

Becoming the Flute

Socrates and the Reversal of Values in Kierkegaard's Later Work¹

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As indicated by the subtitle, the subject of this article is Socrates, obviously not in his own right but as an emblematic character in Kierkegaard's work. As such he is the sole constant human factor, second only to the author. This omnipresence proves to be an adequate point of reference from which to investigate the evolution of Kierkegaard's thought in matters as crucial as irony or indirect communication. I would argue that the evolutionary process implies, much more than a change, a real reversal to opposite attitudes. This is another way of arriving at the conclusion that the author abides until the end by the complex of issues developed from the very outset of his career in *The Concept of Irony*. Stability and revolution come thus to converge.

Aspects of Duplicity

Apart from Christ, whose double nature is guaranteed by both tradition and dogma, there is in the whole Kierkegaard corpus only one person that surpasses Socrates in duplicity, and this is the subject underlying everything, the writer himself.

To dwell for a few moments upon duplicity would by no means be an idle occupation. This phenomenon can take innumerable forms, varied enough to tempt the observer to impatience. When everything visible and observable in the world hides, by necessity, its invisible source while projecting its shadow, why label literary duplicity as a privileged form of representation or even of being? And yet it is so. The complex Ivan Karamazof is a higher personality and a doubly credited literary performance in comparison to his pious brother Aliosha, even though the latter may only work for the good. The demonic Stavrogin,

for all destruction he causes around him, is of a higher standing than the meek Idiot.

To say that this is due to the adventurous nature of evil and vice would be simplifying matters all too conveniently. There is more to it than that. By breaking artistic convention, thus breaking morality at the heart of everything (literature as well) the writer engages in exposing the way of his art (including inner conflicts of representation) alongside its product. Interaction between the inner and the outer universe becomes a manifest process. By portraying evil, the most outstanding among secrets of the soul, the writer displays himself, at work, just as much with the characters depicted as with his own engagement.

Let us summarize the situation in all the non-classical elements it contains. The hero (one could think of Johannes Kreisler, a persona of E.T.A. Hoffmann), as in fact the writer himself, is unsociable, deprived of the means of communication. Or he is not simply evil, but in conflict with the good, and he remains (contrary to traditional literary values), by virtue of this very quality, at the center of our attention in all his transforming images (e.g. Medardus, by the same Romantic author in the *Elixirs of the Devil*). It is as if language, in its refinement through long centuries of literary practice, has been produced solely for his sake.

It is evident that what attracts our attention is specifically the conflict as actual, unresolved present, not as a possible sequence of stages interconnected through the chain of temporal evolution or simple change. Nor is the change in question that by which an undifferentiated character (or even the personality already conscious of the various contradictory elements of which he is composed) moves towards moral perfection, but the very opposite. This evolution is not a common process of degradation either, but a deepening consciousness of the evil layers in personality, for this is the content of religious awareness, as it seems.

The above is formulated with both Kierkegaard and his own Romantic premises in mind. He appears to be by nature prototypically receptive of, has been nourished by Romanticism, and was double or divided from his earliest manifestations as a writer. He started with what one could call an inverted order of things. Much more at ease in intellectual than artistic pursuits, in his literary development he follows a course opposite to the one traditionally ascribed to the Romantic personality. There is nothing in his activities that could even faintly remind one of

the unbridled flight of the imagination congenially expressed by a flow of words that no boundary could contain. Much is thwarting him or obstructing his way. This is amply illustrated by the first volumes of the „Papers“ in the current edition. Nowhere does he feel or sound entirely at home, except in the practice of dialectics, which somehow combines art with scholarship, an art in its own right, as it allows for transitions between opposites, high and low – evil and the good are not yet envisaged.

