takes a rest, is never finished with observing, and even if it ever did that would never find rest?"⁴⁸

It seems strange at first for Kierkegaard to call wonder an "alchemy of doubt." After all, only several months earlier he had published *Fear and Trembling*, where the knight of faith saw the wonder. It would be strange to read that "wonderful movement" as something that involves doubt.

The metaphor of alchemy implies the impotence of doubt to create wonder. Just as alchemists desire gold they cannot synthesize, so critical intelligence cannot, on its own, take stock of the apperceived wonder. Kierkegaard's thoughts here anticipate Climacus's claim in *Philosophical Fragments* that the wonder is "only for faith."⁴⁹ And it explains why the poet of *Fragments* has a powerful intuitive sense of not having written his poem of incarnation. Assurance of divine grace is impossible, for Kierkegaard, for the individual who doubts *anything* is beyond his or her understanding. Such an individual is not only doubtful, but envious of divine omniscience. The only proof [*Beviset*] of the wonder is not made "in the way that doubt demands," but comes from setting the believer's eyes up towards heaven in a gaze that "no envy obscures."⁵⁰

In this way, it is not doubt (which is opposed to belief) but *envy* that becomes the opposite of wonder. Only envy is capable of rejecting the wonder, or taking "offense." In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis considers Descartes' claim in the *Passions of the Soul* that wonder (*l'admiration*)—a first encounter with an astonishing object—is the only passion that has no corresponding opposite.⁵¹ Haufniensis disagrees. But it is not boredom that Haufniensis proposes as the opposite of wonder, but "envy corresponds to the wonder, and recent philosophy would also speak of doubt. Precisely in this lies the fundamental error of recent philosophy, that it first wants to begin with the negative instead of with the positive."⁵² Envious human beings are unwilling to admit their own untruth or insignificance. And in *Two Ages*, envy becomes the "negatively unifying principle" of

⁴⁸ SKS 5, 138 / KW V 135.

⁴⁹ SKS 4, 290 / KW VII 93.

⁵⁰ SKS 5 138 / KW V 135-6.

⁵¹ Descartes, *Tractatus de Passionibus Animae; Passiones, sive Affectus Animae*, II: A. LIII, *Opera Philosophica* (Amsterdam: 1685) ASKB 437, 27. In a suggestive footnote to the English translation of *Philosophical Fragments*, Howard Hong suggests that Kierkegaard, "under the influence of the double meaning of the Latin *admiratio*" may conflate the Danish words for 'wondering' [*Forundring*] and 'admiring' [*Beundring*] (KW VII, 80). Kierkegaard freely plays with the cognates of *undre*.

⁵² SKS 4, 445 / KW VIII 146n.

modern, reflective public society.⁵³ Envy and doubt become the foundations of Kierkegaard's analysis of contemporary philosophy and politics.

Wonder Against Envy

In the second of the *Two Upbuilding Discourses* (1844), published three months before *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard returns to his concept of wonder. Here, he meditates upon the prophet Anna's "*Patience in expectancy*" (Luke 2:33-40). Kierkegaard beautifully calls all life "one nightwatch of expectancy."⁵⁴ The goal of life is to keep contemporary with one's expectancy, as Anna does in Luke's gospel. Kierkegaard laments the prevalent contemporary prejudice that only foolish people are easily astonished; "People often lament that life is so impoverished, existence so powerless in all its magnificence, that it seeks in vain to take the soul by surprise or to captivate it in wonder [*Beundring*], since the wonder at nothing is the highest wisdom, and to expect nothing is the highest truth."⁵⁵

Kierkegaard criticizes a pervasive knowing skepticism among both philosophers and ordinary people. As for the philosophers, Vigilius Haufniensis argues in *The Concept of Anxiety* that "fundamental error" of modern philosophy is that it begins with the negative, that is, with doubt.⁵⁶ Beyond this metaphilosophical point, Kierkegaard famously believed that droves of human beings were unwittingly in despair, misidentifying despair with passing phases of childish fear or adolescent angst.⁵⁷

A passionate idealist, Kierkegaard finds the failure to wonder widespread. Surprisingly, on this subject, Kierkegaard finds praise for political idealists. In *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard argues that "even the idea of freedom and equality is not without form" and that "revolution is essentially... revelation by an expression of energy that is unquestionably a definite something ..."⁵⁸ Essential truth requires conforming one's actual existence to an idea. Kierkegaard's description of causally "active" ideas strikes a chord with Platonism. Wonder shapes the individual's essential truth. Kierkegaard, for his part, always aimed to conform existence to *the* idea, an absolute or eternal truth. And so Kierkegaard criticizes passing enthusiasms—from a woman who dresses in finery for no reason to those that seem like lofty political principles with a venerable history—in search of an absolute idea.

Envy is behind the human desire to puff oneself up with a sham ideality. After the Corsair affair of 1845 and 1846, Kierkegaard came to see the modern public sphere as a noisy throng of individuals afraid of being discredited. Human beings are merely impermanent states of consciousness, but are envious of being far more. The hortatory Kierkegaard of the discourses writes:

"If, however, a person knew how to make himself what he truly is—nothing—knew how to set the seal of patience on what he had understood—ah, then his life, whether he is the greatest or the lowliest, would even today be a joyful surprise... there is truly only one eternal object of wonder [*Beundringens evige Gjenstand*]⁵⁹—that is God—and only one possible hindrance to wonder [*Beundringen*]⁵⁹—and that is a person when he wants himself to be something."⁵⁹

⁵³ SKS 8, 78 / KW XIV 81

⁵⁴ SKS 5, 207 / KW V 206.

⁵⁵ SKS 5, 224 / KW V 226.

⁵⁶ SKS 4, 445 / KW VIII 146n.

⁵⁷ SKS 11, 172 / KW XIX, 57.

⁵⁸ SKS 8, 63 / KW XIV 65-6. Translation modified.

⁵⁹ SKS 5, 225 / KW V 226.

God is the only eternal object of wonder, in contrast to Johannes Climacus's consideration of the Platonic forms. But Kierkegaard is not unsympathetic to the difficulties for disenchanted moderns in particular to remain patient in wonder.

At times, it appears that doubt is the hindrance to wonder. Certainly, doubt is a hindrance to belief. In the first of the *Two Upbuilding Discourses* (1843), Kierkegaard calls doubt "a deep and crafty passion, but he whose soul is not gripped by it so inwardly that he becomes speechless is only shamming this passion."⁶⁰ The expectancy of faith is silent, still, and steadfast, while doubt "sneaks around," "whispers," and "disgraces itself by speaking."⁶¹ Envy and doubt toot their own horns, while paradoxical wonder waits in silence with "awe-inspiring words" of "solemn silence."⁶² This is where worship begins.

