

Kierkegaard and his Pseudonyms: A Preliminary Report

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In recent years a number of Danish scholars¹ have suggested a number of orderings or priorities among Kierkegaard's varied writings. This paper reports a recent computer-assisted investigation which orders eight of Kierkegaard's most interesting pseudonyms in terms of their closeness or proximity to the real or acknowledged Kierkegaard.* Owing to limitations of space it merely sketches the method employed and offers the results without defence or comment. Those wishing a more detailed discussion of these matters are invited to consult other reports of this work where they are dealt with in some detail.²

While Kierkegaard signed many of his works in his own name he ascribed most of the rest, including the majority of his most celebrated ones, to one or other of his many pseudonyms. These he describes as »poetic constructions« or distinct literary personalities, each having his own characteristic life-view which he expresses with an ideal consistency.³ Kierkegaard frequently insisted upon the importance of his pseudonyms,⁴ noted that there were contradictions between their views,⁵ begged that anyone quoting from their works would cite the name of the responsible pseudonym,⁶ and even suggested that a current misinterpretation of his thought was due to the fact that these warnings had not been taken seriously.⁷ Indeed, at one point he even wrote »So in the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine...«⁸ Such claims might suggest that the views of the pseudonyms bear no positive relation to the real Kierkegaard and that their writings may and perhaps even should be disregarded. I would urge a less radical line. Following up a later hint of Kierkegaard, I propose to order the more interesting pseudonyms in relation to their creator. The resulting hierarchy should enable us to take

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account of Kierkegaard's warnings and at the same time preserve the pseudonymous works as a reliable source for the understanding of his thought.

The explanation of Kierkegaard's use of the pseudonyms lies, of course, in his aim and strategy. That aim, as he repeatedly says, was to lead his reader to become a Christian. It was to present Christianity to his contemporaries who, be believed, lived in aesthetic or, at most, in aesthetic-ethical categories. This is the real source of indirect communication, the many pseudonyms and, in large measure, the doctrine of the stages. In fact, the real purpose of the pseudonymous authorship was to present a series of alternative life-views with a consistency impossible for any actual person and in such a way that, taken together, they presented a genuinely dialectical progression from one stage to the next. The pseudonymous authors are ideally suited to this role because they are perfect expressions of these alternative views; or, better, because they are nothing but their living or audible embodiment.

The importance of such a hierarchy can be illustrated with reference to *Enten—Eller* which in this respect, as in so many others, is a kind of paradigm of the entire pseudonymous authorship. The first volume of this work champions the aesthetic mode of life in a way deliberately designed to express and convey this attitude: the second presents the ethical mode of life in a quite different but equally appropriate manner. But these views are here presented as mutually incompatible. Now as readers it is sufficient for us to feel the conflict and, as Kierkegaard intended, to make our own choice. This requires no knowledge or opinions about Kierkegaard; indeed, from this point of view, it is even important that we should neglect his person. But as scientists seeking to understand this complicated and fascinating thinker we plainly cannot take this road. The pseudonyms canvass virtually every possibility and if we would reach the real Kierkegaard we must know which are closer to him and which more remote. We must, in fact, learn to plot the relations between Kierkegaard and his various and varied pseudonyms.

Of course, there are already a number of author identification methods which might have been adapted to solve our problem; those of Ellegård, Morton and, especially, Mosteller and Wallace are but some of the possibilities. But there are clear considerations against the use of such methods in this particular case. While the pseudonyms appear clearly distinguishable from

one another, it is perhaps too much to expect that each would have his own distinctive »thumb-print«. Further, the distinction between the pseudonyms is not simply one of more »style«; on the contrary, the pseudonymous works are best seen as a generally successful attempt to overcome all facile versions of the style/content dichotomy. As Kierkegaard suggests, the pseudonyms are literary personalities whose distinctive life-style is so perfectly expressed in their work that what they say is finally indistinguishable from the way in which they say it.⁹ What is needed then is a method able to take advantage of this feature of his work and, equally, to provide a comprehensive picture of the different text selections; in short, a method possessing the formalism and rigor of statistics and offering as a by-product real insight into the nature of the works themselves. In fact, our procedure yields two or, in the case of the pseudonymous works, three separate vocabulary lists for each selection. Preliminary examination of these suggests that at least one may serve as a basis for a simple and useful abstracting procedure. They have already provided an interesting confirmation of some of our findings and hence support for our method.

