

# The Poet

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Most significant to introduce the main theme characteristic for Kierkegaard's concept of the poet in its duplicity: the poet as artist and the poet as existent individual, are the following critical remarks from his Journal.

He wrote these remarks in late 1854 against Adam Oehlenschläger, the celebrated poet of the Danish golden age, who in his tragedy of 1836 *Sokrates* on the immortality of the soul, had dared to use his *licentia poetica* beyond its limits.

Kierkegaard's destructive and constructive criticism is as follows:

*"What is Deceptive about Sokrates.*

What is deceptive about Sokrates is that his irony is so witty and his intellect so superior that a person is tempted to forget completely that what he is dealing with is simultaneously a matter of life and death.

We read Plato's *Apology* and are enthralled: how extremely witty he is, how pointed every word, how perfect --- alas, we who are spoiled by the cursed notion that to be an author is the greatest of all are tempted to read him as if he were an author, a witty author who probably would even get an A-plus from the journals --- but for Sokrates the stakes are life and death.

On a smaller scale something like this is apparent in my life. For my personal existence has much greater value and is strenuous in a quite different way than my writings. But this is completely misunderstood by this theatrical generation ---

But Sokrates is the only one of his kind! Such a cultivated intellect, so very subtly educated and sharpened that presumably such a man would need all the coddling and all the remoteness from actuality that a poet, an artist, needs and then to be the toughest character in Greece, one who does not produce in a study but in the most crucial actuality ---

Outside Christianity Socrates is the only man of whom it may be said: he explodes existence, which is seen quite simply in his elimination of the separation between poetry and actuality. Our lives are such that a poet portrays ideality --- but actuality is a hell of a lot different. Socrates is an ideality higher than any poet is able to poetize it, and he actually is this, it is his actuality. This is why it is all wrong for Oehlenschläger to want to poetize Socrates. In relation to Socrates "the poet" is a completely superfluous person who can only become an object of ridicule, a laughing-stock, when he does not keep the proper distance but even wants to poetize him. What does it mean to poetize? It means to contribute ideality. The poet takes an actuality which lacks something of ideality and adds to it, and this is the poem. But good God, your Lordship, there is no need at all to add anything here; Socrates' ideality is higher, and it is that precisely by being actuality. This is why the poet, when he wants to poetize, finds himself in the same situation as the orator Johannes Climacus tells about, who at the climax of his address confuses the direction and ascends from the higher to the lower; the poet pulls Socrates down --- yet I have enough of the Socratic in me to understand that I did not get Oehlenschläger to understand this.

What a wonderful Socratic difficult! In order to poetize a man it is surely necessary first to understand him. But Socrates himself says: "To understand is to be." O, dear poet, if you were able to understand this it would never enter your head to poetize it. Consequently it can be poetized only if it is not understood, or to poetize Socrates is *eo ipso* a misunderstanding, and to praise a poet for having poetized Socrates in a masterpiece makes a fool of him.

A great character but lacking an equivalent intellect can be poetized by poetically adding that equivalent intellect, or, conversely, by poetically adding something of character to a superior intellect. But where intellect and character are equally superior, there is nothing for the poet.

How ridiculous for a poet to want to seize hold of Socrates --- Socrates' whole intention was to put an end to the poetic and to apply the ethical, the whole point of which is that it is actuality." (Pap. XI,1 A 430 *n. d.*, 1854, transl. by H. Hong).

This long entry from Kierkegaard's Journal is not chosen by chance. It stresses the very issue on which the duplicity of Kierkegaard's concept of the poet is based: the dialectics of existence between idea and actuality, and between

possibility and actuality i. e. the poet's effort in making the existence of a poet (Digter-Existens) congrue with his historical actuality (Digter-Tilværelse).

Kierkegaard discusses at length this issue in "The Concept of Irony" and his considerations about actuality and about to live poetically in ideality written in this book of early 1841, both with reference to Socrates' irony and to the romantic irony, already contain the germ of his ethical-religious thought which in the later works concerns the poet-dialectician and subjective thinker. The aesthetical ideals of the poet must be proved by his personal actuality in existence. The poet who is also an aesthetically featured man, must live poetically in so far as he considers poetry and aesthetics like view of life 'terminus a quo'<sup>1</sup> in his striving for the ethical-religious Christian view of life.

