

KIERKEGAARD'S VIEWS ON THEATER "WITH CONTINUAL REFERENCES" TO CONTEMPORARY THEATER THEORIES

If one has to choose between **total nonsense** and **partial nonsense**, it is probably better to opt for the first one, following the "logic" of the absurd. This seemed to be the choice of a student of the Zürich University some decades ago, Friedrich Dürrenmatt. He started his dissertation on *The Tragic in Kierkegaard* then left it incomplete, to write plays instead. His explanation of years later was "not actually because I thought it better write total nonsense than partial nonsense, but because I came to believe that one can think not only in philosophy but also on stage"¹.

Let's keep in mind the „not only – but also" opposition that later in Dürrenmatt's life became exclusive, "either – or". The great Swiss playwright soon faced an "unsuccessfully broken" academic career that was compensated many years later only with an honorary doctorate, for a successful playwright's oeuvre.

Nonsense is a central category for all what is going on in theater, as anyone can confirm it working there even briefly. Not only on a practical level but theoretically as well, as the performances often challenge common **sense**, meanwhile regularly include **sensitivity**, sometimes even **sensuality**, the spectator thus may "**come to his/her senses**", beyond thinking.

Kierkegaard's concept on tragic was what Dürrenmatt became interested in at the university, like Kierkegaard himself when writing on tragic ancient and modern, at an early phase of his authorship². Comedies however were higher esteemed by the Danish thinker than tragedies due to their relation to infinity³ and this was the genre Dürrenmatt preferred throughout his

¹ See Dürrenmatt's Acceptance address at Temple University in 1969 receiving the honorary doctorate. See also the Interview by Violet Ketels, In: *Journal of Modern Literature* 1 (1970) pp. 80-108. <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/durrenmatt/interview.html>

² Kierkegaard: *The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama*. In *Either – Or*. Translated and edited by H. and E. Hong, Princeton: University Press, 1987. Vol. I. pp. 137-163.

³ Heiberg's views were determinant in the same respect, see for example: *Johan Ludvig Heiberg Philosopher, Littérateur, Dramaturge, and Political Thinker*. Edited by Jon Stewart. Museum Tusulanum Press, Sören Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen (Denmark), 2008. See also *The Heibergs and the Theater. Between Vaudeville, Romantic Comedy and National Drama*. Edited by Jon Stewart, Museum Tusulanum Press, Sören Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen (Denmark), 2012.

theatrical oeuvre. These plays however had a very special feature that was unknown before and became crucial in the 20th century, defined as **absurd**. The term was alien from aesthetics and from theory of literature. Theology applied this term in the time of Tertullian then Kierkegaard “recycled” it to describe the situation beyond tragedy⁴, opposing the tragic hero, Agamemnon’s choice with the absurd calling of Abraham. Decades later a whole literary trend was inspired by this new horizon that opened up beyond the world of tragedy, determinant for playwrights in general and for Dürrenmatt in particular.

Kierkegaard could be the “godfather” of a literary tradition, extremely important also on 20th century stages? Is it accidental, or is there logic behind? Dürrenmatt’s choice was random as his change of focus proves or a similar logic was present in creating his oeuvre? These are the questions I try to find answers in my paper.

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Kierkegaard’s views on theater and his frequent analyzes of the “phenomena” of theater (and of its related fields like drama, stage, music, acting, performance, effect of the show, audience, etc.) in his oeuvre are of crucial importance. It helps understanding his thinking while inspiring both for theater artists and for theoreticians as well. Kierkegaard often focused on particular features of theater, of drama or just of a tiny little moment of the performance⁵, his interpretation went far beyond aesthetics and history of theater, reaching out to philosophy and theology. Kierkegaard’s approach was far beyond the purely historical or exclusively aesthetic angle of many of his contemporaries focusing on the complexity of theater, anticipating the interdisciplinary approach of contemporary theater science.

This vision of theater could have originated in the many “roles” Kierkegaard played in his life and in his writings. There was the young and ironic **playwright**⁶ at the beginning of his oeuvre then he became a **protagonist** of an ironic play, being ridiculed as a character on

⁴ Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling*. Translated and edited by H. and E. Hong, Princeton: University Press, 1983.

⁵ Kierkegaard: A Cursory Observation Concerning a Detail in *Don Giovanni*” In: *The Corsair Affair and Articles Related to the Writings*. Translated and edited by H. and E. Hong, Princeton: University Press, 2009. pp. 28-37.

⁶ Kierkegaard: Battle between the Old and the New Soap Cellars. In: *Early Polemical Writings*. Translated and edited by Julia Watkin. Princeton: University Press, 1990.

stage⁷ in Andersen's aesthetic revenge for criticizing him. He later became a **theater critic**⁸ of the leading intellectual group of Copenhagen, headed by a playwright, critic, theater director and theoretician, Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Theater in early 19th century Copenhagen meant much more than "only" art or "only" entertainment, it was the most important cultural institution of the time, place for education, meeting point of the middle class, plus an artificial "second reality" to discuss crucial issues. In spite of the multifaceted theoretical approach, Kierkegaard remained a simple **member of the audience** throughout his life, sometimes unreflective and spontaneous when watching the "farce" as described in *Repetition*, yet soon concluding in fundamental philosophical issues. Even when giving a masterful **analyzes of acting**⁹, he comments on the effect of time both aesthetically and anthropologically. He was able to use the public space of theater as a social institution¹⁰, and went to theater just "to be seen" among members of the Copenhagen elite. While being sober and manipulative in this respect, Kierkegaard was receptive for the intoxication of the stage and would not miss a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Most importantly however, behind the many roles there was the "**master dramaturge**" composing not only his life but part of his oeuvre as "textual theater", with staging the self¹¹ in his works and in his deeds.

Dürrenmatt never wrote his dissertation and never wrote tragedies either. Like Kierkegaard he knew a lot about laughter that the Danish philosopher asked the gods for "I may have the laughter on my side"¹². The gods however denied this wish, as Kierkegaard, the heir of his father's melancholy had to realize. The funny hairdresser in Andersen's comedy, the hunchback dandy in the streets of Copenhagen, the later target of the Corsair cartoons became publicly ridiculous more than once. He experienced very profoundly what Dürrenmatt

⁷ H.C. Andresen: *The Comedy at the Open Air*. As revealed by Jon Stewart's new research. See Kierkegaard's text on Andersen's *Only a Fiddler*. In: *Early Polemical Writings*, op. cit.

⁸ G. Pattison, „Søren Kierkegaard A Theater Critique of the Heiberg School“, in: *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries*. Edited by J. Stewart, Berlin – New York: Gruyter, 2003.