Through an unavowed attraction to Plato (a „modern“ philosopher because of his undogmatic practice as well as a non-modern in his ignorance of the new personality to emerge out of the revolution of times) Kierkegaard comes to a pronounced attachment to the Ancient’s master, Socrates. The ambiguous configuration the above-mentioned three persons compose consolidates a Socratic figure all the more amazingly contemporary and consistent, as it is brought about by the very opposite, by the Modern author’s effort to maintain a clearly demarcated distance. The Socrates who evolves out of this method is a character discontinuous and disruptive, in both space and time, i.e. in the evolution of Kierkegaard’s work.

Kierkegaard shows in this an affinity with and a certain degree of dependence on Hamann. The latter’s largely intuitive portrait of Socrates, in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* (1759), treated in the spirit of lavish frugality so characteristic of its author, is nevertheless more homogeneous than Kierkegaard’s. It is to a great extent corrective, demonstrating a piety stubbornly opposed to the Enlightenment. At the same time it constructs a model of identification that would distinguish itself from humanistic mentality in more than one way. But the inner conflict and the devastating element of transformation in Kierkegaard’s Socrates have not been anticipated by Hamann.

There are on the whole no antecedents to Kierkegaard’s treatment of Socrates, unless we count the burdensome Hegel as one. In this regard Socrates becomes a liberator, in the sense that he helps him set himself free from Hegel. He does this, however, only to conceal the new capturing elements which Kierkegaard’s absorption in the depths of the deceitful self, associated with Socrates, or in himself was very soon to bring forth.

This whole remarkable process begins by mastery. In his triumphant dissertation „On the Concept of Irony“ Kierkegaard aimed at nothing less than conquering dialectically the most illusive and evasive life method ever invented among humans – irony, both ancient and

modern, all-pervasive in its aspects that seem to be infinite. Furthermore he was to dilute the phenomenon of irony by raising it to the status and the dignity of a concept. Kierkegaard's pact with Socrates, who has been completely identified with irony never to be severed from it again, has now been made solemn, whatever restrictions or limitations there may have been imposed on the Ancient philosopher.

The Socrates who issues from *Irony* is as unusual a composite as any conquered conqueror or any agnosticist with firm beliefs would tend to be. Kierkegaard declares it to be aggravating that Socrates does not subscribe to common values, the state of Athens is in consequence acquitted, even justified in condemning him. But there is at the same time a universal order of things (unspecified by Kierkegaard) by the standards of which Socrates' own justification is more lasting².

Not airborne but suspended in the air, just as Aristophanes has portrayed him, incongruous and subversive, atomizing the collectivity of the state: It is exactly this dubious figure who, by a strange reversal of dialectical fortune, comes to be a guiding spirit in the work that Kierkegaard begins with *Either-Or*.

His refusal or even plain inability to teach, negatively appraised in *Irony*³, turns into a virtue: This is exactly how teaching among humans should be practiced; any direct transmission of knowledge would be suspicious, at best a pretense. Ignorance about immortality, judged in *Irony* to be of a rather questionable nature⁴, is now understood to be the very criterion of faith, which can only be an agonizing hypothesis, nothing less.

The reversal of values reflects a revolution that has taken place in Kierkegaard's life and work in the short span of time separating *The Concept of Irony* from *Either-Or*. The books are from now on no longer discrete but inform – in unity and tension – one structure.

Two of the most crucial principles that develop in the phase between *Either-Or* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* – the period which coincides with the flowering of pseudonymity – can be identified as the pair of correlatives: Indirect communication and hidden inwardness.

Of those correlatives the one to appear first, even before Kierkegaard gives it a definite name, is indirect communication. In the beginning it is only a literary form, with no apparent awareness from the part of the author that there would be theoretical possibilities of further development.

It is the sympathetic aspect of Romantic communication that occupies Kierkegaard at the outset. The writer behind the sequence of works encompassed by *Either-Or* and the *Postscript*, whether signed and directly acknowledged by himself or pseudonymous, does not strive to be acclaimed by the public; success leaves him entirely indifferent. The text he offers has no message or, to be more exact, even the slight message that it might contain annuls itself, as the aesthetic mode of life is refuted by the ethical.