A. Oehlenschläger heralded the arrival of Danish romanticism. In his poem *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp*, which Brandes<sup>2</sup> termed the corner-stone of Danish literature during the first half of the nineteenth century, the acquisition of the power of the lamp symbolizes the romantic idea that the poet alone can penetrate into the spiritual realm of reality. This romantic belief supports Oehlenschläger's need for concreteness in poetry.<sup>3</sup> However, this poetry has not the outcome of sheer subjectivity as for the German school of romantic poetry, nor sustained by a Socratic "mastered irony". O's poet must realize the task of actuality like a moment in the content of personality. What does matter is the pantheistic infinity of poetry, the poet's relation to the world unfolded in beauty, the harmonic unity of the inner with the outer, this latter as sublime nature displayed for contemplation. Oehlenschläger is not on the side of the "inner", the Fichtian principle that subjectivity, the ego, has constitutive validity, that it alone is the almighty. He is not the "romantic ironist who produces himself as well as his environment with the greatest poetic licence so that his life finally loses all continuity."<sup>4</sup>

O's poet loses as well the continuity of his life, or rather he never builds one, but the greatest poetic licence is in his case on the side of the "outer". Are the sublime nature, the love of the past, the sense of Danish glories, consequently the originality in having brought upon the stage and animated with his poetry all those mythical figures of which the Scandinavian sagas are filled which produce the inner continuity and the need for concreteness in O's poetry.

"But actuality (the historical actuality) relates in a twofold way to the subject; partly as a gift which will not admit of being rejected, and partly as a task to be realized."

“Partly as a gift, this was intended to express the relation of the individual to the past. Irony, however, has not past. Insofar as irony should be so conventional as to accept a past, this past must then be of such nature that irony can retain its freedom over it, continue to ply its pranks on it. It was therefore the mythical aspect of history, saga and fairy-tale, which especially found grace in its eyes. Authentic history, on the other hand, wherein the true individual has his positive freedom because in this he has his premises, must be dispensed with.”<sup>4</sup>

Even if O.’s worship of the mythical aspect of history, saga and fairy-tale does not fall under the category of such conventional irony, and instead he accepts the past in a pantheistic union with the infinity of poetry, the outcome is the same: the disappearance of historical actuality. And for a poet like Oehlenschläger who wants to size poetically in a tragedy, Socrates “who intended to put an end to the poetic and to apply the ethical,” the outcome is a self-mockery. On the one hand Socrates (“the only man of whom, outside Christianity may be said: he explodes existence with his elimination of the separation between poetry and actuality”) points to an infinite, to an “immortality” which goes beyond the infinity of the tragic hero which does not surpass immanence. On the other hand poetic creativity cannot be conceived as an immediate self-creative act of life which enfolds in beautiful thinking the highest objectivity of reality, its hidden inner as in a mirror which reflects in miniature the essence of the universe.<sup>5</sup> Such a creative immediacy, nearly a mystic one, however, which “clings closely to the sense-world and not to the religious sphere” does not apply to the poet’s individuality, consequently Oehlenschläger has not need for an independent domain of the poet and its concepts, only symbols in the divine artistic representation.

For O. for whom ‘Kunsten er Evighedens Organ’<sup>6</sup> actuality as task, or the task of realizing actuality personally in existence as a moment of the historical personality, vanishes in the exalted grandiose picture of the universe which a self-creative act of life can produce by an indisputable power bestowed from eternity. O.’s poetry aloof from the individual’s anxiety, leads to boredom as does the Olympus heaven where the gods, not faced by death and destruction, are beyond human creativity.

Oehlenschläger represents the antithesis to Kierkegaard’s concept of the poet as one always in process of coming into being in his existential movement, his dynamic and thrilling creativity which the dialectics of existence between

actuality and possibility motives. "It is one thing poetically to produce oneself, quite another to allow oneself to be poetically produced. The Christian allows himself to be poetically produced," and this means that Kierkegaard's poet acknowledges that the infinite poetic freedom as positive freedom concerns only the historical actuality by which the poet has been assigned a task.