⁹ Kierkegaard, „The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress“, in: *Christian Discourses*. Translated and edited by H. and E. Hong. Princeton: University Press, 1997.

¹⁰ See: B. Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard*., Princeton: University Press, 1996. p. 13.

¹¹ See the references and metaphors in Alastair Hannay's studies and in Bruce Kirmmse's works on Kierkegaard, and J. Risum, „Søren Kierkegaard on Danish Actresses“, In: *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries*, op. cit.

¹² Kierkegaard: *Diapsalmata*. In: *Either / Or*., op. cit. p. 43.

emphasized “to be a martyr is nothing to being made ridiculous”¹³. The Swiss playwright quoted Paul when referring to the greatest test to be a Christian, and Kierkegaard with his personal sufferance passed this test.

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Tragedy and comedy are commonly known as literary genres to be performed in theater. However these two have very different origin and conclusively different identities as their mythic history reveals. In the ancient Greek tradition Thalia was the muse of comedy however later she became the symbol of theater in general. The female figure became a synonym for theater beyond the particular literary form¹⁴, while for the other literary genre to there was another muse available Melpomene, the female symbol of tragedy. Her fame and name however faded away in the history of theater, just like of the other muses, the one of music (Euterpe) and that of dance (Terpsichore).

This genealogy is particularly important when Kierkegaard and theater is concerned as the muses were daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of **memory**. Her identity and mythic function includes **remembering, recollecting, reminiscent**, basic anthropological features, poetically composed into the narrative of the Greek mythology. Kierkegaard was very much at home in ancient Greece¹⁵ and liked to play with references, creating a “subtext” by that not necessary opening up for all his readers. In *Fear and Trembling* for example indirectly yet determinatively was present the Greek goddess Diana/Artemis¹⁶ providing an oblique set of references, crucial for the in-depth understanding of the text. The philosophical and psychological traces lead to a complex and often controversial interpretation of the issues discussed, from Iphigeneia to Herostratos, from the Eleata thinkers to Heraclitus, including references to the virgin goddess.

¹³ Dürrenmatt interview, see at <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/durrenmatt/interview.html>

¹⁴ In some languages comedy is a synonym for “play”, not necessarily referring only to comic dramas. Comedy theaters like the French Comédie Française do perform tragedies as well.

¹⁵ See the Volume 2 Tome II of of Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources. Kierkegaard and the Greek World. Aristotle and other Greek Authors. Edited by Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun. Ashgate: 2010.

¹⁶ A. Nagy: „The Mount and the Abyss” (The Literary Reading of *Fear and Trembling*). In: N.J. Cappelorn, H. Deuser és J. Stewart ed. *Kierkegaard Studies*. Yearbook 2002. Berlin - New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002.

When examining the phenomena of **repetition**, written soon after *Fear and Trembling* by Constantin Constantius, the author revealed that it was the same for the Greeks as recollection¹⁷. The personified memory Mnemosyne was recalled. Her story shaped her individuality, being the daughter of Gaia and Uranus, thus recollection was conceived by earth from the sky, born as a female titan, the little sister of Chronos, of the master of **time** and the father of Zeus. The later king of gods, the ambitious nephew of Mnemosyne slept with her aunt nine consecutive nights for creating the nine girls, one after the other¹⁸. Divine influx or rather divine incest was needed to create the nine goddesses of arts (and of sciences as these was not separated then). This is the anthropological turn in the history of civilization when the oral tradition was fading away as writing was introduced thus memory safeguarded by objects and not by purely human recollection any more. The differentiation of art forms and scientific disciplines also started then, while the oral tradition had withdrawn to the rescue of theater, where recollection and repetition remained dominant, from ancient times on.

Memory gave birth to **theater**, as Thalia was the daughter of Mnemosyne. As Constantin Constantius argued in *Repetition*, it is a “crucial expression for what recollection was to the Greeks”¹⁹. It is the same movement “but in opposite directions”, thus “what recollection has been is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward”²⁰. The context of the philosophical experiment is his visit to a theater, where repetition is at home. The whole art of theater is based on repetition. Rehearsals are in the center of the process of creation, that in some languages mean also repetition. Once the art work was created, the performances are going to be repeated from evening to evening, sometimes from season to season. Memory plays a crucial role throughout the process, as no other art form needs constant recollection as this one on stage (even in music it is optional, as scores can be applied for the performances, the same is unimaginable in theater)²¹. Recollection is often composed into the body of the performance, as the flow of time constantly changes the work

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*. Translated and Edited by H. and E. Hong Princeton: University Press, 1983. p.131.

¹⁸ There are several narratives about the genesis of muses, I follow the version of Hesiodos in Theogony.

¹⁹ *Repetition*, op. cit. p. 131.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The so-called „staged readings” express it perfectly, as the text can be enjoyed and understood by the performance however theatrical effects are hardly present.

of art, the recreation of the “same” situation, in the “same” atmosphere, with the “same” actions, with the “same” text, etc. in the passing time can never be the same.

When Constantin Constantius wanted to see the show in the Berlin theater he saw before, he logically and aesthetically failed, “there is no repetition at all” he concluded. The theoretic generalization was based on the many concrete details of that particular evening from the mood of the spectator to the conditions given at the very specific occasion, like there was no free box for Constantinus, and the audience has somewhat changed. “Beckmann could not make me laugh”²² as the author sadly registered, yet he mainly missed the earlier atmosphere of the Königstädter Theater he masterfully described, the often vulgar and childish collective enjoyment of the farce.

Constantius missed the very feature that was determined by another mythological figure, recalled indirectly, the mortal god of ecstasy and of intoxication, Dionysus. The resurrected son of Zeus as his genesis reveals repeated even his birth, and later played a determinative role in the dawn of Greek theater. Kierkegaard’s reference recalls the two facets of theater the divine and the orgiastic. Nietzsche will comment on that later at length²³ including another basic feature connected both to temporality and to ecstasy, being determinant for Kierkegaard as well, **music**. The dual character of the performance, the constant ambiguity of the heavenly and of the subhuman becomes transparent in some of Kierkegaard’s texts referring to theater. Calling a performance at one point pure miracle happening on stage “thanks to the great Mozart”²⁴, at other times attending a show seems to be only an easy entertainment, similar to the joys offered by prostitutes or a ride to the Deer Park²⁵.

The expectations of the audience to have the “same” experience as before reappears in Kierkegaard’s oeuvre in a very different context, when “Inter et Inter” writes about Johanne Louis Heiberg’s famous Julie in *Rome and Juliet*²⁶. She first performed it in at the age of 15 in 1828 and then at the age of 35 in 1847. Shakespeare’s text was the same when Johanne Louis

²² *Repetition*, op. cit. p. 169.

