

# Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter

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# Kierkegaard Sources, Influences, and Reception in the Present Age of Inter-texts and – textuality

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The near completion of *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* (KRSRR) marks the success of a project—clearly the largest body of interconnected secondary literature ever published in Kierkegaard Studies—that would hardly have seen the light of day, had it not been for the bold initiative and steadfast stewardship of Jon Stewart of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Copenhagen. Fifteen volumes, some subdivided into 2-5 tomes, written by more than 150 authors of more than 40 different nationalities, and all mapping a web of disciplinary avenues of enquiry across geographical boundaries *and* historical timelines—needless to say, a series like this resists brief summation, let alone characterization. So, let me start out by sketching what the following discussion *can*—and *cannot*—offer. The concepts of “Sources” and “Reception” being intertwined, my musings will only deal with their common ground, which is my own title concept of “Influences.” What sort of intellectual and creative fertility may influences advance, in which forms, for which purposes, and on the basis of which premises?

Given that KRSRR deals with disciplines as varied as theology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, etc., each beholden to its own epistemology, my next limitation is paramount. I will be tending almost exclusively to literary and artistic influences and thus dealing primarily with matters of aesthetics, rhetoric, literary theory and criticism—and with impulses from the other disciplines I just mentioned only to the extent that the literary and art scene evolving around Kierkegaard (SK) has co-opted some of their properties. In fact, while half of KRSRR is devoted to influences on SK, my discussion will concern only those—literary and artistic—of which he may have been the source—and whose recipients/receptions are of Scandinavian, American, or German-speaking extraction. In short: vol. 8, tomes I and III; and vol. 12, tomes I-IV. Even so, sufficient versatility remains, I believe, to highlight what KRSRR, for better or worse, reveals about the role and import of literary “influence” in this day and age.

## I

To begin with a classical Nordic case, did SK influence Ibsen, at least his dramatic poem *Brand*? The author says no, but most scholars disagree, though as much with each other as with Ibsen. In my chapter for KRSRR about the existential psychologist Rollo May, I mention *en passant* how the Danish literary historian Johan Fjord Jensen around 1960 administered the traditional term “influence” in a seminal comparative study.<sup>1</sup> His expression of it suggested, in my shorthand, “an operation meant to detect similarities penetrating integral complexes and their dominating features,” on the basis of which I could rule out direct influences of SK on May, while acknowledging the possibility of an influence less literary and direct.<sup>2</sup>

In the late 1960s, literary studies progressed to the point where, in 1993, Claudio Guillén could claim that “the concept of *intertextuality*, developed some twenty-five years ago, is especially useful for comparatists [...] [as] a way to dissipate the many ambiguities and errors such as those brought along in the wake of the notion of influence.”<sup>3</sup> Guillén, in turn, credits Julia Kristeva for introducing *intertextuality*, claiming, for instance, that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of *intersubjectivity*, and poetic language is read at least *double*.” “Roland Barthes, elaborating on these ideas,” continues Guillén, “explains in passing that the “intertext” has nothing to do with the old notion of source or influence,” as in this quote from Barthes:

Every text is an *intertext*; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms; earlier cultural texts and those of the surrounding culture; every text is a new texture of past citations. Passing over into the text, redistributed in it, are bits of codes, formulas, rhythmic models, fragments of social language, and so on, because language always exists before the text and around it. Intertextuality, the condition of every text, no matter what it is, is obviously not limited to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulas, whose origin can seldom be located, of unconscious or automatic citations, given without quotation marks.

So, where does this change of paradigm leave us? When Guillén calls its benefit “for comparatists [...] considerable,” it is at least for this reason: “The concept of influence tended to individualize a literary work, but without success. The idea of intertext emphasizes the social aspect of literary writing, whose individual character, up to a certain point, is located at a specific junction of earlier writings. [...] However, other problems arise. In the first place, the authoritarian and monolithic character of the pronouncements of Kristeva and Barthes is notorious,” and so the credit and debit sides of the account may both have shifted without positively altering the balance. To quote Guillén one last time: “Our objective is to do away with the vagueness and the interminable list of facts that characterized the studies of sources and influences. But vagueness and limitlessness return at a gallop if intertextuality means anonymity and generality.”

This, I believe, is where many of KRSRR’s comp lit studies are stuck: between the rock of influences and the hard place of intertextuality. Not exactly a comfort zone, but one whose slippery outcomes we are well advised to reflect upon. Harking back to the question about SK’s possible influence on Ibsen, Eivind Tjønneland’s chapter, in Vol. 12, tome III, is brimming with points to ponder. Ibsen’s “early poetics of recollection has a close affinity to SK’s aesthetic stage of life” (146); yet on another score, “similarities of [Ibsenian] detail are more interesting than the general and often imprecise likeness that scholars claim to find between Ibsen and SK.” In fact,

Many earlier hypotheses by Ibsen and SK scholars about alleged similarities between the two are too loose or superficial to convince us of any actual influence. Why postulate influence from SK when the same ideas, metaphors, themes, or words are used by a dozen other authors? Here one should remind oneself that similarity is not a proof of influence. It is important to ask the critical question: could Ibsen have made it up himself, or could there be another source or a combination of sources that are more plausible? Many similarities between Ibsen and SK can also be explained by a common influence from a third source, for example Hegel or Goethe.” (146)

Obviously, these are judgment calls straddling, or uneasily commuting between, the criteria of intertext and influence, and almost all of Tjønneland’s comparisons are these kinds of cliffhangers. In some cases “the verbal likenesses [...] are in my opinion too scarce to allow for a conclusion of direct influence” (149), while in others, “I think one could conclude that [...] proof of influence from SK is rather convincing” (150); with particular respect to *Brand*, which “Ibsen scholarship generally agrees is the play most influenced by SK [...] this influence [...] should not be exaggerated” (155). “What exactly is Ibsen’s relationship to SK in this play? The interpretations are manifold, but the research literature has not offered a conclusive answer” (157). Indeed, “the influence from SK in this drama is complicated” (159). As for *Peer Gynt*, the situation is not much clearer, and “there is no agreement about how the different Kierkegaardian elements work in the play as a whole” (163). In *Ghosts*, “it is not common to mention influence from SK” (168), while in *Rosmersholm* “it is unclear how [a certain use of key words] could be understood with reference to SK” (170). As for *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and *When We Dead Awaken*, core formulations read, respectively, “the connection is not convincing,” “evidence of influence is not conclusive,” “there are no formulations by Ibsen which point to a direct influence from SK,” and the play “could also be understood without reference to SK” (170-71).

Why so many words to so little effect? The last quote suggests that beyond (unsuccessfully) trying to credit SK for impacting another major writer's creativity, one may desire to have him buttress comprehension of that other writer's work (if apparently to a limited extent only). For all its shortcomings, this would be an objective in the intertextual sense—with social features shared by the two writers—rather than in the sense of one influencing the other in splendid isolation.

The same can be said of the mostly far-fetched interrelationship between Edvard Munch and SK, characterized by Hans Herlof Grelland in the same volume and tome. “When we try to investigate the possible influence of SK on Munch in the first part of his career, before reading SK's works, we are left with indirect evidence. We know that in the circles in which he moved there was great interest in SK's thought, and so he could not avoid being exposed to SK's ideas” (189). Even as “indirect evidence,” this amounts to little and is rather what the author terms “general influence”; in fact, it's so general as to not be influence at all, but the type of social affinity that may go with intertextuality, for what it's worth.

The same connectivity obtains in Ingrid Basso's reference-filled piece about SK's influence on Strindberg. She italicizes *influence* in a key passage and finds it evident “when the reader is similar to the author.” The words are Strindberg's but so are the ones in her epigraph, which offers no testimony to influence. Here Strindberg instead declares that “a personality does not develop autonomously” but in intense interaction with “every other soul with which it comes into contact,” much like a bee sucking honey “from millions of flowers, in order to mingle it again and pass it off for its own” (65). A more poetic description of the intertextuality that Guillén & Co. spoke of is hard to imagine, and for all the extensively footnoted attempts in Basso's chapter to substantiate this general take on the social scope of individual artistic creativity with proof of more direct influence, the result falls short of expectations, for example when we learn that “apart from the certainty concerning the fact that in *The Free-thinker* Strindberg was not presenting SK's own ideas, which at that time were unknown to him, through the mediation of Ibsen, one can say that a very strong similarity among the ideas expressed by Ibsen's protagonist and Strindberg's really does exist” (78). No less strenuous is a call for influence that says: “even apart from the explicit references that Strindberg makes to SK in his own writings, one cannot deny that certain parallel psychological traits exist between the two authors—also quite independent of direct influence—and Strindberg himself never misses an opportunity to point this out” (80). Now, why this urgency to find influence at all costs? What purpose does it serve—and for whom—to note merely parallel traits between two authors?

## II

Searching for “influence” is not necessarily a labeling exercise ignoring the dynamics between source and recipient; as Leonardo F. Lisi has recently said of SK's influence on Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, “the notion of repetition has here been transformed from a *state* of existence to a *process*.”<sup>4</sup> And notions of even more dynamic influence are held by Harold Bloom, well known for his maps of misreading and ideas about the anxiety of influence. A virtual drama unfolds in his critiques from the 1970s of authors said to engage, as Terry Eagleton puts it, in “Oedipal combat with some mighty predecessor,” trying to triumph by rewriting or creatively misreading “his or her text as their own.” Regrettably, as Eagleton also points out, this fight to the death for the sake of poetry—or mutual deconstruction of heroic postures—lapses into such self-inflating mannerism in Bloom's later and prodigious output that Eagleton is justified in giving these exercises in “critical banality” a bloody nose. The fact that Bloom, as he writes, “was deeply scornful of historical criticism,” shows unequivocally in a typical later work of his.<sup>5</sup> In the book *Genius* (2002), wherein SK counts as an entirely literary figure, far removed from claims to being an apostle, Bloom's judgment ignores not only a large swath of SK's corpus but also the output of American critics who have forcefully acknowledged both the literary and theological impulses issuing from this oeuvre.<sup>6</sup>

I shall return to their alternative search for intertextual plurality, beyond the scope of traditional influences, later. But for now, let me simply note how Elisabete M. de Sousa's chapter on Bloom in KRSSR, Vol. 8, tome III, unfortunately compounds some of the injuries caused by her subject. She discretely, and rightly, questions Bloom's "habit of naming and citing with an ostensive lack of scholarly apparatus—footnotes, indexes, and page numbers for quoted passages," but atones for his sins of omission by turning her own chapter into a patchwork of quotations so densely and opaquely stitched that little breathing space, let alone critical perspective, is left for the reader to behold. Ironically, the most lucid point of her account is a lengthy 1970s quote from Bloom himself which states that "I do not believe that meaning is produced *in* and *by* poems, but only *between* poems" (54); this, if anything, is an intertextual creed.

