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Review essay

Joseph Westfall, *The Kierkegaardian Author: Authorship and Performance in Kierkegaard's Literary and Dramatic Criticism*, Kierkegaard Studies, Monograph Series 15, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007)

Worries about authors, their identity and authority, are as old as worries about Homer's link to the *Odyssey*, Plato's link to Socratic dialogues, or an unknowable poet's link to the biblical Book of Job. Thankfully, such worries do not haunt us always. The inescapable impact of the old nurse who recognizes the scar, or the incautious request Socrates makes for free meals, or the Whirlwind evocation of vultures feasting on human blood, will, for the moment, banish, our more extended philosophical doubts, wonders, disappointments, perplexities or reveries – banish, that is, worries about a general theory of authorship. Yet the exile of such questions is never permanent, it seems. We seem to have a need for authors and origins, perhaps like a Kantian need of reason, or a need for a first cause, or a need to know who our fathers were. We crave captivating and truthful stories and also creative and steady authors. We posit them, like transcendental egos, even when we know absolutely nothing, biographically speaking, about who they might be. We want the *Odyssey*, but also want Homer, and want him to be more than a convenient filing device for libraries and bookstores. And we would like to have him be a single author, not just a convenient banner to announce the arrival of a traveling storytelling troupe that creates poems by committee.

Is Kierkegaard the name of a storytelling troupe? Our biographical instinct will say No, and point to Copenhagen street addresses, copious journal records dated and on file, letters to contemporaries, descriptions of the author by neighbors and the irrefutable evidence of a weathered

headstone with chiseled words provided by the author. Yet our philosophical instincts cannot be so easily quelled. Perhaps Kierkegaard *is* a storytelling troupe, a creator by committee, in addition to being a singular citizen now safely buried. After all, he leaves us the stage names of his players: Hilarious Bookbinder, Inter et Inter, Johannes Climacus, Vigilious Hafniensus (the Watchman of Copenhagen, whose successor in Freiberg kept anxious watch over being) and half a dozen others.¹ The possibility of Kierkegaard being a metaphysical or literary multitude, whether of our *own* construction, or of *his* literary manufacture, is abetted because he pens parts for *himself*, showing that he can (in a sense) be self-creating. He takes various stage names (S. Kierkegaard, Kts, Kjerkegaard), signs himself at other times as editor, and sometimes delivers a book with no author at all named on the title page (the space for authorship or literary selfhood now a bottomless emptiness). In this tightly argued and exhaustively researched book, Joseph Westfall takes on this alluring, irritating, daunting and compelling city of troubles and wonders. Westfall delivers the best guide we have to the oft-mentioned but little-understood Kierkegaardian occasion of a hydra-headed set of biographical, literary and philosophical issues centered on authorship.

Single and legion

Melville wrote to his neighbor Hawthorne, one author to another, ‘This is a long letter, but you are not at all bound to answer it. Possibly, if you do answer it, and direct it to Herman Melville, you will missend it – for the very fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper.’² On *his* word, Melville suffers a deficit of perdurance, a lack of felt-identity through time. It disturbs him: ‘Lord, when shall we be done changing?’ His words are of more than psychological or biographical interest. They belong with Heraclitus who wrote that one could not step in the same river twice. Melville doubts, or *seems* to doubt, that he, or anyone else, can encounter the same Melville twice. He is surely in a very ‘metaphysical’ mood, and one we can perhaps account for partially by considering the context of literary authorship. When Melville gets immersed in Ahab or Ishmael or Starbuck, he *becomes* this performing troupe, or the players in it, one by one. He seems to vanish as a continuing, single, authoritative presence. If we follow his sense of things, all we have is the figures and actions and settings of a text titled *Moby Dick*.

The writer can seem to vanish as an object of biographies into a constantly shifting authorial stream, a river (or an itinerant troupe) of speakers, writers and actors. It is as if each time Kierkegaard starts a new book, under a new pseudonym, or under a non-pseudonym, he becomes a new author, only problematically related to predecessor and

successor authors. On the one hand we know that Kierkegaard is an inescapable figure, a most tangible presence in European cultural history of the past century and a half. We might forgo interest in his factual activity in and about Copenhagen, but we can hardly overlook his monumental status as the author (the implied source) of an extended oeuvre. From this last angle, Kierkegaard becomes something like Homer, a kind of epiphenomenon of an array of texts (rather than a factual figure for whom we have substantiating historical archives). If Kierkegaard were in that sense non-factual, not necessarily related to a resident of Copenhagen, he still could be an inescapable and generative cultural figure.