²³ Nietzsche: *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*. (The Birth of tragedy from the Spirit of Music) 1872.

²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Either / Or*, op. cit. I. p. 41.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Either / Or*, op. cit. I. p. 287.

²⁶ See Kierkegaard, „Crisis and a Crisis in a Life of an Actress”, op. cit. 412.

was a teenager as it was later when she was more than two times older than the original play's Juliet. Julie "grew up" enormously between the two performances as she did in the one evening or rather in the few days covered by the play. The child of the First Act became "a completely devoted woman, forceful and energetic"²⁷ by the Fourth Act conclusively Fru Heiberg was greater in the second time. Repetition was impossible again, while the truth of the stage overwrites the mathematical verity, being that the number of years. This "absurdity" was a common experience of the Copenhagen theatergoers attending the show, numbers don't matter when stage is concerned.

Young age in the theatrical metamorphoses was discussed from another aspect by Constantin Constantius. When recalling the awakening of the personality by imagination, theater was the explanatory metaphor, when the "individual is not an actual shape but a shadow, or, more correctly, the actual shape is invisibly present and therefore is not satisfied to cast one shadow, but the individual has a variety of shadows, all of which resemble him and which momentarily have equal status as being himself"²⁸. The stage is perfectly suitable for this Schattenspiel of the hidden individual²⁹, to "split himself up into every possible variation of himself" that remain still himself³⁰. In theater the whole process is revealed in front of our eyes, and often this process is the drama itself.

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The multiplication of the individual on stage is creating different identities through different voices as different characters, while the opposite views may result in conflicts, in confrontations, these all are the basic features of drama. The communication in drama is "per definitionem" indirect, the author communicates throughout the process of the drama, the complexity of angles and of voices doesn't mean the "destabilization" of the narrator's authority, on the contrary, it is the very condition of being a playwright to integrate all these

²⁷ Ibid., p. 412. See also Katalin Nun, *Women of the Danish Golden Age*. Museum Tusulanum Press, Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen, 2013. pp. 72-3.

²⁸ *Repetition*, op. cit. p. 154.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 156.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

features into a dynamic entity³¹. Shakespeare was neither Shylock nor Hamlet, as Kierkegaard was neither Climacus nor Anti-Climacus.

The “venture of experimenting psychology”³² meant also that the young man, described by Constantin Constantius could split himself into variations also when watching the play. The visual illusion of this process was the shadow also familiar for Kierkegaard’s contemporaries, as shadow-plays were popular forms of entertainment in marketplaces and in amusement parks. Shadows regularly appear in Kierkegaard’s works, in his “Silhouettes” for example in *Either / Or* that was inspired by dramas, by operas and by performances. Beyond the visual image philosophically it recalls the Platonic concept of our perception of reality, present in a “theatrical existence” as well. The status of the character as merely a shadow recalls Puck’s farewell words at the end of the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*³³.

Shadows appear in significant position in Kierkegaard’s own play *Battle between the Old and the New Soap Cellars*. The protagonist Willibald defines himself as “I am one of Chamisso’s fantasies... a shadow myself, therefore cannot cast any shadow”³⁴. However in the young thinker’s mind it may conclude in the paradoxical act: “If I am going to be a shadow myself, I will at least compose a new one, I will create one... (with great feeling) Let there be a person” he adds, and “at that very moment the cloud assumes the form of Echo”, who is otherwise “my other self”³⁵. This process of multiplication both visual and acoustic (as echo can be considered a voice-shadow) in many respects anticipates Kierkegaard’s later strategy of writing, necessary on stage, yet quite unusual in philosophy.

Kierkegaard however provides another metaphor for the hidden individuality and for the multiplication of voices and of features that becomes another object on stage, the **mask**. Thalia like Melpomene has masks (usually both serve as an iconographic sign for theater). In performances of the Greek antiquity these were applied as robes were and other equipment to

³¹ See Peter Szondi, *Theory of Modern Drama*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.

³² See the important subtitle of Repetition

³³ „If we shadows have offended / Think but this and all is mended, / That you have but slumber’d here / While these visions did appear.”

³⁴ Kierkegaard, „Battle between the Old and the New Soap Cellars” op. cit., p. 107. The reference is to Adalbert von Chamisso’s *Peter Schlemils wundersome Geschichte* that was a popular reading in that time.

³⁵ Ibid.

hide the actor (cone served for loud-speaking and for changing the actor's voice, special shoes were applied) that later in the history of theater regularly returned, for example in the commedia dell'arte, so inspiring for the vaudevilles. Masks have extremely complex psychological, sociological and philosophical connotations, as it visually expresses the change of identity and the borrowed self becomes the real one for the spectator. The use of pseudonyms was a "masquerade" for Johannes Climacus³⁶, while "B." as quoted by Victor Eremita knew that in the magic midnight moment³⁷ everyone has to remove his / her masks and reveal what is behind. This role-playing however for someone not familiar with the dramatic tradition and theatrical specifics composed into a coherent oeuvre, may be interpreted as the fatal undermining of the writer's authority. Peter Christian Kierkegaard evaluated his younger brother's writings this way "even when Kierkegaard wrote in his own name, it was in effect just another pseudonym"³⁸ summarized in his funeral eulogy the excuse and the curse for Søren.

What was the theatrical influence for Søren Kierkegaard inspiring his life-long role-playing? Once he was "swept along into that artificial actuality"³⁹, as Constantin Constantius described, shadows and reflections created an image of existence. The attraction of this collective illusion is very powerful in theater and beyond "The deceived is wiser than the not-deceived". The author of *Stages*⁴⁰ quotes Plutarch appreciating this kind of seduction, referring to a kind of wisdom that can be obtained in theater.

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The anger of the elder brother was justified as that of a clergyman as well. Søren Kierkegaard often referred to the sacral character of theater confronting the ultimate secularization of the institutionalized faith. In ancient times "Theater was a religious service not only in Greece,

³⁶ Kierkegaard: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., p. 536.

³⁷ Kierkegaard: *Either / Or*, op. cit. II. 146.

³⁸ Quoted by B. Kirmmse, „I am not a Christian” – A „Sublime Lie” Or: „Without Authority”?, *Playing Desdemona to Christendom's Othello*, in: *Anthropology and Authority*, Amsterdam – Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000. p. 130.

³⁹ *Repetition*, op. cit., p. 154.