The first stage of our method has two parallel parts; a comparison of the vocabulary densities of the pseudonymous (PS) and the acknowledged (SK) sets and, secondly, a comparison of their internal coherence or homogeneity by means of the vocabulary connectivity method. The purpose of these comparisons is to show that, both individually and collectively, the PS collections are significantly different from the SK. The second stage of our method is a pair-vocabulary test the purpose of which is to establish a hierarchy of the pseudonyms in relation to the acknowledged Kierkegaard.

Our first task was the selection and preparation of text. We chose eight selections from the pseudonymous works (hereafter PS 1, PS 2 ... PS 8) and eight from the acknowledged ones (hereafter SK 1, SK 2 ... SK 8). As indicated in Table 1, all these selections were substantial and the sets total 496 and 483 pages respectively. Four of these selections represent an original work in its entirety; the remainder are carefully selected samples made necessary by the size or, in certain cases, the nature of the original.. SK 8, a deliberately synthetic selection, proved nearly disastrous and is worthy of special mention on that account.

I can spare you the details about text preparation but would stress the following. Our method considers only nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and it is these which form the basis of our subsequent measures of text length and vocabulary size. Further, except where otherwise indicated, it deals with the vocabulary item as such as distinct from its various (word) forms or, indeed, the number of their occurrences. Thus, even the repeated occurrence of *høj*, *højere* or *højest* within a given selection is taken to mean only that this selection contains the vocabulary item *høj*.

The comparison of vocabulary densities is an extremely simple matter. Through detailed empirical investigation we discovered that, for our sets at least, vocabulary size grew with text length according to a bi-logarithmic relationship. This means that the logarithmic ratio of vocabulary to text ($\log V / \log N$) represents an adequate measure of vocabulary density. We use this measure to compare the PS selections and set on the one hand with the SK selections and set on the other.

The degree of internal coherence or homogeneity within these two sets can also be measured by the vocabulary connectivity method. For this purpose we establish the vocabulary connectivity, both calculated and observed, for both sets taken separately. In earlier versions of this work the calculated values were produced from a formula employing the number-frequency distribution of the set and the text length of the individual selection. This was found to be inadequate and in the present version these values are derived instead from a naive model or formula incorporating both individual text lengths and the rank-frequency distribution for each selections. Hence this model, unlike the earlier one, takes account of the differing vocabulary densities. The application of this formula gives the number of vocabulary items which would belong exclusively to a given selection on the basis of this model. The corresponding observed values were produced by the computer by comparing the vocabulary of all selections within each set. As this is a test of approximation to a purely chance distribution, the differences between the calculated and observed values in each case indicates the degree of homogeneity within each of these two sets.

The final stage in our method is the pair-vocabulary test which involves three distinct operations. The first is the determination of the number of

observed vocabulary items each PS selection has *exclusively* in common with SKn. The second is the calculation of the number of such items which might be expected on the basis of chance alone using our naive model for the nine selections (i. e. PS 1, PS 2 . . . PS 8 and SKn) and hence correcting for the differing lengths and densities of each selection. The third is the finding of the ratio between the observed and calculated value.

The statistics concerning vocabulary density (or richness) are given in Table 2. Now, as this table shows, the ratio for both the individual PS selections and for the PS set is in general much higher than that for the SK selections and set. Indeed, the average for the PS set is .845 while that for SK is .825 or, deleting our synthetic SK 8, .819. In brief, the PS authors have a much richer vocabulary than SK. Now if, with Somers,¹⁰ Baudot,¹¹ etc., we regard this ratio as stating an important formal characteristic of a literary work, we have here clear evidence of a significant difference between these two sets. For my own part, I regard it as strong evidence for the claim that the works of the PS authors are quite distinct from those of the acknowledged SK.

This difference can be expressed yet more simply. The PS set has a total text length of 84,111 occurrences (of content words) and a total vocabulary of 8,466 items while the SK set has 82,670 occurrences and 6,562 items. Hence the vocabulary range of the former is approximately 29 % greater than that of the latter. In short, Kierkegaard has a much greater vocabulary range writing in the guise of the pseudonyms than doing so in his own person.

This same general conclusion is suggested by the vocabulary connectivity method which is in fact a parallel or second step in the first stage of our method. This involves a comparison of observed with calculated values for both the PS and the SK sets taken separately. More precisely, it involves a comparison of the number of vocabulary items which are in fact peculiar to a given selection within a set with the number of such items which might be expected on the basis of pure chance. The results of this comparison are given in Table 3.

