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MLN, Vol. 112, No. 5, Comparative Literature Issue. (Dec., 1997), pp. 719-752.

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Secret Agents: After Kierkegaard's Subject



Kevin Newmark

One ought to be a mystery, not only to
others, but also to one's self . . .

—*Either/Or*

Every so often, and driven by a slightly different critical impulse in each case, a new collection of essays dedicated to the writings of Søren Kierkegaard appears. One can hardly doubt the enduring importance of Kierkegaard for literary and philosophical study, yet identifying this significance with any genuine precision, much less consensus, has proven to be a task as elusive as it is repetitive. At stake always seems to be the same issue of what, finally, can be learned from Kierkegaard. And, of course, nothing could be more appropriate to the production of academic criticism and scholarship than asking what, exactly, its object of study is still capable of teaching us. There is something odd, though, about devoting an academic study to an author like Kierkegaard in the first place, for it immediately encounters Kierkegaard's own virulent resistance to academic institutions to which publications like this one necessarily belong, whether they like it or not, whether they admit it or not. Indeed, it is difficult to know just how to proceed with a thinker who considered academics in general to be "a pack of robbers who, in the guise of serving the idea, betray the true servants and confuse the people, all for the sake of paltry earthly advantage."¹ As a teacher, then, Kierkegaard hardly invites us to become students of his writings in an orthodox manner, bequeathing to us professional commentators a legacy that resembles a curse far more than a blessing: "Were there no hell, it would have to

be created in order to punish the professors, whose crimes are such that they are barely punishable in this world . . ." (*Journal*, 3:653). The prospect of immediately becoming a thieving money-grubber, a betrayer of ideas, a source of confusion for the general reader, well, that doesn't really constitute much of an incentive to write on Kierkegaard, does it?

And then there is another side to Kierkegaard's resistance to commentary. Even if one somehow managed to avoid the hellish tendencies of the professors, an ideal that is not inconceivable in itself and surely worthy of our best efforts, there is still no guarantee that the results would ever satisfy the desire to pierce the innermost secrets contained by his texts. In another *Journal* entry that has not failed to produce precisely the type of exegetic divinations that it both foretells and dooms to failure, Kierkegaard assures us that, "no one will find in my writings the slightest information (this is my consolation) about what really filled my life . . ." (*Journal*, 5:226). That Kierkegaard, who definitely did write, and wrote quite a bit about himself at that, finds this outcome a "consolation," suggests that the real reason for reading his writing, whatever secrets he might have left to teach us about, have little or nothing to do with providing us with information about what filled his life.

This rather inauspicious beginning, though, offers at least two possible insights with respect to how *not* to write about Kierkegaard. These two most common recipes for the failure to read Kierkegaard would therefore be: looking for information about Kierkegaard himself, or using Kierkegaard's texts as a pretext for pedagogical purposes. But what exactly does that leave? If one cannot read Kierkegaard in order to learn something about Kierkegaard—since, ultimately, there is nothing essential of him left there—and one cannot read Kierkegaard in order to teach others about anything—since in so doing one would only confuse people and betray the very ideas one pretends to be writing about—what can one possibly do when one reads Kierkegaard and then writes about it?

To take a hint from Kierkegaard, one can perhaps only ask oneself over and over again the very same question, which is also the question about what, exactly, one can ever learn at all. The book that states this question most directly is, of course, *Philosophical Fragments*: "How far does the truth admit of being learned? With this question let us begin. . . ." The inaugural difficulty that each of Kierkegaard's texts begins with anew is characterized in this way: ". . . one cannot seek for what one knows, and it seems equally impossible to seek for what one

does not know. For what is known cannot be sought, since it is known; and what is not known cannot be sought, for in that case one would not even know what to seek . . ." (*Philosophical Fragments*, 11). In the very first place, then, we can learn from Kierkegaard that learning anything whatsoever about the truth is itself a very complicated process that is filled with pitfalls. The possibility of learning the truth about anything should never be taken for granted, let alone used as a pretext for trying to teach others something about it.

This, though, is a truth that seems at first of rather modest, if not barren, proportions, and so it is also with some difficulty that we can appreciate just how far it is likely to take us. Theodor W. Adorno, who belongs in the same context as the first major reactions to Kierkegaard in Europe, was particularly sensitive to this aspect of his writings, especially the so-called religious ones. Adorno, who himself wrote with great succinctness about many different things, almost to the point of leaving too much unsaid, was quick to notice how loquacious, even "boring and painful," Kierkegaard is able to become always talking only about the same thing. "Verbosity is the danger of all Kierkegaard's writings," Adorno points out with some justification, "it is the verbosity of an interminable monologue that continually repeats itself, without any real articulation. . . ."³ Such a recognition on Adorno's part certainly does not prevent him from saying some of the most perspicacious and relevant things that have ever been said about Kierkegaard.

When Adorno speaks of the three spheres of existence in Kierkegaard, for instance—the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious—he does not, like so many other commentators, reduce them to a simplistic formula for mapping out some of the more obvious regions in which all human agents necessarily, though with more or less awareness and success, operate in their day-to-day activities. In fact, one of the very best books on Kierkegaard, Adorno's *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, is predicated upon the essential insight that the three spheres do not provide direct access to representative subjective determinations; instead, they constitute three different, but mutually dependent, modes of interpretation for the various allegorical figures the self finds in existence. These figures of existence are deflected throughout Kierkegaard's philosophical writings, and all of them have to do ultimately with a truth content that the self must discover and interpret, not embody.⁴ That this truth content involves in each case how any given individual is able to appropriate the truth of its own subjective existence returns us to the original question of what

can be learned from Kierkegaard's writing. The deepest mystery of all concerns how the self could ever come to discover anything about itself that it doesn't already know. The existential spheres or stages along life's way, at least the way they are treated by Adorno, offer us a semiology rather than a phenomenology of subjective truth. They do not describe the various types of empirical behavior that would simply manifest in existence the hidden truth of a given subject's inner essence. Rather, they construct a series of elaborate references in which the path leading the self forward from allegorical signs to the possible discovery of its own meaning, or from existence to truth, proceeds itself in a most indirect, coded, and thus secretive manner.

Now it is a commonplace of Kierkegaard studies that one cannot even begin to understand his writings without taking into account the peculiarity of their relation to Hegel. There is even a very learned and thorough book that has been published with precisely this title, as though almost all else that one could say about Kierkegaard would fit neatly as a corollary to his relationship to Hegel, once that relationship was itself completely deciphered.⁵ It is no doubt true that all that Kierkegaard thought and wrote he did from the perspective of someone arguing with Hegel. But this does not mean that it would suffice merely to document, from a position of observation presumed to be outside the fray as it were, the individual points of contact and separation between the two. Kierkegaard did not choose to argue with Hegel in the ordinary sense in which one's choice of an opponent or ally is always at least in part contingent and based on local circumstances and preferences. Kierkegaard understood, more clearly than most of us today, that Hegel's true importance resides in the way his writings provide the fullest exposition of the capacities and limits of Western philosophical thought. Kierkegaard must be given quite a bit of credit in this regard, since he is among the few who realize that Hegel's philosophy, whatever else, constitutes an absolutely inevitable point of departure for his own writings as well as everyone else's, provided only that they take the philosophical demand for truth seriously in the first place.

One of the curious, but perhaps entirely predictable, effects of the history of philosophy, and even of history itself, since Hegel, has been the tendency to forget just how omnipresent the presuppositions and conclusions of his thought still tend to be in our own understanding of the way things work whenever philosophical, ethical, or even political issues are considered in a truly coherent manner. This was the case even when, in the first half of this century, the reception of

Kierkegaard was new enough to seem most exciting, and Kierkegaard was often heralded as providing an attractive alternative to certain elements in Hegel's philosophy that then seemed outmoded or even disagreeable. But it is more than ever the case today, when the interdisciplinary urgency of so many modes of analysis, critique, and behavior serves only to mask the philosophical principles on which they are founded, inviting us to construe the thought of both Hegel and Kierkegaard as though they were safely anchored in our past. The urgency itself, of course, is real enough; it is a fact of life that in today's world is in itself beyond critique, except for the impotent forms it sometimes takes in simple nostalgia and utopianism. However, to the extent that such urgency often discourages more detailed and thoughtful analysis in favor of a perceived necessity to speak and act immediately in order to avert or dispel crisis, it can also just as often result in the rather unfortunate consequence that we remain inadequately informed today about precisely those ways we still understand things according to philosophical concepts worked out most systematically by Hegel. This risk is especially present when we think we are far beyond and different from Hegel and the philosophical concerns that motivated his thought.

And so it doesn't make much sense to treat the relation of Kierkegaard to Hegel as a historical problem, except to the extent that we recognize that the history of our own thought cannot even be said to get underway until we are willing to confront seriously those elements in the philosophy of Hegel that are ineluctable for any thought in the first place, and those elements in Kierkegaard's response to that philosophy that could make a decisive impact upon it. In a word, Kierkegaard's response to Hegel has to do with the way that he gave to subjective existence a meaning that continually resists the systematic coherence of all thought, but in such a way that such resistance is always also predicated on recognizing the legitimacy of precisely that which it must ultimately resist.