⁴⁰ Plutarch referred to spectators of theatre with these (uttered) words of Gorgias in his *De Gloria Atheniensium*. This praise of theatrical deceiving was crucial, not just a footnote or a bon mot, but the motto of *Various observations about marriage* in Kierkegaard: *Stages on Life's Way*. Shocken Books, NY 1967. p. 96.

but also in Persia”⁴¹ as the younger Kierkegaard wrote in his notebook. Thus it was “unthinkable to pay admission” he continued, money can’t interfere with prayers. The difference is that “the theater honorably and honestly acknowledges being what it is”, while the church dishonestly conceals it. It should be written “over the church door or having it printed under the list of preachers on Sundays” adds Kierkegaard bitterly that “money will not be returned”⁴². As Kierkegaard recalls “in paganism theater was worship, but in Christendom the churches have generally become theater”. It is really “enjoyable” to commune with the highest once a week “by way of imagination”⁴³.

The aesthetization of religion provoked Kierkegaard to write a “Theater Review of an Imaginary Piece”, commenting on the artistic character of the church service. “Yesterday Dean John Doe, Knight of Denmark, appeared as a guest at the Church of Our Lady. The house was sold out... Dean John Doe is a genuine artist – his manner is impressive, his appearance noble, his carriage dignified, his gestures fitting, his facial expression unforgettable. ... He presented the well-known number about faith: he has great resources at his disposal. He has horror when this is required, ingratiating when this is necessary, tears when they are needed – in short, he has everything”⁴⁴. The irony is bitter and soon will be biting, however as the performance is being analyzed it reveals that by Kierkegaard’s anger a new scientific field opened up that will be called performance studies, beyond theater criticism or reviews of productions.

The foundation of Kierkegaard’s disdain was deep, to want “to spectate” as he put in a journal entry, “is essentially sinful”, so is to be exalted by the highest. To be a spectator instead of coming out into the tension of true actuality is fatal, so is spectating upon suffering, instead of taking part in it. This “lasciviousness” makes the church into a theater “for the difference between the theater and the church is the relationship to actuality”⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebook.*, Edited by N.J. Cappelørn, B. Kirmmse, J. Stewart. G. Pattison et al. Princeton: University Press, 2007. p. 96.

⁴² See Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings.* Translated and edited by H. and E. Hong, Princeton: University Press, 1998. op. cit. p. 221.

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers.* Translated and Edited by H. and E. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970. Vol. 6. p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 4. p. 601.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1. p. 457.

The significant closeness and distance of church and theater was described as an image in the beginning of *Repetition* referring to the view from the window of Constantin Constantius' Berlin lodging. "Das Schauspielhaus and the two churches are superb, especially when viewed from a window by moonlight... everything is transformed into a stage setting"⁴⁶. In this moment theater created the magic that included churches, but only as decorations. In another segment Kierkegaard defines actors as priests, present in theater, "otherwise [I] hate the snobbery of calling artists priests, but Madame Nielsen one could rightly call a priestess"⁴⁷. However in religious institutions state clerks are employed, as Kierkegaard often defined his masters and ex-colleagues at the university, and beyond.

It is not surprising then that God is a theatergoer, as he has a box in his "private theater", thus he probably owns one as well. Watching the "individual's ethical development"⁴⁸ that is a performance for him. This can be understood by the transcendental atmosphere of stage that can host such performances. This is the logic explaining why *Hamlet* is a "religious drama" for Kierkegaard. To understand the Danish prince in aesthetic categories is hopeless as Frater Taciturnus emphasizes, he is not an "aesthetic hero, and so becomes nothing at all"⁴⁹. Once he is conceived religiously, Hamlet's scruples have "essential importance"⁵⁰. His drama is very familiar for Kierkegaard, being profoundly Danish with his melancholy, with the discomfort at his hometown, with his studies in Wittenberg as well as with his wasted love. Thus one can arrive beyond aesthetics as beyond psychology, to the domain of faith.

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Kierkegaard's thorough interest in drama was "materialized" in his library⁵¹ in which nearly 30 volumes of Shakespeare (two sets in German and one in English) were shelved, plus the ancient classics (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes), in the company of the

⁴⁶ *Repetition*, op. cit. pp. 151-2.

⁴⁷ See J. Risum, "Søren Kierkegaard on Danish Actresses", in: *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries*, op. cit., p. 331.

⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Translated by A. Hannay. Cambridge: University Press, 2009. p. 157.

⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, op. cit. p. 410.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See the Auction protocol of Kierkegaard's library, in: *Auktionsprotokol over Søren Kierkegaards Bogsamling*, Edited by H.P. Rohde, Copenhagen: The Royal Library, 1967.

dramas of Goethe, Kleist, Schiller and Lessing, then Calderon, Gozzi, Molière, Holberg and several others; together with the booklets of the repertoire series put out by the Royal Theater as novelties of the season⁵². The position of drama was exquisite in that time as Hegel established a hierarchy in his lectures on aesthetics, defining it as the highest level of poetry, a synthesis of all literary forms. Heiberg adapted this structure for Danish use and Kierkegaard incorporated that also in his writings, regardless the polemics with his ex-master the “Herr Professor”. Dramas were not “only” for reading, but for preparing to attend performances as Kierkegaard “upheld the tradition of reading the text before going to theater”⁵³ as Janne Risum emphasizes. This was due to his interest in the interpretation of literary texts performed, strengthened by the wish to wholly observe the mechanism of staging, acting, and the reactions of the audience.

Characters on stage continued to live their life in Kierkegaard’s texts as if they were real persons. Heroes and heroines of dramas inhabited his whole oeuvre, from King Lear’s daughter Cordelia to Antigone, from Iphigeneia to Richard III. Some of these references may have been unknown for the contemporary reader not familiar with the referred plays as Kierkegaard was, then he/she was invited to reveal the web of references through the characters mentioned, conflicts recalled to, situations included, dilemmas represented.

For Aristotle characters were of basic importance as they were included in the drama for the sake of action⁵⁴ as Kierkegaard interpreted the Greek author, the primary drive for them was their “telos” as unfolding in the performance. In antic drama the monologues and chorus could perfectly serve the idea, dialogue was not so developed as in modern plays however it concluded in building lyrical and epical features into the text. As “A.” described in *Either / Or*, for modern drama dialogue became dominant, a basic revelation of drama theory not wholly true for Kierkegaard’s contemporaries but for the ones still to come.

In Kierkegaard’s interpretation antic Greek sorrow “like all Greek life” is in the present, “and therefore the sorrow is deeper but the pain is less”⁵⁵. In modern drama the human situation (condition) is different and conclusively differs “the tragic in modern times, for an anxiety is a

⁵² See Risum, op. cit. p. 331.

⁵³ Risum, op. cit. p. 332.

