

Kierkegaard's Irony in the "Diapsalmata"

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Seldom in the history of Western philosophy has there been a philosopher who is also a major ironist. This fact is in itself ironic when one considers the deference paid to the ideas and person of Socrates whose irony is a salient feature of his method. A notable Danish exception to this prevailing lack in the Western philosophical tradition is of course Søren Kierkegaard who ironized throughout his life and devoted one entire work to the subject in *THE CONCEPT OF IRONY*.¹ That a Dane should have been disposed to write a dissertation on this subject is not unexpected because a spontaneous, playful sense of the ironic is a Danish specialty.

THE CONCEPT OF IRONY is an important work not only for its analysis of irony *per se* but also because it is an invaluable prelude to an examination of the author's other works. Many central Kierkegaardian themes are here expressed in a clipped, often ironic or humorous and embryonic fashion. The last section of the dissertation, entitled "Irony as Controlled Moment. Irony's Truth," is especially valuable in preparation for a study of Kierkegaard's aesthetic writings.

The first of the aesthetic works, *EITHER/OR*, is as difficult to understand as it is fascinating to read. Kierkegaard gracefully and ironically acknowledges the difficulty of understanding the book when he writes that though there is "a plan which stretches straight from the first word to the last," there may be indeed no one who discovers it.² He also notes that the problem of the book is stated in the first of the "Diapsalmata," the initial portion, and is only resolved in the last word of the "Ultimatum," the final section, and that the work sets forth a "tremendous dissonance" which challenges the reader to explain it.³ From the time *EITHER/OR* was published to the present day, the number of explanations has become sizable without however, as Walter Lowrie

points out, any of them disclosing a single plan running through the entire work.⁴

To assist his readers in their comprehension of EITHER/OR, Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita, the pseudonymous name of the book's editor, provides considerable information about the contents and the relationships of the material included in the two volumes of the work. He writes that he places the "Diapsalmata" first because "they are best regarded when considered as provisional glimpses of what the longer essays develop more connectedly."⁵ Besides giving his readers this reason for directing their careful attention to the "Diapsalmata," he adds that the diapsalms are individual expressions, often contradictory, which, despite their contradictions, belong to an essential mood.⁶

Thus the "provisional glimpses" which the diapsalms afford of the other essays in EITHER/OR indicate that they deserve special attention because they are an indispensable prolegomena to the rest of the work. This paper is an analysis of the "Diapsalmata" using Kierkegaard's conception of irony as controlled *moment*, which is found in THE CONCEPT OF IRONY, in order to clarify both the meaning of the "Diapsalmata" and Kierkegaard's own relationship to it. Specifically, the first part of the paper will state what Kierkegaard means by irony as controlled *moment*; the second part of the paper analyzes Kierkegaard's conception of irony as controlled moment in the "Diapsalmata."

I

IRONY AS CONTROLLED MOMENT

The term "*moment*" is italicized throughout this discussion in order to continually remind the reader that it carries in this context primarily an Hegelian meaning, an important fact pointed out by Professor Himmelstrup.⁷ However, *moment* has these important modifications of the Hegelian meaning in the thought of Kierkegaard: like Hegel's conception of the term, *moment* is a two-fold movement in which the meaning of the concept is partly abolished and partly preserved; unlike Hegel's conception of the term, *moment* occurs in the

affairs of a person in such a way that the individual's sense of his own historical reality is accented. It is a "moment in the personality."⁸

When Kierkegaard writes of irony as a mastered or controlled *moment* in its "theoretical respect" (irony in its "practical respect" is not comprehensible unless the theoretical side is first understood), he uses the categories of phenomenon and essence. The philosophical echo here is to Hegel's WISSENSCHAFT DER LOGIK in which the essential relationship of appearance and essence is resolved into their identity within the category of actuality.⁹

In the final section of the thesis Kierkegaard makes two crucial statements about irony as controlled *moment* in its "theoretical respect." The first of these passages reads as follows: "Here also is the irony controlled, reduced to moment: the essence is nothing other than the phenomenon; the phenomenon is nothing other than the essence; the possibility is not so prudish that it will not enter into some actuality, but actuality is possibility."¹⁰ The substance of the second crucial passage is contained in its second sentence: "With regard to the theoretical respect, must the essence manifest itself as the phenomenon."¹¹ Neither passage is explained by Kierkegaard. The difficulty of understanding them does not lie only in this fact; it lies more precisely in the fact that the real force of the Hegelian terminology used by Kierkegaard conveys non-Hegelian content, one of the several ways in which Kierkegaard is ironic in his thesis on irony.

In Kierkegaard's entire discussion of irony as controlled *moment*, there is no indication regarding the character of the two subordinate moments which are taken up into the synthesis of the *moment*; however, these subordinate moments are briefly discussed at the beginning of each of the two sections of the thesis. Kierkegaard begins his thesis by observing that these two moments must be given their due, the historical or the phenomenal and the philosophical or the conceptual.¹² After examining the phenomenal side of irony in the first part of the thesis with the conceptual side only hovering in the background, Kierkegaard turns to the conceptual side in the second part with this time the phenomenal side in the background.¹³

In considering the relationships between these two moments, the phenomenal and the conceptual, it is important to recognize that Kierkegaard is formulating his position on the interdependence of reality and truth, which Dr. Malantschuk has pointed out.¹⁴ It is also important to recognize that these two moments

cannot be separated, except in a provisional way, in any analysis of irony according to Kierkegaard: "These two moments are inseparable because if the concept were not in the phenomenon – or more correctly the phenomenon first were comprehensible, first real in and with the concept – and if the phenomenon were not in the concept – or more correctly the concept first were comprehensible, first real in and with the phenomenon – then all cognition would be impossible; in the one case I would lose the truth, in the other, the reality"¹⁵

Just as Kierkegaard found it expedient to emphasize only one of these two moments at a time with a consequent neglect of the other temporarily, so in this paper it is expedient to emphasize the conceptual and philosophical side of the concept of irony in Kierkegaard's thesis first, with a consequent neglect of the phenomenal side temporarily. In Kierkegaard's work he first examines irony as phenomenon and then examines it as a concept; in this paper irony as a concept in Kierkegaard's thesis will be examined first in order that then the phenomenon of irony can be examined to better advantage in the "Diapsalmata."