Kierkegaard understood that Hegel's own thought was exemplary to the extent that it provides a most powerful conceptualization of the systematic and dialectical character of any thinking. However, he also understood, if we can still use that word in this sense, that there was something else, and he called this *existence*, that always prevented the systematic thrust of the Hegelian dialectic from fulfilling itself absolutely. Kierkegaard granted to Hegel the possibility of arriving at objective truth only through systematic thought. But he also insisted upon the subjective truth that was a necessary corollary of actual

existence, for even objective truth has to enter existence by way of a subject, if it is ever to occur at all. Kierkegaard himself was fond of putting this in the form of a recurrent joke: Hegel would certainly be right in everything he ever said about truth and the dialectical understanding particular to it, at least from the objective point of view of the ideal system. But from the point of view of subjective reality, well, he was absolutely wrong, since actual existence, coming into being the precise way it must in the first place, can in no way be governed by the logical system of objective truths that can only follow from it.⁶

A more general way to put this is to note that a straightforward reading of Hegel implies that reason and history must ultimately be able to converge with each other. There is even a short text by Hegel called, "Reason in History," and he also wrote books with titles like, "the philosophy of history" and "the history of philosophy," as though in some deep sense the relation between thought and actuality were symmetrical and neatly reversible. For Kierkegaard, though, things are not like that at all, and everything he wrote in fact exhibited the discrepancy that he found between philosophy and history, between the logic of reason and the actuality of existence.

The site of this discrepancy is what Kierkegaard called the truth of subjectivity: a jagged mode of truth whose existential signs are most available to us in every-day affects such as guilt, anxiety, and despair, which are analyzed in great detail by Kierkegaard in various books. Once again, though, it was Theodor Adorno who pointed out that Kierkegaard would be far less interesting to us if all he did was provide a phenomenology of these subjective affects; to what extent Kierkegaard himself or anyone else exhibits or suffers from guilt, anxiety, or despair is not of primary importance here. Kierkegaard's own writings, in fact, can often seem quite light-hearted and merry in discussing such seemingly depressing moods. Rather, subjective existence is constituted in such a way as to be primordially susceptible to these affects, and their genuinely philosophical significance consists in the precise ways that their very possibility discloses a non-convergence between reason and history, or objective and subjective truth in Kierkegaard's terms. But to say in this way, as Kierkegaard actually does, that there is a radical discrepancy, or separation, between objective and subjective truth, between history and philosophy, is this not also to suggest that actual existence is not and can never be made fully compatible with thinking, that it cannot, ultimately, become reasonable, and therefore that existence remains to some extent

arbitrary, if not wildly capricious? To point out every now and then that the real is not always rational is quite a different thing, for instance, than to declare in this manner that actual existence is and must remain on some level fundamentally alien to all thought. "The systematic Idea," Kierkegaard tells us, "is the identity of subject and object, the unity of thought and being. Existence, on the other hand, is their separation . . . it has brought about, and brings about, a separation between subject and object, thought and being . . ." (*Postscript*, 112). We should in all honesty be willing to admit what a shocking, and potentially irresponsible, thing it is for Kierkegaard to think the separation of being and thought in the first place, not to mention writing it down so that it can be repeated over and over again for others to see. This is one secret he ought surely to have kept for himself.

Scandalous ideas like that, though, are easily enough said: existence separates thought and being; thinking and acting are incompatible. Can such statements even be said to come close to shocking us these days? On the one hand, the empirical discrepancy between thought and being has become one of the most familiar of all experiences; it governs our worst fears of powerlessness and vulnerability as well as, often enough, our secret complicities with them when we are given the opportunity to exercise our own power. On the other hand, to say that the discrepancy between thought and action is not just an empirical fact of life, to be parried or domesticated to whatever extent possible, but that it is instead constitutive of subjective truth as such, now that seems a rather disheartening if not outright inflammatory and irresponsible point of view. And, in fact, Kierkegaard is not often read in this manner; the overtly religious dimension of his texts, which return almost obsessively to conventionally reassuring, if somewhat unpleasant, topics like sin, guilt, and despair seems to have sheltered Kierkegaard from the suspicion of what otherwise might become a radically demoralizing, if not immoralizing, reading.

Nonetheless, Kierkegaard himself always made an effort in his texts to draw attention to the way in which they *should* constitute either a scandal or a folly for our understanding. Perhaps there is a way that we have become cushioned from the shock of Kierkegaard's text, though not because, as is easy to assume, the very real difficulties of contemporary existence make everything so much more complex and urgent than they ever could have been for Kierkegaard and his era. Perhaps it is our own unacknowledged but unshakable faith in

the dialectic that always promises to link thought and being, all counter-examples notwithstanding, that simply prevents us from taking seriously what he actually says in his texts. For example, in *Fear and Trembling*, before beginning to examine in detail the way in which existence comes to fragment thought and being for Abraham, Kierkegaard tells the story of someone who listens to a sermon on the Biblical story, the hypothesis of such a listener necessarily functioning as an allegorical figure for the reader of Kierkegaard's own text. Unlike the official preacher and all those in the congregation, though, this one person takes Abraham's specific plight absolutely seriously. "The most terrifying, the most profound, tragic and comic misunderstanding is very close at hand," Kierkegaard insists, "the person goes home, wants to do just as Abraham did, for the son, after all, is the best. . . ."⁷ "What Abraham did," of course, is a periphrasis for the father's share of responsibility in the death of his only son. The most terrifying misunderstanding Kierkegaard refers to, then, would be the risk that someone hearing such a story would actually consider imitating Abraham through an unthinking participation in the death of their very own child.

An unthinkable possibility, Kierkegaard acknowledges, at least for the preacher and all the others in the assemblage, whose very orthodoxy is set up to exclude any such radical challenge to common sense. Abraham's story is strictly unassimilable to such a community, Kierkegaard suggests. Only to the extent that it is prevented from having any bearing on actual existence, in other words, only to the extent that it is relegated to a past so distant as to become safely aestheticized, can it even still be "heard" today. The absurdity of Abraham's situation is to be understood metaphorically rather than literally, and therefore deprived of the very challenge that it offers to all understanding—one simply doesn't *do* that anymore. Indeed, faced with a contemporary example of the same existential dilemma—and there are, unfortunately, all too many even to mention one—the institutionalized community must immediately disown a deeper affinity to it: "You despicable person, you scum of society, what devil has so possessed you that you want to murder your son . . ." (28). What would be a more common, a more reasonable and finally understandable response to the abominable idea of taking Abraham's "sacrifice" literally?

But, Kierkegaard almost immediately adds, it would be *only* on condition of precisely such a risk—the risk of a folly and scandal that could not be more literal than in the case of misguided infanticide—

that one should even speak of Abraham and the actual discrepancy between thought and being that his story exemplifies: "Is it possible to speak unreservedly about Abraham without running the risk that some individual will become unbalanced and do the same thing? If I dare not, I will say nothing at all about Abraham . . ." (31). In fact, the bad faith of the institutionalized reception of Abraham is evident in its unwillingness to recognize that the risk of radical misunderstanding is no different in this very first case than in all the others that are patterned upon it. With respect to the separation of thought and being that characterizes subjective truth as such, there can be no privileged standpoint of certitude and safety: "We recite the whole story in clichés," Kierkegaard complains, pointing out at the same time: "What is omitted from Abraham's story is the anxiety. . . . What if he himself is distraught, what if he had made a mistake. . . . Was it such a simple matter not to make a mistake? . . ." (28, 61, 66). For Kierkegaard, the possibility of committing a mortal error is what defines the separation of being and thought in the first place, the most profound referential misunderstanding being a necessary risk for existence to occur at all, and not just one type of unfortunate accident among others to which it may or may not be susceptible.

It seems, then, that the absurd dimension of Kierkegaard's thought is not to be taken lightly. The scandal, folly, shock, and paradox that characterize his oblique relation to the dialectic of reason as it is articulated thematically in Hegel cannot be domesticated by reading them in a purely metaphorical register, since Kierkegaard himself provides throughout his texts ample evidence of their entirely unpredictable potential to recur as actual referential forces in everyday life. While it is not strictly necessary to suffer from the empirical symptoms of anxiety, guilt, or despair in order to read Kierkegaard effectively, it would certainly be a relevant possibility. And in many cases such symptoms would no doubt constitute a most appropriate response to the suggestion in his text that our own day-to-day "sacrifices" of epistemological and ethical duty are not nearly as foreign to Abraham and Isaac as we are wont to think.