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama*, op. cit. p. 143.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I. p. 155.

reflection and in that respect is essentially different from sorrow”⁵⁶. In these plays there is no “epic foreground” or “epic reminder” as the collective mythologies evaporated with the changing society and with the historical modifications of the relevant communities, thus “the hero stands and falls entirely on his own deeds”⁵⁷. This is the major difference between antic and modern drama, our age thus becomes “more depressed and therefore deeper in despair”⁵⁸ as later playwrights quite exactly proved it. This is also demonstrated in Kierkegaard’s experimenting with the idea how Antigone could be transformed into a heroine of a modern – Romantic - tragedy⁵⁹. As her anxiety originates in the “horrible secret of her parents”⁶⁰ she may be anxious about the curse that has passed down to her through her blood and name. If she were in love, her sacrifice would be not to get married, “not to leave behind any family”, not to pass on this legacy, as Kierkegaard concludes in his Journals⁶¹ with obvious autobiographical references. This “hereditary sin” though, just like that of Oedipus is basically different from those of Judaism and of Christianity, as the former ones are still suitable for tragedy. Jesus had no drama in his life and so it was with Abraham or with Job. The comparative analysis offered by Kierkegaard, otherwise also a masterful example of the history of genres clearly draws the lines between tragic, antic and modern, but also focusing on the relation with the transcendent to offer still another reflection to discuss the theoretical complexity. Yet it prepares the next step in the history of drama in which the **absurd** of the knights of faith may be interpreted on stage as well, in the process of evaporating faith as it happened on stage and beyond, in the 20th century.

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Beside “tragic drama” there was no “comic drama” that time, in the 20th century this will radically change, due to Dürrenmatt’s approach as well. Before it was either drama or comedy, Kierkegaard however raised the issue of comedy antic and modern, analyzing it with similar methods as he did with the tragic in another chapter of the same book. For Heiberg,

⁵⁶ Ibid., I. p. 154.

⁵⁷ Ibid., I. p. 144.

⁵⁸ Ibid., I. p. 142.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. I. 542.

⁶⁰ Ibid., I. p. 144.

⁶¹ Ibid., I. p. 542.

interpreting his Berlin master comedy was more open to the “infinite” than drama was, and avoided any kind of reflection, what was essential for tragedies⁶². Scribe’s plays offered the opportunity for the comparative analysis for “A.”, his *First Love* was immortalized in *Either / Or*, as a basis for theoretical explanations, while he is nearly forgotten by today. Antic comedy was referred to in the chapter “Rotation of Corps” of the same book, in which Aristophanes was also recalled. Kierkegaard raised the question of laughter quite originally in literary theory and history, focusing on when and how smile is being “transfigured” into that outburst. Conclusively he analyzed how humor was composed from different factors like seemingly “dramatic” actions or like the character’s ambivalent source of information. The colorful and sometimes extreme “novelist” details applied also makes the comedy more colorful, while the “pause in the drama”⁶³ helps in the suspension of comic tension, greatly serving the dramaturgy of comedy. Even the “personal substance of the poetic” character is analyzed from the angle of ridiculousness, and how it was “commensurate with the dialogue”, audible “in the transparency of the situation”⁶⁴. All these contribution to the theory of comedy may be applicable for many comedies light and dark, inspired by the absurdities of the 20th century, from historical grotesque plays to stage persiflage of recycled antique myths.

Kierkegaard however “goes further” to arrive at the lowest level of comic performances, to the farce, for understanding its dramaturgy, its logic and effect, then to raise serious philosophical issues from the angle of a cheap Berlin theater. Nestroy’s *Talisman* was staged there the funny play about red hair, conclusively referring to prejudices connected to that feature, to tricks to come over its disadvantages, to unjust social judgment, and to the possibility and impossibility of the change of personality; by the use of incognito not the least. The unfortunate color of the protagonist’s hair is a kind of “physical abnormality”⁶⁵ that works as a “splendid contribution”⁶⁶ to generate laughter. Constantin Constantius soon warns the reader that “Every general aesthetic category runs aground”⁶⁷ when discussing farce and

⁶² G. Pattison, *Kierkegaard, the Aesthetic and the Religious*, London: Macmillan, 1992. p. 106.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, I. p. 263.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I. p. 247.

⁶⁵ *Repetition*, op. cit. p. 163.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

probably not only aesthetic ones are inapplicable in that context. This is the reason why the “general theater-going public”, that Kierkegaard himself was also a member of, “ignores farce or snobbishly disdains it”⁶⁸. However it explains, even if from the inverse, why important philosophical issues can be discussed in the radically challenged milieu of a theater crossing the boundaries of bourgeois conventions and aesthetic approach.

Many years before theory of reception or sociology of theater was ever conceived, Constantin Constantius already realized that the amusement of the performance “consists largely in the viewer’s self-relating to the farce” that may be contributed to the fact that farce is more popular in the lower levels of the society. With less education the chance for reflection is less, the public is “not at all conscious of themselves as audience, but want to be down on the street or wherever the scene happens to be. But since this is out of the question because of the distance, they behave like children who only get permission to look out of the window at the commotion on the street.”⁶⁹ The argumentation recalls the passivity of the ‘spectating’ and refers to the ‘infantilization’ of the audience, both are basic features for interpreting performances beyond aesthetics. Constantin Constantius offered also a “study of laughter”, much before Bergson and Freud focused on that phenomena. The psychological analysis was based on the social and temperamental levels of the audience, and by that the author masterfully describes the non-artistic relation established with the performance. He defines the laughter as “pathologic” originating in the lost sanity of the audience, regardless of age, time, education; turning back into children again⁷⁰. Conclusively “the otherwise so reassuring mutual respect between theater and audience is suspended”⁷¹, establishing a new relationship to the most important artistic institutions of the time, and anticipating a trend that will be extremely important for the history of 20th century theater.

The author reveals the phenomena of the “second orchestra”, as a perfect metaphor for describing the reactions of the audience mainly on the gallery, as the interaction being masterfully conducted by the comic genius on stage. The effect of the audience’s “composed” noise is the same “magical” as the theatrical miracle, complex and overwhelming as if all they

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 160.

were in the “belly of the whale in which Jonah sat”. It is a brilliant image for the non-reflective, unconditional and permanent “interaction” between man and the larger power to which he gives in, “B. stimulates it, and it stimulates B.”⁷² as the author referred to the actor creating this interaction. The acceleration of the loudly expressed joy concludes in the inverse catharsis of the farce, “Thus I lie in my theater box, discarded like a swimmer’s clothing, stretched out by the stream of laughter”⁷³. By the over-all effect of the performance one falls in the power of a stronger force, becomes an object and enjoys being that, with lost individuality as a conclusion.