Hamlet is a literary invention. Harold Bloom holds that Shakespeare's consummate invention, Hamlet, more or less invents – by embodying – our modern notion of the human. Nevertheless, his massive presence is unrelated to any physical existence substantiated by archives. He has what Westfall would call a powerful poetic (but non-factual) actuality. Perhaps some centuries down the line Johannes de silentio (author of *Fear and Trembling*) or Johannes Climacus (author of *Concluding Unscholarly Postscript*) will have had cultural impacts on a par with Hamlet's, and be recognized as inescapable poetic actualities, non-factual figures (ghosts?) who have shaped our everyday notion of the human.

The cultural impact of Shakespeare or Kierkegaard flies free of any factual history of interest to tax-collectors or accountants of births and deaths. They flourish in the flow of cultural history, which is more than accountants can register. Kierkegaard makes himself more involutedly elusive than Shakespeare, however. Hamlet stages a famous play before the king. *Postscript* Climacus performs (dances, as he has it) before God.³ But Climacus also inserts Kierkegaard as a figure in a section of *Postscript* called 'A Contemporary Effort'; furthermore, he lets 'S. Kierkegaard' intervene still later. Hamlet does not insert a figure named Will Shakespeare in his play before the King or let that figure comment on Shakespeare.⁴

A tax-liable, Copenhagen *resident* Kierkegaard (call him SAK) adopts a strategy as an *author* (call him SK). SK aims for an explicit presence and an explicit absence in the authored texts. SK is an author of authors (pseudonyms, at a minimum) who comment on each other and also on SK and SK's purported relation to them (as if they had detached from SK, in the way Hamlet detaches from the pen of Shakespeare). SK darts forward and then retreats behind and within the drama of the texts, seducing and then abandoning readers, a kind of hide-and-seek not unlike the sudden appearance of a biblical Whirlwind's Voice that doubles as a *Deus absconditus*. The problem of the Kierkegaardian authorship is ours: we have an obsessive desire for the *real, single* Kierkegaard, to *please stand up*.

Westfall does not exactly bring this preternatural spin of texts within texts, authors within texts, self-revoking texts, to a comfortable standstill; but he slows down the action sufficiently for us to get a glimpse

of what might be going on. The master question is whether these antic authorial proliferations and imbrications at last make sense. Perhaps they do in the way the many-sided confusion of a carnival at last makes sense, a rough and many-sided kind of sense that emerges as we escape the crush, noise and glitter of the arcades. Whatever sense thus falls our way comes not as an unambiguous map but as a sigh of relief as the worst of our disorientation is alleviated. Even then, we may know that a swirl of confusion can reappear at any moment. The disheartening alternative to such dawning of sense is that this noisy multiplicity is all deflection and flurry, signifying little.

Who determines identity?

Tax collectors know how to nail down a tax-liable resident of Copenhagen (SAK), and librarians know how to shelve an author whose books arrive in the mail (SK). But when it comes to full authorial identity they do not touch even the tip of the iceberg. In their given roles, these civil servants have no interest in the identity of one Johannes Climacus, humorist and author of *Concluding Unscholarly Postscript*. For them, questions of *his* identity will seem frivolous. Climacus lacks any tax-liable, shelf-location status. Yet Climacus demands that *we* determine an identity for him among the siblings or parents or doubles that gather as the oeuvre authored by figures who sign off as 'Kierkegaard', or another name (or without name). And identity goes deeper than determining relationships among related Kierkegaardian siblings or parents or doubles, variously named and unnamed as the authors of texts.

Although Westfall may underrate this possibility, we might take authorial identity as established by something like genre, apart from associated names or pseudonyms. SK pens his way into history as a notable dreamer, fabulist, diarist, publicist, dramatist, dialectician, sermonizer, satirist, lyricist, conjuror of pseudonyms, ironist, humorist, poet, polemicist. Is his identity necessarily uniform or singular across these genres? Kierkegaard as dialectician might always sign himself Climacus (or Anti-Climacus). But perhaps the key to identity is not the signature so much as the genre. Mixed genres would signal mixed identities. Would having a single author declare himself responsible for everything settle the question of authorial identity?⁵ Who is at last responsible for settling matters of identity – say whether SK is multiple or singular, factual or non-factual, the same in *Either/Or* as in *Edifying Discourses*, the same in *Either* as in *Or*? There is no judge in chambers to hear the case.