This table shows that the SK set is much more coherent or homogeneous than the PS. This is most evident from a comparison of their respective differences. The magnitude of the differences for the SK set is 346 while that

for the PS set is 1,312. Further, of SK's total of 346, 216 or approximately two-thirds come from our synthetic SK 8. If this difference were removed the total SK difference would drop to a mere 150. Clearly, therefore, the SK selections are in general much more like one another than the PS.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that whereas the SK differences contain an approximately equal mixture of positive and negative values, all the PS differences, except that of PS 8, are high and, particularly, positive. This means that seven of these eight selections have a substantially larger number of exclusive vocabulary items than are predicted by our chance model. In short, these selections have a markedly large and rich vocabulary. Of course, this is also implied by the ratios in Table 2.

The final step in our method is the pair-vocabulary test. As already suggested, this consists of a comparison of the number of vocabulary items each PS selection has exclusively in common with SK_n with the number of such items it might be expected to have on the basis of our formula. These values, together with their ratios, appear in Table 4. The resulting hierarchy is given below together with the final ratios for easy comparison.

| Selection | Ratio | Pseudonym | Work |
|-----------|--------|-----------------------------|---|
| PS 8 | 1.0087 | Anti-Climacus | <i>Sickness Unto Death</i> |
| PS 1 | .8854 | A | <i>Either-Or</i> , vol. 1. |
| PS 7 | .8682 | Johannes Climacus (2) | <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i> |
| PS 2 | .8426 | B | <i>Either-Or</i> , vol. 2. |
| PS 6 | .8073 | Johannes Climacus (1) | <i>Philosophical Fragments</i> |
| PS 3 | .7546 | Johannes <i>de silentio</i> | <i>Fear and Trembling</i> |
| PS 5 | .7134 | Constantine Constantius | <i>Repetition</i> |
| PS 4 | .6047 | Vigilius Haufniensis | <i>Concept of Dread</i> |

Now for some brief comment upon these results.

It seems clear that we have here substantial confirmation of Kierkegaard's account of the nature and status of the pseudonymous works. Both Tables 2 and 3 show that all the acknowledged selections apart from SK 8 are extremely homogeneous and, in terms of these measures, rightly regarded as the work of a single author. On the other hand, all our evidence shows that the pseudonymous selections are quite unlike the acknowledged ones and, equally

important, quite distinct from one another. Nor is it simply that, as Kierkegaard pointed out, each pseudonym has his own distinctive life-view; these results show that each also has a substantial distinguishing vocabulary in and through which he expresses that view. Indeed, they show that each pseudonym is, as Kierkegaard said, a distinct literary personality.

The difference between the pseudonymous and the acknowledged works may be seen from the fact that, according to our lists, the words *Paradoks* and *Absurde*, together with their variants, occur 238 times in the former but never in the latter.¹² This is more remarkable in view of the fact that these occurrences are almost always triggered by some reference to Christianity, which references are in fact much more numerous in the acknowledged works. This means that the characteristic conception of Christianity which informs the pseudonymous works is significantly different from that which informs the acknowledged ones. But, in fact, there are comparable differences between the various pseudonyms. Table 3 shows that each of the pseudonymous selections has a very large number of vocabulary items peculiar to itself just as Table 4 shows that each has a surprisingly large number which it shares exclusively with SKn. I have not yet been able to do a detailed analysis of these lists but preliminary examination of the pair-vocabulary of two of the pseudonyms suggests that at least three-quarters of these items have no apparent tie with the subject under discussion. In short, the pseudonyms, like the rest of us, have a certain number of characteristic vocabulary items which continually reveal their identity. Indeed, one begins to suspect that, like most writers who employ pseudonyms in the more conventional sense, they apparently cannot resist the temptation to give themselves away with certain fairly obvious clues.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that our hierarchy does not follow any of the obvious orderings of these works. It is not a function of vocabulary richness, date of composition or similarity of subject matter to that of the acknowledged works. As these appear to be the only other possibilities I would therefore argue that it is in fact an ordering of the pseudonyms in terms of their proximity or likeness to the real or acknowledged Kierkegaard. There is, however, one important limitation. Our method is a merely statistical one and individual placings can be regarded as established beyond doubt only if the differences between the ratios in question are sufficiently large that they

could not be expected upon the basis of mere chance. For the sake of clarity I suggest that we require that these differences exceed 5 %. This means that our results must be read as follows. Anti-Climacus is clearly in first place and Johannes *de silentio*, Vigilius Haufniensis and Constantine Constantius clearly in sixth, seventh and eighth place, respectively. A and Johannes Climacus (2) are tied for second place, Johannes Climacus (2) and B for third, and B and Johannes Climacus (1) for fourth. At the same time, A is clearly above B, and Johannes Climacus (2) is clearly above Johannes Climacus (1).