Still, if there is a certain danger of complacency in reading everything in Kierkegaard as though it were merely figural or historically irrelevant, there would, on the other hand, be the perhaps even more treacherous misunderstanding of taking his thought and writings just literally enough to justify all kinds of recklessly subjectivistic modes of thinking and behavior. Emmanuel Levinas seems to regard Kierkegaard's insistence on subjective truth

as inwardness from such a perspective, and he is therefore highly suspicious of it. Linking Kierkegaard's "taste for scandal" to a certain "cult of ardor and passion," a cult, moreover, that has become incontestably and increasingly prevalent within twentieth-century European thought and politics, Levinas identifies in Kierkegaard's concept of existence "a kind of irresponsibility, and a germ of disintegration. . . ."⁸ Levinas should be given full credit for being among the few to take Kierkegaard seriously enough in the first place to recognize the very real risk of subjectivism and violence that is inscribed so meticulously in all of his texts and that has undoubtedly sometimes played an unfortunate role in their reception. However, it is a long way to go from recognizing the constant presence of risk that accrues to any genuine decision and any real act, to attributing this particular risk itself to Kierkegaard, much less attributing to his text responsibility for the actual ways in which the risk has been dealt with subsequently by others. In his willingness to write openly about the necessity of risk involved in any subjective activity, including writing for that matter, Kierkegaard acknowledges and accepts responsibility for the possibility of subsequent misunderstanding that inheres to it; he does not thereby become directly responsible for all specific examples of misunderstanding that actually have occurred in its wake.

For, to say that there is a radical separation between thought and being is not automatically to suggest a straightforward alternative between, on the one hand, a pietistic flight from being into abstract reflection and, on the other, a pure and simple rejection of thought in favor of subjective caprice. In scrutinizing the separation that befalls even the final identity of subject and object, or thought and being, Kierkegaard is very careful to add: "It does not by any means follow that existence is thoughtless . . ." (*Postscript*, 112). What can we learn from Kierkegaard about this highly paradoxical idea that existence, which produces subjective truth through the very separation of being and thought, need not by the same token be merely thoughtless?

In a lecture entitled, "Kierkegaard and Evil," Paul Ricoeur initiates a partial response to this question.⁹ To the extent that human finitude, freedom, and evil exist, he says, they necessarily escape the philosophical strategies of systematic thought that otherwise would be able to comprehend and thereby eliminate them as anything more than ideal categories. But Kierkegaard's writing about those elements in existence that, from the point of view of comprehending thought,

can only be called paradoxical, absurd, or offensive, is something far different than a simple proclamation of irrationalism: "We should not say that Kierkegaard delights in the irrational . . . it is important to understand how Kierkegaard himself thought in the face of the irrational, the absurd. For he did not proclaim; he thought . . ." (317, 314). Merely to proclaim existence absurd would itself be a rather irrational and irresponsible act that managed to take neither philosophy nor existence very seriously in the final analysis. And Kierkegaard, whatever one knows about his so-called ironic style, was a very serious thinker of existence indeed. His writing is motivated not by the affirmation that existence is a meaningless void, but rather the recognition that everything in existence, including meaning itself, is constantly at risk of becoming a meaningless void.

The problem for Kierkegaard is therefore the following: how to avoid the complacent and self-deluding philosophical belief that all existence is susceptible to objective and rational understanding (and, eventually, justification), without falling into the symmetrical and equally deluded trap of mere subjectivism and caprice? What is therefore of the most enduring importance in the thought of Kierkegaard is the way his writings confront and reflect upon the *limits* of reason and understanding in actual existence. Kierkegaard is not the place to find justification for the simple disappearance and replacement of reason by something else, least of all by the illusionistic motives of self-interest and desire. For how could one even know exactly what one really desired, much less find it, without first taking the trouble to learn as much as possible exactly what one was?

We can now identify with more precision what Kierkegaard still has to teach us. The question of what can be learned is always disclosed as an operation that can only be conducted by the self in search of its own truth. But this truth of subjective existence is produced by the repetitive shocks through which the self discovers itself over and over again as nothing but the gap between thought and being, as the non-identity of subject and object. To come back to Adorno's comment, one can readily admit the potentially loquacious, boring, even painful nature of such repetitions—the ones detailed in Kierkegaard's own text as well as the ones performed by essays like this one—provided one is willing as well to recognize that they are in some sense absolutely inevitable. Moreover, as Adorno himself also recognized, hidden within such tiresome abstractions are much more concrete truths about all kinds of realities. The truly critical elements of Kierkegaard's thought can therefore turn out to be every bit as

objective and social as they at first appear to be exclusively subjective and inward. Kierkegaard's insistence on the self is thus always implicated in an indirect but fundamental insistence on the other as well.

Demonstrating this, however, represents no small challenge, and as such it remains the task of future readings of Kierkegaard. Even with some of the necessary preliminaries about subjective truth out of the way, the initial confrontation with actual examples of Kierkegaard's literary, philosophical, and religious production still leaves the impression of an endlessly provocative but finally rather abstruse, ingeniously topical but cranky and inconclusive collection of scraps or fragments. On the one hand, beyond the immediate question of the self, one has no trouble whatsoever finding abundant references to other difficult but equally important philosophical concepts, and such references are almost always made with originality and daring. But, just as often, one can't help coming away with the doubly disappointing conclusion that not only has Kierkegaard not really been understood; in addition, what can be understood about a given topic makes the conclusions reached by Kierkegaard himself appear necessarily retrograde if not outright silly and, often enough, offensively anachronistic.

The brilliantly perceptive book on irony, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*,¹⁰ would be a complex but a good case in point, though much more dramatic examples could certainly be provided by Kierkegaard's treatment of far less recondite and academic subjects. For instance, there are some very alluring places where Kierkegaard embarks upon an examination and critique of conventional social, religious, political, and even sexual concepts and conduct. After all, how could any consideration of the self achieve coherence if it failed to take seriously and interpret these fundamental modes of its existence? It would be difficult to deny, however, that at first glance his most incisive political commentaries, to take but one of these spheres for example, seem rather to go in the direction of a most dubious complacency with respect to absolutist and undemocratic forms of authority and power than toward other, more innovative and inclusive political alternatives. Perhaps even more difficult to accept without qualification today, since an actual allegiance to monarchical forms of government seems relatively unlikely to represent much of a threat by garnering widespread support, would be Kierkegaard's recurrent references to the way every subject is implicated in the play of sexual difference and politics. No concept

of the self can be separated from a theory and practice of sexual difference, and Kierkegaard's is certainly no exception.

There is of course the romantic theme of love that plays itself out in numerous texts with varying emphases, and that usually includes a highly conventional distinction, taken straight from the code of chivalry, between the active male protagonist and a passive female accompanist, such as in "The Diary of the Seducer," or *Repetition*. And there is as well the overtly metaphorical use of sexual difference to characterize and advance philosophical arguments, such as the opening to *The Concept of Irony*, where Kierkegaard playfully recasts the Hegelian relation between philosophical observation and the phenomenon to be observed and conceptualized as an interpersonal scene of seduction and domination: ". . . it is fitting for the phenomenon, which as such is always *foeminini generis*, to surrender to the stronger on account of its feminine nature . . ." (47). However sorry such affirmations appear on the level of sexual politics, to the extent that the actual subject under discussion is not sexual difference per se but something very different, for which commonplaces of sexual difference merely furnish a ready and approximative analogy, ultimately it becomes impossible to decide whether recourse to gender stereotypes like these is itself conventional, and therefore contingent, or on the contrary an essential feature of Kierkegaard's thought.

Even in texts where the question of sexual difference is confronted directly, such as *The Concept of Anxiety*, to take one important example, the contextual apparatus can become so entangled as to render definitive judgments at the very least highly risky and open to profound misunderstandings. On the one hand, Kierkegaard goes out of his way to promise an entirely new approach to the subject: "The whole question of the significance of the sexual . . . has undeniably been answered poorly until now. . . ." ¹¹ For Kierkegaard, the concept of anxiety is itself unthinkable outside a consideration of original sin, and any consideration of this type of sin, which is a constituent characteristic of human finitude having very little to do with actual behavior in the first instance, must take sexual difference and sexuality into account from the outset. Anxiety is possible only from the moment consciousness becomes aware of its finitude, finitude being itself indissociable from the body and the sexual difference expressed through it. On the other hand, it is also at this point that Kierkegaard will mention in passing his own intention to develop at more length later in the book "in what sense woman is the

weaker sex, as it is commonly said of her, and also that anxiety belongs to her more than to man . . ." (47). And when Kierkegaard does return to this topic in a subsequent chapter, he will indeed expound upon several commonplaces associated, empirically as well as conceptually, with women. "That woman is more sensuous than man," Kierkegaard assures us, "appears at once in her physical structure . . ." (64). Modestly eschewing a more detailed pursuit of just how this difference would become apparent physiologically, Kierkegaard develops the concept instead from an aesthetic and then an ethical perspective. From the point of view of aesthetics, woman would be conceived as a "beautiful" silence, from that of ethics, she would be "procreative" fidelity. "Venus is essentially just as beautiful when she is represented as sleeping," Kierkegaard tells us, "perhaps more so, yet the sleeping state is the expression for the absence of spirit . . . silence is not only women's greatest wisdom but also her highest beauty. . . . Viewed ethically, woman culminates in procreation. . . . Although it is also true that the husband's desire is for the wife, his life does not culminate in this desire, unless his life is wretched or lost . . ." (65, 66). No doubt, such a woman would have to do a great deal of sleeping indeed in order not to end up even more wretched and lost than such a man.