Wonder and Worship

It is now clear that Kierkegaard turns to ancient philosophy to find wonder, and defends this ancient passion in what he regards to be skeptical times. To what end? In the first of the *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (1845), "On the Occasion of a Confession," Kierkegaard offers perhaps his most extended discourse on wonder. Although he will consider wonder in various directions—in *Stages on Life's Way* wonder is expanded to "all falling in love"⁶³—this 1845 discourse is in some way a conclusion of Kierkegaard's description of religious wonder.

Kierkegaard proposes that wonder is expressed in worship.⁶⁴ Worship is a "nightwatch" of expectancy where one waits for wonder (expecting it, knowing it is eternally 'contemporaneous'), or in which one waits in wonder. In the stillness of preparation for confession, Kierkegaard finds a setting removed from the "nature-echo" [*en Natur-Gjenlyd*] of the crowd.⁶⁵ With this odd term, Kierkegaard draws our attention to modern humans' ever-diminishing sanctuaries where one can be in stillness before nature or in nature. Yet it is here, in stillness—or in astonishment where we are left speechless—that worship begins. This first mode of worship Kierkegaard has in mind is not *religious* worship (on his terms), since it involves no internal change in the individual—this is wonder at an immanent reality. For transcendent reality, human beings must wait in the "nightwatch of expectancy." Like the contemporary French philosopher of religion Jean-Yves Lacoste, Kierkegaard likens worship to a nocturnal (in)experience.⁶⁶ One might even become bored and fall asleep at times. Only the angels—Lacoste reminds us that the Aramaic word for angels, *irin*, means ones who keep vigil—do not sleep.⁶⁷ Boredom is, of course, distinct from wonder, since wonder involves fear, awe, astonishment, etc. But it is not the opposite passion that annihilates wonder, since boredom is inert, temporary, and not necessarily disrespectful or contemptuous. Envy, however, is completely closed to wonder.

Wonder is closely linked to the sublime. Kierkegaard considers pagan wonder—regarding a moonlit forest, the solitude of the empty desert, or the depths of an ocean—an invitation to worship. Like the *aporia* or perplexity with which the fourth-century Greek philosophers identified wonder, Kierkegaard proposes that the proper object of wonder is the unknown or inexplicable. Wonder identifies God, writes Kierkegaard, with the

⁶⁰ SKS 5, 31 / KW V 23.

⁶¹ SKS 5, 31 KW V 23.

⁶² SKS 4, 267 / KW VII 36

⁶³ SKS 6, 114 / KW XI 167

⁶⁴ KW X 18.

⁶⁵ SKS 5, 393 / KW X 11.

⁶⁶ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2004), 144-149.

⁶⁷ Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, 78.

“inexplicable all” of existence.⁶⁸ This aesthetic immediacy between the individual and sublime nature is another egalitarian passion; it occurs in “the power of the imagination everywhere in the least and the greatest.” However, to save this passion from idolatry and pantheism, it must be admitted that this is simply poetry produced by the imagination. This will render the passion pure: “Idolatry purified is the poetic.”⁶⁹

Religious wonder—“true” wonder—is unlike the contemplation of the sublime; Kierkegaard installs a moment of self-transformation between one and the other. Unlike the less dialectical Romantics, or even Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Kierkegaard is careful not to elevate aesthetics and poetry to a religious experience. Paganism is a mode of worship and a sense of the holy. But Kierkegaard considers religious experience utterly different because it essentially involves self-transformation. It is traumatic to lose the naïve pagan wonder; this loss brings one close to despair. Scientific discoveries explain natural processes, which then (as for Aristotle) lose their magical wondrousness. But Kierkegaard is not completely nostalgic for the enchanted pagan world. Through the natural sciences, he confirms, “the understanding is able to dispose of everything that belonged to the first wonder; let it do so in order that it can enigmatically help someone to the wonder.”⁷⁰

Losing wonder in an enchanted world invites a certain despair.⁷¹ It is not uncommon to qualify modern life as bereft of an enchanted world: Max Weber’s analysis of rationalization and disenchantment is the best known. But Kierkegaard has a unique angle on disenchantment. The genuine religious sphere, transformative and transcendent, involves passing through despair. Children lose enchantment in the “magic” of fantasy worlds or Santa Claus. Kierkegaard sympathizes, “But you who are yourself in a state of wonder, you of course know that this wonder came into existence when at some time that first wonder was consumed in despair.”⁷² Yet wonder does not disappear in its second stage. It is internalized when one becomes guilty and aware of sin.⁷³ The “true” wonder actually changes the wonderer: for Kierkegaard, “the wonder is in the one who is changed.”⁷⁴

Wonder is a passion for both pantheistic “pagans” who sense the immanence of holiness in the natural world and for those who make the “leap” to the religious sphere. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Johannes Climacus dismissively treats Christians from the superstitious masses to the defenders of world-historical Christendom as “baptized pagans.”⁷⁵ Sin-consciousness, guilt, and near-despair are exclusively characteristic of religious belief. But wonder is common to both pagan and Christian spirituality. Both pagans and Christians share a passion that is “an ambivalent state of mind containing both fear and blessedness.”⁷⁶ Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche deconstructs the (Aristotelian) impulse *to know* as an “instinct of fear.”⁷⁷ It is unsettling to live in “fear and blessedness,” and moderns uniquely have the ability to opt out.

Scientific explanation can detract from the mysteriousness of the natural universe, but Kierkegaard argues that extending the understanding to explain God is a category mistake. Kierkegaard asks, “can the Omnipresent One

⁶⁸ KW X 19.

⁶⁹ KW X 19.

⁷⁰ KW X 26.

⁷¹ Aristotle, *Physics* 645a

⁷² KW X 23.

⁷³ KW X 28.

⁷⁴ KW X 20, 26.

⁷⁵ CUPH 514.

⁷⁶ KW X 18.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1974), V, 355.

actually have become like a rare natural phenomenon?”⁷⁸ Kierkegaard simply proposes that the wonder, which does not manifest itself to the understanding, cannot be debunked.

Wonder in an age of Disenchantment

Kierkegaard is writing to a modern audience suspicious of wonder, to an envious age. Kierkegaard advisedly chooses the term *envy* rather than *pride*. Human beings *wish* to be something more substantial, something less ephemeral than consciousness in a universe of constant change and becoming. Kierkegaard has said, after all—with a nod to Johann Friedrich Herbart—that (before finding an object of wonder) an individual is “nothing,” and “the only one possible hindrance to wonder is... a person when he wants himself to be something.”⁷⁹

Although modern philosophy has perhaps popularized doubt, it has not seeded thoroughgoing skepticism. For instance, the much-debated diachronic problem of personal identity seems not to have unsettled the public. Despite his vaunted individualism, for Kierkegaard the integral self is a fiction. Consequently—and unlike, say, Hume—Kierkegaard argues that individuals *must therefore* fashion themselves. Religious conversion begins by apprehending one’s own “nothingness,” and acknowledging the sin of ignorantly believing that one was “a something.” Envy stands in the way of this apprehension. Perhaps it searches for an ultimate, permanent personal identity, often selected from a pre-arranged constellation of constructs like national identity, sexual identity, class consciousness, or (most insidiously for Kierkegaard) religious identity. On Kierkegaard’s view, these operate on a superficial level because (unlike aesthetic, ethical, and religious attunements) they take the existence of the self for granted.