We want to give an author some latitude over responsibility for what is said in his or her books. Do we also want to give a pseudonym latitude over whether he is responsible for what is said in one of his books?

Lines of responsibility quickly become murky. SK might or might not be responsible for the opinions of Johannes Climacus. Climacus might or might not be responsible for what he says about Johannes de silentio. SK might or might not be responsible for the opinions inserted at the end of *Postscript*, signed 'S. Kierkegaard'. Climacus might or might not be responsible for letting S. Kierkegaard's notes get glued to the end of his tome. There is no simple rule to follow in establishing responsibility in these cases, and Westfall is clear that his task is not to provide one.

Each case of responsibility avowed or attributed is tested, one by one. To take but one instance, the jury may remain hung on the question whether the opinions of S. Kierkegaard from the end of *Postscript* do or do not trump any of the opinions of Climacus voiced from the body of *Postscript*; it may remain hung on whether Climacus has authority to disavow responsibility for remarks that get slipped into those final pages of his book, should he wish to. Westfall listens to the array of texts before him, and hears their pleas, one by one. He also hears Austin and Derrida, who speak from the wings on performativity.⁶ If I *avow* that I believe in God, or believe love should hold sway, or that I will support my son, then in the right settings, my *saying* so to some open extent will *make* it so; and my *identity* then circles around these avowals of care and commitment.

In *The Point of View of my Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard avows that he has always been a religious author. Does his *saying* so *make* it so? To take another instance, can a personage, S. Kierkegaard, who *declares* that he takes responsibility for Climacus' *Postscript*, in fact take responsibility from Johannes Climacus, usurping his standing – by a mere *declaration*?⁷ If the implied author of the Kierkegaardian oeuvre, SK, transfers authorial powers to one Johannes Climacus in the very act of letting Climacus sign off as the author, does SK, some time hence, have authority to *renege* on that transfer? 'S. Kierkegaard' seems to assume he has such authority. He says he is 'responsible for publication' of *Postscript* and also, at the close of *Postscript*, declares that he is the 'author, as people would call it', of eight major pseudonymous works from *Either/Or* through *Postscript*; that is, that *he* is author of *Postscript*. But does saying so *make* it so? Perhaps when 'S. Kierkegaard' concedes he is responsible only for *publication* of a work by another, he thereby forfeits all claim to be *author*, and so has no authority to strip Climacus of authorial status and responsibility.

Responsibility and authority are connected. Ahab has authority to cast judgment on Starbuck, and is responsible for his judgments. Johannes Climacus assumes authority to cast judgment on the work of Johannes de silentio, who writes *Fear and Trembling*.⁸ Ahab cannot cast judgment on Melville, however, so we would think that Climacus cannot cast judgment on *his* progenitor. Yet the inventor of Climacus is infinitely

clever, and makes Climacus infinitely clever. Climacus feigns amusement as he relates how someone in Copenhagen is stealing his lines, publishing his ideas, in books with titles like *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling* – just as he thinks of them himself. Tongue in cheek, Climacus comments obliquely on his progenitor, as if Ahab were to comment on Melville, or as if Hamlet were to comment on Shakespeare. This sounds like a version of Pygmalion and Galatea, the statue that comes to life for its creator, and ‘talks’ with him, as it were. Kierkegaard dreams up Johannes Climacus, who then becomes dreamily amused at the dreamer who dreams him.