Still, the very facility with which we can find such examples of a tired and purely ideological conception of sexual difference within a philosophical analysis that is in other essential respects radically incompatible with them should at least give us pause for thought. In the case of Kierkegaard's discourse on sexuality, for instance, it is far too easy to isolate those fragments of his texts that are readily understood in their own terms, and then assimilate them to more general but equally familiar concepts taken from the larger tradition. Afterwards, it becomes a simple matter of attempting to legitimate them in the worst of cases, or to demystify them in the best. Far more difficult, but also more to the point of trying to respond less poorly for once to the actual significance of the sexual within a general economy of subjectivity, would be to notice and begin to take the measure of the ways in which the entire discourse on sexuality (or religion, politics, literary and philosophical productivity for that matter) is predicated upon principles that risk upsetting and radically transforming any conventional comprehension of it.

It is patently clear that many of Kierkegaard's most predictable and indefensible anthropological adaptations of his philosophical conceptions are grounded in his own, very real and empirical *fear*: of

being misunderstood and distorted in the first place, and then, of actual politics, sexuality, and women in the second. The philosophical arguments themselves, however, begin precisely where such empirical fears reach their limit; not his life, but each of Kierkegaard's writings begins anew in a kind of "fear and trembling" that is oddly fearless in proceeding to the outermost limits of its various "thought experiments."¹² We should in fact be careful not to reduplicate unnecessarily the empirical Kierkegaard's fearfulness when we are confronted in his texts by paradoxical, absurd, or radically ironic conceptualizations requiring of our own thought a fearlessness it is rarely able to exhibit all on its own.

For instance, in the case of sexual difference in Kierkegaard, the entire argument hinges upon the traditional concept of Adam's original sin, but in such a way that Kierkegaard's own inflection of the Biblical text produces a difference that makes each one of the terms slightly unrecognizable in its turn. Adam is the first man, but what characterizes him as such in the creation narrative is his relation to Eve and their implication in a sin of subjective awareness that is at the "origin" of all subsequent human "derivation." What Kierkegaard himself refers to as "the secret of the first" is therefore an oxymoronic principle of derivation that is actually original to the entire race (*Anxiety*, 30). What will always remain an impenetrable secret is how the concept of the origin can only be made accessible to thought in the form of a derivation, which doesn't make the desire to grasp this origin any the less powerful; on the contrary, it is what produces history as an infinite (and infinitely frustrated) task of disclosure. For Kierkegaard, then, sexuality turns out to be a knot in which subjective consciousness, sexual difference as consciousness of the other, and human history as radical finitude are all inextricably named and simultaneously put into unending motion.

As Kierkegaard repeats over and over again, at the beginning of the race, and capable of appearing only with "the suddenness of the enigmatic," is Adam. But it is also literally the case that this particular enigma named Adam cannot be told, much less understood, outside his paradoxical relation to the entire race, which is also to say, his relation to Eve in the very first place. The secret originality of Adam's story is the way it can be unraveled only in its sexual derivation from Eve, and the social history they engender together: "Adam is the first man. He is at once himself and the race. . . . He is himself and the race. Therefore that which explains Adam also explains the race and vice versa . . ." (29). The term that always stands between Adam and

the race in this formulation, and that, therefore, also serves to explain them, is of course Eve.

As innocence, as sleeping or dreaming spirit before it awakens to its own difference as spirit, Adam already names Eve, albeit unconsciously, or in the deflection of an anxious ignorance that both names and conceals sexual difference as such. In Kierkegaard's reading of the Biblical narrative, sleep is not just an anesthetic applied to Adam in order to create Eve from one of his ribs: sleep is the entire existential category that Adam inhabits before his awakening to Eve is posited through sexual difference, hers as well as his. "In innocence," Kierkegaard says, "Adam as spirit was a dreaming spirit In the moment spirit posits itself, it posits the synthesis, but in order to posit the synthesis it must first pervade it in all its difference, and the ultimate point of sensuous difference is the sexual . . ." (49). The Biblical text, along with its entire exegetic tradition, is itself a *fact* of history that Kierkegaard refuses to reduce to the status of a mere fiction or myth. However, he insists on reading them in such a way that Adam must now be understood simultaneously as himself and his other, as becoming a self only by passing through his own sexual difference in a relation to Eve.

Thus, one could not even begin to understand, much less demystify, something like Kierkegaard's concept of sexual difference without first being able to account for the way in which whatever is eventually said about women is also to be understood as man's own original possibility, and vice versa. Man enters history as a woman: the radical absurdity of the proposition constitutes itself as an endless object for reflection and analysis in order to avoid simply becoming a new temptation of the serpent who, according to the same text, has always "tempted writers to be clever . . ." (48). To the extent, however, that the concept of anxiety names a necessary awakening to the derived and therefore enigmatic status of every generation of human subjectivity—as an individual as well as a member of any given group, that is to say, of every difference as such—the concept of woman also names not only the origin of Adam's own sexual, and therefore derived awakening, but also the possibility of generating his subsequent history from that point on. In the course of one of the most insightful commentaries on sexual difference in Kierkegaard, Sylviane Agacinski characterizes the necessarily gendered aspect of this situation as "a constitutional bisexuality," one of whose principal effects would be the very attempt to define masculine and feminine traits, or the coercive need to situate given individuals with respect to such

definitions, or the ultimately contradictory nature of all such responses by the subject to the situation of sexual difference in the first place.¹³ There is, in the first instance, no self that is either male or female, since the self can awaken (in other words, begin to act consciously) only as a result of finding itself in a relationship partaking of both feminine and masculine elements.

That the question—of the self, of sexual difference, and finally of all human history—is itself generated in contradiction, or generates an ongoing contradiction in itself for having always to refer to the one element in the relation only by deflection and derivation through the others, Kierkegaard himself, all his conventional and ideological discourse notwithstanding, saw absolutely clearly. “At every moment,” he has no trouble admitting, “the individual is both itself and the race. This is man’s perfection viewed as a state. It is also a contradiction, but a contradiction is always the expression of a task, and a task is movement. . . . First in sexuality is the synthesis posited as a contradiction, but like every contradiction it is also a task, the history of which begins at that same moment . . .” (*Anxiety*, 28, 49). The individual has a history or, better, generates the movement of a history, in the very same moment that sexual difference is assumed as such a task rather than a given. The task, as always for Kierkegaard, is the recognition of the truth of subjectivity, but the truth of this subjectivity is also always derived, like sexual difference, from a relation of the self to the other.¹⁴

Another name Kierkegaard uses to characterize the situation is *passion*. Passion, though, is not an easy thing—concept and word—to grasp in Kierkegaard. It signifies at one and the same time, shockingly enough, the exemplary story of self-sacrificing love recounted in Christ’s passion *as well as* the natural power of the self’s erotic inclination and desire. Passion thus names infinity’s sacrifice of itself in finitude, its bearing witness to finitude’s infinite potential beyond itself, and finitude’s own desire for itself, its will to lose itself in and as its own or another finitude. As such, Kierkegaard’s passion is, like his concepts of anxiety or despair, indicative of a most peculiar kind of synthesis between consciousness and the body. A synthesis interrupted, passion would be a synthesis of consciousness and body always available only in contradiction with itself, and thus always engaged in surpassing itself wherever it truly exists.¹⁵ But passion is also a very particular word—*passio* in Latin, *Leidenschaft* in German, *Lidenskab* in Danish—and that particular word enriches and complicates the situation a great deal in Kierkegaard’s texts. For in the word for

passion,¹⁶ Kierkegaard hears and repeats, by way of etymological relays, the *passivity* of a suffering that he continually attributes to passion both as self-sacrifice and erotic inclination.

The truth of subjectivity is ultimately this truth of its suffering, of its passivity, and of its vulnerability with respect to another, even if this other at first seems only like another self. Passion is therefore always another word for the way in which the self endures the openness of a wound. But however *passive* passion is in the sense of its enduring a suffering that it necessarily receives from a collision with its other, it is also necessary, according to Kierkegaard, to recognize how far *active* passion must be in order to sustain to the end the passage of this shock. The wound that passion opens is always passive to the extent that it can only be inflicted upon the subject from outside the self's own limits. But this vulnerability to the outside can also be freely assumed within the subject, can become a mode of suffering activity, or patience, on the part of the subject. Kierkegaard's *passion* therefore lies beyond any strictly philosophical understanding of the distinction between active and passive, agent and patient, and thus intention and accident, since it also names the place where the presumed distinction between self and other is eclipsed by their mutual implication and undoing.

Whether it is Christ's passion that entails his suffering and sacrifice on the cross, or the self's passion for itself or another in the erotic mode of longing or belonging, or the passion of the intellect to discover and assimilate whatever lies beyond it, passion always names the paradox of its own undoing: "... one should not think slightly of the paradoxical; for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. But the highest pitch of every passion is always the will to its own downfall . . ." (*Fragments*, 46). It is for this reason that the entire text of *Philosophical Fragments* can begin with only one thought, that of the ultimate downfall of the self in its own death: "I stand ready to risk my own life. . . . I have only my life, and the instant a difficulty offers I put it into play . . . for my partner is the thought of death . . ." (6–7). The final truth of subjectivity, always dependent for its very existence upon the force of its passion for the other, is not just its patient suffering; it is as well its active willingness to encounter the thought of its own death.

