

Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter

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The Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter will no longer include news and announcements in regular issues. For current information from the Hong Kierkegaard Library and other news from Kierkegaard scholars and related groups around the world, please see the website of the Hong Kierkegaard Library at <http://www.stolaf.edu/collections/kierkegaard/>.

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Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks

Volume 4, Journals NB–NB5

Søren Kierkegaard

Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn,

Alastair Hannay, David Kangas,

Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison,

Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Vanessa Rumble,

and K. Brian Söderquist, in cooperation

with the Søren Kierkegaard Research

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Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks

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Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks

Volume 5, Journals NB6–NB10

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Volume 5 of this 11-volume series includes five of Kierkegaard's important "NB" journals (Journals NB6 through NB10), covering the months from summer 1848 through early May 1849. This was a turbulent period both in the history of Denmark and for Kierkegaard personally. The journals in this volume include Kierkegaard's reactions to the political upheaval in Denmark, a retrospective account of his audiences with King Christian VIII, deliberations about publishing an autobiographical explanation of his writings, and an increasingly harsh critique of the Danish Church.

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Inter et Inter: Between Kierkegaard and the Heibergs

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Abstract: Why did Kierkegaard chose “Inter et Inter” as the pseudonym for “The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of an Actress”? Some scholars suggest that this Latin phrase allowed him to allude to intermissions in a theatrical performance. Others suggest that it allowed him to mark a partition in his work as an author. This essay provides an alternate interpretation. More than a theatrical reference or a break in his work as an author, “Inter et Inter” is a contracted, highly abridged pronouncement of the literary and political distinctions between Kierkegaard and J. L. Heiberg.

Key Words: Authorship, Danish Golden Age, Indirect Communication, “Inter et Inter,” Johan Ludvig Heiberg, Johanne Luise Heiberg, “The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress.”

Inter et Inter: Between Kierkegaard and the Heibergs

Like most oral defenses in Golden Age Denmark, that of Kierkegaard’s 1841 dissertation *On the Concept of Irony* was performed in Latin. Unlike other mid-nineteenth-century defenses, however, it attracted a remarkably large and hostile audience. In addition to two official opponents, a handful of educated elites came forward to challenge the young Kierkegaard. Among them was one of Denmark’s leading Hegelians: Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Although Kierkegaard seems to have parried his critiques with ease, he never forgot the insult of Heiberg’s attack.

Seven years after his widely attended defense, Kierkegaard published “The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress,” an encomium to Denmark’s leading actress, Johanne Luise Heiberg, who just so happened to be the wife of Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Although the article appeared under the pseudonym “Inter et Inter,” and nowhere mentions the name of its “admired artist,” readers were quick to identify Kierkegaard as its author and Fru Heiberg as its subject. Many Danes saw this *feuilleton* article as a celebration of her recent portrayal of Shakespeare’s Juliet, a role to which she had returned after eighteen years, and with noticeably less applause from Danish audiences.

But praising Johanne Luise Heiberg was not the only reason Kierkegaard published “The Crisis.” This “little esthetic essay” also allowed him to renew his earlier dispute with her husband.¹ By celebrating Fru Heiberg, who was still enormously popular among Danish citizens, and simultaneously attacking her husband, who was then notorious for his intellectual and cultural elitism, Kierkegaard hoped to rally the support of middle- and lower-middle-class readers, at once distinguishing himself from previous generations of educated elites and identifying himself (and his work) with the populist, egalitarian ideals of an emerging democratic public culture.²

Which brings us back to the pseudonym “Inter et Inter.” Why did Kierkegaard chose this Latin phrase, meaning “between and between,” as his pseudonym for “The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of an Actress”? Some scholars suggest that, given the stated topic of this *feuilleton* article, this pseudonym refers to intermissions in a theatrical performance.³ Others insist that it marks a partition in Kierkegaard’s work as an author.⁴ In this brief essay, I would like to provide an alternate interpretation. More than a theatrical reference or the quilting point for his work as an author, “Inter et Inter” is a contracted, highly abridged pronouncement of the distinctions between Johanne Luise Heiberg, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, and Kierkegaard.

Recalling the Latin proverb *Distingeundum est inter et inter*—"It is necessary to distinguish between notions that need to be distinguished"—Kierkegaard's pseudonym contains two analogous distinctions. The first "Inter" allowed him to mark a distinction between the widely popular Johanne Luise Heiberg and her increasingly maligned husband; and second "Inter" allowed him to draw a parallel distinction between her husband and Kierkegaard. Implicit in these analogous distinctions is a kind of "congregation by segregation," in which Kierkegaard could at once affect the celebrity status of Fru Heiberg and dissociate himself from the reviled elitism of her husband, thereby redeeming his public persona from the humiliating aftermath of the *Corsair* affair.⁵

More specifically, Kierkegaard saw "The Crisis" as an opportunity to convince the Danish reading public that he was not a sanctimonious religious author. "Those who live esthetically here at home have no doubt given up reading me, since I 'have gone religious and do not write anything but sermon books'," he realized in 1848, largely in response to the mild public receptions of *Upbuilding Discourses*, *Works of Love*, and *Christian Discourses*. However, after reading a "little article about an actress," they might be willing to "peek into the next book, hoping to find something for them[selves]." His logic was simple: "An article in a newspaper, particularly about Mrs. Heiberg, creates much more of a sensation than big books"—"yes, it could easily become a firecracker." If Kierkegaard was ever going to recover from the *Corsair* affair and regain the support of popular opinion, he would have to publish this "little esthetic essay."⁶

And there were other reasons for him to publish "The Crisis." "I believe I owe it to Mrs. Heiberg," Kierkegaard notes in another journal entry. Moreover, "I would like to poke Heiberg a little again." And what better way to realize both ambitions than by embedding an assault on J. L. Heiberg in an encomium to his wife? "This way certain things can be said that I could not say so lightly and conversationally."⁷ That Fru Heiberg was "a child of the common people" made this dissimulation all the more appealing.⁸ Not only would it allow Kierkegaard to renew his mastery of indirect communication and, in so doing, to resume his critique of the Golden Age mainstream. Because the Royal Danish Theater was a wildly popular source of entertainment, and Johanne Luise Heiberg was among its most esteemed actresses, publishing "The Crisis" would also help him regain the approval of Danish audiences.⁹

Part and parcel to this public relations campaign was his choice of the pseudonym "Inter et Inter." Kierkegaard probably discovered this Latin phrase and the proverb to which it refers in Eichendorff's *Memoirs of a Good-For-Nothing*, where one student musician says to another, "*Distingueundum est inter et inter*," adding "*quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi!*"—"what is permitted to Jupiter is not permitted to the ox."¹⁰ Another likely source is Hoffman's *Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr*, where Father Hilarious advises Kreisler against the donning of monastic robes: "I feel comfortable in my habit and wouldn't shed it at any price, but *distingueundum est inter et inter!*"¹¹ That Kierkegaard was familiar with these books and owned copies of them both is enough to suggest that he was also familiar with this Latin proverb.