But, if it is so that the poet's life must express genuine actuality, certainly the poet cannot do it taking up descriptively Socrates' actuality in regard to which his own is incommensurable. Fantasy and creative imagination have and must know their own limits to avoid ridiculousness. The poet must know when will not poetry matters, personal endeavor not representation. It is what Socrates, even as a pagan who did not know Christ the Man-God, understood. Therefore, he has marked the limits between aesthetics and ethics, however, neither in the sense that he has rejected aesthetics of which, on the contrary, he made the most valuable use by his 'maieutic' art, nor in the sense that he has made ethical values a Platonic absolute thereby eliminating the dialectics between immanence and transcendence. But O.'s astonishing heavenly illusion of poetry as "stagnation", for which the younger poet, esthete and literary critic J. L. Heiberg had characterized him as "a poet who had lost his poetical spirit," is extraneous to such Socratic dialectics which make Socrates to surpass the classic world of Greece. Consequently O.'s poetry cannot hit the mediocrity of an age levelled in all values, also the ethical and religious, by an exalted idea of aesthetics. For a breath of reality to a sleeping age much more valuable than this unmoved and unmovable neo-classic artistic paradise is the hell of the romantic poet, no matter how negative it may be.

At the other extreme of Oehlenschläger's exalted idea of aesthetics with his pantheistic infinite of poetry, the proper romantic school of Schlegel, Tieck and Solger represents aesthetics from the point of view of sheer subjectivity.<sup>7</sup>

The hell of anxiety, dissatisfaction, and criticism of the romantic soul here requires strongly an independent domain of the poet with all his subjective categories, and this domain marked by psychological tones till their ultimate consequences, can be outlined even today in the abstract and absurd tendencies of modern art.

The real issue is the almighty self. This summons down the beauty from the manifold of a fabulous and marvelous ideality to the manifold of everyday life with its small detail and the trifles in opposition to the heroic past with its trustful and divine grandeur. To both cases the imagination alone rules, but

very far from being blessed by the Olympus gods with a support of stagnant eternity, the romantic imagination goes through the numberless miseries of daily and frustrating experience. Aware of human misery to the utmost, the romantic poet gives himself over to despair for his conditions in bondage and the terrific void caused by a merciless, absolute misunderstanding by which he feels surrounded. The criticism of his almighty irony leaving not unattached a single corner of the world while detaching him from all historical actuality, at the same time upheaves him more and more in himself, robbed from all world tension, in a life of dream. But in spite of this life of dream, the outcome of the ironist's infinite negative freedom which puts its expression in sheer feeling and sheer possibility without continuity in historical actuality, such infinite nothingness of the ironist may become "absolute beginning" in the sense of "the beginning of wisdom".

To this extent romanticism has been beneficial to an age which "has become ossified, as it were, within the finite social situation. Everything had become perfected and consummated in a divine Chinese optimism that allowed no rational longing to go unsatisfied, no rational wish unfulfilled."

"Thus it is not the sentimental or the chivalrous or the marvelous element which constitute the essential or necessary substance of the romantic. It is rather the infinitude, the freedom without physical barriers in the working of the imagination, in the intuition of the ideal, in the fullness and depth of feeling, in the idea-oriented power of reflection, which we must look for the fundamental condition for the romantic and also for a large and significant share of modern art." The world ought to be rejuvenated and romanticism rejuvenated the world.<sup>8</sup> Here its merit. The calamity of romanticist is that what he reaches is not actuality. Consequently "whereas everything around him formerly slept, so everything now awakens but he sleeps. And since dreams do not satisfy, then, boredom, the eternity void of content, is the only continuity the ironist has.

Already in the first work "From the papers of one still living" of 1838, Kierkegaard stresses the importance that poetry must correspond to the poet's life. In all his aesthetic works the same theme is developed on the double meaning which we have seen constituting the dialectics of Kierkegaard's concept of the poet. On the one hand the existence as a poet (*Digter-Existens*) which concerns the poet-artist and the poet-author, this latter endowed with the universal language of the indirect communication. On the other hand the

poet-existing individual who is concerned with the task of realizing his historical actuality in existence (Digter-Tilværelse).

The romantic 'ironist' and the benefit which the age has received from his ideal of living poetically constitutes the background to Kierkegaard's aesthetic masterpiece *Either/Or* which presents the dialectics of the poet in the alternative between the aesthetical and the ethical view of life.