But what could it possibly mean for the subject to think its own death? In other words, what can we, whose passion is thought, still learn from Kierkegaard, if all he eventually teaches us about the truth

of subjectivity is the necessity of thinking our own death and dissolution? The question itself is no longer adequate to the circumstances of its enunciation. For, as an incommensurable difference that for once cannot even be questioned, death exceeds the question and answer structure of thought at every point. Death is what makes asking and answering questions possible, but death is itself never a real question or answer to anything. As soon as thought would grasp death in its passion it would by the same token reduce this radical difference to itself once again. And the same goes for any passion through which the self is truly opened to something else, whether in the mode of epistemological, religious, or erotic passion.

In fact, from one perspective, Kierkegaard's text always appears poised in this way between the same dreary alternative: either the subject deceives itself by refusing the thought of its own death and thereby lacks the passion necessary to pass into actual existence in the first place; or else, the subject embraces in its passion the thought of its own death and thereby necessarily reduces the otherness of death to a philosophical equivalent whose claim to mastery is the biggest deception of all. Either way, the wound of death is closed upon itself and makes no real difference to the self. Whether one accepts the thought of one's death, or one refuses the thought of one's death, one will regret it either way, since in neither case will it ever be possible to encounter the actual difference death has to make in one's own existence.¹⁷ Or else again, and here would be the truly Kierkegaardian alternative, no longer assimilable as such to the question and answer structure of a pedagogical dialogue or a philosophical dialectic, or else passion turns into something altogether different: faith.

Now, Kierkegaard's use of the word *faith* in this context can only be called ironic. The one thing the self must do in order to pass into existence is to endure and embrace—in passion—the thought of its own death. But this the self either will not or cannot do on its own, as a self-identical subject; that is, unless the self is given, from elsewhere as it were, the opportunity to open itself to the absolute alterity of death in an act, an event, of faith. Faith, though, as an operation of subjective belief, rather than a calculation of objective knowledge, understanding or reason, is itself inconceivable outside the very first-person paradigm it also excludes: *I believe*. There can be no faith outside the speaking subject who is its agent, but the self who begins to speak in this way always becomes the agent of its own passion and death. In passion and death, I believe, and so I always speak my belief

in my own death out loud before all others. Such belief, despite its necessary reliance on the first person singular, in no way can be said to originate in the subject who speaks it. Rather, it is the subject that is subjected to and consequently always paradoxically *free* to believe—or doubt—precisely the one event that is by definition beyond its ability to control or know for sure: death.

Faith is thus a mode of witnessing in the sense of testifying before others about the truth of an event that could never be demonstrated to anyone beyond the shadow of a doubt. Faith certifies the singular event of its own belief; it speaks aloud and gives its word to others about something to which it alone is privy, and that therefore might otherwise disappear without a trace. Without itself ever being the source of this secret truth whereof it speaks, faith necessarily becomes a potential source for the continued possibility of such truth to exist, even if this also always includes the persistence of truth in such aberrant modes as misperception, distortion, or deception. Faith is therefore the shadow that stands between certitude and doubt, the belief that continues to speak about certitude in the face of all possible doubt.

In Kierkegaard, the hidden event that lies in this way beyond the control of the subject, the shadowy secret to which the subject constantly bears witness in its faith, is the rapport between the self and its absolutely other, that is to say, the wound of death conditioning the self in its relation to everything else. Faith is the way in which the subject relates to, or testifies to—rather than knows, fears, flees, understands, or negotiates with—its own death in its relation to others. In faith the subject must say “I” (believe), but what the I actually does when it speaks in this way before all others is attest to the originary experience of its own demise. What can only be called ironic here is that Kierkegaard designates the concept of faith—the necessity that the “I” bear witness in its own name to a secret it alone possesses in its absolute singularity—as the sole mode of access the subject will have to its own dissolution and death. The only way the self can relate to its own death, which is also the condition of its passing into existence, is for it not to disappear entirely in silence, but rather to continue to speak to others in a certain way.¹⁸

To call this situation ironic, however, merely serves to beg the question to the extent that we have not yet secured a stable meaning for the philosophical concept of irony. Of course, *irony* just happens to be one more of the subjects Kierkegaard himself speaks about in a certain way and in so doing transforms once and for all for our

understanding. Like faith, irony in Kierkegaard also names, in its own, complex and concealed way, the necessity for the subject to continue bearing witness to its own undoing in order to exist in the first place. The enigmatically condensed figure Kierkegaard uses in *Philosophical Fragments* to convey this irony is that of faith's *autopsy*: "... for the believer is always in possession of the *autopsy* of faith; he does not see through the eyes of another, and he sees only what every believer sees—with the eyes of faith."¹⁹ Faith thus functions as a kind of eye-witnessing; or rather, faith, as a discourse of belief and not a perception at all, always speaks to others *as though* it had actually seen something with its very eyes, in an autopsy. Faith testifies to what is precisely no longer there to see first hand with any eyes and thus always in danger of eluding all perception. Faith is a mode of testimony that not only enacts its own belief but also asks to be believed or credited by others in its turn.

But since what the subject always swears in faith to have "seen" for itself is also its own passion and undoing, its opening unto the absolutely other that can never be simply witnessed as such by the self, faith is also a speaking that must, in the *other* sense of autopsy, give retrospective testimony before others about its passing away. In faith's autopsy, the I speaks of its encounter with absolute otherness, speaks of this collision in such a way that the I is no longer there as an integral self, and so finally speaks of itself only as another. The reason it would no longer suffice to call such a characterization of faith "ironic," in the colloquial, rhetorical, or even properly philosophical sense of the term, is that Kierkegaard also defined irony as precisely this kind of bearing witness to one's own passing away. With respect to the speaking subject, Kierkegaard concedes midway through *The Concept of Irony*, irony severs consciousness from itself, compelling the subject to speak meta-ironically, from beyond its own grave as it were: "the ironic nothingness is that deathly stillness in which irony returns to jest and haunt [*spøger*] (this last word taken wholly ambiguously). . . ."²⁰ The last word, whether it be given to irony or to faith in Kierkegaard, and no matter how playfully (or piously) the expression can be taken, will always return to haunt the subject whose death continues to speak through it.

One of the most extraordinary examples of such a subject is Kierkegaard's Antigone, whose sketch appears in the first volume of *Either/Or*.²¹ Although the text is very short—a fragment, in fact—it deserves extensive analysis. Suffice it to say, the text occupies a position of privilege, since it provides a critical transition between

Kierkegaard's thesis on irony, whose development depends on the classical figure of Socratic subjectivity, and the later books, such as *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *The Concept of Anxiety*, where the truth of subjectivity is embodied in Judeo-Christian figures. Kierkegaard's Antigone is the matrix out of which philosophy's ironic subject is reborn in the mode of religious subjectivity and faith. Or, rather, Antigone names the rearticulation of a certain concept of irony with a highly idiosyncratic and unorthodox reading—Kierkegaard's own *repetition*—of Christianity.²² Kierkegaard's Antigone will thus barely be recognizable as the familiar figure of an older tradition. Uprooted into a "modernity" that Kierkegaard carefully insists *has not yet arrived*, this Antigone recollects far less for us the Greek context to which she originally belonged than she announces, even preempts, radically new features later attributed by Kierkegaard to Abraham, Adam, and the Christian *par excellence*.

Like Adam, Antigone will be haunted for Kierkegaard by an anxiety whose sorrowful character must be appropriated in an originary mode of guilt and sin, inherited in this case from the house of Oedipus. Like Abraham, Antigone will also be subject to a law of absolute silence; through a faithfulness that remains secret, both Abraham and Antigone separate themselves definitively from all living beings. And, according to the narrator of this peculiar little text, whose own identity is designated, and therefore also concealed, by the initial A, the essential difference, or "break," distinguishing the "modernity" of this Antigone-always-yet-to-come from all other ancient or modern tragic figures, past and present, consists in her mode of "self-consciousness." This Antigone is a figure for the truth to the extent that each and every aspect of her "activity" (*Handlen*) will have to issue from a fully self-conscious and reflective mode of subjectivity.

For, according to A, what has until now always eluded the self-consciousness of the ancients *as well as* the merely contemporary moderns, and what will bring his—or is it really *her*?—Antigone so much closer to a future Abraham and Adam than to her ancient Greek kin, will be the peculiar mode of her *suffering*. A fully self-conscious suffering, or *Liden*, then, will mark the secret truth of subjectivity's activity, or *Handlen*, in modernity. But is not such a unique concatenation of action and suffering, with its semantic resonances of activity and passivity (*Handlen og Liden*), not also the moment in which Antigone's unspeakable pain and anxiety begin to reflect, in advance as it were, what Kierkegaard will later characterize, in the *Fragments* for example, as the subject's necessary *passion*? What

A will finally call in this text Antigone's "extraordinary passion" (*overordentlig Lidenskab*) is not her passion alone, but the passion of the exemplary Christian as well.