Add to this Kierkegaard's use of the phrase "*inter et inter*" in other published works, and his familiarity of its corresponding proverb seems even more likely. Prior to "The Crisis," this Latin phrase made three appearances in Kierkegaard's work. The first was in *Either/Or*: "The esthetic individual considers himself in his concretion and makes distinctions *inter et inter*."¹² The second came in *The Concept of Anxiety*: "Metaphysically and esthetically [the comic] cannot be stopped and prevented from finally swallowing up all of the temporal, which will happen to the person who is developed enough to use the comic but not mature enough to distinguish *inter et inter*" (where "to distinguish" translates the Latin *distinguerere*).¹³ The final appearance came in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: "just as a little miss is related to a hero, so a lover is related to a believer, and why? Because the lover is related to a woman, but a believer to God—and the Latin phrase *interest inter et inter* absolutely applies to this."¹⁴ As each of these passages well indicate, "*inter et inter*" was for Kierkegaard as a figure of distinction.

To this list of published works we must also add Kierkegaard's unpublished "New Year's Gift," which parodied the 1844 edition of Heiberg's *Urania* and eventually found its way into an outspoken critique of Heiberg in *Prefaces*. For it is precisely here, in an introductory section titled "Inter et Inter," that Kierkegaard begins the attack on J. L. Heiberg that would eventually culminate in "the Crisis." As Kierkegaard is careful to point out, the mid-nineteenth century is an era without distinctions:

The age of making distinctions is past. Like so much else it has been vanquished by the system. In our time, whoever in a scholarly way clings to making distinctions—the craving of his soul is for something that has long since vanished. The age of making distinctions is past, the productive idea of the four world-historical monarchies reduces everything to the appropriate moment, whether this idea in its historical progress and immanent movement overcomes everything that rises up, or whether, more reminiscent of its first discoverer, Geert Westphaler, in the pathos of conviction it assimilates everything to itself in the course of chitchat.¹⁵

The origin of this indistinction could be Hegel, whose *Philosophy of History* subordinates the European tradition to four phases in the expression of Absolute Spirit. But it also might be Gert Westphaler, the garrulous main character in Holberg's comedy, *Master Gert Westphaler or the Talkative Barber*. After all, Kierkegaard quips, Hegel and Gert are both famous for reducing distinctions to an "appropriate moment." As the leading Danish Hegelian and a champion of intellectual hierarchy, Heiberg would have seen this analogy as an insult.

That it was indeed an attack on Heiberg is readily apparent in *Prefaces*. For if ever there was an "appropriate moment" for authors like Heiberg to publish their works, Kierkegaard goes on to suggest, it is during the holiday season, when their potential for financial gain is at its peak. "As is well known, the literary New Year's rush of commercial scribes begins in the month of December," he explains. "Several sleek and elegant [*nitid*] books intended for children and Christmas trees, but especially useful as gifts in good taste, chase past each other in *Adresseavisen* [a Danish advertising paper]."

Although many Danish authors capitalized on this holiday tradition, only Heiberg is identified by name:

Oh you great Chinese god! I would have sworn to it; is not Prof. Heiberg along in the parade this year? Yes, quite right, it is Prof. Heiberg. Yes, when one is decked out in this fashion, one can easily put in an appearance before the astonished crowd. Not even Salomon Goldkalb in all his glory was thus clothed.¹⁶

If *Prefaces* was renowned for its derision of "Prof. Heiberg," Kierkegaard saw "The Crisis" was an opportunity to build on this notoriety. Consider, for instance, the passage in which "Inter et Inter" contrasts two anonymous authors, one who is known for his frequent attempts to "profit from" Danish readers and another who is known for his "unconditionally unselfish" service to his readership:

If an author who neither has a considerable fund of ideas nor is very industrious were to publish at long intervals an elegant copybook that is especially ornate [*nitid*] and is resplendently provided with many blank pages—the crowd gazes at this elegant phenomenon with amazement and admiration and thinks that if he has been such a long time in writing it and if there is so little on the page it really must be something extraordinary. If, on the other hand, an idea-rich author who has something else to think about than elegance and making a profit from an illusion, exerting himself with ever great diligence, finds himself able to work at an unusual speed, the crowd soon becomes accustomed to it and thinks: It must be slovenly stuff. The crowd, of course, cannot judge whether something is well worked out or not; it sticks to—the illusion.¹⁷

In this flourish of public critique, “Inter et Inter” invites readers to recall Heiberg’s recent publication history. From his 1841 edition of *New Poems* to his mid-1840s editions of *Urania*—all were famous for their glazed covers, meticulous typefaces, and richly ornamented borders. And all were equally well-known for their appearance in the month of December—just in time for Heiberg to meet the demand of holiday shoppers. Moreover, by calling attention to the “long intervals” between these “especially ornate” works (*nitid* being a term he often used to allude to Heiberg), the article also alludes to Kierkegaard’s own publication history, reminding Danish readers of the rapidity with which his own works have appeared.

Given the memorability of *Prefaces*, readers of “The Crisis” would have easily pegged Heiberg as the author of the “elegant copybook” under scrutiny. And they would easily have grasped the argument against him: underpinning the illusion of intellectual and cultural authority on which “Herr Prof.” thrives is little more than a collection of fancy books, all of which are designed to astonish readers and in so doing to enrich their author. To “profit from an illusion,” Kierkegaard suggests, is not only to manipulate public opinion, but also to line one’s pockets.

Which brings us back to the basic rhetorical wager of “The Crisis” and, more specifically, Kierkegaard’s choice of the pseudonym “Inter et Inter.” Would readers who recalled the critique of Heiberg in *Prefaces* also have identified Kierkegaard as his opponent? Were there enough clues in this “little esthetic essay” for them to realize that, behind façade of “Inter et Inter,” there was “an idea-rich author who has something else to think about than elegance and making a profit”? If readers could recall his previous attack on Heiberg’s lavish New Year’s books, might they also recall its accompanying praise of the author who chooses to write prefaces instead? “He moves in and out among the people like a dupe in winter and a fool in summer,” Kierkegaard notes. He is “always joyful and nonchalant, contented with himself, really a light-minded ne’er-do-well,” someone who “does not go to the stock exchange to feather his nest but only strolls through it.”¹⁸ More than a profit seeker, the author of *Prefaces* is a frivolous *flâneur*, a carefree peripatetic, a street-corner loafer—in short, everything from which *The Corsair* would eventually dissociate Kierkegaard, and everything with which “The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress” would later attempt to identify him.¹⁹

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses / The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of An Actress*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 420.

² This argument is developed more fully in Samuel McCormick, *Letters to Power: Public Advocacy Without Public Intellectuals* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

³ See, for instance, Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 483n40.