So, not only lacunae in traditional treatments of SKs influence on Scandinavian giants like Ibsen, Munch, and Strindberg, but more recent transatlantic critiques, like Bloom's, recognized for rejuvenating the notion of influence, alert us to regard the wider ranges of intertextuality, which means "not simply a matter of influences which pass from one author to another, but of the multiple and complex relations that exist between texts in both synchronic and diachronic terms. 'Influence' is simply one mode of intertextuality," to quote *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* by David Macey.<sup>7</sup> To expose such "multiple and complex relations," Gerald Prince's main definition of "intertext" in *A Dictionary of Narratology* is apt: "A text (or set of texts) that is cited, rewritten, prolonged, or generally transformed by another text and that makes the latter meaningful," so that "intertextuality obtains between the two," notably in the sense of Michael Riffaterre, in whose "influential view, a text and its intertext are homologous, and the latter leaves in the former traces controlling its decipherment."<sup>8</sup>

Many observations in Lee C. Barrett's level-headed chapter on "The USA: From Neo-Orthodoxy to Plurality," in KRSSR, Vol. 8, tome III, are in sync with this prospectus. His section on "Literary Approaches" makes clear from the outset that literary reception since the sun began to set on structuralism and New Criticism in the 1970s and 1980s has been tilting toward intertextualism. "Language was conceived as an interchange taking place in an intersubjective context," and as "the rhetorical character of all language was celebrated" (247), the particular implication for the role of SK's work was that

[M]uch more consideration was given to SK's own literary techniques. Intertextual readings, juxtaposing SK's own texts to one another and even putting them in conversation with writings outside his cultural environment became common. Rather than reading in order to determine SK's "position" on topics, these critics often read SK's work as catalysts for the ongoing drama of interpretation. SK's style of writing was prized for its ability to force the reader to assume responsibility for the reader's choice of interpretations. (247)

Examples of critics with this disposition include Louis H. Mackey, Michael Strawser, John D. Caputo, Christopher Norris, and Mark C. Taylor and his "series of monographs on SK and postmodernism" for Florida State University Press. "For some literary theorists in this camp there is no hypostasized text-in-itself or transparent authorial intention available to stabilize meaning," and

[G]iven their rejection of any centered "self" transcending history and culture, SK was applauded by these critics for eschewing a consistent authorial voice, and for effacing any authorial transparency. Given the iterability and intertextuality of writing, SK was praised for renouncing authority over his own texts. SK's strategies of indirect communication were hailed as efforts to make the undecidability of writing evident in its very form. In this view, SK's indirect communication was necessitated by his understanding of language and religious meaning; indirect communication is inescapable in all matters of existential significance. (249)

Basically, prerequisites for exercising “influence” in its traditional form were undercut by this novel outlook. Yet for all the lauded devotion to SK’s rhetoric, content matters have not been crowded out entirely. A certain

category of approaches to SK attempts to synthesize the content-focused and the literary- oriented styles of interpretation. In different ways, these authors take the literary form of SK’s writing very seriously, convinced that it contributes much to the meaning of his texts, but they reject the conclusion that this literary quality leads to indeterminacy or to the subversion of theological or philosophical meaning. Rather, for them SK employs complex literary strategies in order to promote theological and philosophical interests. [...] Most of these authors see a relative open-endedness in the texts, a surplus of meaning that stimulates reflection along certain paths. Most of these interpreters also resist reducing the meaning of the texts to SK’s conscious intentions. Rather, the rhetorical strategies embedded in the texts themselves, given certain conventions of communication, promote certain types of response in the reader and thereby stabilize meaning. (253 f.)

Barrett’s account suggests that traditional influence may get shortchanged as SK’s “conscious intentions” fall by the wayside, but the intertextual space replacing it allows a linguistic/poetic “how” to continue serving a theological or philosophical “what.” Barrett mentions how some socio-political observers have situated this service between Deconstruction and the Frankfurt School (252), but he also illustrates its deployment on its own merits in cognate critiques by Sylvia Walsh and Ronald Hall, Steven Emmanuel and M. Holmes Hartshorne. To the latter, for instance, the insufficiency of Climacus’s aesthetics compels the reader to avoid the leap in favor of realizing the need for God’s grace. Thus, Hartshorne’s book acts as a performative, “illustrating the futility of turning faith into a good work” (255). Meanwhile, Edward F. Mooney orchestrates the convergence of religious interests and literary strategies in a critical reading of SK’s self as “a musical ensemble of contrasting voices, represented by the stages,” a whole field of selves within God’s “ultimate field of possibility, grounding our freedom and receptivity” (257).

Gone may be the idea of the “stages” as “a unified abstract anthropological theory” (257), but not all traces of previous modes of reception. While, say, the “infinite God” has transmuted into the “uncircumscribed ‘Other’” (258), continuity in the history of American SK interpretations is undeniable, as is an undiminished competition among viewpoints. For all of this theoretical refinement, it remains a fact that much of what a given scholar sees is already in the eye of the beholder. Barrett concludes by noting: “perhaps it is the texts’ power to stimulate such a rich interpretive conversation that ensures their continuing status as classics” (259).

Much of this enrichment—or multidimensionality—of the “interpretive conversation” was brought to the table when “influence” became “simply one mode of intertextuality,” as David Macey put it, and when text and intertext began to be noted for their homology, “and the latter leaves in the former traces controlling its decipherment,” as Gerald Prince said before of Riffaterre, who elaborates in his own words how “the intertext is hidden like the psychological unconscious and, like that unconscious, it is hidden in such a way that we cannot help finding it ... because the narrative itself contains clues leading back to it.” And, he goes on to claim, the offshoot is indeed classical, or timeless: “Subtexts [...] and the intertextuality that sets them in motion, do not unfold along an axis of duration. Like the unconscious described by Freud, the unconscious of fiction and, therefore, its truth, stands outside the realm of time and is impervious to its ravages.”<sup>9</sup>

Kristeva pointed more specifically in that direction when she spoke of intertextuality as the intersection of many texts where creative subjects, writers and readers alike, were *in process*: experiencing the critical loss of meaning and identity, but also an eruption of free associations and new connotations, and a novel interplay of contents and forms, thus a new plural identity in recreating poetic text, whose “final meaning [...] will be neither the original source nor any of the possible meanings taken on in the text, but will be, rather, a continuous movement back and forth in the space between the origin and all the possible connotative meanings.”<sup>10</sup> In the

different lingo of modernists like the Swedish poet and critic Göran Printz-Påhlson we are reminded of “the destruction of the past that is a commonplace strategy in modernism since Nietzsche [and] that makes it necessary to create a canon outside history,” and, accordingly, that “essential inaccessibility [...] is the meaning of a modernist poem.”<sup>11</sup>

### III

Even with the added sophistication of recent reception studies, the historical continuity of American SK reception to which Barrett testified also means that much precision and clarity about intertextual outcomes remain figments of the imagination. “SK’s influence on English [language] literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is far-reaching, but, by its nature, elusive and hard to chart,” writes Hugh S. Pyper in the new *Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, before he proceeds to observe that SK’s influence, directly and indirectly, rarely issued from the edifying works and thus by his own standard probably has been “partial at best and liable to be seriously misleading,” if not essentially retaining “the allure of a rather mysterious and complex figure writing in [...] what to most English-speakers was an obscure language.”<sup>12</sup> Pyper and others even surmise that as writings on the border between life and writing, SKs principal legacy, at least to English-speaking audiences, may be in the vein of de Silentio’s *Fear and Trembling*, which is written “to explore his own incomprehension.”<sup>13</sup> This sounds like Roland Barthes’s praise of the art of the impossible: “consideration of the limitations, defections, or impossibilities of writing is an essential element of literary creation,” and “great works have been created from this *absence*”—like Proust’s masterpiece “born explicitly of a book impossible to write.”<sup>14</sup> And reader-response theorists, such as Wolfgang Iser, might add to this intertextuality the reader as a co-author fully realizing the possibilities of a poetic text by normalizing its undecidabilities.<sup>15</sup>

Pyper’s brief treatment of the transatlantic poet W.H. Auden illustrates how debatable SK’s influence remains. On the one hand it was aesthetic, as an “important conversation partner in the development of his [Auden’s] later poetry,” in other words: an intertextual role. Yet the Dane’s allegedly “stern individualism and call to repentance” needed to be balanced with a more community-oriented posture, normally considered an intertextual trademark. The aforementioned Lisi, in his Auden chapter in KRSSR, Vol. 12, tome IV, conversely states that the poet, unlike many of his famous European contemporaries, “does not appear to have had any appreciation for SK’s literary qualities” (perhaps a reflection of a general Anglo-Saxon dismissal of such qualities in favor of a more “marked biographical and theological approach during the 1930s and 1940s” [Lisi’s note 13]); Auden’s SK is the Christian, not the poet (4-6), and his influence peaked as Auden converted to Christianity around 1940. In his discussion of Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, SK provides him with “the framework through which to classify particular patterns of relation and to raise them to abstract conceptual categories” (9), and even his discussion of “contemporary society” relied on SK’s conceptual tools (13). Over time, though, Auden became more critical of this influence, especially because of the religious subjectivity he saw in it (20-22).