Kierkegaard’s analysis of actors and of acting was also very significant compared to those of his contemporaries. When Heiberg answered to Wiborg’s study on the aesthetics of painting with his essay “On Painting and its Relation to the Other Fine Arts”⁷⁴, he was building upon his Hegelian “triads”⁷⁵. Acting meant for Heiberg the creation of a reproductive image, similar to the relief, with an only two-dimensional background, seen from the front as the audience was facing the stage. The “relief-like” characterization suggested a stylized, classicistic way of using gestures, movements, creating the whole appearance of the actor. The more realistic way of acting, which was already present on some stages in Europe was neglected, so was the more plastic illusion of stage that attempted to break with the idea of the frontal structure. These were theoretically excluded from this aesthetic system and from art as well. The great authority of the time, the theater director and playwright Goethe wrote an entire book called *Rules for Actors*⁷⁶ exactly determining how to move, to speak, what gestures to use. Strict rules for actors were enforced when performing and the classical dignity on stage was achieved by the un-naturalistic methods that also intended to “emancipate” the whole art to the levels of other art forms, leaving behind vulgarity and clownery. Just those

⁷² Ibid., p. 166.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 166.

⁷⁴ See Jon Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome II, op. cit., pp. 264-266.

⁷⁵ Heiberg defined the first stage as immediate, or “material arts,” that included architecture, sculpture and relief. The second stage was the “reflective,” landscaping, painting and acting were listed here as “illusory arts.” The third stage included “substance,” with music, rhetoric, poetry at the top of the hierarchy. These stages corresponded, as Jon Stewart has indicated, to Heiberg’s views of the Hegelian triad of being, essence and concept. See more in A. Nagy, „Either Hegel or Diakectics: J. L. Heiberg Homme de théâtre”. In: *Johan Ludvig Heiberg Philosopher, Littérateur, Dramaturge, and Political Thinker*. Edited by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen, 2008.

⁷⁶ Goethe: *Regeln für Schauspieler (Rules for Actors)* 1803.

features Constantin Constantius enjoyed so much in Berlin, and analyzing those paved the way for the theory of modern theater, soon to be born.

The angle Kierkegaard took trans-illuminated the vulgarity and simple ridiculousness of the farce, revealing what may be behind. “Look at Phister it almost hurts when you fix your eyes upon the infinitely insipid stupidity that is stamped on his face. And yet it is not a spontaneous stupidity. No one is born with such a face, it has a history.”⁷⁷ Past becomes again the most significant creator of the comic context on stage that becomes the present of the performance. Recollecting and remembering reemerges also by the movements of Beckmann who comes walking on stage, creating a “masterpiece” by this pure act, his gestures having the same history and characteristics as Grobecker’s face had.

Kierkegaard’s insight was very impressive even for the greatest actress of the time Fru Heiberg. As she wrote in her memoirs “from someone who was not an actor were what I was amazed about”⁷⁸, then quoted the description of Kierkegaard about the interaction between artist and audience in theater, in full length. The author emphatically reconstructed the basic situation “The onstage illusion and all those eyes are enormous weight that is laid upon a person”, however “the weight of the burden continually transforms itself into lightness”⁷⁹. The other important feature for achieving the above mentioned lightness is the anxiety that the actor is overwhelmed by before, but only before entering the stage. Both categories are basic for Kierkegaard beyond aesthetic analysis.

The final opportunity for repetition and recollection regularly returns to questions of time, crucial in theater as it is flowing in an unrepeatably flux. It was inspiring the author “Inter et Inter” to focus on the timeliness of theater that involves acting. When writing “The Crisis and the Crisis in a Life of an Actress”, the actual aesthetic analysis of performing was seen through the “duplication” of times. “That little article”⁸⁰ as Kierkegaard referred to it was inspired by the earlier mentioned *Romeo and Juliet* performances, of which the first version (1828-30) probably was not seen by Kierkegaard, coming from a pious home and being quite

⁷⁷ Repetition, op. cit., p. 163.

⁷⁸ See Nun, op. cit., p. 83.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, op. cit. p. 410.

young then, but the “replica” was already available for him in 1845-46, played by a student of Fru Heiberg⁸¹ Emma Meier, young and talented yet not fit for the role. Next year Johanne Louise Heiberg in her mid-thirties took over the role of Ms. Capulet, being the vibrant teenager of Shakespeare, fatally fallen in love. Feminine youthfulness is raised to its most lyrical power in Shakespeare’s famous play⁸² as the analyst observes, with the weight of “Juliet’s intense complexity” to carry. Thus the “temporary quality” of the youthfulness can well be the pray of the years passed, yet time only takes away something from the “immediate, the simple, the actual youthfulness”. In return the actress’ genius becomes “more essentially manifest”⁸³, and the performance is being trans-illuminated by the “pure, calmed and rejuvenating recollection”⁸⁴. In this idealizing light *Inter et Inter* can see more in the mature Ms Capulet, thanks to the metamorphoses of the years, so the dialectic of potentiality was better expressed the second time. It also means that not only an aesthetic, but also a metaphysical dialectic became manifest this way, as recollection reemerges on stage again, in its “rejuvenating” quality, repeating on stage the life that had already passed away.

The gallery of course “wants to see Miss Juliet a devilishly lovely and damnably pert wench”, as “*Inter et Inter*” clearly understands, however “to *represent* Juliet an actress must essentially have a distance in age from Juliet”⁸⁵. With the hurricane of hormones in the First Act can be played by an intoxicated teenager, however the unfolding of the drama needs much more, “all the nuances of a lover, the entire scale right from the first immediate surrender to the heights of demonic passion”⁸⁶. This is obviously unknown at the age of 14, the devoted, the forceful the energetic woman who “carries out her will”⁸⁷ comes to life later. This is well built into Shakespeare brilliant dramaturgy, as after the explosion of passions for the execution of the promised happiness all the important steps are taken by a pragmatic Juliet. She works out the feasible solutions then she is the master of the hopeful manipulations needed for the

⁸¹ See Risum, op. cit. p. 339.

⁸² Kierkegaard, *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, op. cit. p. 321.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.322.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

fulfillment of their love. Romeo is more the raving, the mesmerized, the love-drunk, conclusively the passive one, maturity becomes a major force in the young girl absorbing time by an enormous speed.

The “essentially feminine”⁸⁸ is beyond the pure and often easy attraction of the young age but based on a certain experience that can be called “recollection”. Judge William understood it in *Either / Or*, for him feminine beauty grows with age. Time has no power over her, thus a woman can have power over time as proved by the performance for aesthetic purposes, yet with conclusions beyond aesthetics. It is hardly by chance that the theater review originally was intended to be part of the *Papers of One Dead*⁸⁹ as Kierkegaard first added then deleted from the manuscript later it was published separately also to demonstrate that its author hasn’t turned entire toward religion⁹⁰. But he remained close to it.