As if the compact scientific essay on irony *The Concept of Irony* were winded off, and brought upon the stage and animated with poetical characters, the first part of *Either/Or* exhibits a philosophic sum of the life of pleasure as in the image of the negative infinite of the romantic poet. The description of Johannes the seducer made by the pseudonymous author of the first part of *Either/Or*, the poet [A], is an apology of the romantic life of pleasure which in the second part of the book gives way to an eulogy of altruism, sacrifice, and temperance.

"His life had been an attempt to realize the task of living poetically --- the poetical was the more he himself brought with him. This more was the poetical he enjoyed in the poetic situation of actuality: he withdrew this again in the form of poetic reflection. This afforded him a second enjoyment, and his whole life was motivated by enjoyment. In the first instance he enjoyed the aesthetic personally, in the second instance he enjoyed his own personality aesthetically.<sup>9</sup> In the first instance he constantly needed actuality as occasion, as factor; in the second instance actuality was submerged in the poetic."

Johannes' actuality is upheaved in sheer enjoyment, sheer possibility of experimenting enjoyment till its most abstract form of reflection on the interesting "How beautiful it is to be in love, how interesting to know that one is in love." The "interesting", this very romantic element already a main issue of Schlegel's thought,<sup>10</sup> leading Johannes' attention at his own existential situation on the limit between poetry and actuality, appears to be at the same time his first stage of self discovery in despair. And it is despair which prepares the way to the leap of faith, the passion of inwardness which the poet's unlimited imagination and his 'vis comica' motives generating the "double-reflexion", the guarantee for the fulfilment of the individual's personality.

"Imagination is what providence uses to take men captive in actuality (virkeligheden) in existence (tilværelse), in order to get them far enough out, or within, or down in actuality. And when imagination has helped them get far as they should be - then actuality genuinely begins." (Pap. XI,1 A 288, 1854).

As a whole the aesthetic work *Either/Or* is a subtle satire of the age, of its

exalted ideal of the poet-genius and the levelled aesthetic and ethical attitudes of life to which Kierkegaard implies a greater ideal, the religious attitudes of life.

The two interpretations of the poet, as artist and author, and as existing individual, which are dialectically intertwined are present not only in his aesthetic works but in Kierkegaard's literature as a whole, and all the more so as the existential movement from the aesthetic to the religious attitude of life develops. And this in accordance with the individual's need of 'the unconditional', which does not mean he had to free himself entirely from aesthetics, aesthetics being a constituent element of his humanity. "To live in the unconditional, inhaling only the unconditional, is impossible to man; he perishes, like the fish forced to live in the air. But on the other hand, without relating himself to the unconditional, man cannot in the deepest sense be said 'to live'. He gives up the ghost – that is, he may continue perhaps to live, but spiritlessly." ("My position as a religious writer in 'Christendom' and my tactics" – SV, XIII, 542, transl. by Lowrie).

Kierkegaard develops his concept of the poet, which echoes his own personal appropriation of Christian actuality, also by a stylistic skill suitable each type of works, the philosophical and the edifying, the aesthetic and the religious, as if he knew various languages. As if, so to speak, that immediacy by which the artistic medium of Mozart's music expresses the sensuous-genius in the image of Don Juan – and music is the artistic medium of Romanticism 'par excellence' – was the pattern followed by Kierkegaard in all his stylistic choice. A superb example of this ability to choose the proper medium of communication and which shows too how deeply Kierkegaard understood the danger of the aesthetical leveling of all values in his time and how he tried to counteract this danger by performing its opposite in the image of the ironist, is given by the stylistic presentation of Either/Or. Here the beautiful confusion and intersection of poetical arguments, both from the subjective and the objective point of view, the infinite succession of sentiments and reasonings without continuity, which the poet ironically enough is supposed to criticise denying his own aesthetical attitude to life, constitute a kind of perfect artistic medium to perform the extraordinary satire of the epoch which is Either/Or, this work which Kierkegaard's epoch – in one sense with reason – exalted as the sublime (cf. Pap. IV A 45).