In the case of the American author Walker Percy, the relation to SK pivots once again on the latter’s conceptual assistance (184) and double-edged subjectivity, as described, in the same volume and tome by Joseph Ballan, quite emphatically in intertextual terms: “[...] Percy admits to having struggled with SK’s emphasis on subjectivity as a corrective to objectivistic excesses at the expense of a proper appreciation for the intersubjective dimension of human life. Interestingly, Percy discovered in the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber [...] a corrective to SK’s excesses in the direction of ‘extreme individualism, subjectivity, and inwardness’” (177). SK’s critique of Hegelianism becomes a stand-in for Percy’s critique of scientism (179, 181, 185), or he conflates SK’s “aesthetic” with modern “scientific” (187), as he freely appropriates SK’s edifying texts (184) for his own breakthrough novel, *The Moviegoer*. Overall, says Ballan, these influences can be iffy, as when, for instance, “we do not insist too strongly on the veracity of this admittedly speculative interpretation [of “the knight of faith” in *Fear and Trembling*]”; nonetheless, “we can put forward the more

modest conclusion” that Percy in one of his novels has appropriated the language from two works of SK, “both of which he explicitly cites elsewhere” (187).

So, did SK’s distinction between a genius and an apostle (that Harold Bloom read in favor of the genius) lead Percy to become a Catholic? Again, the answer is cautiously affirmative. The intertextual space is both richly textured and open-ended, and what Ballan deems necessary to approach its complexity responsibly is not a new interpretation of SK, “but an *extension* or *extrapolation* of his insights as they might be brought to bear on contemporary issues” (188). For SK himself “did not produce a finished system” (for scholars to decode), but “he opened, as it were, a field of inquiry and a space of literary possibilities within which to work” (189).

Hugh S. Pyper phrases it differently as he quotes Percy for saying that he only took from SK what he could use and didn’t worry about the rest. “That is a maxim worth bearing in mind as we consider SK’s influence on creative literature. Writers are not exponents of their sources, but are stimulated by them to rework and reword the expression of their own insights and owe their loyalty to the work they are producing, not to the preservation of the work of others, however influential.”<sup>16</sup> You may call it influence, but what makes it productive is the intertextual framework; yet Pyper’s statement also confirms what we have noticed all along about this latter designation: while its strength is its multifaceted inclusivity, fomenting creativity left and right, its weakness, despite valiant efforts to administer it with rigor, is its bent towards generalizations. Printz-Påhlson, whom I quoted earlier, talks about “the all-embracing claims of intertextualism” and its dependency “on a theory of language that is relational in a wide sense, that is, allows for a wider net of relations outside the grammatical and syntactical categories.”<sup>17</sup>

#### IV

Returning now to the literary scene in Europe, these markers of intertextual rapport between SK and major writers remain in evidence, including the mixed blessings just enumerated. I offer three examples from *The Germanophone World*, Vol. 12, tome I, the first, and oldest, being Rilke in Leonardo F. Lisi’s reading. If SK were not “*the* central influence in Rilke’s life without which his development as a poet would not have been possible [...] Rilke clearly recognized in SK central aspects of his own poetic project and viewed him as an ally in his own pursuits” (214). Later we are treated to the “conjecture that SK’s appeal” for the young Rilke “was primarily as a literary author defined by his unhappy love” (222 f.), and to a letter by Rilke in which only his work life matches the sorrow-free life of the bird in one of SK’s *Christian Discourses* (223 f.). Various influenced by Brandes’s and Kassner’s SK studies, “the biographical and aesthetic qualities of SK’s writings, such as his melancholy and sublimity” remain “central to Rilke’s appreciation of him” for some time (228 f.), though later augmented with impressions of SK’s rhetorical take on Christianity and death, which Rilke translates into his own agenda as Christianity’s last stand and the fullness of time in light of human finitude (230-31). And, Lisi concludes, “of all the SK’s that Rilke could have constructed, he clearly chose the one that shared his own conviction” (232), which conforms to the conclusion Pyper offered up on the nature of SK’s influence on English-language literature and creative literature generally.

The slightly younger Kafka was, according to Nicolae Irina, “undeniably an assiduous reader of SK. However, much of the latter’s influence, encrypted in the former’s literary production, is yet to be deciphered and is already subject to various interpretations” (118). A possible clue to the encryption is a quote in which the critic Brian Edwards identifies Kafka with a certain Quixotic version of Abraham, claiming that “in SK’s theology, as in the story of his engagement with Regine Olsen, Kafka will have found the confirmation that he expected, but only by distortion” (127); at least Roland Barthes’s reference to absence and distortion behind creative writing comes to mind again here. But in light of another scholar’s suggestion that Kafka “might have assimilated Kierkegaardian ideas to his own views [...] [and] appropriated some central concepts from SK’s philosophy and adapted them to his view about existential questions” (130), Irina counsels caution: “although it has been argued for quite some time that a few of Kafka’s texts and characters are Kierkegaardian in nature,

what seems irrefutable is only that such associations are indeed feasible, some maybe more plausible than others, yet none definitely certain in terms of Kafka's own acknowledgment" (128). His conclusion about the conclusions he cites is that they are but "debatable ... attempts to identify SKs presence throughout Kafka's authorship" (131). Why this meager outcome? Does it signify the death of exclusive "influence," or the precariously inclusive life of intertextuality?

My final German-language example suggests that a mix of both may be the answer. Max Frisch, the youngest in this assembly of three, is in Sophie Wenerscheid's chapter "just like many other German-speaking authors from the twentieth century [...] affected by SK's thoughts on aesthetic existence and on the existentialist concept of freedom and self-choice" (80). At the same time, no sources of Frisch's knowledge of SK have been determined, and when it comes to "reflections on typical Kierkegaardian themes—such as choice, freedom, responsibility—[they] appear only in an isolated manner. Plus it is impossible to determine whether these really are references to SK or whether it is only a case of Frisch taking up themes which are fundamental for existential philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre" (81). Clearly oblivious of Riffaterre's criterion, the author of this chapter is clueless about intertextual traces controlling the decipherment of Frisch's texts; instead she arrests his—and others'—possible misreading of SK (based on a mistranslation) as well as these others' misreading of his misreading of SK! (84-85).

The confusion only grows when one critic, cited in a note, argues for SK's anti-influence on Frisch (85), while Wenerscheid restores his influence shortly after, but ends up undercutting many connections to SK in Frisch because they "serve rather to interpret Frisch's texts than give clear philological evidence of textual references to SK's work or of an intended discussion of relevant ideas of SK on Frisch's side" (87). After this marked retreat from intertextual analysis, what remains is an existentialist affiliate rather than an affiliate of SK—and the wishful thinking on the part of Wenerscheid that a "rereading of Frisch's work with regard to references to SK could, however, be tempting and promising if not based on existentialist aspects" (87). What a pity she didn't make her efforts serve her temptation, now the opportunity was there.

## V

I have thus far followed the trajectory of literary SK reception out of Scandinavia, across the Pond, and back into German-speaking Europe. To come full circle, I turn now to Denmark and KRSRR, Vol. 12, tome II. The first chapter, by Søren Landkildehus on "Karen Blixen: SK, Isak Dinesen, and the Twisted Images of Divinity and Humanity," has a subtitle so saturated with intertextual hints that I would have heeded them, had the text itself not been twisted beyond reach. The tome ends with Steen Tullberg's chapter on Villy Sørensen, whose SK-articles I have earlier reviewed for *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*<sup>18</sup> and to which I shall briefly return in conjunction with my mention of Tullberg's lengthy chapter on "Denmark: The Permanent Reception—150 years of Reading SK" for Vol. 8, tome I.<sup>19</sup> In between Blixen and Sørensen, Vol. 12, tome II treats us to discussions of SK and Brandes, Dalgas, Martin A. Hansen, J.P. Jacobsen, Kidde, and Pontoppidan (but not later writers like Suzanne Brøgger and Henrik Stangerup, whom Tullberg mentions for their Kierkegaardian affinities). But let me limit my comments here to William Banks's review of "J.P. Jacobsen: Denmark's Greatest Atheist."

Being also one of Denmark's greatest artists, Jacobsen would certainly qualify for SK's major league, were it not for his alternative outlook. But can such opposites meet? Banks tends to the question by beating around the bush. If Ibsen and Bjørnson had less than clear-cut connections to SK, "with respect to the relation between SK and Jacobsen [...] matters are much more muddled." And "the dearth of direct references is further complicated [by] what amounts to a seemingly irremediable ideological standoff between the two writers" (102). Yet, while "hardly any Danish writers of significance would seem more fundamentally at odds than SK and Jacobsen [...] by no means may it be said that the former did not in some manner impact the latter" (105). Elsewhere, "it has been strongly suggested that Jacobsen's inspiration was very likely SK" (105), and four times

do we hear of Jacobsen's "engagement" (107), "personal engagement" (109), "continued engagement" (111), and diminished—or deeper—"engagement" (115) with SK.

The nature of the "engagement," relative to "influence" or "intertextuality," is demonstrably in question in some elaborate passages. While his youthful "engagement" with SK is not in serious doubt (107), "there is, indeed, every reason to agree with the received opinion that SK had little if any role in the young student's renunciation of Christianity" (108). And assuming that "the single lifelong preoccupation" of the author of *The Point of View* "was the effort to undermine the illusion of Christendom" and to put in its place the notion that "each and every individual must in her own lifespan re-enact the whole of the drama of Christian belief," then "'Denmark's greatest Christian' and her 'greatest atheist' acquire a curious form of reconciliation" as "the essential teaching of [Jacobsen's] *Niels Lyhne* would seem to suggest, in the end, that the drama of non-belief is subject to no lesser measure of rigor" (117). After his many elusive verdicts on points of possible "influence," Banks here sounds adjusted to Riffaterre's homology between text and intertext, the idea that traceable clues to decipher the former are left behind by the latter.

Tullberg in his survey of Danish SK-reception shows that as post-WWI debates about philosophies of life turn more radical in the 1930s, a sounding board is in place for resonating a more radical reception of SK in the post-WWII existentialist climate. In the 1950s, poet-philosopher Villy Sørensen advances a sensibility for myth and religion that works in SK's favor, but at the same time Sørensen is a cultural radical, whose advocacy of the modern welfare state as spiritually liberating leads him to critique SK for underrating the ethical dimension of life (85-86). Of most Danish *belletrists* between the 1960s-1980s, however, "one can speak not so much of an influence that can be directly documented but rather one which concerns a deeper, more ingenious, and general linguistic (especially humoristic) and philosophical inspiration," i.e., "SK as 'the authors' author'" (69)—or as an intertextual center of gravity in Danish *belles-lettres*.