In this discussion the Hegelian terms of "quantity", "quality" and "moment" will be employed with Kierkegaard's particular meaning and these terms provide the titles for sub-divisions in the paper: Irony as Quantity, Irony as Quality and Irony as Controlled Moment.

Irony as Quantity

Irony as quantity describes irony in its empirical or phenomenal form. When Kierkegaard uses the term "quantitative" to classify manifestations of irony he does so with the general Hegelian meaning of the term which is that the meaning components have an external relationship to each other. Irony in a quantitative sense also has affinities to Hegel's use of the term "objective" in his analysis of poetry:¹⁶ just as the epic poet sets before his reader the objective world of things, events and persons, so irony as quantity sets before the reader the objective functions of irony as they operate in the social context.

Kierkegaard discusses irony as quantity in his "Orienting Reflections" which is in the second part of THE CONCEPT OF IRONY. In a very lucid analysis he points out that there are three characteristics which are to be found in every function of irony.¹⁷ The first of these is stated as follows: "the phenomenon is not

the essence but the opposite of the essence."¹⁸ Kierkegaard begins his discussion of this first characteristic by engaging in what contemporary Anglo-American philosophers call "ordinary language analysis"; i.e. he examines how irony functions as a form of life. Kierkegaard observes that, in the oratorical lecture, irony is distinguished by the opposition of what is said to what is meant. Such a locution employs a condition which runs through all irony; namely that the phenomenon is the opposite of the essence; Kierkegaard explains that the thought or the meaning is the essence; when one speaks, the words are the phenomenon. These two, essence and phenomenon, are both absolutely necessary to each other; in this connection Kierkegaard cites Plato's observation that all thought is a talking. In fact, Kierkegaard continues, the "truth" requires an identity of essence and phenomenon (this statement will be taken up later) in the sense that if I had a thought without a word, I would have no thought and *vice versa*. Ironic speech thus is like other locutions in that essence and phenomenon are both necessary for discourse; what distinguishes irony from other locutions is that these two necessary components also stand in opposition to each other.

When the speaking subject is considered – a salient and perennial interest of Kierkegaard – there is found a second characteristic which runs through all irony, namely that "the subject is negatively free."¹⁹ Kierkegaard explains this by describing how the speaker, the communication and the hearer are related in ordinary discourse; in everyday communication I am conscious that what I say is my meaning and that what I say is an adequate expression for my meaning and, further, that the person who hears my expression understands my meaning completely. Thus in the context of ordinary language the speaker and the expression are both "bound" and "positively free." However in the case of ironic expression these ordinary language relationships among the speaker, the expression and the hearer are not operative. When irony is employed, the utterance is of course not the meaning but the opposite of the meaning; in this situation the speaker is free in a negative way, free in his relationship to himself and to others.

There is a third characteristic which Kierkegaard maintains is found throughout all irony; namely "The ironic figure of speech has a characteristic of loftiness"²⁰ in that although the speaker wants to be understood he does

not want to be understood at once or directly and looks down on “pure and simple” discourse which can be directly and instantly understood. In the daily round of events, the ironic figure of speech occurs in the higher social circles as a prerogative; “just as kings and princes speak French, in the same way they speak ironically.”²¹

Kierkegaard discusses other traits of quantitative irony besides the above-named characteristics. He, interestingly, observes the manner in which the ironist makes others reveal themselves through his use of irony; e. g., he praises the ignorant as though they were intelligent and enjoys this form of falseness. However the really important feature of this and the other similar observations about irony is that it discloses aspects of “the subjective freedom”²² of the subject, the second of the above-discussed three characteristics of irony. This subjective freedom has the mark of being something in man’s personality which is incommensurate with reality. However Kierkegaard’s account of this freedom of the subject in quantitative irony is not in the realm of “pure irony” or “irony as standpoint”;²³ this standpoint which is “usurped totality” Kierkegaard takes up in his discussion of irony as quality which follows his section on quantitative irony.

Irony as Quality

Irony as quality describes irony in its subjective and essential nature; it is irony as a standpoint, irony *sensu eminentiori*. When he uses the term “qualitative” to describe irony *sensu eminentiori* he does so with the Hegelian meaning of the term which is that a quality is a determination which is identical with the being of a thing, a determination which is internal to and inseparable from the thing. Irony in a qualitative sense has affinities to Hegel’s use of the term “subjective” in his analysis of poetry;²⁴ just as the lyric poet expresses particular features of the inner experiences of his personality, so the qualitative ironist expresses ironic features of the interior life of his own personality.

Irony as quality along with irony as quantity is discussed by Kierkegaard in “Orienting Reflections” in the second part of THE CONCEPT OF IRONY. In the midst of a paragraph in which he is writing of irony in a quantitative sense, Kierkegaard abruptly introduces his reader to irony *sensu eminentiori*.

Reversing the order of significance which Hegel employs in the dialectical development of his categories which placed "quantity" above "quality," Kierkegaard considers irony *sensu eminentiori* to be "qualitative" in contrast to the previously described characteristics of irony which he terms "quantitative." Whereas irony quantitatively considered is concerned with irony as a "more or less," irony qualitatively considered "separates itself from the previously described irony."²⁶ Upon scrutiny one finds that irony *sensu eminentiori* has the double meaning of the Hegelian conception of a quality, a positive and a negative side. According to Hegel the positive side of a quality depicts the being or the reality of a thing; the negative side of a quality depicts a "determination" which makes it possible to distinguish this particular being from all others. Thus, when Kierkegaard writes that irony *sensu eminentiori* does not direct itself towards this or that existing thing but towards given reality in its entirety, he is stating the positive side of the quality of irony *sensu eminentiori*; then when Kierkegaard adds that this self-direction of irony towards the sum of given reality is undertaken "in a certain time and under certain conditions," he is stating the negative side of the quality of this irony, through in a non-specific form to be sure.