Kierkegaard shares with Nietzsche a more radical idea of freedom, the agent “free from all frameworks.”⁸⁰ Recently, Charles Taylor has criticized this aspiration for absolute freedom as the idealization of “pathological” individuals that are incomprehensible to others. Indeed, wonder is an incomprehensible pathos with transcendent origins. Like Nietzsche’s preoccupation with *ressentiment*, Kierkegaard argues that it is frameworks of disenchanted modernity themselves that are “pathological”: they reproduce envy. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche share a response to cultural disenchantment that is less compromising than Taylor’s. Instead of “opening their horizons” to transcendence, as Taylor proposes, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche find inspiration in the ancients to wipe the horizons of modernity away.

As an alternative to Taylor’s critique, Kierkegaard might be read as a proponent of “Socratic citizenship.” Kierkegaard endeavored to *indirectly* communicating the religious sphere that is not directly communicable. *Two Ages* identifies a political obstacle to Kierkegaard’s evangelical project—the envy reproduced by the “modern, reflective public sphere”⁸¹—which is not usually considered “political” in itself. But for Dana Villa, Socrates’ withdrawal from the democratic institutions and deliberations of Athens is a political act in itself. “Socratic” withdrawal creates space for critical questioning and intellectual autonomy, interrupting the continuum of public opinion and private assumption. Villa makes Socrates an icon of dissident “disillusioned but more authentically moral” citizenship.⁸² As Kierkegaard realized, it is even more critical to carve out the space for Socratic citizenship in the present age of mass media. But Kierkegaard refuses to disjoin the skeptical, aporetic Socrates from the idealist “Platonic” Socrates—to inspire perplexity (*aporia*) is also to inspire wonder (*thauma*).

⁷⁸ KW X 25.

⁷⁹ SKS 5, 225 / KW V 226.

⁸⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 31-32.

⁸¹ SKS 8, 78 / KW XIV 81

⁸² Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 19.

Thus, unlike Villa but like Hannah Arendt and many civic republicans, Kierkegaard models a Socratic citizenship that pushes for the re-enchantment of the world with wonder.⁸³ Critical negativity must be inspired by wonder; for Kierkegaard, the critique of the city always involves affirmation of something transcending it.

Even so, Kierkegaard does not place his hope in supermen who will one day reopen ancient fonts of wonder. He wants to preserve inner freedom—a robust *religious* freedom—within a disenchanted and noisy world. Wonder is egalitarian, it is the preserve of the humble. Humility is hard in an “information age” where the domain of the unknown is shrinking. Kierkegaard broods like a fabulist of the future, “There was a time in the world when humankind, weary of wonder, weary of fate, turned away from the external and discovered that there was no object of wonder, that the unknown was a nothing and wonder a deception.”⁸⁴ Simple people—children, lovers, and revolutionaries—can wonder, and those who maintain their wonder after receiving the condition are afforded the “deeper understanding” that comes with faith. They, as Frater Taciturnus says in *Stages on Life’s Way*, “understand to the point of wonder... a new and infinite wonder [*Under*] that God in heaven is the only one who does not become weary of listening to human beings.”⁸⁵

Nietzsche thought wondering at transcendence was degrading, a “sin” against life. But he also writes in *The Gay Science* that a wonderless “world that consists of us” alone was unsustainable, that confident humanism would collapse into self-loathing pessimism, and that this collapse would require a new vitalist philosophy of the future.⁸⁶ For Kierkegaard, conversely, imagining one’s own life as eternal recurrence is an envious sin against the eternal God. Furthermore, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard diverge in one final, subtler way. Kierkegaard may hope for “unrecognizable ones” to come in the future and re-instill wonder.⁸⁷ But he is not so certain. Religious or pagan, ludicrous or solemn, wonder has a “fragility,” it is sensitive, delicate, and childlike.⁸⁸ In Kierkegaard, more so than in Nietzsche, lurks the melancholic thought that wonder may one day disappear from the world.

⁸³ Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*, 57-8.

⁸⁴ KW X 21.

⁸⁵ KW XXI 378.

⁸⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V, 346.

⁸⁷ KW XIV 108.

⁸⁸ KW X 18.

Una armonía pre-establecida: Kierkegaard y Bergson, una exploración desde la filosofía cinemática de Gilles Deleuze

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En el presente trabajo se pretende explorar el contexto de las fuentes que relacionan la ontología del tiempo de Henri Bergson con la temporalidad ética del devenir existencial de Søren Kierkegaard, a partir de la síntesis que de ambas lleva a cabo Gilles Deleuze en la configuración de la imagen-movimiento y la imagen-tiempo como formas de una filosofía cinemática. No pretendemos hacer un análisis de los argumentos de los conceptos sino explorar el mapa que hace verosímil esta integración.

En los estudios sobre cine que Gilles Deleuze publicó en la década de los años ochenta del siglo XX establece que en ellos no trata de investigar qué tipo de pensamiento representa el cine, sino de saber “bajo qué forma del pensamiento se hace el pensamiento en el cine”¹; forma que tendrá que incluir al tiempo y el movimiento, ya que, de otra manera, el pensamiento crea su propio enemigo que no es el error, sino algo peor: las potencias de la estupidez, la maldad y el sin sentido por haberse olvidado de la fuerza del tiempo².

Deleuze fundamenta esta forma inspirado en el pensamiento sobre la realidad como duración que antes había propuesto Henri Bergson. La relación entre Deleuze y Bergson, ha sido, en el curso del tiempo, bastante explorada por los interesados en el planteamiento sobre la teoría del cine de Deleuze, sin embargo, no se ha enfatizado el papel que tienen las ideas del movimiento existencial o de la interioridad y la temporalidad del pensamiento de Kierkegaard para responder a esta pregunta. A nuestro parecer Gilles Deleuze, en su concepción del cine como pensamiento del tiempo, logra una síntesis entre la filosofía de la duración, propuesta por Bergson, con el carácter ético del movimiento y la temporalidad propuesta por Kierkegaard³ cubriendo, como afirma Rodowick, una visión integrada del pensamiento como ontología y ética del tiempo. Lo cual sería una forma de pensamiento para el futuro, para el porvenir, porque crearía no sólo conceptos o imágenes, sino posibilidades reales de modos de vida.⁴

La relación entre Kierkegaard y Deleuze no ha sido ignorada, pero se ha concentrado en la influencia del filósofo danés en cuanto a las ideas sobre el teatro, la repetición o el movimiento interior de Abraham, que Deleuze trabaja en su escrito *Diferencia y Repetición*. Desde nuestro punto de vista, la comprensión de la relación entre Kierkegaard y Deleuze no se limita solo a este escrito, sino que el filósofo danés adquiere una especial importancia para Deleuze cuando se trata de su intención de comprender el modo del pensamiento cinematográfico, como un pensamiento del devenir. Deleuze ve un tipo de complementariedad y paralelismo entre la idea de Kierkegaard sobre el movimiento y la temporalidad con la ontología de Bergson⁵.