The author addresses the reader, a person he supposes or wishes to be just as independent and solitary as himself. It is Socrates' method he wants to revive in this solemn but completely silent communication. Its principles are laid down in the literary autobiography included in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*⁵.

What strikes our attention is that the method is initially described in purely negative terms. It is *not* direct, before it is given a name, or for that matter any definite content. The variety of forms and synonyms it is introduced with converge sooner or later on the dynamic term of „indirect“ communication – just as the non-didactic or non-scholarly discourse, launched defensively, is converted into the forceful „unscholarly“. Existential enactment allows for this remarkable mutation.

It sounds as if the author introducing indirectness would prefer to present it as a deliberate non-method.

What does this method in fact amount to? The author is *not* to presume to be serious or to develop matters of any gravity; gravity is best rendered anyway by elevation, which might deceive as superficiality. He is unwaveringly conscious of the seriousness of the message, but abhors marketplace ethics that have invaded literature in this most modern of ages. The only thing he has to offer, in a world dominated by shouting agents, is a significant whisper, full of meaning and hardly audible.

Pseudonymous himself, he is convinced of the existence of a reader who is nameless, but not the less concrete for that. The relationship between these two invisible persons has much of the character of an amorous one, but no one has to be revealed to the other.

The preliminaries in this doctrine of silent communication were communicated by Kierkegaard very appropriately in all seclusiveness⁶, in the shadowy realm of his private Papers, as a reaction to the publication of *Repetition* and the way it was received. By that time the reader, responding but out of reach, unalienably personal, „my reader“, has ob-

tained full substance and begun playing the well known role he was to play from now on in Kierkegaard's work.

Thus it is in full confidentiality that the method proclaims itself in the first place. In many ways Kierkegaard tries to cancel one of the most obnoxious predicaments in which a modern writer finds himself. He would if possible be happy to revert back to a time before typography was invented. In a time of impersonal anonymity he wants to reach out for the individual devoted reader, yet without for one moment surrendering his rights of distance.

The method of intellectual midwifery is fully at work here. The negative qualities that Socrates was criticized for in *Irony*, although never converted to positive, are reversed, and acclaimed the ideal method of communication. This applies among other things to his attitude towards money or remuneration in general. *Irony* did not regard it as a sign of nobility that he refused to receive wages for his activity among the young⁷; he had nothing to teach them anyway. Precisely this becomes the touchstone of his greatness, he did indeed possess the noble insight that he had nothing to teach them, he could only prompt them to discover the source of knowledge inside them and teach themselves. Potentiality exists already. By simply turning his attention inwards the disciple discovers that he is indeed equipped with all necessary presuppositions for the acquisition of knowledge. The teacher does not engender this treasure, does not produce it in the least, he only helps it forth, assistant to a birth, no parent of any offspring.

The mechanism and the intrinsic logic of Kierkegaard's work have turned Socratic elocutions at the market place of the Athens of yore into a modern practice among contemporaries. We have already moved into the territory of the *Fragments* and the *Postscript*. Let us consider some possible implications.

Human equality among essentially equal human beings (i.e. no one needs more than slight attention from the master, a passing hint) is sustained in order to make all the more apparent its horrifying consequence: The more gifted an apprentice appears to be the more appalling his depravation becomes. Because there is one respect in which he fails to find any presupposition in himself. When at last, by God's divine interception in human time, he is made aware of his limitation, what he is then taught to discover is no less than an abyss, the irrevocable darkness of Sin, whose beginning is lost in time and whose end is nowhere to be seen. It is as if redemption left it to continue its work undisturbed.

So freedom and perfect equality, mutual dignity among humans, however distinguished the teacher, is absolutely counterbalanced by the individual learner's being plunged into darkness. The Saviour, to be sure, has temporarily-eternally condescended to save him, but this salvation is unattainable, as it can only be developed within the framework of unfulfilled love. If the disciple leaves his human teacher only to discover the plenitude in himself, man confronted with the deity has no other choice but to reject divine love. Returning to himself he finds nothing but an insoluble void.