Kierkegaard maintains that irony *sensu eminentiori* has its "apriority in itself." This apriority of irony is of course not a Kantian proposition known prior to experience but is a self-determining activity which is prior to its own experience. Irony in its higher sense comes to its total view not by a successive destruction of reality piece by piece but by virtue of its own power.²⁷ Thus Kierkegaard finds that the Hegelian designation of irony as "infinite absolute negativity" is correct.²⁸ This definition is of course the definition of irony in Thesis VIII: "*Ironia, ut infinita et absoluta negativitas, est levissima et maxime exigua subjectivitatis significatio.*" Irony *sensu eminentiori* is to be understood as a self-determining standpoint which continually contemplates the totality of existence "*sub specie ironiae.*"

The ironist who contemplates the totality of existence *sub specie ironiae* is described by Kierkegaard as possessing "free negativity." Such a person is unrestrained by the reality which holds him and is in a condition of "floating." This experience of floating provides him with a certain momentary enthusiasm—momentary because, in this freedom, he will destroy it. The source of this

momentary enthusiasm lies in the infiniteness of possibilities. In consolation for making historical reality alien and, to a certain extent, unreal, the ironist draws upon his enormous private reserve fund of possibilities. It is this dimension of subjectivity in irony *sensu eminentiori* which leads Kierkegaard to summarize irony as the "initial and most abstract category of subjectivity,"²⁹ which summary generally parallels the second half of his Latin definition of irony previously quoted in the paper; i. e., irony is the most fleeting and weakest intimation of subjectivity.

To further consider the significance of subjectivity as a part of irony as quality, it is useful to recall the three characteristics which Kierkegaard maintains are to be found in all irony.³⁰ One would expect to find Kierkegaard making explicitly clear both the dialectical process by which these characteristics are altered when they function in irony as quality and the substance of these characteristics in their altered form. Kierkegaard does not do this; only the three traits in their altered form can be discerned and only in an implicit fashion, especially so in the case of the third one. These three characteristics then, as they are discernible in Kierkegaard's discussion of qualitative irony, summarize irony *sensu eminentiori*.

The first characteristic found in all irony is that "the phenomenon is not the essence but the opposite of the essence." In the case of irony as quality, the quality which is identical with the being of irony – its Essence –³¹ is that of "infinite absolute negativity" which thus stands opposed to the Phenomenon³² which, in the case of qualitative irony, is the totality of existence: "Let us consider irony, when it turns itself against the totality of existence, then it holds fast again here to the opposition between Essence and Phenomenon, between Inner and Outer."³³ The second characteristic, "the subject is negatively free," also takes on a new dimension; in the case of irony as quality, the subject is seen to be negatively free from the totality of existence. "When therefore irony discovers that behind the Phenomenon there must be something other than what lies in the Phenomenon – irony constantly attaches great importance to this – then it is that the subject feels itself free and then it is that the Phenomenon continually has no reality for the subject."³⁴ The third characteristic, *fornembed* or "loftiness" is so elusive a feature that one cannot really detect its explicit employment by Kierkegaard in his treatment of irony as

quality. However faint suggestions of *fornemhed* do occur as in the following passage: "In irony the subject constantly retires, destroying by discussion the reality of every Phenomenon in order to save itself, in order to preserve itself in the negative independence from the totality of existence."³⁵

The three characteristics summarized above emphaise the subjectivity and negativity of irony *sensu eminentiori*. This subjectivity and negativity are found by Kierkegaard to be salient features of both Socratic and Romantic irony. "Socrates's standpoint ... was the infinite absolute negativity, irony."³⁶ Concerning Romantic irony after Fichte, Kierkegaard writes: "We see here how irony remains entirely negative."³⁷ However Kierkegaard does find a few characteristics of irony as controlled *moment* in some remarks which A. W. Schlegel makes on Solger's view of irony. Schlegel writes that Solger views irony as a limiting force which teaches man to remain in reality, seeking truth within the limitations imposed by reality. Kierkegaard adds: "Herein lies a deep truth, which I shall come back to later."³⁸ This "deep truth," which Kierkegaard himself immediately considers, will be examined next.

The Concept of Irony as Controlled Moment. Irony's Truth

Irony as controlled *moment* is a unity of the historical or phenomenal and the philosophical or conceptual moments and is a concept in which the moments are *aufgehoben* into their inclusive conception. These two moments, when taken up into irony as controlled *moment*, are termed by Kierkegaard as irony in its "practical" and "theoretical" aspects.³⁹ When irony in its theoretical aspect is examined, one finds that it is a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative irony. This synthesis not only abolishes the opposition between essence and phenomenon and between Essence and Phenomenon; it also preserves both oppositions in its own self-identity. Irony as controlled *moment* when viewed in its theoretical aspect can be conceived as the unity of the objective and subjective mode in the sense in which Hegel uses these terms in his aesthetic categories:⁴⁰ just as the dramatic poet, according to Hegel, combines the principle of epic poetry which is "objectivity" with the principle of lyric poetry which is "subjectivity" into a unity and thus places before his readers an objective series of events, developed through the subjective soul-life

of the characters and realized in existence by acts of personal will, so too irony as controlled *moment* sets before its readers irony operating on the human scene as an expression of the ironist's inner experiences which have been realized by acts of his personal will.

It is significant that Kierkegaard begins his discussion of irony as controlled *moment* by considering three dramatic poets in the Hegelian sense of dramatic poet indicated above. Shakespeare, Goethe and Heiberg are examined by Kierkegaard from the point of view of the relationship between their poetry and their "poet-existence." Shakespeare is the grand master of irony because irony is present everywhere in his productions. Irony sanctions every single feature of the individual poem so that all features have their due and are integrated into the production. This is the phenomenal side of irony. One must also recognize that this visible irony is ironically controlled by the poet who thus conceptualizes it and makes both the poem and himself free. Goethe uses irony as a serving spirit which enables him to have his poetic life congrue with his personal existence; thus his productions enable him to catch a glimpse of various stages in his own personal development. "On the one hand, the single poem rounds itself off by the irony in itself; on the other hand, the single poetic work manifests itself as moment and thereby rounds off the entire poet-existence itself, in itself by the irony."⁴¹ Here the unity of irony's phenomenal and conceptual moments in the controlled *moment* arises. Professor Heiberg as a poet shares the same standpoint as Goethe according to Kierkegaard who observes that almost everything Heiberg writes is an example of irony's "inner economy" and every piece has its place in the totality of his productions.