While sketching in images and ideals the various phases through which the

human spirit had to evolve itself in order to reach the absolute 'totality' according to the speculative Hegel-Goethe belief of the time, all together Kierkegaard's aesthetic works perform the spiritual development of a poet who, at the same time, playing the aesthetically featured man as an existing individual, lives disappointedly in the unearthly mirage of the absolute 'totality' of speculative aesthetics. In so doing, as much confused and disrupted the stylistic presentation of the aesthetic works may appear, Kierkegaard offers true poetry as a motivating force, as a vital impulse which stimulates at distance the mind of the reader and keeps it in operation.

The imperative to free poetry and aesthetics from the tutelage of knowledge begins late as a consequence of the new humanism which characterized the philosophy of the seventeenth century.

A radical transformation of previous artistic standards takes place in the eighteenth century. The change becomes increasingly apparent in the relation between human and divine understanding, when this is no longer a matter of resolving the finite into the infinite, and thus, so to speak, of eliminating it. Now it was required that the finite assert itself in its own character, that it preserve its specific nature even while recognizing this nature as finite. This point of view, developed in the systematic aesthetic of Baumgarten – in his *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (Halle, 1735) – while sustaining the autonomy of reason stressed implicitly the fundamental prerogative of finite nature to an independent form of existence. Taking Leibniz's theory – in his *Disputatio Metaphysica* (Leipzig, 1663) – that divine being as such lies beyond the sphere of phenomenon and is essentially above that sphere, the eighteenth century philosophy gradually learned to do without the "absolute" in the strictly metaphysical sense. Instead appeared a purely human ideal which the age sought to define and to realize with increasing precision and rigor in the different disciplines of thought. Aesthetics and ethics, especially concerning human conduct and human creativity rise to the highest rank which was held before by metaphysics in the strictest sense the discipline of 'the absolute'. The philosophical mind had not to think itself above the gifts of intuition and imagination, but had to be endowed with these gifts, if it had to balance with the gifts of judgment and inference. The inner unity of the philosophic system can only arise from such harmony, and only from it can the highest individual embodiment of the philosophic spirit develop.

The secularization of thought which is the most evident expression of the new philosophical development sees an ally in the ever greater role plaid by satire. As combined force of jest and earnestness, satire had always a special place in communication and in understanding. Originating in magic, satire evolved during centuries as independent domain of the comic and in the eighteenth century as the most refined ironic and humoristic sense of grotesque, with the function of directing men's attention to their own conduct, to disclosure of self, and to consider themselves responsible for their own faults and virtues.

The philosopher becomes akin to the artist in a fundamental feature of his thinking, that of striving for totality which immanent to creativity, does not refer to a metaphysical transcendent order. The new appraisal of imagination and intuition along with the appraisal of phenomenon senses and passion of eighteenth century, then, not only validates aesthetics logically but also justified it ethically by the fact that art has now the peculiarity of activating the whole man. Art appears as an indispensable vital force to man's realization of his true destiny.

However if aesthetics and ethics are the great allies of eighteenth century, gradually aesthetics is overrated until in nineteenth century it reaches the priority. The problem of the beautiful as it was posed by the previous century, in nineteenth century led to a different philosophical anthropology marked by a drawing back the humanism and its secularization of thought to a new form of transcendence within the idea of the absolute spirit. This on its turn gives birth to the so celebrated image of the nineteenth century genius, the almighty and supernatural poet endowed by a metaphysical irony, whom had to become the target of Kierkegaard's satire.

It is well known how the philosophy of Hegel and Goethe in the nineteenth century improved and even transformed the 'humanistic' need of the eighteenth century philosophy with the idea of the 'absolute spirit', the idea of 'totality' as 'the absolute ideality' grasped by 'the beautiful plenitude of the objective thinking'. All these features concern the poet-genius.

Art has not desire to go beyond appearance and all genuinely aesthetic intuition exhibits variety and diversity, but these qualities in turn show a certain order and rule which do not proceed according to the rules of forming logical concept from the particular to the general. On the contrary, artistic rules apprehend the general in the particular and viceversa. Abstraction, which shows us the way to higher classes of concepts, always means impoverishment

so far as direct perception is concerned. Generality is attained only by disregarding particularity, hence at the expense of definiteness. Aesthetics bridges this chasm, for its 'truth' cannot be found beyond or in opposition to concrete qualities, but it can be realized only by virtue of such qualities. Beauty requires not only intense clarity as does scientific concepts, it possesses also extensive clarity.