Socrates as a Pedagogue in the Human Sense

To achieve credibility for the paradoxical situation of man's simultaneous abasement and grandeur Kierkegaard needs a person outside Christianity, at times indeed it might appear outside history or even time, Socrates, though he never describes him even remotely in these terms.

Socrates has transcended the Greek world by virtue of his supersession of the ubiquitous principle of beauty, generally attributed to the Greece of old. This advancement is symbolized by his notorious ugliness⁸. But he has also discarded Greek inquisitiveness into the order of things and the world, exclusively attentive to the one accessible, even if inexhaustible, enquiry into the inner recesses of the individual. There might be heaven, but there could also dwell a demon inside this very noble creature.

We are not going to pause at the chain of successive displacements of meaning in the renowned clause in *Phaedrus* 230 a⁹ that have made this interpretation of Socrates philologically possible. From our present point of view it can no longer be a matter of origins or textual interpretation. We shall only remark that for Kierkegaard the connection of Socrates with evil¹⁰ (Christian with Romantic demonical reverberations) is an established fact, a new aspect and a further explanation of his unattractive appearance (ugliness leads to evil, quite apart from Kierkegaard and long before him – it would suffice to mention King Richard the Third).

If it be deemed a depravation that Greece is „naively“ ignorant, or unconscious of evil-sin, then Socrates is superior to his context. In this respect it is as though his emblematic ignorance were suspended, al-

though it would be an exaggeration to regard him as conscious of sin. In all other respects his ignorance is sustained. It is always negative in content, but it has suffered the transformation of negativity itself turned into a value higher than any finite positive knowledge, second only to God's omnipotent insight.

We remain within the same stage. As already mentioned the principal reversal from the point of view of *Irony* relates to the fact that, while its framework and selection of points of view are still productive, its system of values has been turned upside down. Major Socratic lapses are restored to their rights, acclaimed as exemplary exercises of human conduct, and not quite devoid of theological implications either.

Even figurative elements are presupposed. Socrates abides by his ironical suspension. Should he descend to walk on the ground, then he would be judged by the standards of *Irony* as dissociative, worse than that, encouraging others to detach themselves from any form of collectivity, beginning from its nucleus, family and its ties.

Kierkegaard neither rejects nor refutes this, but reevaluates it into a prime criterion of subjectivity: Dissociation is understood as the first and necessary step for the individual's genuine development. Human company can only be a deviation from that goal and is at any rate highly distracting.

The question of sanction (in terms of *Irony*), which was later to be converted to Authority, is, significantly, not touched upon in relation to Socrates. (When justification becomes actual, it tends then to be a justification of torment.) But the most significant, because unexpected, reevaluation is probably the one regarding the theme of communication itself.

Needless to say, the discussion starts by purely oral preoccupations. The situation is no less charged or complicated than the one prevailing between master and pupil, and the principal development is still to be found in *Philosophical Fragments*. In highly dialectical argumentation (as the Socratic is only presented in order to yield the negative aspect of what the Christian situation is shown to be) ideal human educative contact, as practiced by Socrates, consists in denying to transmit knowledge that he is devoid of anyway, and urging the pupil to find it as already contained in himself. We have mentioned this already, but only now can we add some complementary aspects that seem to make the situation even more puzzling the more one ponders it.

Socrates as the ideal human teacher vanishes from the scene, as he

must, after having imparted the attitude: Search inwards. His declaration of ignorance is a courtesy to the disciple and potentially to any fellow human being.

What the imparted attitude itself amounts to is never explained, nor is the knowledge the liberated disciple has now gained access to made explicit. The dialectical structure of the *Fragments* nevertheless leaves no doubt as to its preliminary nature. As soon as the divine teacher enters the scene, dramatically divine as he has also become human, any direct veneration becomes impossible. Time has culminated in the vertiginous peak that annuls it, the Moment. Separation becomes inevitable after an almost magnetic attraction, while everything pertaining to the past is supposed to vanish. This is of course not stated directly, what is formulated is only the opposite, that after the clash with the moment „everything becomes Socratic again“, that is to say human, and individuals continue their liberating inward learning processes, equals among equals¹¹.