This text on Antigone, "The Ancient Tragic Reflected in the Modern Tragic," is not just a fragment in the ordinary sense of the word. It calls itself "an essay in fragmentary endeavor" in its sub-title, it describes its subject as the fragmentation, or radical *break* occurring in the historical development of the tragic, and it does indeed interrupt itself in the middle of the first part of its exposition, digressing at length upon its stated aim of "fragmentary pursuit" at the expense of "coherency." The text on Antigone is not only a tiny fragment in *Either/Or* Volume 1, it also stops the development of its two principal subjects in order to reflect upon the fragmentary nature of its own genre, and it literally ends by shattering into at least three very different parts: a reflection on antique and modern tragedy to date, a reflection on modern tragedy yet to come, and the actual interruption by the narrator serving to link these two parts while also keeping them separate. Curiously enough, it seems that the more the text reflects upon its stated subject, the more it breaks off into fragments. Reflecting upon the fragmentation inherent to the historical development of the tragic, Kierkegaard's text can only interrupt itself in a series of unfinished digressions. Just what kind of secret pact joins the truth of subjectivity, which is always characterized by Kierkegaard as a fully self-conscious mode of reflection, to this strange economy of fragmentation, which is also an economy of passion?

Among the different ways the title's word, "Reflex," functions throughout the essay, there occurs a very particular reflection between Antigone's "extraordinary passion" and a brief comment made earlier by the narrator. The comment is not, however, about ancient tragedy at all. A mentions in passing that there exists a level of passion—an activity reflected fully in passivity and vice-versa—that defies the aesthetic dimension of tragedy. Such passion would place the tragic beyond aesthetics altogether: "The identity of an absolute action and an absolute suffering [or the identity of an absolute activity and an absolute passivity, *Identiteten af en absolut Handlen og en absolut Liden*] is beyond the powers of the aesthetic. . . . In the life of Christ there is this identity, for his suffering or passivity is absolute, since its activity is absolutely free, and his activity is absolute passivity or suffering, since it is absolute obedience . . ." (150). How, exactly, is Christ's passion reflected, across the narrator's interruption on

fragmentation, in the extraordinary passion of this Antigone-yet-to-come?

Mysteriously. Passion that defies aesthetics, defies as well representation. And such passion can be reflected only mysteriously, in the mode of a secret shared by Christ and Antigone. The ultimate truth of subjectivity, its secret passion, can therefore be disclosed only in the fragments of the narrator's interruption of the philosophical exposition on tragedy. This secret, which is their passion, is also what lends meaning to their life: "Perhaps nothing ennobles a person so much as keeping a secret. It gives a person's whole life a significance (*en Betydning*) . . ." (157). Kierkegaard's Antigone is such a person, or rather, the secret she keeps in her passion also makes her into such a person, gives to her a meaning that otherwise she could not have. Linked in this way to Christ, Antigone is called a "bride of God," keeping for the absolute Other a secret about what it means to be a human subject in the first place. According to A, this secret that keeps Antigone separate from all others, the secret to which she sacrifices *as well as* owes her life, is not in fact *her* secret at all: it is a secret she has inherited from another, Oedipus: "At an early age, before she had reached maturity, dark hints of this horrible secret had momentarily gripped her soul. . . . How she found out is extraneous . . ." (154). The secret that one always inherits from another is thus another name for one's passion. Antigone accepts as her own activity this secret that has been received in the first place from the other, passively.

Here, as well as in other texts by Kierkegaard, subjectivity's secret passion is also referred to as a mode of indebtedness or *guilt*. It is a "suffering" or "passivity" that not only endures the weight of its burden (*liden derunder*), but also "participates" in it actively (*men baerer Skylden med, participerer i denne*, 159). What is so peculiar about the secret Antigone owes her father Oedipus, which she keeps for him alone and which in turn also keeps her separate, secret, from everyone else, is that even the one who has given it to her does not seem to know exactly in what it consists. Or, at the very least, he cannot be said to know exactly what is being concealed by the secret he will eventually share with her. The secret that binds Antigone actively to her father, the one from whom, passively, she has inherited her own life as well as its secret meaning, is something that they "share" without knowing. Their bond is not just the "secret"; secret as well is the bond of their passion that, in uniting them, also escapes all positive knowledge: ". . . [Antigone] knows everything; yet within this knowledge there is still a non-knowledge . . . about one thing, she

does not know, and that is whether or not the father himself knew . . ." (161).

Whether or not the father knew, he passes on to the child the burden of this secret, and the child, according to the text, becomes a subject in her own right only by accepting the weight of this fragmented knowledge. She can be herself only by carrying the burden of another, and the exact content of that burden, measured as both guilt and indebtedness, can never be made fully known to her. Strangely enough, though, and through an extra twist of sexual difference, she now becomes not just a subject as child, but a subject as *mother*. Compared at one point to the "bride of God," Kierkegaard's Antigone appears primarily as the daughter of Oedipus, but she is also sister to a dead brother, and beloved of still another. Nonetheless, at a crucial moment of the essay, the burden she carries transforms her into a *mother*, a *virgin mother* in fact: ". . . she is *virgo mater*; she carries her secret under her heart, concealed and hidden. . . . *She knows no man* . . ." (158, emphasis added). The family relationships in this text, each of them redoubled by specific elements of sexual difference, are, as always in Kierkegaard, exceedingly complex. Nonetheless, given that one of the stated objectives of the essay is to illustrate "the dialectic that connects the individual to the family" so that "the individual sees the inherited characteristics as a component of its truth . . ." (160), one should not gloss over them lightly. Obviously, the reference to the virgin mother here is also a reference to the virgin Mary, the earlier reference to Christ's passion reflected yet again in Antigone's passion, not just as a prefiguration of the crucifixion but as a displaced version of the passion story in the Annunciation. Still, there is another sense in which the phrase, "she knows no man," should be read in a much more radical way. In the passion of her secret, Antigone is separated in an essential way from every living being, no matter what their gender or relationship to her: ". . . she feels alien to humankind . . ." (161).²³

But how can a mother, even a virgin mother, remain alien to those very ones she brings into the world, her own children? Because such a mother, conceived herself from a secret inheritance and conceiving in turn a new child from out of this secret self, always gives birth to another secret.²⁴ The child is a secret, whose own birth coincides with a radical separation from the parent. The separation joins parent and child in their shared secret, fracturing whatever sense of autonomy each might otherwise believe could have been theirs. At least, this seems to be the mysterious story that is told, or rather acted out, by

the narrator, A, in the space of the interruption that occurs between the first and second parts of the essay, between the ancient tragic that is no longer there, and the modern tragic that has not yet occurred in the figure of Antigone.

Antigone, of course, doesn't just name the daughter of Oedipus in the ancient tragedy; she will also have been the child of the parent and narrator, A, who is going to produce her in this very essay: "... She is my work. . . . She is my creation, her thoughts are my thoughts. . . . I put words into her mouth . . ." (153). And in keeping with a certain tradition of authorial identity, A even alludes with pride to the "*paternal* prejudice" he feels in considering his new child, Antigone (162). On the other hand, A's recourse to a rhetoric of authority at precisely the moment Antigone makes her appearance in the text also testifies to a more profound and original uncertainty on his—or *her*—part about occupying the "*paternal*" position claimed.²⁵ In fact, A states unequivocally at another point, whatever chance remains for a "rebirth" (*Gjensfødelse*) of ancient tragedy in modernity, it remains only by reason of the individual's relation to the family and race, and this relation or tie (*Forbindelse*) must pass through the specificity of the mother's body: "... a rebirth, not only in the spiritual sense but in the finite sense of the womb (*Moderliv*) . . ." (159). It may indeed be true, as A says of Antigone, that the "father is always in her thoughts" (161), but it is also the case that *this* thought, of the father, must function as the secret place in which Antigone becomes a virgin mother and gives birth in her turn: "... Her father is always in her thoughts, but how—that is her painful secret."

In those thoughts of the father resound an echo, a reflection and a repetition, of the way A had already claimed to have given birth to Antigone with his/her own thoughts in the first place: "... She is my creation, her thoughts are my thoughts . . ." (153). A is the "father" of Antigone and gives her his thoughts; and so, of course, the father has to be constantly in her thoughts. But *how*, that is her painful secret, as well as his, it turns out. For in the most peculiar twist of all, A him/herself will be reborn through the creation of Antigone's secret, reborn out of her thoughts, though reborn in the mode of a new secret for him/her. After recognizing the need in modernity for renewal and rebirth (*Fornyelse og Gjensfødelse*), A introduces Antigone and immediately confuses all the family and gender roles. Gone once and for all is the possibility of telling the difference between mother and father, parent and child, self and other, active and passive, masculine and feminine, agent and patient. The moment Antigone

comes into the world, it becomes impossible for A to say with certainty who gave birth to whom, to say for sure which is which or who speaks for whom, and so it becomes all the more hopelessly urgent for A to stake a claim to legal ownership: “. . . She is my creation, her thoughts are my thoughts, and yet it is as if in a night of love I had rested with her, as if she had confided, entrusted to me a deep secret. . . . I put words into her mouth, and yet it seems to me as if I abused her trust or confidence. . . . She is my property, she is my lawful property, and yet at times it is as if I had cunningly crept into her confidence and trust, as if I always had to look behind me for her; and yet it is the reverse, she is always in front of me . . .” (153). The passage makes it impossible to decide precisely where the secret originates, or whose trust would be abused in sharing such a possession, but in their common passion both self and other issue forth to a renewal and rebirth in the text.