The poet-genius possesses intensive clarity and extensive clarity to the utmost degree unattainable to common man, consequently he can encompass both idea and phenomenon in a single glance. With his great sensory perception and imaginative power along with his natural disposition to perspicacity, he can grasp and perform the essences of reality as 'en sand Mikrokosmos' by his objective beautiful thinking. This ability is a spiritual attitude, is the attitude of a mind as a whole and is that which characterizes the spirit as poet-genius, which therefore cannot be acquired or learned but with which the poet-genius is born.

The new science of aesthetics in the nineteenth century, then, even if it abandons itself to sensory appearance without attempting to go beyond it to something entirely different as the grounds of all appearances, nevertheless resolves itself in a metaphysical anthropology which surpasses the limits of the eighteenth century humanism and finds its representative in the poet-genius.

The following comment of Kierkegaard on Goethe's greatness as novelist shows how he understood this feature of the nineteenth century aesthetics. A feature which would necessarily end with the pretention to encompass in its "absolute totality" by the "objective beautiful thinking" even the actuality of existence.

"If I were to state briefly what I really regard as masterly in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, I should say that it is the capacious governance which pervades the whole work, the entire Fichtean moral world-order, even more doctrinairely developed in the novel, which is inherent in the whole book and gradually leads Wilhelm to the point theoretically postulated, if I may put it that way, so that by the end of the novel the view of the world the poet has advanced, but which previously existed [*existerede*] outside of Wilhelm, now is embodied and living within him, and this explains the consummate impression of wholeness that this novel conveys perhaps more than any other. Actually, it is the whole world apprehended in a mirror, in a true microcosm" (Pap. 1 C 73 p. 227).

A most valuable picture of the Danish cultural situation in the nineteenth century, saturated in all values by this exalted conception of aesthetics whose hero, the poet, with the gift of his metaphorical language: poetry, can grasp "the truth" is given by the work of Troels-Lund *Bakkehus og Solbjerg* (Copenhagen, I-III, 1922); especially the third volume to which we refer here together with the studies of Otto Borchsenius *Fra Fyrrerne* (I-II, Copenhagen 1878-80). In these studies ("Stillestandsmændene i Fyrrerne", op. cit. I, 247-301 and "En Sjæl efter Døden" og "Adam Homo", op cit. II, 19-87) are significant documents on the literary debate about the meaning of 'ideality' and 'reality' in aesthetics and from the opposed tendencies of Romanticism and Realism.

In 1854 when Kierkegaard wrote the remarks on the poet and against O. here reported, he had fully developed his philosophy of existence and the individual's existential actuality grounded in Christianity. From this point of view the realm of aesthetics, to which art, imagination, fantasy, creativeness and all that is pertinent to the poet and his indirect communication belong, is seen at the same time as anti-thetical and related to the individual's endeavour for actuality (Tilværelse = personal existence) which must be an existential Christian actuality.

In agreement and disagreement with the humanistic needs of the philosophy of his age, Kierkegaard is decidedly opposed to the doctrine of the poet-genius and the absolute spirit, as in the image imported from German philosophy.<sup>11</sup> And especially opposed to his contemporary J. L. Heiberg who having introduced Hegel in Denmark brought metaphysics into poetry. However, of the exalted conception of the poet which the nineteenth century Danish culture presents, he maintains the importance given to intuition and imagination in knowledge along with the importance of senses and passion, but ties all these meanings to the main topic of his thought: existence.

It is known that existence must not be confused with life, and not with the idea of existence. The conquest of the individual personal existence is the meaning of existence, and it finds its expression in the full awareness by which the individual in the light of absolute freedom chooses among all the possibilities which the imagination reflects from his life as an unfulfilled actuality. Such a choice, a terrific risk of free choice about the most decisive alternatives of life, the individual makes absolutely alone as if he were surrounded by void.

When aware that 'subjectivity is the truth' the individual understands this subjectivity in the sense that, as an existing individual, he must choose while facing alone the deepest significance of existence: the dialectics between immanence and transcendence. This latter not to be understood in the sense of a Platonic concept but of the Christian reality makes him to choose as 'if under the eyes of God' or as if 'God were the middle term'. Evidently the Christian God meets his creature, the individual who is a historical creation conditioned by space and time and tied with an unbreakable bond to his creator, in a personal encounter, being so that:

"Existence is the dialectical element in a trilogy whose beginning and whose conclusion cannot be for an existing individual, who *qua* existing individual is in the dialectical element" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, SV, 1 ed., VII, 270).