„Socratic again“. Is this meant as a concession? Is it regressing? Is it the bitter or simply realistic acknowledgment of the fact that a human being cannot endure a divine encounter, even, or perhaps exactly because of the solicitude of the god, that man recoils precisely at the sight of or even at the very suspicion of divine humiliation? The notion of Offence, the deliberate or aggressive denial of belief/faith in the Paradox, is introduced precisely to account for this inner conflict, a conflict which, strangely, is not associated with the Socratic appeal for introspection.

This conflict among others is not solved in the *Postscript*, which is meant to be an explanation of *Fragments* or its theory applied. It becomes even more intensified, while the focus of interest shifts imperceptibly to a standpoint which is no longer that of the living teacher, but the writer, who, even while suspending quite a few vital living activities, is all the more occupied with existence.

Socrates becomes continuous with the writer practicing existential indirect communication, and he is brought in several crucial phases to support the practice, which he seems to sanction wholeheartedly, while its main exponents remain Lessing (really a portrait of the *Postscript* author¹²) and Kierkegaard himself. By a strange development the teacher, the one who did not count, has become the only one who is really important. There is no allusion to the Romantic ironists condemned in *Irony*, even if the unidentified description of ironists-in-isolation-from-

each-other¹³ is justified and celebrated over and against the all-too-protected and secure type of direct communication between the reader and the self-assuming author who generates it.

All these reversals are tacit. Kierkegaard cannot, even in the name of Climacus, refer openly to himself and the totality of his work. He does not indulge in correcting himself or revising former attitudes, except in passing. But what hovers incessantly over it all is the issue of justification. With regard to Socrates, the dialectics that would both justify Athens in the end for condemning him (as indeed Hegel has suggested) and nevertheless grant Socrates justification on a higher universal scale, has in fact been left open since *Irony*.

Insufficiency of Human Educative Methods

Discontinuity is the first word that once more comes to mind when contemplating the space of Kierkegaard's work after the *Postscript*. There is no one more congenial to accompany him in this new venture than Socrates, whose very smile (an unwavering attribute, the dialectical converse of his ugliness) is the symbol of a breach. Irony is also according to E. T. A. Hoffmann concentrated in the region of the mouth, a frail passage from inner to outer world, organ of disclosure and concealment (cf. self portrait¹⁴). It is a breach in the continuum of speech and communication and a breach in the immediate.

No appeal to statistics is required in order to establish the validity of the observation that Kierkegaard makes his Socrates revolve around a very few recurring Platonic passages. Apart from *Phaedrus* 230 a (i.e. no need to investigate idle mythological questions while I remain ignorant as to myself, with emphasis on secondary clause: *for I might prove to be a beast*), there is *Meno* 82 b f. on Socrates as a teacher who helps the disciple to discover knowledge already available inside himself. And last but not least *Theaetetus* 150 a, Socrates admitting that far from being able to give birth he, as a true son of Phaenarete (Hamann begins precisely with the observation that Socrates is the consequent child of a sculptor and a midwife) can only take credit for helping others to give birth.

None of the above qualities are revoked after the *Postscript*, but the Socrates that follows is now attached to different utterances from the Plato corpus.

The dominant question from now on is the one regarding hidden

inwardness. This has been pseudonymously developed in *Fear and Trembling* and – somewhat ambiguously, it is true – in the last chapters of the *Postscript*¹⁵. Is Kierkegaard still going to build on that conception, ironical in its origins, presupposing as it does division between appearance and being?