We may think in encountering texts signed ‘Søren Kierkegaard’ or pages signed ‘S. Kierkegaard’ that at least at those junctures doubts about authority and responsibility are minimized. Those signatures ought to give us something like ‘the true Kierkegaard’, the SK apart from the masks. Yet it may well be that ‘S. Kierkegaard’ and ‘Søren Kierkegaard’ function more like a pseudonym than not. Some years after Søren’s death, his brother Peter suggested, in effect, that works signed by Søren should be treated as if written by a pseudonym: he did not want the signature ‘Søren Kierkegaard’ to license anyone to attribute to his younger brother responsibility for the judgments, opinions and reports contained in the books signed ‘Kierkegaard’. What was said in the books, pseudonymous or otherwise, was not to be taken as the considered judgment and opinion of his flesh-and-blood brother. Peter’s motives, of course, are tainted. Peter was a high-ranking and respected bishop in the Danish State Church, precisely the established Church that Søren relentlessly ridiculed. As Søren approached death, Peter, as brother and bishop, had an opening to forgive and heal, but that did not happen. Years later he had every reason to wish that the books attacking Christendom and the Church did not in fact represent the views of a member of his family, and did not represent Søren’s real views on the Church over which he ruled as a bishop. It helped Peter to believe that his younger brother’s polemics were just another mask he loved wearing. Although Peter’s motives for treating ‘Kierkegaard’ as a pseudonym are tainted, his hypothesis has independent interest.

If we say that ‘Kierkegaard’ is the implied author of a text or oeuvre (rather than that he is SAK who paid taxes) what exactly is the difference between *that* view, and the view that ‘Judge Wilhelm’ (or Johannes Climacus) is an implied author? Is the gap between ‘Judge Wilhelm’ and any factual judge in Copenhagen any greater than the gap between ‘Søren Kierkegaard, author’ and a particular resident of Copenhagen who has that as a given name? As we suggested above, in the long run, it will be the implied author of the oeuvre, rather than any particular resident of Copenhagen, who will (or will not) have made an indelible mark on the times. If this is true, we might as well be indifferent whether SK was more or less real than Judge Wilhelm – just as we might as well be indifferent

whether Shakespeare was more or less real than King Lear. From a very important angle, *Lear is Shakespeare*, and *Judge Wilhelm is Kierkegaard*. The Shakespeare who did or did not pay his taxes is of no more interest than the Kierkegaard who did or did not pay them. Perhaps Peter's hypothesis can never be conclusively established, but I think it has *some* power to fly.

Is there a limit to how far we can stretch Kierkegaard across pseudonymous and veronymous genres? Is he, as SK, just *equivalent* to the full range of the authorship? If he is stretched that thin, perhaps he becomes volatilized, now one mask, now another, including the mask labeled 'SK', and so of very little perduring substance. Let us return to Austin and performatives. If SK (the implied author) is like a speaker, he must have enough permanence to promise, avow, take something as his own. If no self perdures, there is no self that can hold its future self to be responsible for its present or past declarations, and hence no declarations or promises can be made. An utterly ephemeral self could not ask others to respect its words or promises, for there is nothing perduring to back them.

Thinking back to the start of our discussion, perhaps we should say that Melville *has no authority* to volatilize his identity. If he tries to utterly undo his permanence, he has undercut the place from which any undoing could be accomplished. Yet if he lacks authority to undo his permanence, why do we listen when he *says* he is ephemeral: 'the very fingers that now guide this pen are *not precisely the same* that just took it up and put it on this paper'. Can Kierkegaard fashion himself as ephemeral, shifting with the assumption of each new voice, each new voice undercutting its predecessors? If Kierkegaard (SK) changes, he must also not change. We see flux, in Melville and in SK's carnival of creations. But he, and we, also wake up on the other, more steady, side of the bed. In Kierkegaard's case, he knows that the 'me' who sips coffee is the 'me' who gives lines to Climacus is the 'me' who sincerely writes religious discourses signed robustly Søren Kierkegaard and is the 'me' who takes back Climacus' status as author. Yet the angle from that side of the bed, unmetaphysical and practical and everyday as it is, does not seem to refute or permanently silence the angle from the *other*, unsteady side. From that side one enters the mix and glitter and darkness of the oeuvre, wherein the author and oneself are an elusive multitude. We cannot dismiss as frivolous, ill-founded or hysterical the existential-literary worries that Kierkegaard and Melville both lament and evoke – puzzles, anxieties, about who *they* really are, and by implication, about who *anyone* really is.