⁴ See, for instance, Joseph Westfall, *The Kierkegaardian Author: Authorship and Performance in Kierkegaard’s Literary and Dramatic Criticism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 270; Hong and Hong, historical introduction, *Christian Discourses / The Crisis*, xvi.

⁵ On the practice of “congregation by segregation,” see Kenneth Burke, “The Rhetorical Situation,” in *Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues*, ed. Lee Thayer (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1973), 263-75.

⁶ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses / The Crisis*, 418, 419, 416, 425

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁸ Jørgen Bukdahl, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 57.

⁹ On the role of the Royal Theater in Danish cultural and social life, see W. Glyn Jones, *Denmark* (New York: Praeger 1970), 64-66.

¹⁰ Joseph von Eichendorff, *Memoirs of a Good-For-Nothing*, trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Calder and Boyars, 1966), 106. On Kierkegaard’s familiarity with Eichendorff, see Judith Purver, “Eichendorff: Kierkegaard’s reception of a German Romantic,” in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome III: Literature and Aesthetics*, ed. John Stewart (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 25-49.

¹¹ E. T. A. Hoffman, *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr: Together with a Fragmentary Biography of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler on Random Sheets of Waste Paper*, trans. Anthea Bell (Penguin Classics, 1999), 262. On Kierkegaard’s reading of Hoffman, see Judit Bartha, “E.T.A. Hoffman: A Source for Kierkegaard’s Conceptions of Authorship, Poetic-Artistic Existence, Irony and Humor,” in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, 115-35.

¹² Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part II, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 260.

¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, eds. and trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 154.

¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Vol. I, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 455.

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *Prefaces / Writing Sampler*, ed. and trans. Todd W. Nichol (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 103. Cp. Kierkegaard's opposition of "qualitative disjunction" to the "gnawing reflection" of Hegelian dialectics in *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 78.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Prefaces*, 23.

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses / The Crisis*, 316.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ On the *Corsair* affair and its relevance to the publication of "The Crisis," see McCormick, *Letters to Power*, Chapter 5.

REVIEWS

In the following "reciprocal book reviews," Simon Podmore and Jason Mahn review one another's books on Kierkegaard, each making reference to their own in the process. This format has enabled each of them to come to terms with a work that in many ways complements and supplements his own, as well as to reflect on his own book in light of the other. Setting these reviews side by side here highlights the deep convergences in two projects that read Kierkegaard on sin and self theologically—and in postmodern key—as well as sets their differing assumptions and implications in starker relief.

Fortunate Fallibility: Kierkegaard and the Power of Sin

Jason A. Mahn

Oxford, 2011, 265 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-19-979066-1

**Reviewed by Simon D. Podmore
University of Oxford**

In responding to the generous invitation to write a reciprocal review of Jason Mahn's book in relation to my own contemporary offering (*Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*, Indiana University Press, 2011), I wish first of all to appeal to Mahn's privileging of the idea of *fortunate fallibility*. All theology is *fallible*, insofar as its discourse strives within the lacuna of the 'infinite qualitative difference' between the human and the divine. *Fortune* resides in the freedom of theology to not only discover what Kierkegaard called 'joy in the thought that before God one is always in the wrong', but also the joy in the freedom to engage in dialogue with one another under this forgiving caveat. To my mind, both of our books share and develop their ideas from this vital paradigm: a consciousness of the potency of sin in dialectical relationship with a desire to behold a divine light operating in the depths of human darkness.

“O happy fault, which merited such and so great a Redeemer!” is the joyous fifth-century Easter-Eve exclamation which resounds throughout Jason Mahn’s perceptive and theologically sensitive exploration of the *felix culpa* in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard. There are, as Mahn astutely elucidates in this admirable work (and as I also emphatically concur), few thinkers who possess Kierkegaard’s talent for transmuting the darkest night which is ostensibly furthest from redemption into an occasion for the dawning of faith. Kierkegaard’s works, as Mahn perceptively reads them, provide us with ‘an existential *via negativa* through which he labors to revive the possibility of faith.’ However, this ‘existential’ dimension does not, Mahn argues, lead so much to the *Angst* of modern existentialism as it does to the sacred praise of early Christianity. In this I am again in sympathy with the *theological* anthropology Mahn proposes: while Kierkegaard is clearly a progenitor of existentialist philosophy, his own source of ‘existential’ pathos can be discovered within the archives of devotional Christianity. In this respect, we each discuss Augustine and Luther; while Mahn refers also to liturgy and I make appeal to mysticism. And yet, in having noted such retrospective tendencies, I also think that we both attempt to situate our theological anthropologies within a contemporary, even postmodern context—in consultation with such notable interlocutors as Derrida and Levinas.

In *Fortunate Fallibility*, Mahn explicates Kierkegaard’s exposé of Romanticism’s delight in the human individual’s free capacity to sin (as perhaps most viscerally expressed in its enchantment with the vitality of ‘the demonic’) as well as his critique of Idealism’s omniscient pretensions for the justification of evil. By contrast, Kierkegaard is shown to present a theological account of a Fortunate Fall which neither fetishizes the sin of the libertine nor moralizes evil within the service of a grand philosophical system. Rather than succumbing to the temptations of ‘cheap grace’ (another concern Mahn and I hold in common), Kierkegaard’s notion of Fortunate Fall speaks rather of *possible* sin than *actual* sin: that is, of ‘human fragility, fallibility, and the possibility of spiritual offense.’ In this Mahn reads Kierkegaard not in terms of ‘paradox’ or ‘orthodoxy’ alone but as a ‘para/orthodoxy’ (‘a way of speaking that is truly odd, odd but true’) which resonates with the ‘Exsultet’ of the Easter Eve Mass.

Mahn affirms a position also central to my own work, namely that the *possibility* of sin—including the possibility of offense, the freedom to say ‘no’ to Christ—is the divine gift of human freedom which also provides an essential facet of authentic Christian faith itself. This possibility is to be preferred, by both Kierkegaard and Mahn (and also by myself), to the ‘spiritless innocence’ of modern bourgeois Christendom. To Mahn’s fertile discussion of *possibility*, I seek to add, via my own reading, that *possibility* is not only an expression of freedom in relation to *sin*; the ‘impossible possibility’ of *forgiveness* can also be understood as an expression of the divine freedom to forgive in a way which transcends all merely human possibilities of forgiveness. In this respect, I suggest that the infinite qualitative difference between the human and the divine is expressed *initially* via the consciousness of sin, but *ultimately* via the infinite quality of divine forgiveness. As such, while human freedom is expressed through the anxious possibility of sin, the divine freedom to ‘forgive the unforgivable’ is conveyed through a paradoxical divine im/possibility.