En otras palabras, y como lo han hecho notar José Miranda Justo y Bogue⁶, Deleuze ve en Kierkegaard a uno de los pensadores que han puesto el pensamiento en movimiento y estaría actuando como un precursor del cine. Afirma en este sentido: “Cuando Kierkegaard lanza la maravillosa divisa, ‘sólo miro los movimientos’, puede comportarse como un asombroso precursor del cine”⁷. Este énfasis de comprender el pensamiento de Kierkegaard en relación al movimiento ya ha sido señalada por Clare Carlisle, quien señala que toda la filosofía de Kierkegaard tiene al movimiento como una de sus categorías principales y sus textos están plenos de metáforas del movimiento desde el momento en que el danés ha definido su tarea como la de comprender el

significado de llegar a ser cristiano y no el del ser cristiano. “The movements uncovered in Kierkegaard’s writing at once subvert philosophy’s traditional Project of knowledge and create a new metaphysics of the heart. The inward essence that empowers beings –the thing-in-itself that Hegel had expelled from thought- is rediscovered by Kierkegaard in the intensive and yet relational movement of spiritual passion.”⁸ Kierkegaard mismo, en su *Diario*, llega a subrayar la importancia del tema del movimiento: “The category to which I intend to trace everything, and which is also the category lying dormant in Greek Sophistry if one views it world-historically, is motion (*kinésis*), which is perhaps one of the most difficult problems in philosophy”⁹.

Con este tipo de idea, a nuestro modo de entender, Kierkegaard completa la perspectiva ética de la ontología de Bergson. En el pensamiento cinematográfico de Deleuze esta complementariedad se descubre como una nueva postura ética en la vida moderna, que no consiste en elegir entre objetos u opciones, sino entre modos de vida, que van desde la indiferencia total a la elección a vivir en el constante elegir la posibilidad de elegir de nuevo, como ha desarrollado Kierkegaard en *O lo uno o lo otro* bajo la voz del seudónimo Juez Wilhelm: “El <<o... o...>> que he planteado es, pues, absoluto en cierto sentido, ya que se da entre elegir y el no elegir”¹⁰.

No extraña, entonces, que Deleuze, en sus estudios sobre cine, afirme: “Kierkegaard extraerá todas las consecuencias de esto: la elección, que se plantea entre elección y la no elección (y todas sus variantes), nos remite a una relación absoluta con el afuera, más allá de la conciencia psicológica íntima pero también más allá del mundo exterior relativo, y resulta ser la única capaz de volver a darnos tanto el mundo como el yo (...) la identidad del pensamiento con la elección como determinación de lo indeterminable”¹¹.

Esta relación de paralelismo y complementariedad entre la filosofía del tiempo en Bergson y de la temporalidad ética en Kierkegaard con las que Deleuze responde a la pregunta sobre la *forma* del pensamiento cinematográfico pueden explorarse, desde nuestro punto de vista, al menos por tres fuentes. En primer lugar, la influencia que recibe Deleuze por parte de Jean Wahl, quien había sido alumno de Bergson y a quien Deleuze consideraba el filósofo francés más influyente, como afirma en una carta referenciada por Francois Dosse¹². Jean Wahl no sólo fue la puerta de entrada de Kierkegaard a Francia, sino que varios de sus libros, como el de *Metafísica o The Philosopher’s Way*, relacionan constantemente a Bergson con el filósofo danés, en particular en cuanto la idea de una filosofía del futuro o una ética del porvenir¹³. Precisamente esta es la idea mediante la cual Deleuze caracteriza al cine, reconociéndola como una herencia de Kierkegaard y Pascal¹⁴; pues Kierkegaard menciona esta filosofía del futuro en *La repetición*¹⁵ y, por su lado, Bergson¹⁶ también hace mención de ella como una filosofía que piense la realidad como el devenir constante.

La segunda fuente nos remite más allá de Deleuze, es decir, en las propias relaciones entre Bergson y Kierkegaard. Aunque se trata de una relación hasta la fecha no muy explorada, existen varios contemporáneos con el filósofo francés, que llamaron la atención a Bergson sobre la complementariedad entre su pensamiento y el de Kierkegaard acerca del tiempo. En este sentido, es notorio el caso de Georges Cattai y el de Harald Höffding. Cattai en sus dos artículos “Bergson, Kierkegaard and Mysticism” -publicado en el *Dublin Review* en 1933- y “Kierkegaard Le Précurseur” -publicado en 1955- realiza un paralelismo entre las concepciones del tiempo de Bergson y de Kierkegaard desde una perspectiva mística. Afirma Cattai: “the Danish mystic Kierkegaard – whose work is only just becoming known outside his own country- had opposed to the fictive and spatial time of mathematicians true duration, the source of the soul’s emotion in which God is realized”¹⁷.

En el artículo “Kierkegaard Le Précurseur”, Cattai habla de la relación entre Bergson, Proust, Péguy y Kierkegaard en torno a la idea del instante como plenitud de los tiempos. Al leer el artículo, y atraído por este paralelismo que Cattai realiza entre su pensamiento y el de Kierkegaard, Bergson le contesta, al parecer en una conversación personal, diciéndole que Harald Höffding ya le había hecho notar esta semejanza, y que a pesar de

que puede no ser una interpretación muy fiel a su pensamiento existe entre ellos –Cattaui y Bergson- una armonía pre-establecida, como nos refiere Cattaui: “Bergson m’avait écrit pour me dire que je n’avais pas seulement été un interprète fidèle de sa pensée, mais qu’il y avait entre nous ‘harmonie préétablie’”¹⁸.

En tercer lugar se podría explorar la relación entre Bergson, Kierkegaard y Deleuze desde la filosofía de Schelling, ya que el profesor y filósofo más influyente en Bergson, y al que él sucedió en la Academia francesa, fue Félix Ravaisson¹⁹, nacido en 1813, y que estudió personalmente con Schelling, en paralelo con Kierkegaard. Carlise Clare afirma en este sentido que Ravaisson y Kierkegaard, siendo contemporáneos, realizaron proyectos prácticamente paralelos, uno en el contexto católico y el otro en el luterano, contra concepciones estrechas de una visión materialista del hombre e instrumentalistas del bien y los valores²⁰.