Since the 1990s scholars like Joakim Garff have tended to a Kierkegaardian subtext, "which in many places in a dialogue with an imagined reader is revealed as the New Testament narrative," while he shows other moments of SK's pseudonymous project to be drawing more "on the narrative, which the project has as a silent reference, than [on] the project itself" (87). Talking about moments, Lars Erslev Andersen has discussed SK's "moment" in terms of textual absence to be traced within "a game of difference, delay, and postponement," known from the theories of Derrida, and affording an "openness of indeterminacy," yielding an equally possible "Barthes-inspired pact between text and reader" (88-89). Meanwhile, Lasse Horne Kjældgaard advocates a "double view" of aesthetic and historical SK-readings (89 f.); and Arne Grøn argues that "the constitution of the individual in SK is build [sic!] on a dialogical principle" (90), while Klaus Wivel writes that "in his [SK's] thought the individual constitutes merely a name, a dash" (91).

The examples are all characteristic building blocks of the intertextual enterprise, some of them technically configured, others culturally contextualized. On the latter score Joakim Garff has contributed an instructive chapter on "Formation and the Critique of Culture" in the new *Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, which concludes with a view of SK the writer as written and able to understand what he wrote, or what was written via him (in his novel of formation).<sup>20</sup> As for Tullberg's conclusion to his comprehensive KRSRR chapter on SK in Denmark, it is remarkable how similar it is to Barrett's American counterpart: past controversies resurfacing in new disguises; the 'how' of textual enunciation receiving attention alongside thematic and philosophical questions of 'what' and 'why,' as intertextuality gains ground; and paradigms of the past being dethroned. It may be a pluralistic trend that greater textual exchanges ensue and the "tendency towards a broad spectrum" of reception becomes the new norm, but Tullberg finds it "difficult not to see the richness in it at the same time" (98-99).

I hope to have presented my selections from KRSRR, not in splendid isolation but in the same intertextual manner that some of the authors brushed upon. If, as a result, SK emerges as an intertextual rather than an influential author, he is both filling a conversational space and enacting his part of a critical metabolism beyond disciplinary confines. Indeed, as I cautioned at the outset, my suggestions to that effect are but small literary slices of a much larger pie of food for thought. Certainly, the intertext encompasses the interplay between SK and readers and writers responding to his works, but also the textual interplay within these works, intratexts, such as that of A and B in *Either/Or*, as well as interplays among all of these different textual entities.

To sum it all up, let me end on a note struck by Umberto Eco, a truly canonical intertextualist. In a paper called “Intertextual Irony and Levels of Reading” (220),<sup>21</sup> first published in 1998, he speaks of “the endless dialogue that goes on between texts” and its affinity to “two Model Readers,” the semantic reader who looks for “how a story will end,” and the semiotic reader, “who asks himself what kind of reader that particular story was asking him to become” (222 f.). Eco writes about the necessity of reading *Finnegan’s Wake* as “a huge intertextual laboratory” (226), but SK’s authorship requires the same, as KRSRR demonstrates so well. As to the irony that may issue from the tension between Eco’s two readers, there can be no “reading of an intertextually ironic text that ignores its dialogical element. Intertextual irony calls together the happy few—except that the more there are of these happy few, the happier they will be” (228). Whether someone like SK would go along or not, we are assured by Eco, doesn’t matter, for “the intentions of the empirical author count for little” (232). So be it!

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<sup>1</sup> Johan Fjord Jensen, *Turgenjev i dansk åndsliv: Studier i dansk romankunst 1870-1900* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1961), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Poul Houe, “Rollo May: Existential Psychology,” in *KRSRR*, Vol. 13, p. 233 f.

<sup>3</sup> For this and subsequent quotes see Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*. Tr. Cola Franzen (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 244-48.

<sup>4</sup> Leonardo F. Lisi, “Kierkegaard and Modern European Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*. Eds. John Lippitt & George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 560.

<sup>5</sup> For this and the preceding quotes by Terry Eagleton, see his *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Zizek and Others* (London & New York: Verso, 2003), pp. 168-70.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), pp. 197-202, esp. 197, 202. With his punch line that SK “was a genius and not an apostle, as he surely knew,” Bloom seeks to finalize the divorce between these two identities. But SK also knew himself to be a wannabe apostle, or as Sylvia Walsh puts it: “Acutely aware of his failure to embody the Christian ideals in his own life, SK described himself as ‘religiously and personally a penitent’ and ‘a poet who flies to grace’” (Walsh, “Kierkegaard’s Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, p. 292.).

<sup>7</sup> David Macey, “Intertextuality,” *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 203 f.

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- <sup>12</sup> Hugh S. Pyper, "English Language Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, pp. 571-72.
- <sup>13</sup> Pyper, p. 588.
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- <sup>15</sup> See Wolfgang Iser, "Tekstens appelstruktur," in Michel Olsen & Gunver Kelstrup (eds.), *Værk og læser: En antologi om receptionsforskning* (Copenhagen: Borgen/Basis, 1981), pp. 102-33.
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## **Making a Hell out of Heiberg: *En Sjæl efter Døden* as a Possible Literary Influence on Kierkegaard's Presentation of Sin**

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A group of people who function only as a crowd, as *numerus*, also function only as a machine.<sup>1</sup>

As is well known, Kierkegaard's desire to be in the presence of the 'common man' could be satisfied by slipping out of his home at *Nytorv* and immersing himself in a refreshing 'people bath' in the streets of Copenhagen.<sup>2</sup> And, at least before the Corsair controversy disrupted this quotidian pastime, it seems that such immersions provided a kind of refreshment of – or even fuel for – his authorship. This much was suggested by Andrew Hamilton, a British visitor to Copenhagen during the 1840s, who noted Kierkegaard's habit of 'walking about town all day, generally in some person's company', an activity that Hamilton thought contributed greatly to his 'universal study of human nature'.<sup>3</sup> Re-invigorated in soul by encounters with those he met at street-level, Kierkegaard would return to his first-floor study and take up his pen once again to write in service of Christendom.<sup>4</sup>

However, at various points in Kierkegaard's second authorship a very different kind of 'people bath' is described. Here, we find the gathered populace portrayed not as a potential source of literary inspiration or spiritual sustenance, but as an aimless, supine, zombie-like human mass. We might call this the state of 'crowd-existence'. To enter into crowd-existence is to choose anonymity over differentiation, levelling over decision,

anomie over passion. And to remain in it is to evade the call of God to become *hiin Enkelte*, that is, the ‘single individual’.

In a recent article, I have argued that the phenomenon of crowd-existence presented itself as a useful vehicle by which Kierkegaard could communicate something about the Christian doctrine of sin.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in that article I even suggested that, in Kierkegaard’s hands, the journey of a single individual into crowd-existence represents a kind of personal recapitulation of the original Fall narrative.

In this (supplementary) article, however, I wish to address a question that arises from that argument. That question is as follows: from where did this vision of crowd-existence originate? Or, to put the question more pointedly, why did Kierkegaard choose crowd-existence as a literary trope by which to illustrate this most pernicious of human destinies when, in fact, his own habit of seeking out and profiting from the company of people in the streets of Copenhagen indicates that the concept of ‘crowd’ held a quite different meaning for him personally? Could it be the case that, rather than his own experience of crowds, Kierkegaard was in fact drawing on quite a different influence here? And if so, what might that be?

I’ve increasingly wondered if that influence might be traceable to a rather unexpected source. And so here, in what should only be taken as the hunch of an amateur literary detective, a candidate is unearthed, brushed down and presented for analysis. Who do we find laid out on the forensic examination table? Lo and behold, the body of that old nemesis, J. L. Heiberg. And in his hands a faded manuscript-copy entitled *En Sjæl efter Døden*.<sup>6</sup>

The objective of this short article will not be to analyse Heiberg’s play *per se*, as worthy a task as that would be, especially given the fact that it is surprisingly little-addressed in the world of Kierkegaard studies.<sup>7</sup> It seeks merely to pose the question as to whether this play might have provided a literary antecedent to one of the key themes of Kierkegaard’s Christian authorship and, if so, what that might indicate about the nature of the influence wielded by Heiberg on that authorship as a whole. To do this, it will first describe the play itself, drawing out its presentation of crowd-existence, before proceeding to some observations on the influence, both direct and indirect, it seems to have exercised upon Kierkegaard.