Let us recapitulate his twofold attitude up to this point. There is an ethical demand for transparency (Assessor William in *Stages on Life's Way* and *Edifying Discourses* already containing intimations of the impossibility of full disclosure) and the aesthetic or religious thrust towards concealment. It might appear contradictory that those realms, which are supposed to stand for the opposite poles, both display this pervasive trait identically, yet this is exactly the case. An opposition prevails of course with respect to the motives of concealment. The aesthetic personality is not inclined to be decipherable; he is self-sufficiently elevated above communication, not necessarily despising his fellow human beings but definitely beyond needing their assistance, or for that matter any recognition or acknowledgment. He can carry out experiments but is not occupied with the result at all. Content to be absorbed in the labyrinthine turns of the imagination, he is resolute in refusing to offer anything concrete. He might fail sometimes, as indeed he does in *Repetition*, at least as far as his initial expectations are concerned, but this does not seem to affect him in the least.

The religious person, at the threshold of Christianity (*Fear and Trembling*, and the *Postscript* at the next to last phase), is hiding too, although for different reasons. In one aspect he resembles the author and practices indirect communication, he loathes the appearance of seriousness, to the extent that, had he to choose between two evils, he would prefer by far to seem frivolous. He is conscious of living in an age saturated with knowledge where no engagement or passion is visible. Not unlike Socrates, he would rather clear the ground first¹⁶. He sounds more like a precursor to the ideal communicator; as soon as the air is clear no one would object to us becoming direct again, he seems to promise.

This is another way of suggesting that „then everything might safely turn back to Socrates“. But at the same time the gap that has been established between communicating agents is too deep, and there seems to be no way back.

Paradox theology, on Lutheran ground, limits operations. There is an ironical concern to sever the utterance from the meaning of the utterance and to sever the speaker from both. There is no incompatibility

so far with the gospel urge of „anointing your head“ or avoiding pharisaic gestures, no conflict between existing as an ironical author and as a non-ostentatiously believing Christian.

But Christianity is more intense than that. Practice in a time of abundance made certain precautions imperative. Matters are still more acute in a world that has degraded Christianity to a state of complacency. Insisting to the end on the Lutheran suspicion of merits, Kierkegaard wants to go further than asceticism, back into the martyr pattern of the origins of Christianity.

The Socrates Kierkegaard evokes now has become a stern figure. One is continually reminded that he is and remains pagan, but there is no way of circumventing the prototypical scene of the *Apology*. What happened then and what was it that the young ambitious author of *Irony* and its theses had overlooked? Exactly the fact that truth is persecuted, and, conversely, that persecution is the cardinal criterion that one is advocating the truth. This is the lot of any Christian who is really a Christian, and it is precisely the same now as it was in the great era of the martyrs.

But there can be no persecution without the Christian's witnessing to the truth. Irony or indirectness must be discarded, they are too protective. One has to confess one's faith unequivocally, and bear the consequences that are sure to ensue.

The more specific faith to which Socrates purportedly adhered to is not touched upon. Platonic passages where the singular „god“ is mentioned are not without bearing in a Christian context¹⁷. But Kierkegaard prefers to allude to the persecuting crowd, the anonymous mass of people who choose to condemn the only one among them whose life's task it became to goad them on – or wound them in their self-assertiveness¹⁸ for their own good.

Ultimate Reversal in the Name of Christianity: Irony Discarded – Socrates Retained

„When you accept the workings of the flute, you surely would admit the existence of a flute player“? The opponent has necessarily to accept that obvious truth. There is nothing to concede as it were. And yet the innocent avowal has some ominous consequences.

The passage is one to which Kierkegaard insistently alludes¹⁹.

Existence is a presupposition for everything. But a flute is more than just everything. It is an instrument of music, and music can stand for poetry. Thus we might say it is a means by which the highest form of expression could be achieved.

We observe by now an unmistakable shift in Kierkegaard's preoccupations from the music, or the text (indirect communication as it is developed until the *Postscript* can also be read as a series of essays on the morals of style) to the author. The author provides a criterion for his sentences with his life. It sounds as if we still remained within the obvious, but this is very far from the case. For there is no coincidence between author and text, they are almost meant to contradict each other in appearance. This contradiction is not any usual product of excess – exaggerated seriousness, for instance, which invariably turns ridiculous. On the contrary it is expressly calculated as discreetness from the very beginning. Fully aware of the seriousness of what I am going to announce, I pretend I am playing. It has been conceded of old²⁰ that the reverse might also occur, but it is never exemplified, the author is bound to frown on playing, one need only read about a plaything in the *Fragments* as that which a child is not to choose²¹. And yet the flute has to be played upon.