The truth of the subject in Kierkegaard is therefore the law of this secret, a secret always shared between self and other, though shared in such a way, abusively, that it remains hidden in front when one looks behind for it, and vice versa. Neither self nor other can ever have full access to its own origin or end in the secret sharing of both. As a law of property that is also a law of trust and abused trust (*Fortrolighed*, *misbrugte Fortrolighed*)—that is, at bottom, *faith* (*Tro*)—this truth of subjectivity is always susceptible to the most radical misunderstandings and aberrations. That is to say, when all is said and done, *irony*. Nothing can stop this irony, Kierkegaard teaches, since irony is the nothingness that always returns to jest and haunt. Even in Antigone’s piety, in her trust, and faith, there is always the non-knowledge that can come back to haunt her as an ultimate inheritance from the other. That too is her secret, the very knowledge that what she now knows can never be shared with another; she knows no man and can be known by none. This secret is precisely the non-knowledge—of self and other—that lies in what can never be revealed openly, as knowledge or teaching. Which is another way of naming her secret: death.

What Antigone, the modern subject yet to come, knows without being able to say or teach to us directly, is a secret about death: “. . . our Antigone’s life, on the other hand, is essentially at an end. . . . She, too, although alive, is in another sense dead; her life is quiet and concealed . . .” (156–57). This is the secret she keeps for another, the debt she owes and that alone will make her into a self in the first place. It is also the secret in which the other keeps her. The secret

that always keeps her, that keeps her from herself as well as from all others, quietly, is the death that is always shared with another. Shared, not in the sense of a revelation or disclosure, but rather shared by entering into the other's death, as an always returning impossibility that quietly haunts the living self, who can share it only incompletely.

And this, ultimately, is what Kierkegaard teaches in each of his texts, if it still makes any sense to call that teaching. This is the reason the narrator, A, speaks of a community dedicated to fragmentary pursuit. It is not a community, a family, or a race that is fragmented in the sense of currently experiencing the deprivation of a greater whole or totality to which it might at some other point belong, in the past or future. It is fragmented in the much more original and definitive sense that what it shares, as a community, is nothing other than the secret of death; and so it calls itself by the Greek neologism, *Symparanekromenoi*, a fellowship of the dead.

Curiously enough, though, it is not on that account a community any the less lively or living; indeed, it is flourishing. At each and every meeting, in fact, the entire membership of these entombed ones (*Begravne*) undergoes renewal and rebirth (*Fornyelse og Gjenfødselse*). But the initiation into this rebirth of the dead, no matter how closely it remains tied to certain mysteries, certain secrets, will not resemble familiar scenes of salvation and entry into ever-lasting life. Rather, acts of renewal and rebirth are predicated here on a mode of thought (*Tankegang*) that the narrator calls, again using a Greek word that, if not altogether a neologism, is bound to appear rather bizarre in the context: *anakoluthiske* (152). Now *anacoluthon* is a technical term of rhetoric, naming the interruption of one syntactical pattern, one grammatical construction by another, before the first is allowed to complete itself. Like so much else in this text, it is a deviation, a rupture or a break within an overall movement that could otherwise be integrated into one system of meaning. In part, the word is appropriate to the context to the extent that A indulges here in a stylistic feat the editors call a "periodic tour de force" (629), an uninterrupted series of intricately interwoven subordinating clauses that ultimately denies the human possibility of coherency so delicately achieved by its own grammar. In other words, the "anacoluthon" at issue would be the interruption of the rhetorical "coherence," or the syntactic construction, by the philosophical thesis of "fragmentation" articulated in it.

But the true interest of this anacoluthon lies elsewhere.²⁶ What is really at stake in the anacoluthon is the potential of any given subject

to construct itself meaningfully without exposure to a threat of radical interruption. In the case of Kierkegaard's text, and without being able to claim the rhetorical figure would be a mere "example" of the existential dilemma taking precedence over it, we have seen how "Antigone" functions as the name for an anacoluthon of a different order. The truth of Antigone's subjectivity, whatever else, is also an anacoluthon. To the extent that she must recognize her truth in an ineradicable debt to an inaccessible other, Antigone's future can be constructed only by a detour through this secret inheritance. But as a result of this construction of self permanently interrupted through the other's secret, her coherency as a subject will always be radically fragmented.

Understood in this way, anacoluthon also names the interruption of subjectivity by its encounter with the wholly other: death. A fellowship of the dead, *Symparnekromenoi* is by definition beholden for each renewal to the anacoluthic mode of thought—the thought of death being nothing but a thought of interruption, though an interruption that cannot itself be thought through to its completion, and thus a secret always remains. That is why the narrator of this text, A, specifies that the art of the *Symparnekromenoi* consists in producing a very particular kind of writing. A writing of the dead for the dead, for the constant renewal of the dead by the dead, such writing is always dedicated to the secret subject, the subject of the secret that lives by returning always to a thought of the dead, or a thinking that death always interrupts before it arrives at completion. Such writing, according to A, can be nothing but *posthumous*, no matter how alive its author; or, better, the more alive and lively the author, the more renewed and reborn, the more the writing will be posthumous: "Our society requires a renewal and a rebirth at every single meeting and to that end requires that its intrinsic activity be rejuvenated by a new characterization of its productivity. Let us, then, designate our purpose as a venture in fragmentary endeavor or the art of writing posthumous papers (*efterladte Papirer*, posthumous papers, papers left behind) . . ." (152).

To go on living by commemorating anew the dead and, especially, the dead that make the subject itself more and more alive in a certain sense, that is what Kierkegaard would have left behind for us to read in his own posthumous papers. But it is readable there only in the mode of a secret, an anacoluthic thought, interrupted and therefore concealed in its very unfolding, before it could ever manifest itself clearly, coherently, completely. And so it is also always prevented from

becoming the finished construction of a fully autonomous and self-conscious subject. For, as papers left behind, posthumous writings are also, according to A, unfinished in the other sense of being just a bit untidy, negligent, indolent, careless and even slipshod in their appearance as thought. "*Efterladenskab vil jeg altsaa kalde, hvad der frembringes iblandt os, det vil sige kunstnerisk Efterladenskab; Efterladenhed, Indolents vil jeg kalde den Genialitet, vi saette Priis paa. . .*"

That's what Kierkegaard actually wrote, but who can still understand it? Totally opaque, totally untranslatable and unrepresentable as it is, that very simple sentence whose thought is absolutely interrupted and thus sealed in the secret of its Danish fragments. To those who can read it, and their number, obviously, is all too small indeed, Kierkegaard leaves a compact but inexhaustible source of posthumous papers: *Efterladenskab/Efterladenhed*, things left behind, unfinished things, things left behind as inheritance, heritage, or estate, posthumous property, unfinished business, things overlooked or neglected, and things taken care of in a slovenly manner. The secret is ours for the taking. We are all secret agents.

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NOTES

- 1 Søren Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 3:653. Further references in the text.
- 2 *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David Swenson, revised trans. Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962). Further references in the text.
- 3 Theodor W. Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," *Søren Kierkegaard: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), 20–21. For an excellent study of Kierkegaard that begins by taking seriously this aspect of his writing and thinking, see Peter Fenves's "*Chatter*": *Language and History in Kierkegaard* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- 4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Further references in the text. Clearly, Adorno is much indebted to Walter Benjamin's unorthodox understanding of the allegorical mode distinctive of certain writers. Still, it is no accident that Adorno would have found fertile ground for this type of allegorical approach in the texts of Kierkegaard, just as Benjamin himself developed many of his most remarkable insights while working on the French poet Charles Baudelaire. Adorno himself even had a clear sense of the close affinity between Baudelaire and Kierkegaard. But to date no substantial work has been done treating both writers together.
- 5 Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

- 6 One of the most concise formulations occurs in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968): "Reality itself is a system—for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing subject. System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality. It may be seen that system and existence are incapable of being thought together; because in order to think existence at all, systematic thought must think it as sublated, and hence as not existing . . ." (107). Further references in the text.
- 7 *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 28. Further references in the text.
- 8 Emmanuel Levinas, "Existence et Éthique," in *Noms propres* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1976), 104.
- 9 Paul Ricoeur, "Two Encounters with Kierkegaard: Kierkegaard and Evil; Doing Philosophy after Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard's Truth: The Disclosure of the Self*, ed. Joseph H. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 313–42. The response begun by Ricoeur can be only partial since he eventually replaces the genuinely Kierkegaardian disjunction between philosophy and existence with their possible unity in "a new way of doing philosophy . . . a genre of conceptual thought, which has its own rules for rigor, its own type of coherence, and which requires its own logic . . ." (341). This new genre would be a form of hermeneutic interpretation whose questions and answers eventually tie thought and existence meaningfully together in "representations." The logic referred to would apply simultaneously to literary, philosophical, and religious modes of representation. In this respect, Levinas's insistence on the enigmatic, incognito, and thus non-representational relation between the self and the absolutely other actually comes closer than Ricoeur to Kierkegaard's own non-dialectical, and risk-laden, understanding of the relation between philosophy and existence.
- 10 *The Concept of Irony with constant reference to Socrates*, trans. Lee M. Capel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965). Further references in the text.
- 11 *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. Reider Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 67. Further references in the text.
- 12 Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonym responsible for *Fear and Trembling*, puts it this way: "As for me, I do not lack the courage to think a complete thought. Up to now I have feared none, and if I should encounter such a one, I hope at least that I will have the honesty to say: This thought makes me afraid, it shocks me, and therefore I will not think it . . ." (30).
- 13 Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Kevin Newmark (Tallahassee: Florida State University Presses, 1988), 172.
- 14 That the self is never anything but a derived relation to itself by way of the other is something that Kierkegaard himself was at times perfectly capable of stating with all possible clarity: "The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another. . . ." *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13–14. What complicates the issue, and therein lies its richness as well as potential for misunderstanding, is the fact that, although Kierkegaard never wavers on this point, the way it is mobilized in different texts is highly volatile. Thus, the irreducible requirement that the self relate itself to itself through the other is not itself consistent with respect to the "other's" attributes: sexual (man/woman), existential (Christian/non-Christian), ontological (human/non-human), and metaphysical (divine/human) differences accounting for some of the more important narrative strategies adopted. The

sentence that states the definition of the self can also always be read in such a way that the "other" through which the self relates itself to itself is its "self" in the very first place. The originality of the relation that conditions the self is such that the self is always already an "other" for itself.