At this point in his text Kierkegaard concludes his general survey of these poets who are exemplifications of irony as controlled *moment* with the exceedingly important passage previously cited in this paper which is crucial to the understanding of Kierkegaard's conception of irony as controlled *moment*: "Here also is the irony controlled, reduced to moment: the Essence is nothing other than the Phenomenon; the Phenomenon is nothing other than the Essence; the possibility is not so prudish that it will not enter into some actuality, but actuality is possibility."⁴²

This passage is unexplained by Kierkegaard. The most plausible interpretation is that the terms "Essence" and "Phenomenon" are the equivalents respec-

tively of the conceptual and phenomenal moments which, according to this passage, come together as irony's controlled *moment*. This interpretation needs to be sharpened and enriched by making explicit certain distinctions implicit in the passage, which distinctions will give precision and profundity to the conceptual content of irony as controlled *moment* in the personality.

Apparently Kierkegaard uses the terms "Essence" and "Phenomenon" with the meanings taken from his discussion of quantitative and qualitative irony in which the term "phenomenon" is in opposition to "essence" and the term "Phenomenon" is in opposition to "Essence." In irony as controlled *moment*, these oppositions within quantitative and qualitative irony are *aufgehoben* in such a manner that the oppositions are both abolished and preserved.

Continuing then with this interpretation, the opposition of the pairs of terms found in quantitative and qualitative irony is abolished as follows: In quantitative irony the opposition of phenomenon – the words – to the essence – the meaning – is abolished in the sense that the phenomenon has the essence and the essence has the phenomenon; i.e., the words have a meaning and the meaning has words through which it is expressed. In qualitative irony the opposition of the Phenomenon – reality in its entirety – to the Essence – infinite absolute negativity – is abolished in the sense that the Phenomenon has the Essence and the Essence has the Phenomenon; i.e., reality in its entirety has within itself infinite absolute negativity and the infinite absolute negativity has within itself reality in its entirety.⁴³

The opposition of the two pairs of terms found in quantitative and qualitative irony is preserved in irony as controlled *moment*. In quantitative irony, the opposition of phenomenon – the words – to the essence – the meaning – is retained within the meaning of irony as controlled *moment* in order that ironic discourse can be distinguished from other types of discourse. In qualitative irony the opposition of Phenomenon – reality in its entirety – to Essence – infinite absolute negativity – is retained within the meaning of irony as controlled *moment* in order to distinguish irony from other types of relationships between the subject and its object such as doubting.

Irony as controlled *moment* integrates essence and phenomenon and Essence and Phenomenon into an act of personal will. Just as the dramatic poet places before his readers the objective events produced through his own interior life

and brought into reality by an act of personal will, so the master ironist places visible irony in the objective world, which irony develops in his subjective life – provisionally separated from the world – and is implemented or realized by an act of his own will. Thus “possibility is not so prudish that it will not enter into some actuality, actuality is possibility.”⁴⁴

The introduction of will into the conception of irony prepares the reader for the rest of the discussion of irony in its functions as controlled *moment* which is almost entirely concerned with the practical side of irony. Earlier in the thesis, Kierkegaard remarks that irony, in contrast to doubt which has a conceptual determination, is essentially “a practical determination and is theoretical only in order to be practical.”⁴⁵ It is only in this section of the second part of his thesis that the practical stands out as the most prominent emphasis. Unless the relationship between the theoretical and practical moments are understood, the practical side will merely remain interesting, insightful and strikingly quotable but the point on which it turns will be missed.

When irony is controlled, then irony reaches the level of its true significance. “What doubt is for science, irony is for the personal life.”⁴⁶ Irony, controlled irony that is, is an indispensable condition for man’s personal fulfillment; it is the personal life’s “absolute beginning.” Though one must be cautioned about irony as about a “seducer” according to Kierkegaard, it may on the other hand serve as a guide for it is a means through which personal life can receive health and truth.

Irony, when controlled, sets limits, makes finite; it thereby gives “truth, reality and content.”⁴⁷ Kierkegaard expresses his meaning in more practical terms than this; e.g., if there is a disproportion between an enthusiasm which is an effect and the real size of its cause, irony can point this out. Again, if an individual is impatient to harvest before he sows, irony can be used to chastise such a person no point. Further, if one were to provide a view of world history (this is obviously directed against Hegel), irony could point out that it would be necessary to have as much time as the world has needed to provide the data in order to write about it.

Kierkegaard sums up the conception of irony as controlled *moment* with the observation that this kind of irony has a practical and a theoretical side.⁴⁸ On the practical side, irony places the emphasis upon reality which is here under-

stood to be history in which consciousness successively "outlives itself" in such a manner that its state of salvation is gained by remaining "present" within history. In short, "reality obtains its validity by action";⁴⁹ the action, Kierkegaard adds, is not "inane tirelessness" but has its "apriority" in itself so that it does not get lost in a "contentless infinity." The theoretical side of irony as controlled *moment* is stated by Kierkegaard as follows: "the Essence must manifest itself as the Phenomenon."⁵⁰ This passage, one of the two previously cited in this paper which is crucial to the comprehension of irony as controlled *moment*,⁵¹ is another formulation of the conception of the unity of Phenomenon and Essence. The Essence is manifested as the Phenomenon in a complete fashion so that there is nothing, to use Kierkegaard's apt phrase, that "sticks back" behind this unity. This manifestation also prevents idolatry of Phenomenon, which idolatry is only a one-sided view of existence maintaining as it does that the world of phenomena is all that exists. In summation, irony's truth is that it is a controlled *moment* in the life of the historically committed person.