## 1. Heiberg and *A Soul after Death*

Published in his *Nye Digte* of December 1840, although never performed on stage, Heiberg’s *A Soul after Death* immediately garnered a number of positive reviews, especially (and perhaps unsurprisingly) from members of his personal coterie.<sup>8</sup> The play adopts the genre of the late medieval/ Renaissance five-act allegorical ‘morality play’ to present the journey of a ‘soul’ to the next world, that which we might call the what-is-to-come (in this regard, we might describe the play as a ‘poetic-drama’ or, as the subtitle suggests, an ‘apocalyptic comedy’). The soul in question belongs to a deceased middle-class citizen of Copenhagen, a most worthy man (so it seems), ‘as sincere a friend and citizen as could be’.<sup>9</sup> Although this man had been a thoroughly unspeculative, uncultured, philistine citizen in life, he has been assured (by his pastor, no less) that he will certainly ‘find his peace’ in the what-is-to-come.<sup>10</sup>

The journey takes place in three stages. In the first stage, the soul, who is rather contumelious at discovering his new state of existence, trudges off towards the lot he assumes will be his, namely, ‘heaven’.<sup>11</sup> Spying its gates, he is challenged by St Peter to warrant his entry, to provide ‘evidence that you really can enter Paradise’.<sup>12</sup> The condition he must fulfil, it transpires, is to undertake another journey, a post-mortem *imitatio Christi* around the Holy Land, from Nazareth to Golgotha. The soul equivocates. After all, he was never much interested in religious matters whilst on earth. Or, to be more accurate, he tended to side with the majority opinion that knowledge of God was unattainable: ‘he is beyond our conceptions, such is taught to anyone who desires to know about him’.<sup>13</sup> In fact, rather than weary his legs on this quest, the soul blithely reports that he

would rather visit the United States of America on (what can only be described as) some kind of celestial group package-holiday. America, after all, is a land that is of a great deal more interest to the soul than Judea, for it is a land of culture and progress, a land 'where one can tread on the soil of freedom, and where everything is carried out by the power of the steam-engine'.<sup>14</sup>

In this scene, then, we find Heiberg's pastiche of contemporary Christendom. Driven by nothing but the herd mentality, the soul in life never bothered to undertake a quest for (speculative) knowledge. And so, in death, it is quite appropriate that he should be shut out from the inheritance of Christendom (as Heiberg understands it) as a 'Christian apostate'.<sup>15</sup> The crucial point is, however, that Heiberg attributes this exclusion not to the soul's piety or faith (or lack of it), but rather to the soul's cultural triviality and philistinism whilst on earth. In life the soul wallowed in the midst of 'finitude'; for this reason, and for this reason alone, in death he is debarred from entering the 'infinitude' of heaven.<sup>16</sup>

So where to now? For the second stage of his journey, upon the advice of Saint Peter, the soul is transported instead to Elysium, an alternative domain reserved for the 'good men who lived before the time of Christ, the pious heathens'.<sup>17</sup> Will this place be more suited to the soul?

At the gates of Elysium the soul finds the Classical figure Aristophanes standing as guard. When challenged to justify his entry, he once again stumbles over his *shibboleth*: it turns out that he has not read any of the Classics (preferring instead to study in 'a trade school class')<sup>18</sup> and, moreover, that he is familiar with Socrates' trial not through any Greek text, but only as it was portrayed in a recent play and reported in a Copenhagen tabloid, *Raketten*.<sup>19</sup> As the soul himself admits, rather than Greek or Latin, he'd rather read the London or Paris newspapers.<sup>20</sup> Here again, having absorbed himself in a life of cultural triviality and philistinism whilst on earth, Heiberg presents the 'infinity' of the afterlife – this time, in the form of the Classical heaven – as being lost to the soul, who is once again debarred from entering. The soul has not followed the path of *de Dannede* and, for this reason, his inheritance is once again squandered.

And so on to the third and final stage of his journey, as presented in Acts Three and Five of Heiberg's play. Here, the soul arrives at a new place. This time he is met at the gate by Mephistopheles. This place is none other than the Christian hell. But to the soul it appears as a most enticing, homely location: in its architecture, in its art, there is 'pure symmetry' all around – this looks right for him.<sup>21</sup> In fact, this place looks just like the Copenhagen he has recently departed! The soul is comforted by the fact that here, in this location, he may finally find his place within the crowd, just as he did before. As Mephistopheles puts it: 'in our country you live by the exactly the same wisdom as you used to live down below'.<sup>22</sup> And so he merrily enters.

What does he find in this place? He does indeed find the same culture and companions that he left down below. But, to his horror, he begins to realise that here those things have mutated into insipid, flat, banal and arid things. In this place, there are universities, but no learning; there is politics, but no democracy; there are gatherings of people, but no fellowship. Boredom presides: 'one yawns very often in this country', says Mephistopheles.<sup>23</sup> This place is the embodiment of finitude.

Heiberg's polemical agenda here comes clearly into view: the philistines of contemporary Copenhagen, dwelling in triviality and meaningless pursuits, and perhaps sat in the audience (!), need to be prodded by the banality of this vision to lift their eyes to the dawn of the speculative Idea, rising up against the horizon. The alternative is the fate that is suffered by this soul, who in life 'only believed in the actual and never tried to glimpse the skeleton lying beneath, that which we might call 'the Idea''.<sup>24</sup>

This Heibergian agenda takes ghastly form in the final action of the play. In hell, the soul is given his punishment: along with a multitude of faceless others he is enlisted in a kind of labour-camp. The task is Sisyphean: they are required to fill the copper-basin of the Danaïdes with a bowl that has a hole in the bottom.

Two observations immediately strike us. First, the punishment that Heiberg reserves for this soul is a gruesome, inverted form of infinity: ‘only with infinite, manifold labour can this [copper-basin] be filled in infinite time’, Mephistopheles says.<sup>25</sup> And second, the punishment that Heiberg reserves for this soul must be endured in the midst of the crowd, the crowd understood here (just as we noted above) as an aimless, supine, zombie-like (non-) human mass.

This crowd itself can now be heard chanting in the distance. It makes its fateful appearance on stage, a ‘chorus of the Danaids’.<sup>26</sup> In its midst the soul recognises erstwhile ‘professors and men of science, doctors, and poets by their thousands’, all those who seemed to be significant to earthly eyes.<sup>27</sup> And yet, for all this, the crowd is anonymous, composed of a multitude of nameless, quiescent automata, moving as one, chanting together, as it advances towards eternity: ‘busy, busy is our watchword until the final hour of the world’.<sup>28</sup> The soul resignedly submits to join its ranks. His lot is to be subsumed into the Heibergian crowd, a *numerus* marked by undifferentiation, an amorphous mass of (non-) humanity in which all outlines of concrete individuality have been eviscerated. This soul that was mired in finitude in life finally gets his reward, crowd-existence, emblematic of finitude *ad infinitum*, out of which all spirit has been drained.

It is precisely this depiction of crowd-existence that, I suggest, is taken up and used by Kierkegaard in his presentation of the Christian doctrine of sin. And yet, in order to trace why this might be the case, one more comment needs to be made, this time about the context within which Heiberg was writing.

My suggestion is that *A Soul after Death* is best placed in the context of contemporary debates on the question of the immortality of the soul that had infiltrated the intellectual life of Denmark after the death of Hegel in 1831. The story of these debates has been told elsewhere, as has Heiberg’s own (polemical) role within them: we might say in summary that rather than accepting it as an item of Christian dogma, Heiberg argued that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul would be better addressed by means of philosophy, that is, philosophy understood as the vehicle of Hegelian speculative logic.<sup>29</sup>

What is of particular interest, however, in relation to *A Soul after Death*, is the role Heiberg ascribed to aesthetic experience in this process. For Heiberg, contrary to what a Hegelian might expect, art *was* able to serve as a vehicle to further speculative logic. Thus George Pattison writes: ‘the Hegelian limitation of art in relation to philosophy – and indeed with the larger compass of Hegel’s system in relation also to religion – does not register to anything like the same degree in Heiberg’s writings’.<sup>30</sup> But – and this is the salient point for an understanding of Heiberg’s aim in this play – art did *not* achieve this by inducing, refreshing or awakening a new, subjective awareness of Christian dogma in the hearts of the audience present.<sup>31</sup> Rather, art was able to serve speculative logic by bringing an individual in synch with the immortal spirit, thus (as it were) allowing that individual to overcome death in the present *before* dying.<sup>32</sup> This is a crucial distinction to bear in mind: for Heiberg, this play – in both its form and in its content – does not function as a didactic poem extolling the hope of a Christian afterlife, but, much more deliberately, as a vehicle for a Hegelian proclamation of the immanent.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. Kierkegaard and *A Soul after Death*

But what has all this got to do with Kierkegaard? My claim in the second part of this article is that Heiberg’s understanding of aesthetic experience is the key that enables us to unlock Kierkegaard’s strange – but ultimately productive – interest in *A Soul after Death*. To be more precise, we might say that while Kierkegaard inevitably rejected the Hegelian doctrine that underlies it, Heiberg’s play presented itself to him *in spite of this* – or perhaps even *because of it* – as a curiously fecund vehicle by which his own ideas about the what-is-to-come might be contained. Thus we might say that while Kierkegaard necessarily rejected the content of the play, he was able to make use of its aesthetic form. And, in particular, the formal element he was able to make use of was Heiberg’s presentation of crowd-existence.

What is the warrant for making such a claim? After all, although it is known from the *Auktionsprotokol* that Kierkegaard owned a copy of *A Soul after Death*,<sup>34</sup> what is immediately apparent upon close examination of his corpus is the apparent dearth of references to it. And indeed, where such references can be found, they are invariably indirect and allusive.

In order to justify my claim, then, I propose gathering what references we do have into three clusters. In the first cluster we find Kierkegaard comparing the play with Dante's *Inferno*. In the second cluster we find Kierkegaard considering the way in which Heiberg might be credited with 'turning heavenward' the gaze of his audience. In the third cluster we find the only direct reference to the play in the entire published corpus, which is given in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In isolation, these clusters may seem incidental or even contingent (which may explain their critical neglect). In series, however, they build up an interesting picture of Kierkegaard's attitude to Heiberg's play, even if this attitude remained somewhat unacknowledged by Kierkegaard himself.

For the first cluster we begin with a journal entry written in 1843.<sup>35</sup> In this entry, Kierkegaard recalls with a sense of injured pride Heiberg's review of *Either/ Or*, which Heiberg had published earlier that year.<sup>36</sup> In the midst of lampooning Heiberg for this review – which, suffice to say, he had not received in good spirits – it is interesting to note that Kierkegaard draws attention to Heiberg in his capacity as author of *A Soul after Death*:

It will soon be two years since Herr Professor changed from being the witty, jocular, hilarious vaudeville playwright who yet at times seemed somewhat astray in the faith, the victorious polemicist, the measured aesthete, and became Denmark's Dante, the musing genius who in his apocalyptic poem peered into the secrets of eternal life, became the Church's dutiful son.<sup>37</sup>

Kierkegaard indicates here that, in the eyes of some at least, Heiberg had managed something of a public relations *volte-face* by means of this play: from being 'the witty, jocular, hilarious vaudeville playwright' of Copenhagen, Heiberg was now beginning to be appreciated as a 'dutiful son' of the Church, a latter-day Dante no less, offering to the people a faithful vision of the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul by means of his art. In fact, as Kierkegaard was well aware, this PR exercise had been facilitated in large part by Heiberg's disciple (at the time), H. L. Martensen. In a review of *A Soul after Death* published in *Fædrelandet* in 1841 Martensen had praised Heiberg in exactly these terms: he had the ability – perhaps even a greater ability than Dante – to portray the destiny of the human soul into and through the what-is-to-come.<sup>38</sup> Surely Heiberg could not have hoped for better marketing for his play than this!