- 15 Only a slight shift is required to notice that the peculiar nature of this synthesis that so interests Kierkegaard in his own theorization of *passion* resembles in an uncanny way precisely what he excoriated in Friedrich Schlegel's linking of the finite and the infinite, or body and spirit, in his novel, *Lucinde*. The "scandal" in Schlegel's text may not at all partake of the same register and tone as the one in Kierkegaard's, but beyond all their differences, there remains the shared emphasis on a principle of mutual interference and interruption that complicates once and for all any seamless articulation between thought and being. Ultimately at stake in both cases would be a logically consistent and coherent concept of history.
- 16 One of the richest, if condensed, versions of Kierkegaard's inflection of the term *passion* is found in the *Philosophical Fragments*. In the "Appendix" to a section on the absolute paradox, Kierkegaard reflects on a passion (*Lidenskab*) for the other that leads necessarily to offense and scandal. The "activity" of the self in its passion is simultaneously, and thus paradoxically, a mode of suffering or "passivity": "All offense is in its deepest root suffering, or passive (*lidende*). . . . The Danish language correctly calls emotions (*Affekten*) mental sufferings (*Sindslidelse*). . . . In this respect [the offense] is like that form of unhappy love to which we have just alluded. Even when such a self-love (and does it not already seem contradictory that love of self should be suffering or passive?) announces itself in deeds of audacious daring, in astounding exploits, it is passive (*lidende*) and wounded. It is the pain of its wound that gives it this illusory strength that resembles action (*Handlen*) . . ."; *Philosophical Fragments*, 61; *Philosophiske Smuler* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1963), 48. For a most remarkable example of the way Kierkegaard's "passion" survives in contemporary writing, see Jacques Derrida's "Passions: An Oblique Offering," in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), and "Demeure: Fiction et Témoignage," in *Passions de la littérature*, ed. Michel Lisse (Paris: Galilée, 1996). Of course, between Kierkegaard and Derrida, bearing witness to their differences as well as their affinities, stands everything that Maurice Blanchot has written with "passion."
- 17 This is the gist of the short text entitled "Either/Or" contained in *Either/Or*. It concludes with the following example: "Hang yourself, and you will regret it. Do not hang yourself, and you will also regret that. Hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way. Whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way. This, gentlemen, is the sum and substance of all philosophy. . . ." *Either/Or*, Vol. 1, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 38–39. Further references in the text. For Kierkegaard, death is not something susceptible to being integrated in what he calls the "successive dialectic," that is, a dialectic of *Aufhebung* in which any difference, including death, can be mediated into a higher unity of understanding and knowledge. Adorno is one of the few to appreciate how powerfully Kierkegaard's insistence on death can also function as a mode of "protest against a world which is determined by barter and gives nothing without an equivalent" ("Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," 32). In a very strict sense, death cannot be economized on—it has no equivalent.
- 18 One recognizes in this formulation the precise situation assigned to Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*. For more extended commentaries on the structure and dynamics of this text, see my "Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: The Space of Translation," *Genre* 16 (Winter 1983), 373–87; and Jacques Derrida's "Whom to

- Give to (Knowing Not to Know)," in *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 19 *Philosophical Fragments*, 128. See also Peter Fenves's "Autopsies of Faith: *Philosophical Fragments*," in "Chatter."
 - 20 *The Concept of Irony*, 275. For more detailed treatments of this aspect of Kierkegaard's concept of irony, see Birgit Baldwin's "Irony, That 'Little, Invisible Personage': Reading Kierkegaard's Ghosts," *MLN* 104:5 (1989), 1124–41; and my "Taking Kierkegaard Apart," *diacritics* 17:1 (Spring 1987), 70–80.
 - 21 "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama," in *Either/Or* 1, 137–64; "Det Antike Tragiskes Reflex I det Moderne Tragiske," in *Enten-Eller* 1 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962), 127–52. Further references in the text. The very choice of Antigone for such a subject is both entirely predictable and incalculably overdetermined. Useful points of reference for the specificity of this choice include: Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); George Steiner, *Antigones* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, 1996); Sylviane Agacinski, "Le Savoir Absolu d'Antigone," *digraphe*, Vol. 29 (March, 1983), 53–70; and Carol Jacobs, "Dusting Antigone," *MLN* 111:5 (1996), 889–917.
 - 22 As is usually the case for Kierkegaard's allegorical rewriting of Classical or Christian narratives, a necessary intertext is provided by Hegel's philosophical commentaries. With respect to this text on the reflection—which is also a repetition and a haunting—of the ancient in modern tragedy, it is helpful to recall not only the treatment of ancient and modern tragedy in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, but this brief affirmation from his *Philosophy of Right*: "The right of the subject's particularity, the right to be satisfied, or in other words the right of subjective freedom, is the pivot and center of the difference between antiquity and modern times. This right in its infinity is given expression in Christianity and it has become the universal effective principle of a new form of civilization. . . ." *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 84. Up to a certain point, named here by the word *pivot* (*Wendepunkt*), Kierkegaard would be in complete agreement. But by occupying this pivot in a very particular way, Kierkegaard's Antigone gives a radical twist to the movement of philosophical and historical mediations narrated by Hegel's texts.
 - 23 ". . . føler hun sig fremmed for Menneskene. . . ." This is the gloss the text gives to the citation from Sophocles's *Antigone* on the following page: "alive to the place of corpses, an alien still,/never at home with the living nor with the dead" (159). Antigone's solitude is all the more absolute to the extent that it occurs only through her separation from a densely populated universe: "She, too, does not belong to the world in which she lives; although healthy and flourishing, her real life is nevertheless hidden . . . she feels her own significance, and her secret sinks deeper and deeper into her soul, ever more inaccessible to any living being . . ." (157). The curious insistence of the narrator that Antigone be a "bride" despite the fact that she "knows no man" can be slightly better appreciated when one recalls that the Danish word for bride (*en Brud*) echoes the word for break (*et Brud*) that inaugurates this essay on the ancient and the modern. Bride to her secret, Antigone necessarily breaks with the world. For several of Kierkegaard's own references to this play of the letter in his language, see *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 79, 664.
 - 24 In the text on Antigone it is written, "she carries her secret under her heart" (158), but Kierkegaard was much more explicit elsewhere in characterizing such

"carrying" as a moment within the process of term pregnancy. The editors of *Either/Or* 1 refer to a relevant *Journal* notation: "... a similar expression is to hide a secret; she is a mother; it stirs under her breast ..." (543). But even more to the point is the enigmatic use of the mother and child imagery in *Fear and Trembling* to introduce the story of the "secret" that also serves to link and separate father and son, Abraham and Isaac: "... When the child is to be weaned, the mother, too, is not without sorrow, because she and the child are more and more to be separated, because the child who first lay under her heart and later rested upon her breast will never again be so close ..." (13).

- 25 Kierkegaard often confronted the question of what it means to be a father, and whether in fact being a father, if it actually ever had taken place as such, would still be possible in anything other than a mode of *delusion*: "... I believe that it is the most sublime to owe one's life to another person; I believe that this debt cannot be settled or discharged by any reckoning. ... What does it mean to be a father? I must indeed smile when I think of myself as a father. ... The contradiction here is something both to laugh over and to weep over. Is being a father a delusion? ..." *Stages on Life's Way*, 44–45. The text on Antigone is thus written in a very peculiar temporality: between the father of the past, who is no longer there ("... Oedipus is dead ..."), and the future perfect mother—the modern Antigone to whom this text points, though only as the possibility of a future reflection and repetition of that past.
- 26 The tension, and play, between the construction and its interruption, between coherence and fragmentation, is a critical topos in some of the main texts of German Romanticism, and the text on Antigone is undoubtedly one of the places Kierkegaard enters the fray. Adorno shows his own sensitivity to the issue by using this particular passage to conclude his book on the "construction" of the aesthetic in Kierkegaard (139–40). However, he takes the fragment in an entirely different direction from the one being proposed here. More relevant would be Paul de Man's use of the term *anacoluthon*, without however making reference to its occurrence in Kierkegaard, to characterize Friedrich Schlegel's use of the term *parabasis*. "The Concept of Irony," *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178–79.