II

IRONY IN THE DIAPSALMATA

In THE CONCEPT OF IRONY Søren Kierkegaard engages in far more than an academic critique of Hegel and Nineteenth Century Romanticism and an academic counter-proposal that irony must be controlled. Professor F. J. Bille-skov Jansen has pointed out that the thesis gives Kierkegaard an opportunity to resolve personally ambivalent relationships to Romanticism as well as to provide the opportunity for him to experiment and develop his own style of writing.⁵² Professor Billeskov Jansen adds: "One can really say that he [in his thesis] tests both his thought and his pen. Kierkegaard has found his life's instrument and now he tunes it."⁵³

Kierkegaard's first major expression of his now successfully tested powers of mind and pen is EITHER/OR which he wished to be regarded as his first book.⁵⁴ In the "Diapsalmata" portion of EITHER/OR the reader is given "provisional glimpses" of the contents of the later essays, which fact has been previously noted in this paper; these glimpses are offered through three types of diapsalms

according to Victor Eremita: "aphorisms, lyric cries and reflections."⁵⁵ The diapsalms can be regarded as "refrains," "the eternal *einerlei*,"⁵⁶ on the many themes of Romanticism.⁵⁷ These refrains are those of a world weary man in the form of diary notes, very appropriately without dates since they are in a sense always the same.⁵⁸

The "Diapsalmata" are important for other reasons than the fact that they are refrains on the themes of Romanticism. The diapsalms are also significant when they are regarded as commentary and criticism on a wide variety of topics which include antiquity, history, society, introspective psychology, logic, art and metaphysics. For the purpose of this paper they are important because they are expressions of irony – quantitatively, qualitatively and as controlled *moment*.

Irony as Quantity in the "Diapsalmata"

Before discussing the manner in which quantitative irony is expressed in the "Diapsalmata" it is important to mention a literary characteristic of the aphoristic diapsalms which, when considered separately from the diapsalms that are lyric cries and reflections, are termed by Professor Billeskov Jansen to be "anecdotal aphorisms" – they are personal utterances which are founded upon anecdotes.⁵⁹ Professor Billeskov Jansen's example of an anecdotal aphorism uses Kierkegaard's concerning Jonathan Swift: "Old age realizes the dreams of youth; one looks at Swift; in his youth he built an insane asylum, in his old age he was himself an inmate."⁶⁰ This aphorism, Professor Billeskov Jansen points out, was built upon Goethe's motto in Part II of DICHTUNG UND WARHEIT: "Was man in der Jugend wünscht, hat man im Alter die Fülle."⁶¹

This anecdotal aphorism in the "Diapsalmata" fuses the same anecdote concerning Swift which is earlier related in the PAPIRER⁶² with the motto of Goethe and results in a poignant presentation which is both a refutation of a sanguine view of man's life and also an assertion of the irony in Swift's own life. Kierkegaard calls the anecdote about Jonathan Swift one which illustrates "an irony of fate"; the visible irony in the aphorism is an example of quantitative irony.

The irony of the Swift aphorism can be more clearly understood when it is conceived as an instance which exemplifies the definition of quantitative irony;

i.e., the essence is not the phenomenon but the opposite of the phenomenon. In the case of this aphorism, the phenomenon includes the initial and apparently entire direction of the utterance which prepares the reader for an optimistic conclusion in which Swift's old age would realize the dreams of his youth; the essence or real meaning is the surprising twist which opposes the expectation carefully laid down in the phenomenal setting; the essence is the bitter fact concerning where Swift spends his last years.

Quantitative irony, which has been earlier discussed, is expressed as irony "more or less." Sometimes the irony is "more" in the sense that it is very obvious and very poignant. Not only is this true of the aphorism regarding Swift but it is also true in regard to the first diapsalm which is a reflective one. In it the poet is depicted as producing ravishing music, the phenomenon, while in reality he is an unhappy man, the essence, whose cries are so fashioned that they appear to be ravishing music.⁶³ Sometimes the irony is "less" in the sense that it is less obvious and important than it is in other passages; this is true of the following aphorism: "There is a rambling reasoning which in its ceaselessness stands in the same relation to the result as the limitless line of Egyptian kings does to the historical worth of their reigns."⁶⁴ What is given in this aphorism is the phenomenon; the reader must supply the essence, namely that the value of the result in both cases is nil.

Another characteristic of quantitative irony, also previously discussed, depicts the subject as negatively free. Kierkegaard makes the subject or author of these diapsalms negatively free from his utterances in two ways: first he designates the subject or author as the anonymous "A"; secondly he never permits "A" to be bound into his own utterances in the manner of common discourse. The change in the anecdote about Swift from its earlier form in the PAPIRER to its aphoristic anecdotal form in the "Diapsalmata" is illustrative of the way in which Kierkegaard sets his subject "A" negatively free. In the anecdote's relation in the PAPIRER, Kierkegaard is the subject and he binds himself into the anecdote by introducing his own term to describe the irony which is "fate's irony," and in so doing he observes the general requirements for ordinary communication; namely that the subject is conscious of his meaning, that his expression conveys this meaning, and that the reader understands completely. In the "Diapsalmata," however, the aphorism about Swift is expressed in such a manner that the

subject is not bound into the discourse; he is negatively free with respect to his own role as author and with respect to any obligation to make certain that his reader understands precisely and completely what he means. Whenever quantitative irony is present in the diapsalms, one will also find “A” – the subject – negatively free of the usual communication requirements of everyday discourse. Another facet of this negative freedom of the subject from the obligations of everyday discourse is the frequent lack of allusion to the anecdote on which the aphorism is based. The aphorisms burst forth and then adroitly end with their clever twists in such a manner that the subject is elusive, uninvolved and negatively free.