In his *Fædrelandet* review, however, Martensen was offering more than merely praise for Heiberg's poetry. In addition, he was prepared to suggest that in *A Soul after Death* we find Heiberg's art not merely *representing* the journey of a soul towards salvation, but also *presenting* the very means by which that salvation could be achieved. 'In art the human has eternal life', Martensen writes.<sup>39</sup> In this way, he stands firmly in line with Heiberg's own understanding of art – as an ally of speculative philosophy, it was able to bring about a Hegelian proclamation of the immanent.

For Kierkegaard, of course, this was a terrible confusion of categories. No bones about it: as far as he was concerned, Heiberg was a most unworthy successor to the great Dante. Thus in his *Prefaces*, for example, he has Notabene make reference to 'an apocalyptic poem and an obliging review' that 'baldly gave us to understand that Prof. Heiberg had now become Dante'.<sup>40</sup> Notabene suggests that if this presages the future direction of theology then we ought all to be 'very afraid'.<sup>41</sup> In the same spirit, at the end of Book IV of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis condemns those who 'envision eternity apocalyptically, pretend[ing] to be Dante'.<sup>42</sup> For Haufniensis, Dante is the poet who, in presenting the journey of a soul in the what-is-to-come,

sought to engender an ‘ethical’ response from his readership, that is, a response that would prepare a Christian for the journey of his or her own soul, conceived according to an orthodox schema of judgment and reward, heaven and hell. This Dante, for Haufniensis, not the ‘latter-day’ one, was a truly Christian writer, for ‘no matter how much he conceded to the view of imagination, [he] did not suspend the effect of ethical judgment’.<sup>43</sup>

In this first cluster of references, then, drawing a direct contrast between Heiberg’s presentation of eternity and Dante’s, Kierkegaard is clearly indicating his critique of *A Soul after Death* as a guide for Christians seeking enlightenment about the what-is-to-come. Heiberg has not yet made the transition from ‘measured aesthete’ to ‘the Church’s dutiful son’, as Martensen claimed, because he is committed to understanding the immortality of the soul as a function of immanent logic. Whatever Heiberg gives us about the what-is-to-come in this play, then, must be categorically rejected.

But what about the second cluster of references? Here I suggest we find something new: a degree of nuance is introduced to the straightforward disdain that was documented above. This cluster centres on the idea that Heiberg’s play has caused the audience’s gaze to be ‘turned heavenward’.<sup>44</sup> This comment is certainly laced with irony. But at the same time it introduces a note of intrigue – a kind of piqued interest – as to what Heiberg has managed to achieve by means of the genre he has adopted. With this second cluster, then, we begin to move towards an understanding of how Kierkegaard is able to appropriate Heiberg’s play *constructively* for his own purposes.

We find this reference in the form of a handwritten, scrawled adjunct to an unpublished letter entitled ‘An Open Letter to Professor Heiberg, Knight of Dannebrog, from Constantin Constantius’.<sup>45</sup> This whimsical document was penned by Kierkegaard in 1844. It is his response to Heiberg’s (brief) discussion of *Repetition* in an article published in the first issue of his journal *Urania*, entitled ‘The Astronomical Year’.<sup>46</sup> Heiberg’s article had roused Kierkegaard’s ire for having claimed that the concept of repetition described in his book was appropriate only for the realm of nature, rather than for the realm of Spirit, where Hegelian mediation (rather than Kierkegaardian repetition) must remain in exclusive operation. It was in return of this review that Kierkegaard – in the guise of Constantius – offers his sardonic eulogy for this ‘Knight of Dannebrog’ and his apparently ‘superior’ critical judgment.<sup>47</sup>

At the foot of this letter, Constantius scribbles a brief appendix. In it, he lauds Heiberg for having found a ‘congregation’ in his ‘latest poem’, referring, of course, to *A Soul after Death*. What an achievement, he writes, to have caused this congregation to ‘turn its gaze heavenward’ by its subject matter.<sup>48</sup> Of course, the tone is heavily ironic. For the movement that Constantius has in mind is not caused by the awakening of faith or piety in the audience: rather, the head-turning in view here is nothing other than star-gazing, as inspired by Heiberg’s newly-declared interest in the practice of astronomy!<sup>49</sup> All that Heiberg has succeeded in presenting to his audience in this play, then, is a dead-end, a confusion of categories. He has prompted, as it were, the head movement of one in search of stars and galaxies, not the head movement of one looking up to the infinite God, in search of guidance for the what-is-to-come.

And yet a small amount of literary detective work reveals that this same phrase takes on much more positive connotation elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s work. In *Stages in Life’s Way*, for example, the phrase (as quoted from Oehlenschläger’s poem) is used of the absolute commitment given by two lovers in marriage.<sup>50</sup> And in some of Kierkegaard’s second authorship texts we find the phrase used of activity even in the religious sphere: in *Practice in Christianity*, for example, one of the three types of person pictured as genuinely seeking for Christ is depicted as having ‘his eyes staring upward as if [his salvation] might still come from heaven’.<sup>51</sup> In fact, in parts of the second authorship the phrase seems to have been used by Kierkegaard as something of a siglum for the movement of authentic Christian faith.

All I seek to point out here is that this phrase, jotted down in an obscure 1844 document and directed as polemic against Heiberg's play, finds a more constructive resonance later on in Kierkegaard's authorship. Heiberg the philosopher-theologian *has not* succeeded in reliably presenting the content of the what-is-to-come. But Heiberg the aesthetician *has* succeeded in turning the gaze of the Danish public heavenward. Does that count for something? Was that of interest to Kierkegaard?

The third – and final – cluster is perhaps the most interesting of all. For here we find the only direct reference to Heiberg's play in Kierkegaard's published corpus. It is found in the midst of Climacus' musings on the immortality of the soul in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Part way into this section Climacus suddenly declares: 'I have read Professor Heiberg's *Sjæl efter Døden*'.<sup>52</sup>

Before going further, we must take note of what immediately follows. For Climacus adds: 'I have done so with the help of Dean Tryde's commentary'.<sup>53</sup> What is this referring to? Climacus is referring to a review of Heiberg's *Nye Digte* published in 1841, just after its release, by Dean Eggert Christopher Tryde, pastor of the Church of our Lady in Copenhagen.<sup>54</sup> In his review Tryde, abandoning a certain hesitation he had previously exhibited towards the marriage of Hegelianism and Christianity, praised *A Soul after Death* as a profound account of 'the Christian religious consciousness'.<sup>55</sup>

Given what we have seen in the first and second clusters above, it is no surprise that Tryde's obsequy towards Heiberg causes Climacus' blood to boil: 'I wish I had not read it', he writes.<sup>56</sup> Climacus' severe reaction centres on Tryde's celebration of the play as a model of Christian salvation. For Climacus – in line with all the references considered above – Hegelian philosophy, as presented in the play, is inadequate for this task because it never addresses itself to the lived life of a subjective individual. Thus, he argues that Heiberg's play has no insight into the question of 'the immortality of a mortal', as he puts it.<sup>57</sup> It simply 'does not require the ultimate dialectical exactitude commensurate with a learner who wants to organise his life according to such guidance'.<sup>58</sup>

In spite of this automatic recoil, however, a different, more positive approach to Heiberg's play is also hinted at in the *Postscript*. For Climacus suggests that, in his opinion, whilst the content of *A Soul after Death* is bankrupt, its aesthetic form may have some cash-value, even for an author seeking to awaken a Christian response in his readership. To be more precise, Climacus hints that the aesthetic form of this play models how a single individual can be aided to process the 'negative' situation of the fear of hell for him or herself.<sup>59</sup>

Climacus' argument goes like this: in order for 'an existing subject' to render his 'negative thoughts' (that is, fear) about the what-is-to-come useful to himself '[...] an illusive form is the only adequate means of presentation'.<sup>60</sup> This is because 'direct communication implies the dependability of continuity, whereas the illusiveness of existence, when I grasp it, isolates me'.<sup>61</sup> And so 'whenever the subjective is of importance in knowledge and appropriation is therefore the main point, communication is a work of art'.<sup>62</sup> Climacus' argument, then, is that art may prove a useful ally to the Christian author, but only as existence-communication, not as content-communication. It only remains for him, then, to apply this principle to the 'negative' situation of the fear of hell: whilst it would be 'foolish [...] to want to reassure people about their eternal happiness' (because, *contra* Heiberg, there's nothing that an author can do to settle this question for an existing individual), a Christian author would be well advised to engender an aesthetic situation in which the existing individual is 'unsettled' about his or her eternal destiny.<sup>63</sup>

The juxtaposition of critical denunciation and constructive appropriation that we find in the *Postscript* is, I suggest, a useful clue to Kierkegaard's handling of *A Soul after Death*, particularly in the context of the second authorship that is to follow. Whilst the content of the play is disavowed as a representation of the journey of the (Christian) soul in the what-is-to-come, Heiberg's (formal) attempt to portray the nature of the crowd-existence

that awaits the one who has not become a single individual in the present is, it seems, carefully noted by Kierkegaard and stored up for future use.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I asked whether the body of Heiberg could, as it were, be exhumed and re-examined as a constructive influence on Kierkegaard's authorship – his Christian authorship, even. In one sense, of course, there is hardly a case to bring forward. The references that have been itemised above demonstrate that Kierkegaard's reading of *A Soul after Death* was predominantly critical: the journey that Heiberg presents is not to be taken as a reliable guide to the what-is-to-come. And yet, there is an indication that, whilst he certainly could not adopt the soteriology that underlines Heiberg's thought, Kierkegaard did allow himself to be influenced by certain formal aspects of Heiberg's pastiche. In particular, this includes Heiberg's depiction of crowd-existence as emblematic of the destiny of a sinner who, unrepentant on earth, would be subsumed into the *numerus* upon entering the what-is-to-come. Appreciating how he was able to make a hell out of Heiberg, then, illustrates how nimbly and delicately Kierkegaard was able to work with and appropriate from those whose theological system he, nevertheless, resolutely rejected.