Taking us through *The Concept of Anxiety*, *The Sickness Unto Death*, and *Practice in Christianity*, Mahn’s compelling book traces what he identifies as ‘Kierkegaard’s creation of *felix fragilitas*’, formed in contradistinction to Hegel’s own speculative theodicy of *felix culpa*. Mahn then considers Kierkegaard’s *felix fallibilitas*, in contrast to the *felix culpa* of Romanticism; before arriving at a Kierkegaardian *felix offensatio* which, while consciously modern, nonetheless coheres with the heart of the Easter Exsultet. Finally, Mahn arrives at his *Felicitas* where the joy of Christianity is elucidated with perceptive reference to Kierkegaard’s devotional writings. Here talk of ‘*Salighed* (beatitude, happiness)’ rises from the fire and ash of anxiety and despair. Mahn rightly reminds us that the familiar motif of Kierkegaardian faith is not simply ‘being out over 70,000 fathoms of water’ but ‘*simultaneously* to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water *and yet* to be joyful.’ In this sense, Mahn’s incisive reading of Kierkegaard speaks not simply of sin but of the beatitude and bliss of grace, the light of which glitters all the brighter for the darker possibilities of life. Such indeed sings the Exsultet of Easter Eve.

It is one of the frequent frustrations of scholarship that Mahn's book and my own arrived on the bookshelves at a similar time, without properly crossing paths in their journey to publication. I would have relished the opportunity to write my own book with the benefit of having read *Fortunate Fallibility*. But I am neither the first nor the last to encounter such a disappointment. Reading Mahn's book after having written my own leaves me with a sense that while forgiveness features more prominently in my account of the self before God, Mahn has succeeded further than I have in eliciting the felicitous in Kierkegaard. While we both converge on the themes of anxiety and despair, I also devote much (possibly morbid) attention to the themes of melancholy (both aesthetic and religious), the death of God, the death of the self, the *mysterium tremendum*, and those dreadful inner and outer aporias evoked by the idiom of 'the abyss'. Where *Fortunate Fallibility* speaks to the nature of 'temptation' [*Fristelse*], my *Anatomy of the Abyss* is drawn to the secret struggle of 'spiritual trial' [*Anfægtelse*] which can beset the endeavour to exist alone before the Face of God. In our offerings to the world of Kierkegaard scholarship, we both seek a sense of salvation in the midst of fallenness by appealing, above all, to the paradoxical; and yet I remain challenged above all by Mahn's discerning book to question whether I have yet fully realised the fortunes of fallibility.

Kierkegaard and the Self before God: Anatomy of the Abyss

Simone D. Podmore
Indiana University Press, 2011, 280 pp.
ISBN 978-0253222824

Reviewed by Jason A. Mahn
Augustana College (Rock Island, IL)

Encountering Podmore's book on Kierkegaard was, for me, akin to the conversation that friends of a mutual friend have when they first meet without the one who brought them together. Knowing little of one another, they typically compare what they like about their mutual friend—an exchange that sometimes kindles jealousy in realizing that the friendship wasn't exclusive. Podmore's suggestive and intricate account of the sinful and forgiven self before God reads Kierkegaard in ways that remind me that my "own" reading in *Fortunate Fallibility: Kierkegaard and the Power of Sin* (Oxford UP, 2011) is not unique—a realization that is reassuring and humbling at once.

Both books use descriptions within *The Sickness unto Death* of the apertures within the self and between the self and God as the shifting pivot around which we explore manifold qualitative differences—in Podmore's case, the difference between the self and a *Wholly* Other God before whom it stands as always in the wrong; the difference between that same self and a *Holy* Other God who manifests not sheer alterity but the "im/possibility" of atoning forgiveness; and finally, the important difference between these infinite qualitative differences. Indeed, Podmore's study progresses—decisively and with needful hesitations—through that third difference: from understanding God's radical otherness through the *tremendum* of sin to expressing it through the *mysterium* of forgiveness. Podmore begins with the "confession" that he originally understood the abyss solely in terms of sin; "mercifully," he later came to recognize it as forgiveness. I begin my book with a similar confession about why I was first attracted to Kierkegaard's "fortunate Fall" motif for romantic reasons and only belatedly realized just how orthodox and Christological it was. It would seem that our projects not only trace central turns in Kierkegaard's corpus from his exhibition of anxiety, despair, and melancholy to the forgiveness and joy that shine through them, but also display our own intellectual conversions, evoked so craftily by our mutual friend.

For all his assurance that the fathoms of the abyss finally plumb the graces of God, Podmore is careful not to let the end outstrip its necessary means. The book thus leads us down “this narrow and harrowing path to faith via despair” (xvi), employing Augustine, John of the Cross, Barth, Tillich, Derrida, Levinas and, especially, Rudolf Otto and Martin Luther to work beside Kierkegaard in “reenergizing the radical tension of subjectivity that is inherent to becoming a Christian.” That necessary tension is produced when a finite self stands absolutely before an absolute God. Podmore joins Kierkegaard in preserving it not only by circumventing likely dangers (Enlightenment reason, bourgeois spiritlessness, Hegelian mediation, atheistic existentialism) but also by deconstructing subtler reductions, including postmodern reductions of the estrangement between God’s holiness and human sinfulness to “alterity” plain and simple. (To be clear, Podmore is no Derridaphobe; he knows and appreciates poststructuralism well enough to use it for theological ends.)

Podmore reads all these figures and many more generously but not without incisive critique. Even Luther, who becomes something of prototype for (with)standing (in) the abyss *coram Deo*, gets critiqued when he inadvertently domesticates its mystery and horror. Too easily resorting to “the devil” to explain our revulsion at facing the naked God, Luther, on Podmore’s reading, needs Kierkegaard’s subtle correction—radical evil is nothing more (or less) than “the discrepancy between God’s infinite majesty and man” (JP 4:4949). Kierkegaard’s account of spiritual trial thereby “not only inherits but partially divests itself of its Lutheran inheritance” (123) as the monk’s fits of *Anfechtungen* give way to the ongoing *Anfægtelse* (spiritual trial) of the self alone before God.

Again, this emphasis on the opaque and fathomless dark night of the soul does not reflect Kierkegaard’s (or Podmore’s) desire to revel in the uncanny, but rather entails the necessary means of glimpsing how undomesticated grace surpasses even immeasurable sin. The self’s journey from one to the other—this “circuitous affirmation of selfhood”—comprises the throughline of the book. And yet, the book’s bulk is devoted, in Kierkegaardian fashion, to the many dead ends that flank this quest for personal authenticity: on the one side, the self’s modern independence from God, on the other, its postmodern erasure. The biggest obstacle turns out to be the temptation of using the abyss of sin to calculate that forgiveness is impossible. In other words, the only path toward becoming a self before God becomes its own greatest obstacle; one necessarily risks a certain “Romantic impulse toward demonic heroism,” not to mention a “fetishism of melancholy,” when one comes to stand before the Wholly Other. It is to Podmore’s credit that he doesn’t prescribe a failsafe antidote for such despair. As I also trace with different terms in *Fortunate Fallibility*, the possibility of such radical rejection of God is a necessary determination of “authentic” faith itself. Podmore writes of how the unhappy consciousness accompanying one’s distance from God is “transfigured” but not erased when one stands before God and receives forgiveness. Stronger still: Disclosure of the Holy One “inevitably reproduces the estrangement that it is intended to overcome” (73, quoting Gooch).