I feel slightly remiss as a reviewer of this challenging and rewarding book in failing to convey the great number of subtle details in Westfall's necessarily circuitous arguments and elaborations as he weaves in and

out of the periphery of the authorship. The vast majority of Kierkegaard commentary focuses on the central arguments of central texts. Westfall refuses such familiar ground, for his interest is what an *author* in and of the Kierkegaardian oeuvre might be. The circuitous periphery of the authorship (title pages, or strange addenda to a text, for instance) – this is the anomalous zone where Westfall finds hints and provocations that can illuminate the way one author (or pseudo-author) speaks to or assesses others, or, often enough, interprets the authorship as a whole. Spatially speaking, authors write not just from the center but from the edge of what they write, so Westfall's necessary itinerary is to trace the ragged edge of the authorship. Tracing this periphery (and my tracing of Westfall's tracing) is like drawing the Maine coast on a napkin, and then wondering if perhaps the rivers were more the periphery of the land.

That said for the record, in the remainder of this review I should like to face a pivotal contrast Westfall deploys in his exposition, the contrast between fact and fiction, which to my ear is made to bear more weight than it can, and so breaks down. Then I should like to finish by tallying a number of interesting points in Westfall's discussion that deserve more attention than I can give here.

Fact or fiction

In negotiating the tangles of authorship, Westfall often turns to an apparently transparent distinction between factual and fictional domains. It is clear enough that Ahab and Mozart's Don Giovanni belong in the domain of fiction, while Regine Olsen and Kierkegaard's mother belong in the domain of fact. But that clarity is persuasive mainly, if I can put it this way, from the standpoint we all share as taxpayers. As we abandon, if only for the moment, that status and enter the domain where cultural forces and matters of self-conception loom large, Ahab, Hamlet and Don Giovanni inhabit a very *real* domain that seems neither factual nor fictional nor simultaneously both. In discussing a citizen's or a community's sense of itself, the fact–fiction contrast seems less and less useful, and certainly not dominant. The injured–uninjured contrast is *sometimes* crucial in understanding a moment in sports, but not always. When an outfielder makes a great catch, it just falls aside. The fact–fiction contrast is *sometimes* crucial in understanding authorship, but not always. When Hamlet or Climacus become an aspect of the self-conception I somehow author, that contrast can seem to fall away.

Westfall writes: 'From the perspective of factual actuality, there are not degrees of poetic actuality – no fictional characters are "more real" than others' (140). Yet if Kierkegaard lures us into authoring self-conceptions, it is unclear (so far as I can see) whether we thereby think from the

perspective of factual actuality or of poetic (or fictional) actuality. And from the perspective of assessing (and thus authoring) our self-conceptions, so-called fictional characters *can in fact* be lined up, some ‘more real’ than others. It is Kierkegaard’s strategy to make us *see* either that the judge is ‘more real’ than the unnamed aesthete or vice versa. It is his strategy to wreck the thought that each figure is equally real.

Consider our sensitivity to genre as it relates to authorship. If writing generates implied authors, genres do too. Local history gets written up in one genre (we might call it factual), and local poetry gets written up in another, each by a correspondingly different sort of author. What is the genre of Judge Wilhelm’s letters – what *kind* of letters are they? Is not the implied author of a letter slightly different from the implied author of a sermonic discourse? Is not the implied author of Johannes de silentio’s ‘Speech in Praise of Abraham’ slightly different from the implied author of the earlier section, ‘Attunement’? Judge Wilhelm may not speak from the factual, but if he occupies fictional space, it is surely not in the neighborhood of Batman or Snow White. Are not the subtitles ‘dialectical lyric’ (for *Fear and Trembling*) or ‘mimic-pathetic-dialectic complication’ (for *Postscript*) indications that non-factual genres are not uniformly fictional? The idea of poetic actuality is not sufficiently nuanced to capture the placement of a Kierkegaardian author. Of course, Westfall does not say that *genres* fall into the factual and fictional (or poetical), only that authors occupy one or the other. Taking up a multiplicity of genres, however, can be an invitation to consider multiple metaphysical variations beyond the familiar fact–fiction duple. Non-factual authors are not thereby captive of the fictional. Non-factual actuality isn’t just captive of the fictional or the poetical.⁹

Dialectical writing (say, *Philosophical Crumbs* or *Unscholarly Postscript*) implies an author in philosophical space – not exactly poetical or fictional space. The genre of *The Point of View of my Work as an Author*, or of Climacus’ report ‘A Contemporary Effort’, is contested: it is too simple to say we have a factual Copenhagen resident reporting the facts about a writer who is also a local resident. The genres (and the status of associated authors) of ‘Edifying Discourses’ or journals can also seem slippery. If a Kierkegaardian author can appear as a dreamer, fabulist, diarist, publicist, dramatist, dialectician, sermonizer, satirist, lyricist, conjuror of pseudonyms, ironist, humorist, poet, polemicist and more, perhaps there is not just one metaphysical niche (say, the poetical or fictional) that is uniformly occupied by this marvelous array.