Linking the concept of the poet to the dialectics of freedom and the main theme "subjectivity is the truth", Kierkegaard wants to point out in polemic with the "absolute" to which his age has exalted aesthetics, that neither aesthetics nor ethics are the disciplines of "the absolute" in the sense that it might be possible to eliminate the dialectics of existence between immanence and transcendence.

Aesthetics, however, if it acknowledges its own limits, is beneficial to the individual's endeavour for his existential Christian actuality. But aesthetics cannot exhibit actuality. The most which the artist, the poet-author can attain is in using correctly his poetic insight far from the claim to perform actuality, so that he understands the meaning of the 'mastered' Socratic irony for which 'to understand is to be'.

Language is the common medium of scientific and artistic representation. But in the two cases the same means serve an entirely different end. In the scientific treatment of a topic the word functions simply as a symbol for a concept; its content lies in its abstract significance. This treatment applied to art would deprive art of all phenomenal content since art does not strive for the perception of knowledge in general, but for the perception of sensory, of intuitively experienced knowledge. The power of the artist, of the true poet, consists in his ability to endow the 'cold symbols' of the language with the breath of life, in his ability of saturating them with immediate sensory content. For this language of poetry is an imaginative language supplanted by metaphorical expressions. But language itself is essentially ideality (Pap. IV, De om-

nibus dubitandum est p. 144), consequently neither in scientific nor in artistic sense it can perform reality. Therefore even the most sublime poetry, if it is meant to perform actuality, can exhibit only an indirect message of it.

Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, making this the very issue of their philosophy, at the same time criticize the doctrine of the poet-genius of the nineteenth century aesthetics for which the poet is endowed with the power of performing the highest objectivity of reality. Indeed Kierkegaard's pseudonyms can be considered as a language, the language of the pseudonymous authors and the poet-subjective thinkers whose different personalities conjugate the discourse on existence. As putting in concrete characters the inflexional forms belonging to nouns and verbs of existence they group the infinite individual phenomena of existence each under its class, the aesthetical, the ethical and the religious, but not intended to convey any preconceived truth the language of Kierkegaard's poets do not perform actuality.

Playing with irony, humor and all forms of the comic Kierkegaard's poets are "a special type of poets" (Pap. X, 6 B, 8 p. 229) who communicating at distance with the universal detachment proper to language of art, make their discourse on existence effectual in arousing a playful disinterestedness both in the speaker and in the listener who so became aware to be both a receiver. To this extent they must realize the 'how' they understand the communication about existence in actuality for themselves.

"The fact that there is a pseudonym is the qualitative expression that it is a poet-communication (Digter-Meddelelse), that it is not I who speak but another, that the communication is addressed to me just as much as to others . . . With respect to ethical-religious communication, I am not permitted to communicate more than I, the speaker (den Talende) am. If I place the requirement higher, I must express that this presentation is a poetic one (Fremstillingen er et digterisk) . . .

That the communication is poetic (digterisk) may be expressed either in the form of declaration by the speaker saying in his person: this is poetic-communication, that is, what I am saying is the very truth, but the fact that I am saying it constitutes the poetic aspect; or that *qua author* the speaker can do it with the help of pseudonyms. The difference between such a speaker-author and the typical poet is that the speaker-author himself defines himself as striving in relation to what is being communicated.

And the whole distinction pertaining the poet-communication is related

again to Christianity's category that Christianity is an existence-communication and not doctrine . . .

For Christianity the question is: does or does not my personal life express what is communicated. As long as my life expresses what is communicated, I am a teacher, when this is not the case, I am obliged to add: what I say is certainly true, but my saying it is the poetic aspect, consequently it is a poet-communication, which, however, is meaningful both for keeping me awake and keeping me striving, and, if possible, for awakening others" (Pap. X,2 A, 184: Den nye Pseudonym (Anti-Climacus)).