Both of us want to return Christian existence to its original difficulty; both resist closing the essential fissures within and between the self *coram Deo* that would keep the possibility of despair at bay, but with it the possibility of glimpsing divine forgiveness or cultivating Christian joy. Thus, the trick for both (and Kierkegaard too) is to characterize salvation as other than reprieve—in Podmore’s case, to narrate the transformation of the infinite qualitative difference from sin to forgiveness (as well as the transfiguration of a naked, accusatory God to God as clothed in Christ) without characterizing forgiveness as closing the gap and thus domesticating grace. Podmore fittingly traces the “transfiguration” in terms of the shifting refractions of optics: the Holy Other becomes recognized in the Wholly Other when the person sees herself as she is seen. This relational account is thoroughly Lutheran, as is the near inextricability of the person and work of Christ (Christ is God as facing me; to know this Christ is to know his benefits). Yet I wonder if that recognition of oneself as recognized by God adequately explains why the possibility of offense becomes such a pregnant possibility when one faces the forgiving God. Podmore helpfully interprets the ongoing possibility of offense, that “guarantee whereby God protects himself against man’s coming too close” (SUD125), as an essential

reminder that forgiveness is impossible by human standards and that faith will entail a free consent of the will. He concludes that “the *possibility* of offense may this be understood as an undeniable expression of human-divine *alterity*” (Podmore 170, original emphasis). But does recourse to “alterity”—which Podmore earlier regarded as flatter than the depths of sin—adequately suggest why offense is not only possible, but *increasingly* and *enticingly* possible, when one stands *coram Christi*?

My own work turns from *Sickness* to *Practice in Christianity* in order to show how the possibility of rejecting Christ characterizes Christian faith because Christ remains not only “other” but also “lower” than we have come to expect, and so constantly reverses our expectations for what count as sin and salvation. At stake here is whether the superfluous person of Christ doesn’t get made too familiar by any account of salvation as reconciliation from estrangement. Spatial models quickly break down, as Podmore himself so helpfully suggests: intimacy with God through Christ does not overturn God’s otherness. If my own project supplements his, it is to characterize sin as not only the abyss itself but the desperate attempts to mediate and erase difference in order to make more sense of the impinging possibility of offense when God is revealed as so close and so low.

But Podmore complements and critiques my assumptions as well. Whereas I follow *Practice* in looking to Christ’s incommensurable person as a way of deconstructing closed economies of salvation, Podmore reminds me that God’s “work” of forgiveness can resist cheap grace all on its own. His final chapters comprise rich meditations on a passage from *Sickness* that I and others too easily pass over: “there is one way in which man could never in all eternity come to be like God: in forgiving sins” (SUD 122). It is only our human, all-too-human “*compensatory* view of forgiveness [that] places it within the traditional...economy of exchange whereby the giving of a gift implicitly places the receiver in debt to the giver” (186). When God forgives, the unmaking of sin remains qualitatively different from every other response—as different as God’s creating *ex nihilo*. The gift of God’s forgiveness is thereby impossible—it impossibly becomes a possibility only if and because it is actual. Forgiveness thus cannot be appropriated and yet—impossibly—it must be repeated. And so, by Kierkegaard’s reading and Podmore’s careful analysis, the highest divine gift necessarily becomes the hardest human task. Podmore thus joins Kierkegaard in making Christianity both miraculous and difficult, and “yet not more difficult than it is” (CUP I: 557). I am grateful for his own challenging and extraordinary work.

Spiritual Writings: A New Translation and Selection

George Pattison
Harper, 2010, 336 pp.
ISBN 978-0061875991

Reviewed by Mark Stapp

Among the reactions generated by Kierkegaard’s upbuilding discourses, readers tend to agree on one point: the discourses demand patience. This is due in part to Kierkegaard’s thoughtful conversation with his reader, but also—let us speak frankly—due to the unentertaining prose style that Kierkegaard adopts for this portion of his authorship, which contrasts with that of his pseudonymous texts. George Pattison, the translator and editor of *Spiritual Writings*, an excellent new selection of Kierkegaard’s discourses, would agree. As he notes in an earlier study of Kierkegaard’s religious writings: “Isn’t it part of the fun of reading Kierkegaard that we relish being teased by his irony and humour and never know quite how seriously to take him – so why allow ourselves to get bogged down in texts that boringly mean what they say?”¹

Pattison underlines again the somnolent quality of the discourses in his translation notes for *Spiritual Writings*: “Undoubtedly the discourses require patience.... Sometimes I have speculated that part of their role is precisely to train the reader in patience.”² Pattison’s accomplishment in his presentation of sixteen of Kierkegaard’s quasi-sermons (Kierkegaard, of course, would deny the ability to speak with sermonical authority) is to reiterate for readers that if we do as Kierkegaard asks, if we read the discourses honestly and carefully—and, Kierkegaard hopes, aloud—then we will experience rewards distinct from and perhaps more profound than what we find in Kierkegaard’s more entertaining texts. Pattison makes a persuasive demonstration of his belief that in the discourses “... we may attain the best available view of the largest possible range of Kierkegaard’s writings and so arrive at the optimal view of ‘Kierkegaard’ himself, the matter that his writings give us to think on.”³

Pattison aims *Spiritual Writings* at non-scholars, but it is a useful text for all readers of Kierkegaard. Pattison translates the discourses with the goal of rendering Kierkegaard’s discourses into more contemporary and straightforward English. Pattison adds sub-headings within each discourse to help guide readers through the often loquacious and indirect prose. (He observes that Kierkegaard would have benefited from “editorial assistance” when writing his discourses.⁴) Pattison acknowledges that his inability to disguise the circumambulatory and repetitive structure of Kierkegaard’s discourses may be, as the saying goes, a feature rather than a bug. Kierkegaard’s unrelieved rhetorical style is probably a challenge by Kierkegaard *to* the reader as much as *for* the reader. In this way, the discourses are more quietly accomplished examples of the performative writing that Kierkegaard displays in his pseudonymous texts.

Pattison makes a subtle but impactful decision to group the discourses beneath three section headings: gift, creation, and love. Pattison’s headings make explicit three central and intertwined themes of the discourses, but they also direct our attention to the ways in which Kierkegaard’s religious investigations are foundational for Kierkegaard’s philosophical thinking. Readers of Pattison’s earlier work such as *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Theology, Literature* and *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* will recognize Pattison’s aims.⁵ In these studies, Pattison draws on the categories of gift, creation, and death to examine Kierkegaard’s philosophical relevance and concludes that “... it is in [Kierkegaard’s] religious thought, in his theology, that the threads of Kierkegaard’s thinking come together.”⁶

(Perhaps Pattison’s interest in suggesting the philosophical import of the discourses was a catalyst for his unfortunate decision not to reproduce in *Spiritual Writings* the full scriptural passages Kierkegaard chooses as epigraphs. These are included in Kierkegaard’s original texts and convenient access to them would assist readers in following the discourses.)