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- <sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard: *Letters and Documents*, (1978), (trans. Henrik Rosenmeier, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), Letter No. 188, to J. L. A. Kolderup-Rosenvinge (August 1848), p.269.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. Kimmse, Bruce, (1996), *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p.106.
- <sup>3</sup> Hamilton, Andrew, (1862), *Sixteen Months in the Danish Isles, 2 Volumes* (London: Richard Bentley), p.269.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. Garff, Joakim, (2005), *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), p.313.
- <sup>5</sup> Howles, Tim, (*forthcoming*, 2015), 'The Undifferentiated Crowd: An Analysis of the Kierkegaardian Single Individual in the Light of Mimetic Theory', to be published in *The Heythrop Journal*.
- <sup>6</sup> Heiberg, J. L., (1840), *En Sjæl efter Døden. En apokalyptisk Comedie in Nye Digte* (ed. Oskar Schlichtkrull, Copenhagen: Povl Branner, 1919). All translations are my own from the Danish. References are given in the format *Sjæl* 1:57 (*Chor*), indicating 'Act', 'page number' and 'speaker'. At the time of writing, an English translation does exist, but is not straightforward to access: Meyer, Henry, (ed.), (1991), *Heiberg's A Soul After Death* (Seattle, WA: Mermaid Press). Scholars will look forward to the new translation to be published within the *Texts from Golden Age Denmark* series: Stewart, Jon, (ed.), *Heiberg's New Poems and Other Texts, Volume 10* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, forthcoming).
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Nagy, András, (2008), 'Either Hegel or Dialectics: Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *Homme de théâtre*' in *Johann Ludvig Heiberg: Philosopher, Littérateur, Dramaturge and Political Thinker* (ed. Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.), pp.357-394; Vorobyova, Nataliya, (2008), 'Heiberg and Kierkegaard: Playing with Nemesis' in *Johann Ludvig Heiberg: Philosopher, Littérateur, Dramaturge and Political Thinker* (ed. Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press), pp.165-192.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, cf. Martensen, H. L., (1841), review published in *Fædrelandet*, No. 398 (January 10), columns 3209-3211.
- <sup>9</sup> *Sjæl*, 1:57 (*Chor*), 'En ærlig Ven, en Borger som kun Faa'.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 1:57 (*Chor*), 'For til sin Fred at gaae'.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 1:58 (*Sjæl*), 'Himmerig'.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 1:59 (*Peder*), 'Først lad mig see Beviset/ For, at du virkelig skal ind i Paradiset'.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 1:66 (*Sjæl*), 'Han er ufattelig; saadan man lærer/ Enhver, som Videnskab om ham begjærer'.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 1:63 (*Sjæl*), 'Jeg altid længtes efter/ At see det Land, som har saa store Kræfter/ Det Land, hvor man paa Friheds Jordbund triner/ Og alt udrette kan med Dampmaskiner'.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 2:68 (*Aristophanes*), 'christlig fornægter'.
- <sup>16</sup> Although cf. Csakó, István, (2008), 'Heiberg and the Immortality Debate: A Historical Overview' in *Johann Ludvig Heiberg: Philosopher, Littérateur, Dramaturge and Political Thinker* (ed. Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press), pp.95-138 for an argument that the play in fact represents a more nuanced take on Christianity that is suggested here, esp. pp.135-136.
- <sup>17</sup> *Sjæl*, 1:67 (*Peder*), 'Der boe de Gode, som før Christi Tider/ I Verden leved, Hedningskarer fromme'.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 2:71, (*Sjæl*), 'Jeg har gaaet i Handelsclasse'.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 2:74, (*Sjæl*).
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 2:71, (*Sjæl*).
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 3:78, (*Sjæl*), 'I dens Form hvilken skjøn Symmetrie!'
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 3:83, (*Mephistopheles*), 'Man lever egenlig i vor Stat/ Paa samme Viis som hos jer dernede'.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 3:94, (*Mephistopheles*), 'Man gaber meget i dette Land'.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 3:97, (*Mephistopheles*), 'Hvori man paa det Reale troer/ Og faaer ei det mindste Glimt at see/ Af den magre Benrad, man kalder Idee'.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 5:108 (*Mephistopheles*), 'At kun ved uendelig Manges Flid/ Kan det fyldes i en uendelig Tid'.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 5:109, 'Chor af Danadider'.

- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 5:108, (*Mephistopheles*), ‘Men du vil finde her Professore./ Magistre, Licentiater, Doctores/ [...] Poeter I Tusindtal’.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 5:109, (*Chor*), ‘Travlhed, Travlhed er vort Løsen/ Indtil Verdens sidste Stund’.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf. Csakó, István, (2008); also Kjældgaard, Lasse Horne, (2005), ‘What it means to be Immortal: Afterlife and Aesthetic Communication in Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*’ in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2005* (ed. Cappelørn, Niels Jørgen, and Deuser, Hermann, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), pp.90-113.
- <sup>30</sup> Pattison, George, (2002), *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.101.
- <sup>31</sup> This was precisely the point made by Poul Peter Møller in response to Heiberg in his ‘Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed’, first published in 1837, and reprinted in the second volume of his *Efterladte Skrifter* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1842), p.161.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. Stewart, Jon, (ed.), (2007), *Heiberg’s Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course and Other Texts, Volume Three* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel), p.96.
- <sup>33</sup> And, moreover, one that was able to function somewhat below the radar of the Danish state press law of September 1799, article 5 of which threatened a penalty of exile for a period of 3 to 10 years for any publication which denied the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.
- <sup>34</sup> ASKB (ed. H. P. Rohde, Montréal, 1991), Item 1562.
- <sup>35</sup> *Pap. IV B 46*, ‘How Does ‘One’ Treat *Either/ Or*’, p.202-204.
- <sup>36</sup> Heiberg, J. L., (1843), ‘Litterær Vintersæd’ in *Intelligensblade*, 1843, Vol. 2, No. 24, pp.285-292.
- <sup>37</sup> *Pap. IV B 46*, ‘How Does ‘One’ Treat *Either/ Or*’, p.203. The reference to Heiberg’s ‘apocalyptic’ poem clearly indicates that *A Soul after Death* is in view here, bearing in mind the play’s original subtitle.
- <sup>38</sup> Martensen, H. L., (1841), review published in *Fædrelandet*, No. 398 (January 10), column 3211.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *Prefaces* (ed. and trans. Todd Nichol, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.25.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Anxiety*, (ed. and trans. Radar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.153.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Presumably this is to be understood as a hypothetical audience, given that Heiberg’s play was never performed in his lifetime.
- <sup>45</sup> *Pap. IV B.110*.
- <sup>46</sup> Heiberg, J. L., (1844), ‘Det astronomiske Aar’ in *Urania*, 1844, pp.77-160 (ASKB U 57), reprinted in *Prosaiske Skrifter*, Vol. 9, pp.51-130.
- <sup>47</sup> In this regard cf. a related reference in Kierkegaard, Søren, *Repetition* (ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1983), p.182.
- <sup>48</sup> *Pap. IV B.110*.
- <sup>49</sup> *Pap. IV B.110*. On Heiberg and astronomy cf. Garff (2005), pp.63-65, 68-74; Nagy (2008), p.382. A similar connection is made in *Prefaces*, p.24.
- <sup>50</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *Stages on Life’s Way*, (ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1988), p.159. The poem is Oehlenschläger’s *Aladdin*, II.
- <sup>51</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *Practice in Christianity* (ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1991), p.20.
- <sup>52</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1992), p.171.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Tryde, Eggert Christopher, ‘Nye Digte af J. L. Heiberg’ in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, vol. 1, nos. 2-3, 1841, pp.159-198. Cf. also Stewart, Jon, ‘Eggert Christopher Tryde: A Mediator of Christianity and a Representative of the Official Christianity’ in Stewart, Jon, (2009), *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries, Tome II: Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate), pp.335-354.
- <sup>55</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.175.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.171.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Cf. Mulder, Jack, (2010), *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), esp. chapter 6, ‘On Being Afraid of Hell: Kierkegaard and Catholicism on Imperfect Contrition’, pp.153-177.
- <sup>60</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.82 ff.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid, p.387.

# BOOK REVIEW

## *Kierkegaard's Indirect Politics* Bartholomew Ryan

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While the literature on Kierkegaard and the political has been steadily growing in the past decade, a common problem has plagued many of these attempts to politically utilize the authorship of Kierkegaard. This problem could be called the problem of expertise, as much of the existing literature on Kierkegaard and the political is written by either experts on the work of Kierkegaard who lack a real understand of contemporary political philosophy and theory; and on the other hand, experts in political philosophy and theory who have only a casual relationship with the work of Kierkegaard. This trend has led to readings that are oddly one-sided, creating the conditions for Kierkegaard scholars to critique scholars of political philosophy in a damning manner, and vice versa. This problem has led to Kierkegaard being left out of much contemporary political philosophy and theory, and at best has left him as a marginal figure in these debates.

Luckily, Bartholomew Ryan's *Kierkegaard's Indirect Politics* avoids these problems completely. Ryan matches an extremely impressive, and subtle, understanding of the religious authorship of Kierkegaard with an excellent analysis of issue in contemporary political theory. Not only does this book offer the rare gift of an author who is an expert in both Kierkegaard *and* political thought, but the added bonus of an author with an ability to pull from some of the masters of modern literature (Melville, Kafka, Joyce, Beckett) to create a work as interesting in a literary sense as it is in a philosophical sense.