Poetic communication, then, as universal language of art implies detachment from actuality and to this extent aesthetic is beneficial to the individual's striving for his Christian actuality. However, if Kierkegaard's poets do not fall under the category of the poet-genius, neither the detachment from actuality which is proper to the indirect communication reminds the detachment from concrete existence we have seen to characterize the negative infinity of the romantic ironist. For Kierkegaard's pseudonyms and poet-authors who are not equal to God in regard to their writings, still remains a fixed place on heaven from which to cast a benevolent smile on human comedy. This fixed place that "the thought must allow to be born into the depth of substantial life (the Christian incarnation) is at the same time the guarantee for the most complete detachment from actuality if what matters is the poet who communicates about existence, and for the most effective incitement in the receiver the communication for whom what matters is to realize in actuality 'how' he has understood it.

Kierkegaard's poets share with the romantic ironist the absolute freedom, the negative infinity which detaches the self from actuality, however, only as far as at stake is the universality of the communication. If what matters is the actual personality of the individual, then, the speaker and the listener who in regard to the poetic communication are both recipient are the very responsible. They are both responsible to allow the preoccupation with self to be so overwhelming to prevent them from taking decisive steps towards the realization of actuality, and in accord to the ethical-religious and Christian view of life. They are both responsible to allow the ironic escape from lethargy of the mind make them fall victim of lethargy of the will; both responsible to allow the radical boredom and the wretched spectacle of the creature turn them in demoniac wrath against the Creator. But even if the role of virtue will never be disclosed

in dark destiny by the recipient, selfdiscovery and rebirth from nothingness can always rise from the power of laughter of a "gudfrygtig Satire" (SV. XIII, p. 505, My Position as a Religious Writer in Christendom and my Tactics) which, displayed by a true poetic communication, needs to destroy any hypocritical attitude of existence behind the magnificence of geniality, success and remote eternity.

In accord to such a true poetic communication, in 1854 Kierkegaard can look critically at his entire production from the point of view of the author. It confirms what already stated in 1848, the distinction of the production between 'the literary whole' created by the poet *qua author* whose aim is to communicate indirectly how to become a Christian, and 'the authorship' lived by the poet *qua man*, the poet-dialectician whose existence strives to become a Christian. The self-criticism of the poet-author while causing the impossibility of publishing during his life-time the work: The Point of View for My Work as An Author, at the same time proves how Kierkegaard has personally understood the lecture of a sound poetic communication which teaches that "the poet establishes and is established by – the lack of something" (Pap. X, 1 A 198).

## NOTES

All references to Kierkegaard's Samlede Værker (cit. Vol. and page) are to the 1st edition Cop. 1904–06 and are followed by the references to the English translation. All the references to Kierkegaard's Papirer (cit. by vol. and entry) are to the reprint of the second edition Cop. 1909 by N. Thulstrup in 1968–70 with the additional volumes.

- 1 'terminus a quo' Nota nr. 2: Et Ord om min Forfatter-Virksomheds Forhold til 'den Enkelte'. SV XIII p. 599.
- 2 Georges Brandes: Det Nittende Aarhundrede, Mennesker og Værker.
- 3 P. Rubow: Dansk Litteraturkritik, Køb. 1970 (Om den Danske Klassiske Romantik).
- 4 SV XIII p.: The Concept of Irony, translated by Lee M. Capel, Harper, New York 1964, pp. 292–300.
- 5 I. P. Richter: Vorschule der Aesthetik.
- 6 A. Oehlenschläger: *Om Ewald og Schiller, Digterværker og prosaiske Skrifter*, 1851.
- 7 Møller: Arena, Om Poesi og Drama (1843) p. 89. M. Goldschmidt, Nord and Syd, 3, 1850, Oehlenschläger og gamle Danmark.
- 8 Pap. 1 C 88. Billeskov Jansen: Studier i Søren Kierkegaards litterære Kunst, 1951.
- 9 Either/Or, trans. by David F. Swenson, vol. 1, reprint 1971, Princeton Univ. Press, pp. 299–301.
- 10 Fear and Trembling (about the interesting) Problem III pg. 92. Hirsch: Kierkegaard-Studien, 2 vol., Gütersloh, 1930–33.
- 11 J. L. Heiberg: Samlede Værker, Æstetik (Spekulativ Comedie).