Hemos explorado las fuentes de las relaciones entre Kierkegaard y Bergson desde la filosofía, pero también podríamos señalarla desde la teoría cinematográfica de André Bazin que fue quien mayor influencia tuvo en Deleuze. Porque, por un lado, como mencionan Francois Dosse²¹ y Dudley Andrew²², Deleuze no sólo reinstaló el nombre de Bazin para Francia, sino que permaneció fiel a su legado considerando que sus dos grandes estudios de cine son el desarrollo de lo que Bazin dejó en ciernes. Hay que mencionar que es André Bazin quien fundó la famosa revista *Cahiers du Cinema* que tanta influencia ha tenido hasta nuestros tiempos. Y al mismo tiempo, Bazin era parte del movimiento personalista de Emmanuel Mounier, y escritor fecundo en la revista *Espirit* que Mounier fundó. Debido a la relación estrecha con Mounier, y como ha demostrado ampliamente Dudley Andrew²³, la teoría realista del cine de Bazin, como la develación del misterio de la singularidad de lo real, se fundamenta en la visión del mundo presentada por el personalismo y el existencialismo cristiano extraído de ciertos filmes específicos como los de Jean Renoir.

El pensamiento de Mounier, y por ende de Bazin, está determinado directamente por el pensamiento de Kierkegaard. Mounier expresa que el programa de pensamiento que se propone en su famosa obra *El personalismo* es un nuevo humanismo como la síntesis entre las dos críticas a la despersonalización del mundo moderno: por un lado, Kierkegaard, que llama a la conciencia de la subjetividad y su libertad y, por otro, Marx²⁴.

Podríamos concluir que las relaciones de complementariedad entre la ontología de la duración en Bergson y el pensamiento ético de Kierkegaard que liga la elección con la temporalidad, y que Deleuze conjunta para darle forma a un pensamiento del cine como pensar del tiempo y como ética del porvenir, no es un mero artificio de Deleuze que carezca de importancia, sino que, a pesar de que Bergson no tienen una referencia explícita sobre Kierkegaard, hay diversos caminos de exploración que los relacionan: desde los pensadores como Jean Wahl, los contemporáneos de Bergson que se lo hacen notar, el paralelismo de Ravaisson con Kierkegaard y las relaciones con la teoría del cine desde el personalismo de Bazin, que establecen un camino amplio de comprensión de la realidad, la duración y la temporalidad, en una integridad espiritual, ontológica, antropológica y ética. No cabe duda que estas relaciones representan, en la historia del pensamiento, una armonía pre-establecida, como decía Bergson.

¹ Deleuze, Gilles, (2009), *Cine I. Bergson y las imágenes*, tr. Sebastián Puente y Pablo Ires, (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Cactus), p. 43.

² Cf. Marrati, Paola, (2006) *Gilles Deleuze. Cine y filosofía*, (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Nueva Visión), pp. 92-93.

³ Las referencias de Deleuze a Kierkegaard no son marginales en sus estudios sobre cine pues en varios pasajes de su obra le dedica una atención especial a las ideas del danés sobre la elección, la repetición y el cine como pensamiento. Cf. Deleuze, Gilles (2012) *La imagen-movimiento. Estudios sobre cine 1*, tr. Irene Agoff, (Barcelona: Paidós), pp. 165-170, 190-191. Cf. Deleuze, Gilles, (1985) *La imagen-tiempo. Estudios sobre cine 2*, tr. Irene Agoff, (Barcelona: Paidós), pp. 230-238. Cf. Deleuze, Gilles (2014) “El pensamiento de la elección existencial. Pascal, Kierkegaard y Sartre.” en *Cine II. Los signos del movimiento y el tiempo*, tr. Sebastián Puente y Pablo Ires, (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Cactus), pp. 603-631

⁴ Cf. Rodowick, D.N. (2010) “The World, Time” en D. N. Rodowick (editor), *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze’s Film Philosophy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 98-100.

⁵ Niels Nyman Eriksen ha señalado en un artículo sobre el movimiento en Kierkegaard cómo la concepción de posibilidad es similar a la de Bergson, y por ende a la de Deleuze. Cf. Nyman Eriksen, Niels (1998) “Kierkegaard’s Concept of Motion: Ontology or Philosophy of Existence?” en Niels Jorgen Cappelørn y Herman Deuser, junto con Jon Stewart y Christian Tosltru (editors) *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 1998*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter). P. 30, n. 17. Jankelévitch también ha señalado como Bergson hubiera visto bien la idea de salto cualitativo de Kierkegaard para hablar del concepto de cambio o movimiento. Cf. Jankelévitch, Vladimir (2006) *Henri Bergson*, tr. Francisco González Arámburu, (Xalapa, Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana), p. 68.

⁶ Cf. Miranda Justo, José, (2012). “Gilles Deleuze: Kierkegaard’s Presence in his Writings”, en Jon Stewart (editor), *Kierkegaard’s Influence on Philosophy. Tome II: Francophone Philosophy*, (Surrey, UK: Ashgate), pp. 94, n.70. Cf. Bogue, Ronald. (2010) “To Choose to Choose-To Believe in This World” en D. N. Rodowick (editor) *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze’s Film Philosophy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p.121.

⁷ Deleuze, Gilles y Guattari, Félix. (1997), *Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*, tr. José Vásquez Pérez y Umbelina Larraceleta, (Valencia, España: Pre-Textos), p. 282. El texto del que habla Deleuze se encuentra en un pasaje de *Temor y temblor*. Cf. Kierkegaard, Søren (1998) *Temor y temblor*, trad. Vicente Simón Merchán, (Madrid: Ténos), p. 30 / SKS 4,134.

⁸ Carlisle, Clare. (2005) *Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Becoming*, (New York: State University of New York Press), p. 5.

⁹ Kierkegaard, Søren, *JP IV C 97 n.d.*, 1842-4.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, Søren (2007) “El equilibrio entre lo estético y lo ético en la formación de la personalidad”, en Søren A. Kierkegaard, *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida II*, trad. Darío González, (Madrid: Trotta), p. 165 / SKS 3,173.

¹¹ Deleuze, Gilles, (1985) *La imagen-tiempo. Estudios sobre cine 2*, tr. Irene Agoff, (Barcelona: Paidós), p. 236.

¹² Cf. Dosse, Francois. (2011), *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman, (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 110.

¹³ Cf. Wahl, Jean (1948), *The Philosopher’s Way*, (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 10, 13, 201.

¹⁴ Cf. Deleuze, Gilles, (1994) *La imagen-movimiento. Estudios sobre cine 1*, (Barcelona: Paidós), p. 169, n.16.