Tying down the variety of genres and their associated implied authors might be coming at the question of authorship in a way that complements coming at it as Westfall does (in such revealingly meticulous detail) – in terms of signatures on texts and papers and what these might reveal. Perhaps the assumption that we have basically poetical-fictional and

factual types of actuality mimics the assumption that we have basically mental and physical types of actuality. Looking for the variety of spaces for writing (genres) might be like looking for the variety of spaces for action, spaces that defy or severely challenge the mentality–physicality split. If the space of action is endlessly varied perhaps the space of Kierkegaard's writing is endlessly varied, and lumping that writing as an outpouring within poetic-fictional actuality stops inquiry at a barren location (rather than helping it along to a more fertile location).

A fertile pluralism of genres and associated authors couples nicely with a refusal to stop time, to think of time as endlessly variable. After warning Hawthorne that his return letter may be missent, Melville cries out, 'Lord, when shall we be done changing?' He is gripped by Ahab, then Ishmael, and so loses his center, just as Kierkegaard is gripped by Johannes de silentio, then Climacus, and so launches (or reveals) the question of his center. Melville, as if frightened by self-elusiveness and ephemerality, turns to a hope that Hawthorne's friendship will be saving. 'Knowing you persuades me more than the Bible of our immortality', he writes.¹⁰ In marked contrast, Kierkegaard seems exhilarated by the thought of change, taking it as a bracing condition to live out and replicate in his literature.

Kierkegaard is often boxed up as promoting three more or less stable stages of existence: the aesthetic, ethical and religious. But there are many genres under each of these headings, none seems especially stable, and this gentle three-step may be somewhat tongue in cheek, a wink at Hegelian three-steps. The question of stable selfhood is explored as early as *From the Papers of One Still Living*, the piece of criticism from which Westfall launches his exploration of authorship (a piece of criticism, by the way, written in a book with absolutely no attribution of author on its title page). The nameless author distinguishes two shapes of a unifying, perduring 'life-view' that characters in a novel (and perhaps in real life, too) must have. For instance, a 'simple soul' may instantiate a life-view that is never spelled out in explicit self-descriptions or self-narrations although it is unmistakably evident in comportment and bearing. Alternatively, there are verbally articulate souls who enact a self-conception in comportment and bearing and also spell out in words the coherent center they occupy – perhaps a simple soul with a poet's flair. Of course many other kinds of characters, not just simple souls, have impressive substance in presence or bearing, or in both bearing and a capacity narrate their substance, their presence and bearing. Now if Kierkegaard is legion, does he nevertheless expect of himself the stabilizing life-view he expects of a character in a novel?

Kierkegaard endlessly vexes the question whether he is single or legion, whether others are single or legion, whether there are stable live-views available for habitation for himself or his pseudonyms or his

neighbors. Melville did not create Ishmael, Ahab or Starbuck to make readers wonder where, or who, or whether *he*, *Melville* was, but I suspect Kierkegaard created Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus and a dozen other figures to vex readers with the question where (and whether) he was; and where and whether *they* were. His reader was to ask of himself or herself, 'Do I exist?' – and if so, where and how.

Concluding unsystematic tally

Let me touch on a number of cognate themes I have time now only to mention.

(1) The dynamics of theater performance and of establishing the identity of stage-characters are of great interest to Kierkegaard. Westfall finds Kierkegaard's discussion of theater central in establishing a vocabulary for understanding the Kierkegaardian author. Thus he focuses on Kierkegaard's works of literary and theater criticism: for example, *The Crisis and The Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (1848, signed, 'Inter et Inter'), *From the Papers of One Still Living* (1838, unsigned), the *Postscript's* 'A Contemporary Effort' and 'My Work as an Author' (1849, unpublished). In tune with Kierkegaard's practices, Westfall expands the theatrical nature of authorship (note that *Postscript* is 'a mimic-pathetic' [comic-tragic?] composition) well beyond narrow questions of theater criticism. The authorship itself is a kind of theater. Westfall lets us hear a pseudonym (or non-pseudonym) as a distinctive stage-voice that sounds across the stage in response to the voice of another, even as the voices of the pseudonyms sound across the stage with and against the voices of the signed discourses, and so collectively voice a staged ensemble that I, as a listener, can merely appreciate, praise or dispraise, or that I, as an existing individual addressed by this ensemble (perhaps especially addressed by one or another of its members), can speak to that address and be changed through sympathetic response to and with it. The context of theater is helpful in other ways, as well. Philosophers and literary critics on both sides of the postmodern divide ponder what it is to claim a position or belief or even a life as one's own (as opposed to merely repeating views in cultural circulation, or going through the motions in life, as if it were not one's own).¹¹ To own a life may be parallel to owning the stage-character one performs.