I believe that this evidence could be used to formulate a fuller picture of Kierkegaard both as person and author and this is, indeed, the final aim of our whole investigation. But I have run out of time and must be content with one observation. Anti-Climacus does indeed appear to be one of the »anti-theses« within Kierkegaard's nature as he himself suggested¹³ but our results suggest that it is A, the champion of the aesthetic, rather than Johannes Climacus, who is the other. And if this is so Kierkegaard is even more complicated and fascinating than we have imagined.

The results of this work to date can be summarized very briefly. The pseudonymous works differ both from the acknowledged ones and from one another. Kierkegaard's conception of the relations among the pseudonyms is at least substantially correct. His warnings concerning his authorship are entirely justified and there can be no excuse for not taking them seriously. Of course it is ludicrous that one should have to use a computer to show that Kierkegaard understood his own work but, as he would have been the first to recognize, where illusions are wide-spread, a certain measure of deceit may well be necessary.

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NOTES

- ¹ Cf., for example, the following: Ed Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard, Hans Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed*, II, *passim*; E. Hirsch, *Kierkegaard-Studien*, II, pp. 672 ff., *et passim*; F. J. Billeskov Jansen, *Studier i Søren Kierkegaards litterære Kunst*; F. J. Billeskov Jansen, »Essai sur l'Art de Kierkegaard«, *Orbis litterarum*, vol. 10, No. 1-2, 1955, pp. 18-27; Niels Thulstrup: »Commentary«, *Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton 1962, pp. 146 ff.
- ² Cf. Alastair McKinnon, »A Method of 'Author' Identification«, *Computer Studies in the Humanities and Verbal Behaviour*, (forthcoming) and Alastair McKinnon, »Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms: A new Hierarchy«, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, (forthcoming).
- ³ Cf. »A First and Last Declaration«, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. (Hereafter »Declaration«).
- ⁴ Cf. »Declaration« and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, *passim*. (Hereafter *Point of View*).
- ⁵ *Journals*, 1238 and »Declaration«.
- ⁶ *Journals*, 1238 and »Declaration«.
- ⁷ *Point of View*, p. 126.
- ⁸ »Declaration«.
- ⁹ Cf. the following comment of Kierkegaard upon the pseudonymous works: »If you are capable of it, present the aesthetic with all its fascinating magic, enthrall if possible the other man, present it with the sort of passion which exactly suits him, merrily for the merry, in a minor key for the melancholy, wittily for the witty, &c.« *Point of View*, p. 29.
- ¹⁰ H. H. Somers, »Statistical Methods in Literary Analysis«, *The Computer and Literary Style*, ed. Jacob Leed, Kent State University Press, 1966, pp. 128-140.
- ¹¹ Jean A. Baudot in recent private correspondence.
- ¹² Since this was written M. Ferdinand Ouellot has pointed out that *Paradoks* occurs once in »The Instant« (Number 5) and a number of times in *On Authority and Revelation*. I am grateful for this observation but would still wish to maintain that these concepts have little if any place in the conception of Christianity presented in the main acknowledged works.
- ¹³ Cf. »To me there is something so inexplicably happy in the antithesis Climacus-Anti-Climacus, I recognise myself, and my nature so entirely in it that if someone else had discovered it I should have thought he had spied upon me.« *Journals*, 1000.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

Selections from Acknowledged Works

| Selection | Sample | No. of pages | Title | Date |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------|--|---------|
| SK 1 | 5 of 18 Discourses | 72 | Atten opbyggelige Taler (Edifying Discourses) | 1843 |
| SK 2 | Complete | 78 | Tre Taler ved Tænkte Leiligheder (Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions) | 1845 |
| SK 3 | Complete | 51 | Hvad vi lære af Lilierne paa Marken og af Him- lens Fugle (What we learn from the Lilies ... of the Air) | 1847 |
| SK 4 | Every second page | 55 | Lidelsernes Evangelium (The Gospel of Suffering) | 1847 |
| SK 5 | 4 of 5 Sections | 67 | Kjerlighedens Gjerninger (Works of Love) | 1847 |
| SK 6 | 1 of 4 Sections | 75 | Christelige Taler (Christian Discourses) | 1848 |
| SK 7 | Complete | 34 | Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen (Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air) | 1849 |
| SK 8 | { 3 articles | 15 | Bladartikler (Newspaper articles) Krisen og en Krise i en Skuespillerindes Liv (Crisis in the Life of an Actress) Guds Uforanderlighed (God's Unchangeableness) | 1843-48 |
| | { Complete | 21 | | |
| | { Complete | 15 | | |
| | | 51 | | 1848 |