¹⁵ Cf. Kierkegaard, Søren, (2009) *La repetición*, trad. Demetrio Gutiérrez Rivero, (Madrid: Alianza), pp. 27, 63, 64 / SKS 4, 9, 25.

¹⁶ Cf. Bergson, Henri (1959) *La evolución creadora, en Obras escogidas*, tr. José Antonio Miguez, (Madrid: Aguilar), pp. 699-748.

¹⁷ Cattai, Georges. (1933) “Bergson, Kierkegaard and Mysticism”, *Dublin Review*, V. 191-192, p. 70. En este mismo texto en la nota a pie de página Cattai nos dice: “In the course of a recent conversation, M. Henri Bergson told me that twenty years ago Harald Höffding, the Danish philosopher, had pointed out to him the affinities between his conception of time and that of Kierkegaard” *Ibid.*, p. 71. Esta misma referencia la encontramos por Harold A. Larrabee uno de los primeros introductores y editores de las obras de Bergson al inglés “He (Bergson) is plainly one of the pioneer figures of the “revolt against reason” (...) he is a descendant of Heraclitus and Plotinus and (as Höffding pointed out) Kierkegaard and many others” Harold A. Larrabee (1949) *Selections from Bergson*, (New York: Appleton-Centruy-Crofts, Inc.), p. xvii. Se sabe que Bergson mantuvo correspondencia con Cattai y Hoffding inclusive el filósofo danés escribió un libro tanto de Bergson como de Kierkegaard. Cf. Bergson, Henri (2002) *Correspondances*, (París: Presses Universitaires de Franc), pp. 141-142, 145-146, 160-161, 172, 214-215, 231, 237, 292-293, 626, 1007, 1234, 1385, 1459, 1521, 1523-1524, 1631-1632. Cf. Hoffding, Harald (1917) *La philosophie de Bergson*, tr. Jacques De Coussange, (París: Librairie Félix Alcan).

¹⁸ Cattai, Georges (1955) “Kierkegaard Le Précurseur”, en Georges Heinen & Magdi Wahba (editores) *Vues Sur Kierkegaard*, Le Caire: La Part du Sable., p. 47, n. (1). El fragmento de esta nota es la reproducción que Cattai hace de su conversación personal con Bergson. Como también nos ha indicado Habib C. Malik. Cf. Malik, Habib C. (1997) *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard. The Early Impact and Transmission of his thought*, (Washington. D.C.:The Catholic University of America Press), p.330.

¹⁹ Cf. Gilson, Étienne, Langan, Thomas & Maurer, Armand A., (editores) (1966) *Recent Philosophy, Hegel to Present*. (New York: Random House). Cf. Carlisle, Clare and Sinclair, Mark (2008) “Editor’s Introduction”, en Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, tr. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, (London, UK: Continuum), p. 5.

²⁰ Cf. Carlisle, Clare (2013) “The Self and the Good Life” en Nicholas Adams, George Pattison and Graham Ward (editors) *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), pp. 34-35.

²¹ Cf. Dosse, Francois. (2011) *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. Intersecting Lives.* trans. Deborah Glassman, (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 404, Kindle edition mini ipad 2 pos. 7907.

²² Cf. Andrew, Dudley (2005) “New Foreword” en Bazin, André, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, trans. Hugh Gray, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press), p. XXIII.

²³ Cf. Andrew, Dudley (2013) *André Bazin. Revised edition*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), Kindle edition, mini ipad 2 pos. 408-411.

²⁴²⁴²⁴ Cf. Mounier, Emmanuel (2002) “El personalismo” en Emmanuel Mounier, *El personalismo. Antología esencial*, tr. Carlos Díaz Hernández, (Salamanca, España: Sígueme), pp. 682-683.

“Born for opposition”:

The Narrator of Byron’s *Don Juan* and the Climacus of the *Postscript*

Troy Wellington Smith

Articles in translation on the British romantic poet George Gordon, Lord Byron became a regular staple in Danish newspapers by 1815 (Nielsen 366). According to Johannes Hohlenberg, when Kierkegaard studied at the University of Copenhagen, the city “was . . . full of aestheticising dandies, who went about in the guise of a Byron or a Heine, acting like somber and melancholy ironists . . .” In fact, it is even possible that Kierkegaard belonged to one such clique himself (14). Yet this Byronism was more than merely a posture; it served as a fundament for Danish *romantisme*, which celebrated the isolation, suffering, and rebellion of the Byronic hero (Rossel 210). The passions and opinions constituting the warp and woof of Byronism were taken up by the Danish literary ephebes of the 1830s, and Kierkegaard, never content to languish as an observer, sought to exhibit his own take on these demonic motifs (Fenger 313).

Like many of his contemporaries, Kierkegaard reacted against the classicist Weimar Humanism of Johan Ludvig Heiberg and his school, turning instead to the romanticism of Victor Hugo, E. T. A. Hoffman, Heinrich Heine, and Byron (Fenger 312). In his study of Danish literature in the period of 1825–70, Hans Hertel considers the advent of Byronism to be integral to the collisions and cataclysms that took place (362). Kierkegaard himself witnessed the idealistic optimism of the Golden Age yield to an orgy of dissatisfaction and despair, as Byron, who was known as “the poet of despair” exerted his influence on Denmark (Summers 291). Perceiving Hugo, Heine, and Byron, as well as the schools associated with them, as a single movement, the public warily observed a radical individualism in revolt against authority in literature, philosophy, morality, religion, and politics (Hertel 363). Whereas this individualism led inwardly to subjectivity, pessimism, melancholy, and cynicism, outwardly it aimed for emotional and social emancipation (Hertel 362). Byron was emulated by a generation of Danish poets not only for his verse and aestheticism, but also for his skepticism and ennui (Rossel 210). A poet in his own estimation, Kierkegaard may have drawn from these Byronic doubts and doldrums in the creation of at least one of his pseudonyms, namely the Johannes Climacus of the *Postscript*.

Kierkegaard’s engagement with the works of Byron was earnest if not extensive. Contained within the main collection of *The Auctioneer’s Sales Record of the Library of Søren Kierkegaard* is *Lord Byrons sämmtliche Werke* (Rohde 99). While the exact extent to which Kierkegaard read in these ten volumes cannot be definitively ascertained, Bartholomew Ryan cites passages from Kierkegaard’s publications that point to his having read some of both Byron’s first book, *Hours of Idleness*, and some of his last, the uncompleted satirical epic poem *Don Juan*. Moreover, Ryan also registers explicit references to *Manfred* and *Cain* in Kierkegaard’s notebooks and journals that indicate that he (Kierkegaard) probably read them, as well. Kierkegaard’s affinity for these two

dramatic poems ought to be explored at some point, but the present essay will concern itself exclusively with *Don Juan* and its intertextuality with—if not influence on—Kierkegaard and his *Postscript*.