(2) Westfall identifies the illustrious precedent to the Kierkegaardian problematic of authorship. Plato authors Socrates, yet Socrates gives Plato his lines and even upstages him just as Climacus can upstage Kierkegaard. Socrates can turn, Pygmalion-like, against his progenitor, at least against the older Plato who progressively abandons him. Perhaps Climacus maps a position his progenitor might reject. And in any case,

the texts shelved under 'Plato' seem to require a posit of something like a regulative ideal-author who gives us Socrates and a stable of other speakers. Apart from biological, familial and cultural lineage, we could think of Kierkegaard as a Platonic 'transcendental condition' of reading *Postscript, Fear and Trembling* and other texts, including texts that are repetitions of earlier ones,¹² and hope to sense something like a Platonic-Kantian 'transcendental unity of authorial production'.

(3) Westfall develops Kierkegaard's view that writers give their work a kind of imperishable existence, a kind of immortality (51). Death and resurrection are in play as tax-liable Kierkegaard dies, and implied-author Kierkegaard rises up from the grave. Accordingly, the true poet is engaged in 'posthumous production', as one of Kierkegaard's subtitles implies: 'A Posthumous Work of a Solitary Human Being'. An imperishable prose harbors an implied author resurrected with the prose.¹³ This view raises havoc for deflationary biography that addresses mainly the mortal taxpayer and flawed suitor. 'The freedom of literature – its true immortality – is its absolute distance from the factual' (135). A related consequence of a text's immortality is that SK cannot fix the meaning of a part or the whole of the authorship with any authority exceeding the authority of any other reader. He cannot give an 'incontrovertible last word on Kierkegaardian authorship' (77).

(4) Explanation, interpretation, performance and transfiguration are interrelated.¹⁴ In performing a role, for example, I interpret the part and 'explain' it to an attentive audience, an audience who observes my transfiguration from a citizen collecting actor's guild wages to the immortal Hamlet. Whether I am transfigured into the immortal Hamlet, after my best efforts, is in God's hands, as it were (I am exclusively passive with regard to that outcome). As I explain, interpret and perform, however, I am both active and passive. Climacus can be seen as performing, explaining and interpreting in his comic-dialectical-pathetic role. Whether there occurs a transfiguration that allows him to come eternally alive in this role depends on a kind of grace.

(5) In Christian theology God alone effects transfiguration. Humans perform and interpret the poetized roles that emerge in and through transfiguration. We cannot know but can have faith alone that the tax-paying author passes into the transfigured poeticized author who speaks from the page of a text. We cannot know but can have faith that we authors of our lives will pass transfigured into unperishing poetry. God stands behind transfigurations of persons, raising spirit and life from death and decay. 'The author comes to be understood by his or her readers as both author and work, *simultaneously* but *separately* the creator of the work and a created element within it.' Thus the transfigured author 'gives birth to him- or herself by writing the work in which he or she is written' (143).

I might have been a visitor to Copenhagen in 1846 wanting to make Kierkegaard's acquaintance and to get him to sign my fresh copy of *Concluding Unscholarly Postscript*. If I rang his bell, he might appear. Noting the book and divining my purpose, he might answer, 'I'm sorry, there is no Johannes Climacus at this address – you've been missent, misinformed.' Trying to match wits, I might foolishly say, 'Ah! But Mr Climacus has added a few pages here at the end. See? They plainly declare that S. Kierkegaard, not Climacus, is the author!' I would be swiftly admonished. 'Young man, I wouldn't believe everything you read in books, especially in books that are dialectical and unscholarly, written by fanciful and humorous authors, full of dubious mental exercises and imaginative travels! Neither S. Kierkegaard nor Johannes Climacus receives visitors here!'