A loftiness in the irony, frequently appearing in the diapsalms, is the last and also previously noted characteristic of quantitative irony. “A” is condescendingly critical of those who lead active, industrious and useful lives; with an air of disdain he seeks to denigrate the aims, desires and values of his age: the great challenges offered by the age are in fact sickly reflections of the ego,⁶⁵ the desires of the age are dull,⁶⁶ the age lacks passion,⁶⁷ and the thoughts of the time are too paltry to be sinful –⁶⁸ at heart he despises men and laughs when others are praised for their goodness of heart⁶⁹ and he wishes for a police order prohibiting sentimentality.⁷⁰ The busy man is ridiculed by a humorous description: “When I see a fly, at a crucial instant, settle itself on such a [busy] business man’s nose, or he becomes spattered by a carriage which drives past him in even greater haste, or a drawbridge goes up before him, or a roof tile falls down and strikes him dead, then I laugh with all my heart.”⁷¹ When given the choice of having whatever wish he most wants granted by the gods, “A” elects to always have the laugh on his side.⁷² These passages, which ripple with quantitative irony, disclose *fornembed*, a condescending loftiness directed towards the human condition.

Irony as Quality in the “Diapsalmata”

A striking example of the infinite absolute negativity of irony as quality is in the following diapsalm: “I do not care at all. I do not care to ride because the movement is too violent; I do not care to lie down because either I should have to remain lying, and I do not want to do that, or I should have to get up again and I do not want to do that either. *Summa Summarum*: I do not care at all.”⁷³

The three characteristics that are found in all irony are present in this diapsalm. The first, the essence is not the phenomenon but the opposite of the phenomenon, is expressed in "A's" indifference to everything, which indifference is infinite absolute negativity – the Essence, which stands in opposition to the entirety of "A's" given existence which is the Phenomenon. The second, the subject is negatively free, is seen in the manner in which "A" eludes a sense of responsibility by choosing not to care at all. The third, *fornembed*, is the cool confidence with which this absolute indifference is declared: "I do not care at all."

The absoluteness of the negativity expressed in this diapsalm is emphasized when one compares it to the journal entry upon which it is based which was written in the summer of 1837 when the thoughts in the passage were Kierkegaard's own mood.⁷⁴ In the journal entry he writes that he does not care for anything including walking, riding or lying down, but, however, one notes that the negativity is not complete because he does care to drive and let objects glide by in order to feel his own languor. Nevertheless he claims that he looks in vain for something to enliven him, something to destroy his ennui. The dissimilarity with regard to the degree of indifference between the journal entry and the diapsalm is that in the latter the indifference has become an infinite absolute negativity; as Professor Billeskov Jansen expresses it: "When the passage is used in the "Diapsalmata," the utterance is no longer relative but absolute."⁷⁵

The diapsalms "often contradict" themselves according to Victor Eremita, and thus it is not surprising to find a diapsalm in which "A" does care for at least a certain kind of experience; this diapsalm is a picturesque sketch of a qualitative ironist's relationship to reality.⁷⁶ Care, here, is a baronial castle, high on a mountain top hid in the clouds. From this eagle's nest, the aesthetic personality darts down to seize his prey and bears his quarry, a picture, aloft to his castle where he weaves this find into the tapestry of his palace. Such an aesthetic personality, "A" continues, lives as though dead, erasing the temporal and contingent world. "A" ironizes himself in this passage in the sense that the erasure of the temporal and contingent world is not and can never be absolute because the world must provide the pictures that are to be woven into the tapestry. In this diapsalm, qualitative irony in its free play of subjectivity as

infinite absolute negativity, the Essence, is dramatically presented in opposition to reality in its entirety, the Phenomenon.

Turning then from specific diapsalms to common themes found in the "Diapsalmata": the opposition of Essence and Phenomenon, the first characteristic of qualitative irony, is clearly seen when the theme of meaninglessness is considered. In this connection, qualitative irony and meaninglessness are found together when "A" supposes that an evil spirit has placed spectacles on his nose which are so constructed that through one glass he sees everything powerfully magnified and through the other he sees everything equally powerfully reduced.⁷⁷ The opposition between the infinite absolute negativity of irony as Essence and the totality of existence as Phenomenon is poignantly depicted and results in utter meaninglessness, in total incomprehensibility, which is the lot of such a qualitative ironist. The inextricable connection between qualitative irony and meaninglessness is apparent in "A's" wish that if only he could behold a constant loyalty, *trofasthed*, which could withstand everything! But unfortunately his soul's poisonous doubt destroys everything.⁷⁸ The sense of total meaninglessness is sometimes spoken of as a lack of self-mastery; "A" feels himself unable to weave himself into the tapestry of life, he cannot spin and the only option that he can discover which will express himself is to cut the thread and thus manifest absolute negativity.⁷⁹ "A's" sense of meaninglessness is aggravated by his occasional ironic self-parody: only when he was young was life meaningful, i. e. only when he was not a Romantic ironist in his infinite absolute negativity.⁸⁰

The subject in its negative freedom, the second characteristic of qualitative irony, is sharply delineated when one examines the theme that reality disappoints the ironist but that the entertainment of possibilities or the recollection of the past never do. As long as "A" plays with the endless combinations of concepts which the world of possibilities proffers, he can never be disappointed or disillusioned. The wine of Phenomenon makes him either sad or melancholy; the wine of Essence is his *summum bonum*, "and what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating as possibility."⁸¹ When actual experiences of the past have been elevated to a remembrance, then and only then is it possible for actuality, in this transformed subsistence of remembrance, to be valuable and secure. "To live a life in a state of recollection is the most

perfect life that can be conceived. Recollection satisfies more abundantly than the sum of existence and has a security which no reality possesses."⁸²

Fornembed, the third characteristic of irony as quality, is present in several of the diapsalms previously discussed in this section of the paper, particularly in the case of the two diapsalms concerning "care." Perhaps the most poignant expression of this loftiness aspect in quantitative irony is in the last of the diapsalms in which "A" converses with the gods.⁸³ In reply to the offer of the gods to grant him any wish, "A" replies that he would like always to have the laugh on his side. The urbanity of the request and the *savoir faire* of the gods in granting the request are both appropriate manifestations of a condescending loftiness in which the ironist's infinite absolute negativity, the unexpressed Essence, is directed towards the totality of existence in the form of laughter, the Phenomenon. That the ironist ironizes himself is also apparent in that the response of the gods, laughter, can be interpreted as mockery directed towards the ironist and the totality of existence.