In the discourses that pertain to gift-giving, Pattison includes four in which Kierkegaard describes our indebtedness to God. Meditations on James 1:17-22 and Job, the discourses are beautiful devotionals that emphasize our utter dependence on divine benevolence. We always already owe all that we have to our Creator. For Kierkegaard, this assertion is not poetic phrasing, but an ontological fact and the essence of our human identity. There are beautiful spiritual meditations here, to be sure, but also thinking that reaches outside the religious realm. In these discourses and in his other religious authorship (notably *Works of Love*), Kierkegaard draws philosophical implications from our state of indebtedness that are striking in how they parallel contemporary discussions of gift-giving and the gift’s complex, even paradoxical, nature.

The discourses about divine gifts lead naturally to the creation discourses. Pattison orients his selection around Kierkegaard’s frequent return to the narrative of the lilies and the sparrows in Matthew 6:24-34. Kierkegaard’s thinking shows itself to be deeply concerned with God’s roles as Creator and constant Protector of creation. That which is essential to us as individuals—most notably, our ability to love God and others—are gifts from God and direct links to our Creator. As created beings, we achieve our highest fulfillment

when we empty ourselves before God and, with a spirit of divine adoration, accept how we are made and what we have been given.

The love discourses draw both from 1 Peter 4:7-12 and the figure of the woman described in Luke 7:37-50 who washes Jesus's feet with her hair. In these discourses it becomes clear how central the concept of love is to Kierkegaard's thinking—a fact not as immediately visible in his pseudonymous authorship. Kierkegaard's reflections on the mindset of the woman weeping at the feet of Jesus (in front of judging observers, he reminds us) are meditations on the nature of love and its relationship to God's grace and forgiveness. Kierkegaard's iterations on the figure of the woman explore the divine love that is at the core of every true gift and all creation.

Kierkegaard's essays wind through seemingly endless nuances pertaining to the existential impact of God's gifts, creation, and love. This is beautiful, but also requires patience, which returns us to the question of why Kierkegaard uses such a willfully unentertaining style when he pens his upbuilding discourses and his religious writings more generally. As Pattison suggests, the texts have an unedited quality in the senses of being unfiltered, as well as wordy and repetitive. Neither impression is exactly true, nor unique to the discourses. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works could also have used a second set of eyes and a red pen at points, and we are never safe to assume that Kierkegaard is unfiltered—even in his supposedly private journals and papers.

But Kierkegaard's religious writings have a self-absorbed quality that contrasts with the authorial remove and intellectual jousting of his pseudonymous texts. Kierkegaard still hopes for readers of his discourses, and he still takes time for subtle rhetorical strategies in his texts. We sense, however, that Kierkegaard no longer quite has control over or objective distance from his discourses. He is both author and addressee of the discourses, and the texts are confessional as much as pedagogical.

The complexity of the issues he addresses in the discourses seem to leave him at times searching for appropriate language and analogies—something we rarely sense in his pseudonymous texts. Plumbing the mental state of a seducer as Kierkegaard does in *Either/Or?* Easy, with possible laughs to boot. Identifying with the thoughts of a sinful woman publically washing the feet of Jesus with her hair? Hard, endless work. Kierkegaard would argue that disguising the required effort from the reader would neither be accurate nor Christian.

Kierkegaard's lessons do not sink in easily. This reviewer recognized Kierkegaard's call for patience on an intellectual level, but found himself on every page becoming the sort of reader whom Kierkegaard accuses of hurrying scripture along: "Even if one or two of them, whose minds aspired to something higher, did attend to the apostle's words, it wasn't for long. They let their thoughts be occupied by the words for a moment and concluded, 'Now we've understood them, bring us new thoughts that we haven't understood.'" ⁷ A re-reading is in order, it seems. Pattison has done a good work by encouraging us to approach Kierkegaard's discourses more deliberately and by providing a context in which to better appreciate them.

¹ Pattison, George. *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Theology, Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

² Pattison, George. *Spiritual Writings: A New Translation and Selection* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), xxxii.

³ Pattison, *Upbuilding Discourses*, 9.

⁴ Pattison, *Spiritual Writings*, xxxi.

⁵ Pattison, George. *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005)

⁶ Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 126.

⁷ Pattison, *Spiritual Writings*, 5.

**Note to Self: Maybe There *Are* More Things
Than are Dreamt of in My Philosophy**

***The Literary Kierkegaard*
By Eric Ziolkowski
Northwestern University Press, 2011, 447 pp.
ISBN 08101227822**

Reviewed by Jamie Lorentzen

[Kierkegaard passages cited below are from the Hongs' *Journals and Papers* series (Indiana UP) and the *Kierkegaard's Writings* series (Princeton UP)]

Eric Ziolkowski's *The Literary Kierkegaard* is a significant contribution to the ever-growing literature of Kierkegaard scholarship that addresses Kierkegaard's vast and evocative literary background, sensibility, and influence. Ziolkowski suggests how the *literary* Kierkegaard serves as the ground from which the contours of his philosophical, religious, and psychological content are thrown into relief.

Early in his book, Ziolkowski quotes from a 1964 critique by Henning Fenger:

“Among the many existing Kierkegaards there is one who is little known even in Scandinavia—Søren Kierkegaard, the man of letters.” This literary Kierkegaard is “not an isolated phenomenon, a genius fallen from the sky.... He is a genuine product of a well-defined literary milieu, the Copenhagen of the 1830's and the 1840's,” the period of Hans Christian Anderson, N. F. S. Grundtvig, and numerous other superlative authors and poets—the period the Danes justifiably call the Golden Age. (21)

Here and elsewhere, Ziolkowski suggests that academic fetishes continue to this day to tag—and thereby commodify—Kierkegaard as strictly “philosopher” or “theologian” or “proto-existentialist” or “proto-postmodernist” or “proto-deconstructionist.” Ziolkowski essentially wants to re-assert Fenger's point, namely, that Kierkegaard was preeminently a literary artist “whose art served not only aesthetic but also philosophical, ethical, theological, and ultimately religious purposes.... Most readers of Kierkegaard are so preoccupied with discovering his thought that they fail to realize how much attention he devoted to construction and style” (20). Looking at Kierkegaard's writings from the plains of this wider literary landscape may even show more things about the breadth of Kierkegaard's vision of heaven and earth than are dreamt of in many a Kierkegaard scholar's philosophy.

If Ziolkowski's underlying presupposition about specialized Kierkegaard scholarship is correct, then investigations into Kierkegaard's style and form are no less essential than more strict investigations into his content and thought. To the literary artist, how style and form are crafted *in-forms* words and phrases that evoke content and thought. In this context, Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological and religious content may be more accessibly rendered from his rich literary background, sensibility, and literary style and form. Kierkegaard's form and style, in other words, establishes a highly concrete and readily available path by which content may be understood, appropriated, and internalized. As Kierkegaard hints: just as a person “essentially puts his whole personality into his communication,” so too “an author puts his whole soul into his style” (*Two Ages* 103).