As the pseudonym A writes in “The Immediate Erotic Stages,” “Even if Don Juan is not given speaking lines, an interpretation of Don Juan that nevertheless uses words as a medium is conceivable. And there actually is such an interpretation by Byron.” The young aesthete acknowledges “[t]hat Byron was in many ways particularly endowed to present a Don Juan,” but that, “when that undertaking failed, the reason was not in Byron but in something far deeper.” As A explains, the fundamental flaw in Byron’s Don Juan is that he is “construct[ed] . . . out of the context of his finite life-relationships. But Don Juan thereby became a reflective personality who loses the ideality he has in the traditional picture” (106), or, implicitly, the ideality he has in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that A awards pride of place in his pantheon of classic works of art. After a brief interlude, A, returning to his theme of Byron, writes,

As soon as Don Juan is interpreted as a reflective individual, an ideality corresponding to the musical ideality can be attained only when the matter is shifted into the psychological realm. What is achieved, then, is the ideality of intensity. Therefore, Byron’s *Don Juan* must be regarded as a failure because it stretches out epically. The immediate Don Juan must seduce 1,003; the reflective Don Juan needs to seduce only one, and how he does it is what occupies us. The reflective Don Juan’s seduction is a tour de force in which every particular little episode has its special significance; the musical Don Juan’s seduction is a turn of the hand, a matter of a moment, more quickly done than said. (108)

The musical Don Juan is, of course, the titular protagonist of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*; the hero of Byron’s *Don Juan* is one attempt at a reflective Don Juan. Although the poet’s Juan is not reflective in the conventional sense, he is wrought only of language, and thus in a Hegelian context he is essentially distinct from the immediate Don Juan of the classic opera.¹ Since the epic by definition extends through time and space, the ideality of Byron’s reflective Don Juan is severely attenuated. In order to realize an ideality commensurate to that of *Don Giovanni*, the author must turn inwards to depict the seducer’s psychology over the course of a single conquest. One cannot be sure if Johannes the Seducer is A’s pseudonym, but the irony is rich when Victor Eremita, Kierkegaard’s editorial pseudonym, writes, “Here we meet new difficulties, inasmuch as A does not declare himself the author but only the editor. This is an old literary device to which I would not have much to object if it did not further complicate my own position, since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle” (8–9). Whether or not Johannes is A’s pseudonym, “The Seducer’s Diary” certainly adheres to A’s prescription of an intensive plot for the reflective Don Juan if he is to preserve the ideality of the legendary figure (Hong and Hong 620), the very ideality—according to A—that Byron’s reflective Don Juan is lacking.

Byron scholars, however, might argue that to criticize the poet’s magnum opus on the basis of its titular protagonist is a misunderstanding. The critical consensus is that *Don Juan*’s hero is not, in fact, Don Juan himself, but the narrator. Supposing A (like Kierkegaard) read *Don Juan* in German, his unorthodox interpretation of the poem could be attributed to his having read it in translation. After all, as Goethe wrote of *Don Juan*, “as we approach closer we become aware that English poetry is already in possession of something we Germans totally

1. As A writes in the essay, “Music always expresses the immediate in its immediacy . . . Reflection is implicit in language, and therefore language cannot express the immediate” (70). Thus, whereas a “musical Don Juan,” and its apotheosis in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, is *eo ipso* immediate, a Don Juan of the printed word, such as Byron’s, is inherently reflective.

lack: a cultured comic language” (qtd. in Butler 49). If he is therefore incapable of appreciating the narrator’s comic brilliance, A would be oblivious to his heroic stature. Like the narrator in the opening line of the first canto, the pseudonym might be expected to lament, “I want a hero . . .” (1.1.1).

Nevertheless, it seems possible that Kierkegaard appreciated the narrator of *Don Juan* well enough to borrow some of his attributes for the Climacus of the *Postscript*. Broadly speaking, neither Climacus nor Byron’s narrator repose in abstract omniscience, but rather both are existent, finite human beings—that is, at least within their respective fictional universes. In his “Preface to Cantos I and II,”² Byron states that “the following epic narrative is told by a Spanish gentleman in a village in the Sierra Morena on the road between Monasterio and Seville, sitting at the door of a *posada* with the Curate of the hamlet on his right hand, a cigar in his mouth The time, sunset” (38). Concurrently, the subjective authorship of Climacus does not emanate from abstract objectivity, but rather originates from a finite temporal and spatial location, which perhaps in part explains why the *Postscript* is “unscientific.” As the pseudonym recalls, “It is now about four years since the idea came to me of wanting to try my hand as an author. I remember it very clearly. It was on a Sunday; yes, correct, it was a Sunday afternoon. As usual, I was sitting outside the café in Frederiksberg Gardens There as usual I sat and smoked my cigar” (185). Rather than abstracting themselves from existence in a bid for omniscient, scientific knowledge, both Climacus and the narrator are cigar-smoking men of leisure who recount tales from their evenings in time and space.

Upon close inspection of Byron’s narrator and the *Postscript*’s Climacus, one will note the heterogeneity of their respective compositions, or, more specifically, the interposition of the author’s self within his literary character. For instance, like Byron himself, the narrator is an expatriate of some sort. This is indicated when the poet writes in the preface, “The reader is further requested to suppose him (to account for his knowledge of English) either an Englishman settled in Spain, or a Spaniard who had traveled in England . . .” (39). The character of the narrator is complicated further when, again in the preface, Byron states, “[T]he reader is requested to extend his supposed power of supposing so far as to conceive that the dedication to Mr Southey and several stanzas of the poem itself are interpolated by the English editor” (39). This editor, too, could quite well be Byron himself, as the dedication to Robert Southey is adjudged “to be the production of a present Whig” or “the work of a rival poet” (39). By attributing the *Postscript* to Johannes Climacus but including his own name on the title page as editor, Kierkegaard creates an analogous tension between pseudonymous author and editor of his book. Just as Climacus “had been a student for a half score of years” when he finally decided to become an author (185), Kierkegaard himself was a student for a seemingly interminable period; he did not sit for his theology examination until he had been at the university for ten years (Lowrie 67). Climacus also resembles his author in having lost his father, but he mirrors Byron’s narrator, as well, in being a very aged thirty years. In the introduction, Climacus declares, “I, Johannes Climacus, born and bred in this city and now thirty years old, an ordinary human being like most folk, assume that a highest good, called eternal happiness, awaits me just as it awaits a housemaid and a professor” (15). This passage of the *Postscript*, in which the tricenarian Climacus anticipates his inevitable demise, is echoed by Byron’s narrator, who laments his mortality at the start of his fourth decade. Yet while Climacus looks forward to his rejuvenation in death, the narrator is irrevocably exhausted:

² Byron wrote this text in Venice in the fall of 1818, but it was not published until 1901 (Steffan, Steffan, and Pratt 562). Of course, Kierkegaard would not have had access to it, but, as I will demonstrate below, the cantos themselves suggest a finite, existent narrator, not an omniscient one.