Kierkegaard was polemical and cagey enough to revel in the changing shadows of a self and in the difficulties others would have in finding him. And he was moral and religious enough to exploit another possibility that his maze of writings afforded. In that maze, Kierkegaard continually intimates that only where radical openness to change is present – that is, only where a solid self *cannot* be pinned down – can there be hope of transfiguration. Melville avowed that knowing Hawthorne persuaded him of 'our immortality'. Kierkegaard saw writing itself as a working that might eventuate in transfiguration. Yet he was persuaded of immortality (if he was) on other grounds than Melville embraces. In a moment of exuberant prophecy, he declares that *Fear and Trembling* will make his *name* immortal – yet he wanted more than an immortal name. If he were persuaded of his immortality, it would not be, as with Melville, through a glimpse of undying friendship. He craved the glimpse of a God who would not just make his authorship but make *him* immortal, beyond all change and corruption.

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Notes

- 1 Vigilious Hafniensus is the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*; Heidegger's anxious watch (or vigil) over being, as well as his notion of *Augenblicken*, are themes of this Kierkegaardian text. The Danish 'Oieblikket' (eye-blink) can mean 'moment of vision' or 'a receptive glance that transforms'; it is standardly rendered in English Kierkegaard translations as 'The Moment'.
- 2 Herman Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. with intro. John Bryant (New York: Modern Library, 2001), p. 44.

- 3 He says he, or better, Socrates, is 'a solo dancer before God' (Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Scientific Postscript*, trans. H. and E. Hong [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992], vol. 1, p. 89). The Climacus of *Philosophical Crumbs* dances with death (see Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, intro. Edward F. Mooney, trans. M. Piety [Oxford: Oxford University Press, World Classics series, 2009], p. 89 [Preface, last sentence]).
- 4 Climacus lets himself explain the authorship of which he is a member (as if Hamlet's play, 'The Mousetrap', were to explain the play *Hamlet*, or perhaps, all of Shakespeare). The famous 'first and last explanation' found at the end of the *Postscript* should be counted as the fifth 'explanation' of the authorship; the earlier explanations were published in Copenhagen feuilletons, including 'To Mr Orla Lehmann', 'Public Confession', 'A Little Explanation' and 'An Explanation and a Little More'; see Westfall [78 f.].
- 5 Is the writer of the Shakespearean sonnets the same writer as the writer of the comedies, or of the histories, or of the tragedies?
- 6 Derrida is interested in the performative aspects of *writing*. Austin and Searle, of *saying*, and Kierkegaard, in the performative aspects of authoring (146).
- 7 Melville, similarly, testifies that his identity is impermanent. Does his testimony *make* it so – *make* it true that who he is ever-shifts, that he is a changeling without end?
- 8 He judges Johannes de silentio in the section of *Postscript* called 'A Contemporary Effort'.
- 9 I cannot help thinking that these questions of how 'the ontological status' of a Climacus or Judge Wilhelm emerges are analogous to the question of how 'living speech' emerges from the bare facts of ink on paper, how the exhortations and cajolings of the judge can begin to speak from the page, transfiguring factual ink marks into something quite different – certainly not into fictions: perhaps into the space of imagination, art, artistry or life.
- 10 Melville, *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, p. 44.
- 11 See my essay, 'What Has Hegel to Do with Henry James? Acknowledgment, Dependence, and Having a Life of One's Own', *Inquiry* 45(3) (2002): 331–50. This essay appears as ch. 9, 'Henry James: An Ethics of Intimate Conversation', in my *Lost Intimacy in American Thought: Recovering Personal Philosophy from Thoreau to Cavell* (New York: Continuum, 2009).
- 12 *The Crisis* might be a repetition of the earlier *From the Papers*, and *Practice in Christianity* might be a repetition of themes from *Fear and Trembling*.
- 13 In addition, the work is posthumous in the sense that in the process of writing at his desk, SAK enters a nowhere apart from body, pen and desk, as if the writing were of one already dead. 'A Posthumous Work' is the subtitle to the first of *Two Ethical Religious Essays*, by H. H.; the subtitle has a second line that reads: 'A Poetical Venture'; see Westfall, p. 51f.
- 14 On explanation, see note 4, above.