Irony as Controlled Moment in the "Diapsalmata"

At the beginning of Kierkegaard's discussion of irony as controlled *moment*, it will be recalled that he examines the poetry of Shakespeare, Goethe and Heiberg in order to point out the manner in which visible irony is present in their productions. His examination pays particular attention to the ironic relationship between the poem and the poet's personal existence. Goethe, Kierkegaard maintains, achieves such a remarkable congruence between his poetry and his "poet-existence" that he surveys his poetry and sees himself as he was at various periods of his life. Goethe is not just a master of irony in his productions, objectively considered; he is a master of irony in the relationships between his poetry and his own personal existence as a poet. Goethe thus escapes the disproportion that often exists between a poet and his productions in which the poet exhibits a masterful control of irony in his productions but exhibits a total lack of control of irony in his personal life.

This achievement of Goethe is also an achievement of Kierkegaard. Thus far this paper has pointed out that Kierkegaard masters irony in his productions;

now it examines the manner in which he masters irony as evidenced in his own "poet-existence."

Like Goethe's, Kierkegaard's irony permits him to see himself as he once was though the medium of his productions. When Kierkegaard drafts the diapsalm concerning "A's" lack of care about anything,⁸⁴ he is not only drawing upon his experience recorded in his journal in 1837; he is sharpening the picture of himself in the light of his better understanding of the aesthetic personality. The irony lies in the opposition between what he writes about and what he now is: Kierkegaard is writing as an aesthetic author, the Phenomenon; he is a religious author, the Essence. He is a worldly writer who is already in the cloister.

Few authors have viewed their relationship to their work in as complex a manner as Kierkegaard does. In 1848 he explicitly states this relationship in *THE POINT OF VIEW*⁸⁵ where he describes the various personal modes of existence which he adopts in order that his personal life will congrue with the type of books he is writing. His personal mode of existence in connection with his aesthetic writings, which of course includes the "Diapsalmata," is described in terms which express the concept of irony as controlled *moment* without the words actually being used. Kierkegaard does mention the irony of his authorship when he observes that "the irony lay precisely in the fact that within this aesthetic author, under this worldly appearance, the religious author hid himself, who just at the time possibly consumed as much piety for his edification as commonly suffices for an entire household."⁸⁶

Kierkegaard as an author has a Phenomenal and an Essential life. On the Phenomenal side, he is an aesthetic author who gives the appearance that his life congrues with his writing. He takes pains to be seen every hour of the day, living seemingly on the street in the company of Tom, Dick and Harry – *creti og pleti*. He arranges to be seen going back and forth in the most frequented spots to the city; he often appears in the theatre, but only for five or ten minutes. All of this is done, he tells his reader, as a way of "seconding my aesthetic work." Phenomenally, his life and the themes of his works congrue. "If Copenhagen were disposed to a single opinion about anyone, I dare say it was disposed to a single opinion about me: I was an idler, a loafer, a flaneur, a wanton bird, a good perhaps even a brilliant head, witty, etc. – but as for 'seriousness,' I lacked that utterly. I represented the irony of worldliness, the enjoyment of

life, the most subtle form of pleasure seeking – but as for 'seriousness and positivity,' there was not a trace of that; however, I was prodigiously interesting and piquant."⁸⁷

On the Essential side, Kierkegaard as a religious author was already in the cloister and his writing coheres with his religious purpose. He has broken with the world and suffers from an overwhelming melancholy. He spends his time in prayer and devout meditation because he regards himself as penitent. In his words, this life provides "indescribable satisfaction to the inner indignation which existed within me from my childhood onwards; because long before I had ever seen it for myself I had been taught that falsehood and baseness ruled the world."⁸⁸

In the play of the opposition between Kierkegaard's life as Phenomenon and as Essence, one is aware not only of the opposition between Phenomenon and Essence but also of the two other characteristics of irony, namely the negative freedom of the subject and the *fornembed* directed towards the general condition of man; this latter characteristic is especially prevalent in the discussion of his personal mode of existence in connection with his religious works.

This opposition, between the Phenomenon and the Essence aspects of Kierkegaard, his writing and his cohering mode of existence, when combined, constitutes irony as controlled *moment* in Kierkegaard's historical existence. On the side having to do with his writing, what he writes in the "Diapsalmata" is the opposite of what he really advocates; here is an example of the opposition of the phenomenon to the essence. On the side having to do with his life, Kierkegaard appears as a man of the conventional world when in reality he is a man of the cloister; here is an example of the opposition of Phenomenon to Essence. There is a shift of meaning here in both pairs of terms, phenomenon and essence and Phenomenon and Essence, from what has hitherto been meant when the pairs were discussed as quantitative and qualitative irony respectively. The reason for this change of meaning lies in the fact that these oppositions are now conceived from the point of view of their unity within irony as controlled *moment*; when they are so understood, certain meanings which they possessed when the oppositions were intrinsically considered are *aufgehoben* in the sense of destroyed and others are *aufgehoben* in the sense of preserved in the *moment*, within the person of Kierkegaard as author.