But now at thirty years my hair is grey
 (I wonder what it will be like at forty?
I thought of a peruke the other day);
 My heart is not much greener, and in short I
Have squandered my whole summer while 'twas May,
 And feel no more the spirit to retort. I
Have spent my life, both interest and principal,
And deem not, what I deemed, my soul invincible. (1.213.1-8)

Whereas the narrator has come to doubt the immortality of his soul, Climacus accepts the eternality of his *a priori*. Nonetheless, he was beginning to feel senescent four years earlier on the decisive day he resolved to become an author: "So there I sat and smoked my cigar until I drifted into thought. Among other thoughts, I recall these. You are getting on in years, I said to myself, and are becoming an old man without being anything and without actually undertaking anything" (186). While youth and vitality are fundamental to the archetypal romantic hero, both the narrator and Climacus find themselves becoming prematurely ancient. One can be assured that Byron is writing autobiographically here, but, as an icon of romanticism, his words speak more broadly to the movement's enervation. In Kierkegaard's subsequent book, *A Literary Review*, he would employ Thomasine Gyllembourg's novel *Two Ages* as an occasion to contrast the incendiary "age of revolution" with the tepid "present age," and to express (under his own name) this same sense of postromantic burnout that he sketched in the Climacus of the *Postscript*.

The second part of this essay will illuminate the affinities between the respective philosophies of Byron's narrator and Kierkegaard's pseudonym. Now, this is not to suggest that Kierkegaard necessarily emulated Byron, but a side-by-side reading of the texts will reveal remarkable similarities. One might first consider that the task of both the narrator and Climacus is an adversarial one. This is only made explicit by the narrator in a later canto, but even a casual reader of the poem will recognize that this has been the narrator's program all along. As he proclaims,

No doubt if I had wished to pay my court
 To critics or to hail the setting sun
Of tyranny of all kinds, my concision
Were more, but I was born for opposition. (15.22.5-8)

Just as Byron's narrator faces the temptation of lauding his slack historical moment in a breezy paean, so does Climacus find his slothful period demanding praise:

[T]he many benefactors of the age . . . know how to benefit humankind by making life easier and easier, some by railroads, others by omnibuses and steamships, others by telegraph, others by easily understood surveys and brief publications about everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who by virtue of thought systematically make spiritual life easier and easier and yet more meaningful (186)

Like Byron's narrator, Climacus does not consider his present age praiseworthy, but rather thinks it intolerably smug. Just as the narrator is "born for opposition," Climacus, reflecting back on his afternoon in Frederiksberg Gardens, recalls, "I comprehended that it was my task: to make difficulties everywhere" (187).

One hopes that future studies of this topic will be able to determine whether Climacus's posture is specifically Byronic or that of the romantic rebel writ large, but, in any case, it is intriguing to note the philosophical positions that the narrator and Climacus mutually occupy. Consider, for instance, the first canto, in which the narrator reacts to Juan's imminent tryst with Donna Julia, the young wife who had resigned herself to a Platonic relationship with her friend's handsome teenage son (i.e., Juan):

Oh Plato, Plato, you have paved the way
With your confounded fantasies to more
Immoral conduct by the fancied sway
Your system feigns o'er the controlless core
Of human hearts than all the long array
Of poets and romancers. You're a bore,
A charlatan, a coxcomb, and have been
At best no better than a go-between. (1.116.1-8)

Climacus may not be as abusive of Plato as Byron's narrator, but he nonetheless would heartily concur with him on the inadequacy of the Platonic system vis-à-vis the existential philosophy of Socrates. "Socrates," according to Climacus, "essentially emphasizes existing, whereas Plato, forgetting this, loses himself in speculative thought. Socrates' infinite merit is precisely that of being an *existing* thinker, not a speculative thinker who forgets what it means to exist" (205). Surely, the swoon of first love that Juan and Julia experience in this scene is an essential example of "what it means to exist," and only a thinker who has forgotten the power of this feeling would be brash enough to interpose a speculative system between two lovers as a safeguard against unchasteness.

The narrator of *Don Juan* also puts forth a polemic against modern systematic thought that is later echoed by Climacus.³ Consider first the former's following two stanzas:

If from great Nature's or our own abyss
Of thought we could but snatch a certainty,
Perhaps mankind might find the path they miss,
But then 'twould spoil much good philosophy.

One system eats another up, and this
Much as old Saturn ate his progeny,
For when his pious consort gave him stones
In lieu of sons, of these he made no bones.

But System doth reverse the Titan's breakfast
And eats her parents, albeit the digestion
Is difficult. Pray tell me, can you make fast
After due search your faith to any question?

³ For more on the narrator of *Don Juan*'s prolepsis of the Climacus of the *Postscript*, see Jerome McGann (115-17, 127).

Look back o'er ages ere unto the stake fast
You bind yourself and call some mode the best one.
Nothing more true than not to trust your senses,
And yet what are your other evidences? (14.1-2)

In the first stanza of the canto, the narrator anticipates Climacus's critique of speculative thought. When the systematician claims, "Not until the end of it all will everything become clear," Climacus objects, "But if the conclusion is lacking at the beginning, this means that there is no system" (13). Byron's narrator describes one system after another being consumed by its successors, but, as Climacus implies, this dialectic lacks an ultimate τέλος. Drawing on Roman mythology, the narrator offers a simile to illustrate this want. Saturn is said to have eaten all of his children, with the exception of Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto. They were hidden from him by his wife, Rhea, who instead gave him giant stones, which he unwittingly devoured (Steffan, Steffan, and Pratt 727). Through this simile, in which stones—like effigies—are mistaken for gods, the narrator asserts the impossibility of system ever arriving at the absolute if the preceding philosophies that it has consumed are founded on untruth. Yet without these fallacious philosophies, there would be no material for speculative reflection, and hence the dialecticians have no choice but to submit them to the system in the vain hope that in the end everything will all be clear.

To conclude, the narrator of *Don Juan* could well be a source for the Johannes Climacus of the *Postscript*, but Climacus is probably a composite of several other sources, as well. A more "scientific" analysis of the *Postscript* might be able to distinguish between the pseudonym's specifically Byronic elements and those derived from Continental romanticism, but such a project will have to be undertaken elsewhere. As it has been concerned primarily with intertextuality, and not influence, this essay—in a suitably Kierkegaardian fashion—will leave the question of the narrator's direct influence on Kierkegaard and his Climacus to the discretion of the reader.

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