“Aside from his virtues as a religious and philosophical thinker,” Ziolkowski writes, Kierkegaard “prided himself on his ‘lyrical’ prose style, a style he considered able to ‘produce a stronger lyrical effect than verse’ (*JP* 5:5939). . . . Lamenting once to his friend, the philosopher Hans Brøchner (1820-1875), that Danish literature ‘lacked a prose with the stamp of art,’ Kierkegaard claimed to ‘have filled this gap’ (*Encounters with Kierkegaard* 245). On another occasion he reportedly told a friend: ‘Yes, you see. Well, Denmark has had its greatest sculptor in Thorvaldsen, its greatest poet in Oehlenschläger, and its greatest prose stylist in me’ (*Encounters with Kierkegaard* 113)” (25, 26).

Kierkegaard is the first to call himself “hardly anything but a poet” (*Point of View* 18), but not a poet who wrote strictly “in the medium of imagination instead of precipitating men into ethical realization in actuality” (*JP* 4: 4275). Rather, he was “a singular kind of poet” (*Without Authority* 165), one who wrote in the medium of imagination to precipitate men into ethical realization in actuality. Deception is involved, but the literary style to which it subscribes is ethically intended to *deceive into the truth*:

From the total point of view of my whole work as an author, the esthetic writing is a deception, and herein is the deeper significance of the *pseudonymity*. But a deception, that is indeed something rather ugly. To that I would answer: Do not be deceived by the word *deception*. One can deceive person out of what is true, and—to recall old Socrates—one can deceive a person into what is true. Yes, only in this way can a deluded person actually be brought into what is true—by deceiving him. (*Point of View* 53)

Kierkegaard scholars nevertheless still may have problems calling Kierkegaard something so apparently “frivolous” or “self-indulgent” as a *poet*. That said, a glance at his literature reveals poetic-dramatic personae, including editors, a hermit, a judge, young men, a seducer, a mute, a quiet man, a watchman, poets-in-prose, lyricists, letter writers, and wannabe pastors. Collectively, the motley crew writes things like fictional biography (*Johannes Climacus*); aphorisms, jokes, imaginary speeches, creative nonfiction, play reviews, fiction, and epistles (*Either/Or*); rogue sermons and discourses for “awakening” (*Upbuilding Discourses, The Sickness Unto Death* et al.); dialectical lyrics, a eulogy, and “expectorations” (wha’?) (*Fear and Trembling*); a novel loosely constructed from reports, letters, and incidental observations (*Repetition*); a five-chapter—read “five-act”—thought-project, complete with interlude (*Philosophical Fragments*); parodies of systematic writing (*Concept of Anxiety; Concluding Unscientific Postscript*); prefaces (*Prefaces*); a symposium among previously constructed fictional pseudonyms, plus more letters and fictional narrative diaries (*Stages on Life’s Way*); a book review nearly as long as the piece of literature under review (*Two Ages*); an intellectual autobiography (*Point of View*); pamphlet writing (*Late Writings*); and a massive literary journal.

How literary can a guy get?

More to Ziolkowski’s subtext: Why can’t philosophy and religion scholars generally be more neighborly and share the infinite wealth of Kierkegaard with literary studies scholars *and* why can’t literary studies scholars, in an equally neighborly way, want or even care to receive Kierkegaard into their curricula?

Translation: Where’s the *love*?

What Robert E. Montgomery writes about D. H. Lawrence regarding this sad split, this unrequited love, could just as easily be said about Kierkegaard:

A truly unified view [of D.H. Lawrence] will have to penetrate to the ground of unity between fiction and philosophy, to see them as twin products of the same consciousness. . . . His didactic and expository works are products of the same creative imagination and. . . they exploit the imaginative resources of language to communicate to the feelings as well as to the intellect. Lawrence himself leaves no doubt that his own goal is the union of fiction and philosophy. He says in his essay on “The Future of the

Novel”: “Plato’s Dialogues, too, are queer little novels. It seems to me it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split. They used to be one, right from the days of myth. Then they went and parted like a nagging married couple with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and that beastly Kant. The two should come together again, in the novel.” ...In Lawrence’s view...the modern mind, after more than two thousand years of abstract conceptualizing, simply cannot conceive the synthesis that he has in mind. To the modern mind, art and philosophy, image and concept, feeling and reason, action and truth, are distinct and separate. In order to understand Lawrence, we must transcend our normal categories. This requires an extraordinary effort of thought, but without it we cannot grasp Lawrence in his wholeness. Without a fundamental reconceptualizing of art and philosophy we will be left with a false dichotomy and a false choice between the prophet and the poet. (*The Visionary D. H. Lawrence: Beyond Philosophy and Art*, by Robert E. Montgomery (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 3, 4-5)

There of course have been and continue to be any number of Kierkegaard scholars from various disciplines who are sensitive to reuniting the literary and philosophical/religious Kierkegaard. One such example is worth invoking, if only because he made practical academic and curricular inroads toward such a synthesis of fiction and philosophy.

For decades, Howard Hong taught a January interim class at St. Olaf College entitled *Philosophical Ideas in Literature*, which was the perfect prelude for at least some unassuming students to his Spring semester *Kierkegaard* course. In that interim course, he defined literature as *philosophia en concreto*, which he translated as “philosophy made concrete.” Even before teaching Kierkegaard, Hong already was suggesting that literary (concrete) approaches to understanding the human condition were more accessible than philosophical/theological (abstract) approaches. Hong (whose St. Olaf and University of Minnesota studies earned him a Ph.D. in English, and who came to Kierkegaard via Ibsen) knew that undergraduates may best appropriate *ethics* (Hong’s, and arguably Kierkegaard’s, primary watchword) *through a story, a literary text*, much like how Judge Williams prescribes to A: “You know how the prophet Nathan dealt with King David when he presumed to understand the parable the prophet had told him but was unwilling to understand that it applied to him. Then to make sure, Nathan added: You are the man, O King. In the same way I also have continually tried to remind you that you are the one who is being discussed and you are the one who is spoken to” (*Either/Or* II 5).”

Ziolkowski might add here: “The transformation of aesthetics as science into the aesthetic as existential stage furnishes a supreme example of Kierkegaard’s wont to favor the existential and the concrete over the speculative and abstract. This trait is already exemplified in his dissertation, which opens by identifying the concept of irony with Socrates’ existence; indeed, Socrates is Kierkegaard’s first and foremost mentor in the art of existentializing the abstract or conceptual, because ‘for Socrates every single thing was a metaphorical and not inappropriate symbol of the idea’ (*Concept of Irony* 18)” (18-19). (Christ, it should be noted, is Kierkegaard’s first and foremost *Christian* mentor in the art of existentializing the abstract or conceptual through Christ’s preferred literary genre, namely, parable.)