Indirect communication insists that this scheme has no other purpose than setting the reader free. The reader has to be dialectically independent in order to choose between extremes. But the writer is just as interested in saving his own freedom. His point of departure is emancipation from having to follow the intricate diplomatic rules and codes of conduct imposed by the literary *milieu*. If he could, he would also free himself from a posthumous attachment to literary groups he does not have the least inclination to associate with. But he knows already that it is very improbable, when one of the most outstanding individuals from the immediate literary past, Hamann, had not escaped this fate²². Future, the tense of all striving, is also the time of the dismantling of every secret, temporary disguise or charade.

Freedom's cause is by its very nature noble, but it cannot remain so for very long. The maxim of distinguishing the person from the truth (cf. the *Postscript*, and here we could add a reminiscence from the *Symposium*²³, which actually amounts to Socrates equating himself with the truth) becomes in due time tantamount to making „truth“ the auxiliary and, as already observed, the propounding person becomes everything that really matters.

In the compound flute-player the focus of attention is transferred imperceptibly from the instrument to the human component. The tune is such that it is no longer enough to perform it, it has to be enacted. The relationship between the two parts of the complex ceases then and there ensues the process of becoming the flute, nothing less would suffice.

Becoming the flute implies suffering. There is nothing new in that if one remembers the legendary bull of Phalaris²⁴, whose tormented contents, a poet, turned out to be full of sublime sounds – words, we must add, as if produced for misunderstanding.

The incompatibility between author and reader, the unreadable text, reinforced through Kierkegaard's own experience with his reading public, very soon becomes a factor of the utmost relevance. The inevitable next stage is that it is transformed to a principle and a criterion for being essentially an author (versus Adler for instance²⁵), not just a person who formulates words-into-sentences-into-paragraphs-into-books and publishes the result of this more or less mechanical process at no cost, or even for profit.

We have left behind the distinction between the serious and the ephemeral author, and have arrived at the core of the matter: Either an author or not an author at all. Essential authorship requires misunderstanding, and there is a state subsequent to that which can only imply martyrdom.

On this side of dogmatics Socrates is still the model. He has been exposed to ridicule through the work of Aristophanes (that seemed so adequate at the time of *Irony*), and ridicule led to a death sentence. Kierkegaard has reached the time when he can openly identify himself. Was the *Corsair's* cartoon attack not ridicule enough²⁶? Did it not show him the way to martyrdom in a more tangible sense? And did it not incidentally deprive him of the only pastime he could indulge in – not for one moment abandoning working on sentences – to walk unnoticed in the streets of Copenhagen, as a genuine Man-of-the-Crowd?

How is the reader to respond to all this? He has to believe in the author and his sufferings, defying all outer appearances. And still in order to fulfill his ideal the writer has to remain entangled in a net of misunderstanding.

The net tightens. Identification patterns are no longer available, the writing author cannot obtain any death sentence, not to speak of crucifixion, which is excluded dogmatically.

The paradox, not the one developed by the dialectician Kierkegaard, but the one displayed in his life and work, is that the more intensely he wants to withdraw from the scene, to leave the reader to follow his text undisturbed, the more menacingly he presses himself upon the same reader. The urge for distance is translated into an almost suffocating proximity.

We can attribute Socrates' constant presence exactly to the fact that, while „written“, he is no writer. He exists by virtue of this indifference to words (he is even extolled for speaking „bad Greek“²⁷). That the whole happens nowhere else but in that very written literature does not seem to occupy Kierkegaard. Perhaps because by the time of the great confrontation writing has become so essential to being, more vital than breath it would seem, that it has ceased drawing attention to itself.