When the relevant Phenomenon-aspects of Kierkegaard's writing and mode of existence are combined with the Essence-aspects of his writings and mode of existence, then the unity of irony as controlled *moment* in his poet-existence can be understood. This combination is achieved by the formulation of two complex propositions which retain the oppositions between phenomenon and essence and Phenomenon and Essence but which reduce the oppositions to unity, to the *moment*: first: while it is true that the "Diapsalmata" conceived as phenomenon congrues with Kierkegaard's life when it is conceived as Phenomenon, it is also true that the "Diapsalmata" conceived as phenomenon congrues with Kierkegaard's life conceived as Essence; second, while it is true that the "Diapsalmata" as essence congrues with Kierkegaard's life as Phenomenon it is also true that the "Diapsalmata" as essence congrues with Kierkegaard's poet-existence conceived as Essence. These two complex propositions then reduce to *moment*: "The Essence [of his aesthetic writings and his mode of existence] is nothing other than the Phenomenon [of his aesthetic writings and his mode of existence]; the Phenomenon is nothing other than the Essence." Day in and day out during much of the period of the aesthetic writings, Kierkegaard makes certain that "the Essence manifests itself as the Phenomenon" in irony as controlled *moment*.

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Postscript. This paper was prepared and presented in the spring of 1965; since then Lee M. Capel's translation of THE CONCEPT OF IRONY has been published.

NOTES

- ¹ SØREN KIERKEGAARDS SAMLEDE VAERKER, edited by A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lange. Second ed., 1920-31, Vol. XIII, 101-428. Hereinafter all references to this work will be designated "SV."
- ² SØREN KIERKEGAARDS PAPIRER, edited by P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torsting. 1909-48, IV A 214. Hereinafter all references to this work will be designated "Pap." All translations in this paper are the author's.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 216.
- ⁴ EITHER/OR, trans. by Walter Lowrie with revision by Howard A. Johnson, 1959, xix, Vol. II.
- ⁵ SV, I, xii.
- ⁶ *Loc. cit.*
- ⁷ Jens Himmelstrup, TERMINOLOGISK ORDBOG TIL SØREN KIERKEGAARDS SAMLEDE VAERKER, 1964, 137, 23, 204-15.

- ⁸ Pap., III B 2. Concerning the relationship of irony to Kierkegaard's theory of personality, I refer the reader to Arild Christensen's "Der junge Kierkegaard als Schriftstellerpersönlichkeit und die Persönlichkeitsauffassung in den Frühwerken," *Orbis Litterarum*, 1963, XVIII, 26-47.
- ⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, WISSENSCHAFT DER LOGIK, Zweiter Teil, Zweites Buch, Dritter Abschnitt, "Die Wirklichkeit."
- ¹⁰ SV, XIII, 424.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 428.
- ¹² SV, XIII, 113-7.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 341-2.
- ¹⁴ SYMPOSIUM KIERKEGAARDIANUM, *Orbis Litterarum*, Tome X, Fasc., 1-2, 1955. Essay by G. Malantschuk, "Das Verhältnis zwischen Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit in Sören Kierkegaard's existentiellem Denken," 167.
- ¹⁵ SV, XIII, 342.
- ¹⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, VORLESUNGEN ÜBER DIE AESTHETIK, Dritte Bind, Berlin 1838, 322, 326 ff.
- ¹⁷ SV, XIII, 347.
- ¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 348.
- ²⁰ *Loc. cit.*
- ²¹ *Loc. cit.*
- ²² *Ibid.*, 353.
- ²³ *Loc. cit.*
- ²⁴ Hegel, AESTHETIK, 323, 419 ff.
- ²⁵ SV, XIII, 354.
- ²⁶ *Loc. cit.*
- ²⁷ *Loc. cit.*
- ²⁸ *Loc. cit.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 364.
- ³⁰ *Supra*, 6.
- ³¹ The "E" in Essence is capitalized in order to distinguish this Essence from the type of essence discussed in the section on "Irony as Quantity."
- ³² The "P" in Phenomenon is capitalized in order to distinguish this Phenomenon from the type of phenomenon discussed in the section on "Irony as Quantity."
- ³³ SV, XIII, 357
- ³⁴ *Loc. cit.*
- ³⁵ *Loc. cit.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 371.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 386.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 420.
- ³⁹ SV XIII, 427-8.
- ⁴⁰ Hegel, AESTHETIK, 323-5.
- ⁴¹ SV, XIII, 424.
- ⁴² *Loc. cit.*
- ⁴³ J. L. Heiberg, SAMLEDE SKRIFTER, Prosaiske Skrifter, I, 1861, 183-7.
- ⁴⁴ SV, XIII, 424. The relationship between possibility and actuality in which they are both separate and yet identical appears to presuppose a conception of irony which Mr. Arild Christensen, in his work previously cited, has described as a continual process in which possibility flows out of the self and actuality flows back into the self; *op. cit.*, 40.
- ⁴⁵ SV, XIII, 357.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 425.
- ⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 427-8.

- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 427.
⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 428.
⁵¹ *Supra*, 3.
⁵² F. J. Billeskov Jansen, *STUDIER I SØREN KIERKEGAARDS LITTERAERE KUNST*, 1951, 17–20.
⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.
⁵⁴ *A KIERKEGAARD CRITIQUE*, edited by Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, 1962, Essay by F. J. Billeskov Jansen, 12.
⁵⁵ *SV*, I, xii.
⁵⁶ Billeskov Jansen, *STUDIER*, 29.
⁵⁷ *EITHER/OR*, trans. by David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson with revisions and a foreword by Howard A. Johnson, 1959, 443.
⁵⁸ Billeskov Jansen, *STUDIER*, 28.
⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.
⁶⁰ *SV*, I, 5.
⁶¹ Billeskov Jansen, *STUDIER*, 29.
⁶² *Pap.*, III B 9.
⁶³ *SV*, I, 6–7.
⁶⁴ *Loc. cit.*
⁶⁵ *SV*, I, 6–7.
⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.
⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.
⁶⁸ *Loc. cit.*
⁶⁹ *SV*, I, 28.
⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.
⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.
⁷² *Ibid.*, 31.
⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4.
⁷⁴ *Pap.*, II A 637.
⁷⁵ Billeskov Jansen, *STUDIER*, 29.
⁷⁶ *SV*, I, 30.
⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.
⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24–5.
⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.
⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, 21–2, 30.
⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 29.
⁸² *Ibid.*, 19.
⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31.
⁸⁴ *Supra*, 23–4.
⁸⁵ *SV*, XIII, 545–624.
⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 595.
⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 586.
⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 587–8.