—All of which plays into the very purpose of Kierkegaard’s literary intentions *qua* poet, and especially under the auspices of his pseudonyms, all of whom essentially (and according to Ziolkowski) “are poets ‘in the elemental sense of imaginative thinkers’ [‘Historical Introduction’ of *Fear and Trembling* xxv]” (21). After further quoting the Hong’s discussion of Kierkegaard’s poetic use of imaginary construction and imaginatively constructing [*experimenterende*] at length, Ziolkowski writes: “In Kierkegaard’s time, the term ‘poet’ generally connoted ‘writer of literary texts.’ As the Hong’s point out, Kierkegaard pursued the role of ‘poetic *Experimentator* who makes or fashions the various pseudonyms, poetic, imaginative constructors, who in turn imaginatively shape characters, scenes, situations, and relations expressive in various ways of the hypothesis(es) informing the work’ (*Fear and Trembling* xxv)” (22).

And so Ziolkowski perhaps rightly calls Kierkegaard *literary* above all other descriptors. Given that the personae or masks that make up Kierkegaard's singular and comprehensive authorship and authenticity run so thick and are so existentially varied, it would seem too narrow to call him anything else.

SURVEY OF THE CONTENTS

Ziolkowski notes that, in 1838, the young "Kierkegaard admitted that whenever he read a book, what gratified him 'was not so much what the book itself is as the infinite possibilities there must have been in every passage, the complicated history, rooted in the author's personality, studies, etc.' (*JP* 5:5297)" (181). It is in journal entries such as this that Kierkegaard signals what Ziolkowski calls "the essentially literary as opposed to the strictly theological or philosophical nature of his writings. We must therefore be prepared to survey, to probe, and to interpret as thoroughly as possible, and to decipher and to decode whatever necessary, the linkages between his writings and those of other literary masters by whom he was directly and manifestly influenced" (4).

Following an introduction that addresses Kierkegaard as *literary*, including his embrace of the poetic to more deeply express his commitment to the ethical, chapters 1 through 4 consider literary antecedents upon which Kierkegaard relied or may have relied, including Aristophanes, Socrates, Wolfram's *Parzival*, Cervantes' *Quixote*, and Shakespeare. Chapter 5 offers a comparative study of Kierkegaard and Thomas Carlyle, contemporaries who did not know each other yet perhaps would have smiled upon parts of each one's own imagination imaginatively constructed by the other.

Ziolkowski then begins his concluding chapter with this: "It bespeaks the limitless complexity of the literary Kierkegaard that salient features of his and his pseudonyms' aesthetic, ethical, and religious thinking, and of their irony and humor, are evoked by such varied characters as Aristophanes' Socrates, Wolfram's *Parzival*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Carlyle's *Teufelsdröckh*" (257). (His assertion of *limitless complexity* helps justify why literary critics before and after Ziolkowski's study are compelled to construct similar comparative studies between Kierkegaard and any number of writers, ranging from Milton to George Eliot to Kafka to Faulkner to Rilke to Ibsen to Auden to Walker Percy to Melville to Dante to Dostoevsky to Bob Dylan.) Also in his conclusion, Ziolkowski considers writers and filmmakers who followed and were influenced by Kierkegaard. Throughout the entire text, an array of literary voices contemporary to Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark is also considered, for Ziolkowski is equally well versed in the history and people who surround Kierkegaard in his time.

ON LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF LITERARY COMPARATIVE STUDY

To quell some Kierkegaard scholars who may summarily dismiss the literary critic's bread-and-butter historical-comparative studies approach, Ziolkowski writes: "in order for a comparison to be sound, somehow a balance must be achieved between the recognition of likeness and the acknowledgement of difference" (47). In effect, Ziolkowski makes it clear throughout his work that his various comparative studies do not hide the *limits* of comparative study, especially between Kierkegaard and writers of whom Kierkegaard was not or may not have been aware, whether they preceded, were contemporary with, or followed him. Ziolkowski's intent, like the intent of any well-meaning literary critic, is simply to position the reader between two or more subjects being compared in order to allow one subject to nourish as deep an understanding of another subject and vice versa. As Samuel Butler writes in his *Notebooks*, "though analogy is often misleading, it is often the least misleading thing we have."

Isn't the act of comparative studies, after all, what we do as humans all the time? We consider similarities and differences, then grow or shave those similarities and differences to profiles that smack of our

selves or other selves—all selves that essentially are *relational* phenomena that relate themselves to themselves, to others, and to the power that established the relationships in the first place. It is how we read ourselves like the common literary critics that we all are, either regretfully or unregretfully confined to comparative, analogical, relational studies of ourselves and others. Comparative study, then, is not unlike what Mark C. Taylor writes of translation, in which host and parasite “are bound in a symbiotic relationship which is mutually nourishing. The host feeds the parasite which, in turn, renews the life of the host.... Through translated representation, the parasite enlivens the host” (“Reinventing Kierkegaard,” by Mark C. Taylor, *Religious Studies Review*, v. 7, n. 3 (July 1981), 203-4).

CODA

In 1992, the Hong Kierkegaard Library moved from the top floor of St. Olaf College’s Holland Hall (one floor above the philosophy department) to the old Reading Room in the very basement of Rølvaag Library, several floors below the many-windowed English department and near the bedrock of the building. I interpreted the move as a good sign that philosophy and literature could live undivided under one roof, where both disciplines could join in an ongoing construction project of mutual upbuilding, where stylistic and substantive tensions between concrete images co-existing with abstract philosophical ideas might no longer be a detriment to sound inquiry but rather a clear advantage. Literature built without philosophical bedrock cannot be great; philosophy without poetry lacks literary windows through which actual, daily cares and struggles of human existence may be viewed more concretely and thereby addressed more deliberately.

Kierkegaard knew the need for such a union between literature and philosophy, for he knew how humans hunger for the concrete-actual in literature and the abstract-ideal in philosophy—to sustain a healthy and fully human existence. Further, Kierkegaard was acutely aware of the importance of bridging such a divide to protect the fully human from impending advances and distractions of industrialism, materialism, and consumerism (especially digital consumerism) that threaten the import of literature and philosophy in human development. Against long odds and a contemporary culture that largely misunderstood his own interdisciplinary approach to both the world and the world of ideas, he built a many-windowed esthetic upon a bedrock of ethical, philosophical and religious presuppositions.

Add Ziolkowski, then, to the list of growing Kierkegaard scholars sympathetic to and championing the literary Kierkegaard. Just as the play’s the thing wherein Hamlet catches the conscience of the King, the literary Kierkegaard’s the thing that moves readers to feel passion to appropriate the *what* of his philosophy, the *what* of his theology, and the *what* of whatever else assistant professors and Horatio-like friends of Kierkegaard like to think he writes about.

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