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Hamlet being a “religious drama”, while Romeo and Juliet serves as the expression of “essentially feminine” on stage and to the complex relation to recollection, thus Kierkegaard’s relation to Shakespeare, greatly differed from the Copenhagen ‘mainstream’ of the time. Shakespeare was not yet the giant to admire, particularly in the city where the wounds of the British bombardment did not heal easily.⁹¹ When Heiberg rejected the presentation of *Richard III*, he argued that the play’s coloring was too dark, and the characters’ actions were in contradiction with the temperament of the Danes. Shakespeare was “too national” for Heiberg’s taste and also a realist,⁹² hardly compatible with his classicistic concept of dramaturgy. For Kierkegaard however the British bard was not only “great” but “immortal”, with other words the “poets’ poet”, no less than a “hero”. Kierkegaard rarely was so generous

⁸⁸ See Risum, op. cit., p. 338.

⁸⁹ See Kierkegaard, *Crisis and a Crisis in a Life of an Actress*, op. cit. p. 412.

⁹⁰ See Nun, op. cit., p. 79.

⁹¹ See Fenger, H.: *The Heibergs*, New York: Twayne Publishing House, 1971. p. 5.

⁹² *Heiberg’s On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age and Other Texts*, *Heiberg’s On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age and Other Texts*. Edited and translated by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2005.

in his oeuvre with others⁹³ and few authors had similar adjectives as the British playwright. For Kierkegaard the poetic expression of passion on stage was probably the main motif of the admiration, confronting his passionless age as mentioned already in the motto of *Either / Or* and then constantly reemerging throughout the oeuvre. The powerful acceleration of the strength of the human soul and the mobilization of the personal emotions until its extremes, like in Richard III, in Lear, in Macbeth could find parallels only in the Old Testament. This way the vicinity of God was approached through the domain Kierkegaard defined at other places as **absurd**.

The transcendental closeness of a social institution was crucial for Kierkegaard, as theater had that possibility as well. Church was out of the question for several reasons mentioned before, yet theater with its multifunctional character could include that as well. Plus in Denmark it was “monothe(atr)ism” as the Royal Theater was **the** theater, not only based on the royal monopoly of the absolute monarchy⁹⁴ until 1848, but the centralization was due to its very high artistic level, combined with a (limited) openness for new initiatives, where education was pleasantly mixed with entertainment. “To every civilized Dane the center of Copenhagen and of the world was the Royal Theater”⁹⁵ as Henning Fenger argued, and this position demanded the presence there for those, part of the intellectual elite. This was Kierkegaard’s strategy for “misleading” the local opinion-leaders, when he spent 5 minutes in the theater just to be seen, then ran home to continue his work on *Either / Or*⁹⁶. Being the most influential laic gathering point it was also an educational venture, artistic experience was at home, yet served simultaneously as a fashion show. Constantin Constantius however disliked the “odious female exhibitions”⁹⁷ as women staged themselves in the hallways and in the rows, yet in theater history this is also of major importance. The mixing of different social classes, the working of the cultural infrastructure, the exchange of views informally was possible mainly if not only in theater.

⁹³ In *Stages* there are extremely important remarks also for understanding Shakespeare’s Hamlet (even if not in the main text). The concrete references to Richard III as demoniac, to Cordelia of Lear as “having her heart on her lips”, or to Hamlet as a wonderfully disturbed theology student are in different segments of the oeuvre.

⁹⁴ See Risum, op. cit., p.331.

⁹⁵ Fenger, Kierkegaard: A Literary Approach. In: *Kierkegaard and his Contemporaries*, op. cit. p. 304.

⁹⁶ See Risum, op. cit., p. 321.

⁹⁷ *Repetition*, op. cit., p. 169.

Kierkegaard as an author also knew that while the Copenhagen Flying Post was published in 250-330 copies and other magazines could hardly reach this number, yet as seat numbers and the records of the box office calculations suggest 1500 people could attend a performance in the Royal Theater⁹⁸ from evening to evening. Kierkegaard also knew that *First Love* is significant by its very position, as Scribe was the most wanted author of the time from 1823 to 1895 101 of his plays were performed, in 2,676 performances, in the Royal Theater alone. Theater exercised powerful influence not only to the educated people, but often the less-educated citizens attended some of the more attractive performances, just as the non-Copenhageners did, when visiting the capital.

When Kierkegaard became a “theater critique of the Heiberg school” as George Pattison defined part of his activity, he participated in the highly important interpretation process of the work of art for the theatrically “laic” audience. The level of literacy had to be also considered and the limited possibility for the dissemination of written ideas. These could have been the reasons to conclude when writing about Scribe “for me the performance is the play”⁹⁹. There will be still many years to come even to determine performance studies as a field to explore scientifically, yet for “A.” in *Either / Or* it was already clear that theater equals performance. This happened in a time of theater history in which the playwright seemed to be the most important person to identify the show, his name was written with the largest characters on the poster and the role of verbal communications was eminent.

Kierkegaard had yet another extremely theatrical feature to interpret. “Not only for pleasure” was the imperative inscription at the Royal Theater, deeply imprinted into the young Kierkegaard’s mind. He often quoted this sentence in different contexts “everything retrogresses” – he added on the margins to the draft of *Either / Or* -, “even theater is changed for the intelligent by its striving to be not only for pleasure, an alarming tendency toward the other side”¹⁰⁰. His focus on the danger of the “intelligent” reveals Kierkegaard’s emphasis on to the performative aspect of theater, he knew that reflection and speculation may undermine the very effect of the performance.

⁹⁸ Peter Vinten-Johansen: “Johan Ludvig Heiberg and his Audience in Nineteenth-Century Denmark”. In: *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries*, op. cit. p.354.

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Either/ Or*, op. cit. I. p. 239.

¹⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, *Either/ Or*, op. cit. I. p. 547.

Finally he knew something about the artists' position, with the ambiguous appreciation by the public. The high expectations of the audience could be fatally challenging, difficult if not hopeless to fulfill. While the audience has on the one hand the "national duty" to admire the actor or actress, like Fru Heiberg, there was the ambiguous curiosity as well "how long is she now able to last"¹⁰¹. This kind of enquiry with all its banality and excitement can easily "kill", once the admiration becomes "lethargic", even indifferent or worst. Kierkegaard compares this to the "ungratefulness" toward God in a very significant parallel as "they have the lazy idea that they can always have him"¹⁰². Transcendence reappeared on stage.