Selections from Pseudonymous Works

| Selection | Sample | No. of pages | Title | Date |
|-----------|---|--------------|--|------|
| PS 1 | Diapsalmata and ForfØreres Dagbog (Every fourth page) | 66 | Enten–Eller. Første halv- bind (Either–Or, vol. 1) | 1843 |
| PS 2 | Ligevægten ... Udarbejdelse | 52 | Enten–Eller. Ander halv- bind (Either–Or, vol. 2) | 1843 |
| PS 3 | Every second page | 51 | Frygt og Bæven | 1843 |
| PS 4 | C. C.'s sections com- plete | 58 | (Fear and Trembling) Gjentagelsen (Repetition) | 1843 |
| PS 5 | Every third page | 43 | Begrebet Angest (Concept of Dread) | 1844 |
| PS 6 | Complete | 84 | Philosophiske Smuler (Philosophical Fragments) | 1844 |
| PS 7 | Every Sixth page | 86 | Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift (Unscientific Postscript) | 1846 |
| PS 8 | Every second page | 56 | Sygdommen til Døden (Sickness Unto Death) | 1849 |

TABLE 2
Text-Vocabulary Relationship

| | Text Length N | Vocabulary V | $\frac{\log V}{\log N}$ |
|------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| SK 1 | 11181 | 2176 | .825 |
| SK 2 | 14408 | 2807 | .829 |
| SK 3 | 8588 | 1732 | .823 |
| SK 4 | 10114 | 1940 | .823 |
| SK 5 | 11285 | 2074 | .818 |
| SK 6 | 12845 | 2180 | .810 |
| SK 7 | 6548 | 1262 | .813 |
| SK 8 | 7701 | 2144 | .860 |
| PS 1 | 10519 | 3132 | .869 |
| PS 2 | 9380 | 2258 | .845 |
| PS 3 | 8639 | 2229 | .851 |
| PS 4 | 9771 | 2868 | .865 |
| PS 5 | 7759 | 2057 | .851 |
| PS 6 | 13549 | 2509 | .824 |
| PS 7 | 15432 | 3032 | .831 |
| PS 8 | 9062 | 1854 | .827 |

TABLE 3
Vocabulary Connectivity Values

| | <i>Vocabulary exclusive to given selection</i> | | Difference |
|------|--|------------|------------|
| | Observed | Calculated | |
| SK 1 | 447 | 412 | + 35 |
| SK 2 | 664 | 649 | + 15 |
| SK 3 | 268 | 281 | ÷ 13 |
| SK 4 | 302 | 337 | ÷ 35 |
| SK 5 | 352 | 375 | ÷ 23 |
| SK 6 | 407 | 404 | + 3 |
| SK 7 | 170 | 164 | + 6 |
| SK 8 | 644 | 428 | +216 |
| PS 1 | 944 | 583 | +361 |
| PS 2 | 406 | 315 | + 91 |
| PS 3 | 383 | 311 | + 72 |
| PS 4 | 669 | 495 | +174 |
| PS 5 | 401 | 274 | +127 |
| PS 6 | 522 | 362 | +160 |
| PS 7 | 765 | 516 | +249 |
| PS 8 | 339 | 218 | ÷ 78 |

TABLE 4

| | <i>Exclusive Vocabulary</i> | | Ratio |
|------|-----------------------------|------------|--------|
| | Observed | Calculated | |
| PS 1 | 269 | 304 | .8854 |
| PS 2 | 139 | 165 | .8426 |
| PS 3 | 123 | 163 | .7546 |
| PS 4 | 156 | 258 | .6047 |
| PS 5 | 102 | 143 | .7134 |
| PS 6 | 155 | 192 | .8073 |
| PS 7 | 237 | 273 | .8682 |
| PS 8 | 116 | 115 | 1.0087 |