Shall I speak out, and, if I do, shall I do it directly? It is no scholarly errand, salvation or perdition are at stake. The arguments on either side are exactly equal in number. Am I to speak openly, I expose myself, suffering is safeguarded. If I choose the indirect way, then I pretend to no merit, and dogmatics is safeguarded as well.

Socrates, who remains the same and relentlessly repeats the same essential things²⁸, can still follow along. The dialectical art he has pursued is turning on him. And he is not going to be idle either, there will always be sophists (who „pretend to be Christians“²⁹) to contend with.

Notes

- 1 The present article has been written on the basis of an oral communication in Danish at the conference on Kierkegaard's later work organized by the Norwegian Academy of Sciences in Oslo, October 22-25, 1992. It is a sequel of the concluding Socrates chapters in „Kierkegaard and Hellenism“, to appear from Reitzel's Press later this year.
- 2 *The Concept of Irony*, Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press 1989 (Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. II; same editors-translators and same series in all references that follow), p. 213 n. = *Samlede Værker* (1901-1906) XIII 293 n.
- 3 *The Concept of Irony*, p. 186 (SV XIII 268) – compare with *Philosophical Fragments* in its totality.
- 4 *The Concept of Irony*, p. 69 (SV XIII 162) – cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 201 (SV VII 168).

- 5 Signed by Climacus, *Postscript*, pp. 251-300 (SV VII 212-257).
- 6 Pap. IV B 101-120: *Fear and Trembling / The Repetition*, pp. 281-324.
- 7 *The Concept of Irony*, p. 186 (SV XIII 268); cf. *The Works of Love* (SV IX 305), where it is compared to the attitude of apostle Paul.
- 8 *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 50 (SV VI 51), through *Works of Love* (SV IX 351).
- 9 There is a corroborating passage from Diogenes Laertius (II, V, 21) which is used to the same effect, and indifference to idle mythological enquiries is extended to Astronomy, J.L. Heiberg's preoccupations not being without influence on this supplement. See Pap. IV B 116 (*Fear and Trembling / The Repetition*, p. 300), and *Postscript*, p. 469 (SV VII 408).
- 10 Socrates turning inside himself discovers that he is endowed with a predisposition to everything evil, see *Postscript*, p. 164 (SV VII 135).
- 11 Cf. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 65 (SV IV 230).
- 12 *Postscript*, pp. 63 ff. (SV VII 47 ff.).
- 13 *The Concept of Irony*, pp. 246 f. (SV XIII 321 f.).
- 14 See drawing printed on front page of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Carl Georg von Maassen, 7th. Volume, Munich-Leipzig 1914.
- 15 See *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*, pp. 38 ff. (SV III 89 ff.) and *Postscript*, pp. 525 ff. (SV VII 458 ff.) respectively.
- 16 *Postscript*, p. 187 (SV VII 156).
- 17 *Apology* 42 a; *Theaetetus* 176 b.
- 18 *Practice in Christianity*, p. 88 (SV XII 84).
- 19 *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 35 (SV IV 202), see *Apology* 27 b. In *Postscript*, p. 51 (VII 39), it is applied to speculative philosophers, in *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 122 (XI 232), to those offended by Christianity. In Pap. X,5 A 10 to Christendom.
- 20 *The Concept of Irony*, p. 248 (SV XIII 323).
- 21 *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 16 n. f. (SV IV 186 n. f.).
- 22 *Postscript*, p. 250 (SV VII 211).
- 23 See *Postscript*, p. 242 (SV VII 203) and *Symp.* 201 c.
- 24 *Either-Or*, Vol. I, p. 19 (SV I 3).
- 25 Pap. VII,2 B 235, p. 7.
- 26 *For Self-Examination*, p. 9 (SV XII 302).
- 27 Pap. VIII,1 A 225.
- 28 *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 72 (SV IV 236), in a long series of allusions to the same Socratic formula.
- 29 Pap. X,2 A 135, p. 102.