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Dürrenmatt was certainly right to find in Kierkegaard's views the inspiration for his thinking and definitely had good reasons to leave it then to scholars and start writing plays instead. Besides the great Swiss author many other theater makers and thinkers about theater were influenced by Kierkegaard's thoughts. Not necessarily the positive knowledge about Kierkegaard was determinant, often vague recollections of his works or artistic interpretations of his thoughts were inspiring. There are many hints, traces and transparences, mainly as possibilities to discuss as future scholarship may give definite answer to these hypothesis if and how the influence worked.

First and foremost Kierkegaard's thinking and even his personality was determinant for the greatest Scandinavian playwright, who inspired generations of theater makers in Europe and beyond, Henrik Ibsen. Besides important issues raised by Kierkegaard, like sacrifice, incognito, the poetic plays, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* sometimes seem like illustrations for certain Kierkegaardian dilemmas. However there is a common and determinant feature of nearly all the plays of the Norwegian author, that **recollection** is the real dramaturgical mover, and as the past starts to unfold, the fake harmony and life lived as incognito is over. Thus a special kind of **repetition** plays the lead and breaks traditional dramaturgical frames to create new ones.

¹⁰¹ Kierkegaard, *Crisis and crisis in the Life of an Actress*, op. cit., p. 314.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 318.

Ibsen's role for modern drama can't be overestimated. As he demonstrated that actions of the present originate in the past and analysis of the past events took over the role of motivation, he made an immense turn in drama history as Peter Szondi highlighted it in his book on *Theory of Modern Drama*. In Szondi's interpretation the very history of modern drama was started by that move. The radical theater makers of the early 20th century were staging Ibsen dramas one after the other, Théâtre Libre in France, Freie Bühne in Germany, its counterpart in Britain initiated the significant trend, while in Hungary the philosopher György Lukács, being extremely receptive to Kierkegaard¹⁰³ translated *Wild Duck* for his radical theater initiative called Thalia Society. Regarding drama theory and history it is important to notice that the theoretical background for Peter Szondi inspiring and forming his method, was Walter Benjamin and Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, the last being an author on a book on Kierkegaard, while Benjamin was extremely receptive to his ideas.

There are interesting parallels to further elaborate, like the great French writer's parody-nonsense about his professors, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* was vaguely similar to the (definitely unknown) Kierkegaard-play. Kierkegaard also moved the term **tragic** from the world of theater and drama into philosophy (mainly in *Fear and Trembling*) the same way was **absurd** transposed from its Christian Latin origin in early theological thinking to aesthetics, to describe a nonsensical dialogue on stage probably first time in history¹⁰⁴. Absurd represented the surpassing of drama (that of Iphigeneia in *Fear and trembling*) to describe an unexplicable yet omnipresent phenomena beyond tragedy. Absurd as a genre of drama however was born in the 20th century as the artistic reflection of existentialistic Weltanschauung, in the works of Sartre, Camus, Beckett and others. Different kinds of inspirations however often referred to the same source, Kierkegaard.

When the British author and playwright Martin Esslin "baptized" the trend in his 1963 book *The Theater of the Absurd* he referred both to the negation of action and to the impossibility of communication, both features commonly known as present in Kierkegaard's writings. Several open questions could and should be posed to reveal the hidden presence of the great Danish thinker and the fanatic theatergoer in today's theater theories.

¹⁰³ See A. Nagy: From a Tragic Love Story to a Tragic Life Story" [Geroge Lukács' reception of Kierkegaard], in: Jon Stewart ed. *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social Political Thought*. Hampshire – Burlington: Ashgate, 2011

¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, *Either / Or*, op. cit. I. p. 277.

- (1) The sacrality, missing from churches yet present on stage was crucial for many theater makers who had similar polemics with the institutional faith as Kierkegaard did¹⁰⁵.
- (2) The use of masks for creating different identities could also have its philosophical argumentation in Kierkegaard to inspire theatrical execution (Artaud¹⁰⁶), in the context of Existentialism.
- (3) Indirect communication is basic in dramas and became also important in performances, when explaining analyzing them Kierkegaard offers a key.
- (4) Kierkegaard's views on tragic were of crucial importance and probably inspired *The Metaphysics of Tragedy* by the young György Lukács, the modernity versus the tragic was repeatedly analyzed throughout the 20th century's thinkers, concluding also in the inspiration of the *Post-Dramatic Theater* as defined by Hans-Thies Lehmann.
- (5) Repetition is the crucial feature of emblematic absurd dramas like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as it is a basic element of the contemporary post-absurd play *Heldenplatz* by Thomas Bernhard. Postmodern theater regularly applies philosophically conceived repetition in the performances mainly that of Robert Wilson, sometimes based on Heiner Müller's plays that can be analyzed also from this angle.
- (6) One of the most interesting theoretic analysis of contemporary theater in historical perspective is Erika Fischer-Lichte's the *History of Drama*¹⁰⁷, focusing on the question of identity, of its crises and of its creation, interpreting history of theater as history of identity. Her anthropological approach incorporating the views of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner refer to Kierkegaardian dilemmas in the "rites de passages" the same way as in crossing borders.
- (7) Performance studies as initiated by Victor Turner and Richard Schechner could have also learnt from Kierkegaard, who wrote a "theater review" about a church sermon and was aware of the theatricalization of certain events of life. Patrice Pavis in his

¹⁰⁵ Rilke's explanations reveals it in his *Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* when referring to theater at Arles, meanwhile on contemporary stages, Grotowski, Vassilyev, Wilson, Barba recalls the same lack of sacrality.

¹⁰⁶ Sartre's explanations reveal the Existential background of Artaud's work.

¹⁰⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theater*, Routledge, 2002.

analysis of performance talks about “theater experience” similarly as Kierkegaard did when writing about farce. The great French theater theoretician’s views are close to those of Constantin Constantius, for example when in the vaudeville tradition he identifies the origins of commercial theater and refers to certain features of mass culture.

(8) Finally there is the specific quality of theater as “Memory Machine” following Marvin A. Carlson book title¹⁰⁸. The interaction between theater and memory is of crucial importance, both for the dynamics of reception and also for performances incorporating elements of earlier shows, reinterpreting those as emerging from the collective recollection.

Dürrenmatt was right to choose the total nonsense as theater is willingly deviates from the world of intellect, of rationality and of logic. He realized this as the conclusion of Kierkegaard’s argumentation about theater and beyond, yet to follow him he had to break with the method and praxis of the Danish thinker and instead of explanation of certain phenomena he started to produce dramas and to present them. Probably this was the most Kierkegaardian way to understand and to interpret his revelations – not on page but on stage. If these two can ever be distinguished at all.

¹⁰⁸ Marvin A. Carlson, *The Haunted Stage. The Theater as Memory Machine*. University of Michigan Press, 2003.