The main argument of the book is that while Kierkegaard's work is at odds with a straightforward conception of political philosophy, there exists an undeveloped theme of indirect politics in his authorship that articulates the type of political praxis made possible by one existing with an inward, and critical, distance from external political endeavors. After outlining this latent (indirect) political potential in Kierkegaard's own work in chapter one, Ryan then highlights the influence Kierkegaard's thought has played in the work of four influential political thinkers of twentieth century European philosophy: Georg Lukács, Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno. During these chapters, or interludes, Ryan does not only outline the manner in which Kierkegaard's work served a crucial role in the intellectual development of each of these figures, but also provides what is one of the best overviews currently available of the philosophical relationship between the work of Kierkegaard and German critical theory. By the conclusion of the book the reader is left wondering why they have thus far failed to realize how Kierkegaardian figures like Benjamin and Adorno are, and how much Kierkegaard himself already embodies so much of the philosophical ethos of German critical theory.

The most important conceptual development of the work is what Ryan refers to as Kierkegaard's 'indirect politics, which he describes as "the gap or interlude (*Mellemspil* in Danish) that makes room for the dialectical leap, the exception, the exile and loafer, and the negative foil to all totality" (1). Ryan is arguing that rather than leading to an apolitical inwardness, the Kierkegaardian self has radical political potential precisely because she is always operating at a distance from external political society. The two figures which reappear throughout the book to exemplify this type of political self are Socrates and Christ, two figures who existed at odds with the dominant political powers of their times and offered a radical political critique from the margins. While neither engaged in explicitly political activity as such, the public teaching of both amounts to nothing less

than a radical political critique of totalizing systems of power. Throughout the work Ryan sets this figure of the ‘interrupter’ against totalized political projects, many of which he associates with Marxist thought, something I will return to at the conclusion of this review.

With the work of Lukács Ryan argues that while Kierkegaard played a significant role in influencing his early literary criticism, once he pledges fidelity to overtly Marxist political projects, Kierkegaardian inwardness becomes the enemy. Much of this chapter is spent arguing against the conception that Kierkegaard’s inward model of the self is antithetical to critical political praxis. Rather than perpetuating this reading Ryan instead asks, “can Kierkegaard be accused of being a despiser of the masses, a bourgeois gentleman (an aristocrat even?) intolerant of common people? (51)” He argues that instead of a political quietism, “the writings of Kierkegaard are as much ‘anti-capitalist’ as those of the young Lukács. (54)” For Ryan this anti-capitalist sentiment emerges through the position of the inward praxis outlined by Kierkegaard, arguing that:

The paradox of Kierkegaard is, in holding onto the religious element in his thinking, his authorship can be viewed as the development of a powerful expression of concrete social foundations – something far beyond merely reactionary (61).

Here he relies on the figures of interruption, Socrates and Christ, who are able to bridge between finitude and infinitude through their own indirect political praxis (62). He makes this argument explicit later in the chapter, arguing that:

Kierkegaard’s solitary individual can perform as the outsider interrupting our pre-conceptions, disrupting the collectivism and the leveling in the present age, and thus making a space for a particular voice and opening within the socio-political world (74).

One might rightly ask at this point what sort of political interrupting did Kierkegaard himself ever engage in? For Ryan this can be found:

With his broadsheet *The Moment* seven years later, Kierkegaard finally steps out onto the street to engage with the common person who has ridiculed and laughed at him as a result of the caricatures in *The Corsair* and his attack on the whole establishment of Denmark [...] (63).

While this can rightly be read as a sort of social and literary praxis, I do wonder whether or not Kierkegaard’s production and sale of *The Moment* qualifies as radical political praxis when compared to some of the other political figures discussed in this book, though, with Ryan it seems that Kierkegaard’s political praxis must necessarily be of this indirect nature. Along with this, an interesting tension remains as regards the importance of inwardness in political matters. Ryan argues that inwardness goes beyond class categories (54), but does this mean that the inwardness of the oppressive capitalist matters just as much as the inwardness of the oppressed laborer? A final concern at this point is the role of the political subject as an interrupter. Surely we cannot all be Socrates or Christ, so what does this look like in terms of collective political activity? Can the indirect political subject ever move past interruptive critique to collective activity?

In the chapter on Schmitt Ryan focuses primarily on his use of the exception, pointing out that while Schmitt thinks he is gleaning this concept from Kierkegaard himself, their political uses of this concept could not be further apart. Ryan defines this concept as such, “literally, the exception is a person or entity that is ‘excepted,’ or that does not follow a rule (92).” For Kierkegaard, the exception haunts the political norm in any attempt of a totalizing system to hold absolute power (i.e., Socrates), while for Schmitt, the exception serves the place of excepting rulers themselves from the law for the sake of maintaining a particular order. As Ryan convincingly shows, the exception of Schmitt’s *Political Theology* is in no way the exception as represented in the figures of Socrates or Christ by Kierkegaard. This is especially important in terms of the human, as

Kierkegaard's indirect politics could never be used to create an exception out of a particular human being, or class of human beings, in the name of a dominant political order. This political humanism is an unexpected effect of Kierkegaard's emphasis on the paradoxical nature of the religious. The religious serves as a constant point of interruption in the life of spirit, and this interruption leads to an ongoing critical evaluation of principalities and powers. With this chapter Ryan convincingly shows how contemporary political philosophy would be wise to shift away from any lingering utilization of a Schmittian conception of the exception and instead move towards the potential in Kierkegaard's conception of the exception as the spot of interruption and critique.

Ryan moves on to an extremely interesting discussion of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Walter Benjamin. If Kierkegaard scholars have not previously taken seriously the productive potential of this relationship, with Ryan's book one no longer has an excuse to not consider the shared aims of these two nomadic thinkers of the European city. Ryan shows that both Kierkegaard and Benjamin present an ultimately hopeful, and messianic, philosophical and political theory in the midst of an apocalyptic sort of political and cultural ruination. According to Ryan, the "tension of ruination" (159) serves as a paradoxical productive tension in the thought of both figures. While Benjamin's thought is grounded in an idea of catastrophe, Kierkegaard's is grounded in an experience of loss (162-3), and in both cases this fundamental loss, or catastrophe, opens up the path for a creative and messianic sort of political thinking which can think a new world to come in the face of the increasingly destructive world of modernity. Unlike the previous chapters, for the most part Ryan paints Kierkegaard and Benjamin as fellow travellers of sorts, separated by little more than place and time in Europe. However, the crucial difference seems to lie in the fact that Benjamin's messianism is informed by the thought of Marx, while for Kierkegaard the messianic still remains a thoroughly Christian category.

If Benjamin is painted as a potential ally for Kierkegaard's indirect politics, Ryan presents Adorno as Kierkegaard's most worthy adversary. Adorno's first book, a study of Kierkegaard carried out under the supervision of Paul Tillich, was ruthless in its critique of Kierkegaard's conception of inwardness, the same inwardness that Ryan uses to argue for the potential of an indirect political praxis. Adorno critiques Kierkegaard for a sort of absolute and empty inwardness, which is the antithesis of any sort of external political praxis. Following this Adorno argues that the human being becomes trapped, or petrified, in inwardness. This critique builds upon the conflation between protestant theology and capitalist ideology observed by Adorno, in which radical political praxis is reduced to the building of an inner kingdom inside the self (183). While many previous commentators on Adorno's work on Kierkegaard have quickly dismissed it on the grounds that Adorno had limited access to German translations of Kierkegaard's work and due to this missed many of the crucial implications of the pseudonymous voices, Ryan avoids this and instead develops one of the most productive encounters between Kierkegaard and Adorno currently available. The most interesting aspect of this chapter is when Ryan moves away from discussing Adorno's early work on Kierkegaard and provides an analysis of the manner in which much of the conceptual novelty in Adorno's later system, his negative dialectics, is already prefigured in Kierkegaard's own work. Ryan makes this argument through a conceptual analysis of Kierkegaard's insistence on the 'restlessness of infinity' (191) which leads to a critical appropriation of Hegel's dialectic in a way in accordance with Adorno's own post-Hegelian dialectic. As Ryan notes through a reading of the work of Gillian Rose, both Adorno and Kierkegaard move beyond the supposed completion of finality to develop a dialectics which instead prioritizes systematic incompleteness (200). This dialectical openness then leads to a critical political stance which once again makes possible the interrupter whose critical praxis complicates any supposed completion, finality or totality in the political realm. Following this Ryan argues:

To call Kierkegaard's individual absolutised to the point of isolated inwardness is to miss the point of *The Sickness unto Death* where Anti-Climacus wields the negative dialectic moving the self through oneself, others, society and God (200).

Ryan's argument in the chapter on Adorno ends up being one of the strongest both philosophically and politically, as he brings Kierkegaard's 'restless infinity' surprisingly close to the concerns of Adorno's negative dialectics, showing how rather than having left Kierkegaard behind with his first book, Adorno's mature philosophical project can be seen to embody and extremely Kierkegaard form of dialectics. Once again, Ryan here sets a new standard for any future work taking seriously the relation between Kierkegaard and Adorno.

Before offering some brief critical questions, I want to state in very clear terms that this book is fantastic, and a must read for anyone interested in Kierkegaard and the political, and an even more necessary read for anyone working on Kierkegaard's relation to German critical theory. It charts an extremely interesting trajectory that stays firmly rooted in a careful reading of Kierkegaard's authorship while at the same time advocating for the continued relevance of critical theory in contemporary political thought.

My primary criticism of this book is not so much with the encounters that Ryan stages within in, but rather with the encounter that he seems to avoid, the encounter between Marx and Kierkegaard. Throughout this book Ryan seems to take a fairly negative stance on the work of Marx and the history of Marxist thought, and at various points seems to place Kierkegaard's inwardness at complete odds with a sort of Marxist external praxis. Following this, I wonder if rather than thinking only of a Kierkegaardian indirect politics in opposition to a Marxist revolutionary praxis (in a sort of socio-political either/or), one could think of these positions as two aspects of a higher order dialectic between indirect politics and revolutionary praxis? A sort of dialectic between the inward and the external which paradoxically affirms an external political praxis capable of turning inward, and an inward political critique capable of leaping outward in external acts? While this may reside outside of the scope of Ryan's project, in a world facing both economic and ecological devastation, I worry that this Kierkegaardian indirect politics needs to be capable of leading to a direct form of political praxis capable of gathering inward individuals around external forms of collective action. And I wonder if this both/and could be developed through a consideration of Kierkegaard and Marx?