

**CONSTANTIN CONSTANTIIUS' *LITTLE CONTRIBUTION*
TO AN ONTOLOGY OF BECOMING***

*A PEQUENA CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE CONSTANTIN CONSTANTIIUS
PARA UMA ONTOLOGIA DO DEVIR*

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Abstract: In October 1843, Kierkegaard published *Repetition* under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius: a “droll little book”, in which he stages one of the most original and deepest concepts of his philosophical reflection. Not even two months later, Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860) wrote a review that gave rise to a polemical reaction by Kierkegaard. A controversy that, however, has the strange peculiarity of remaining solitary. Kierkegaard in fact writes a long and inflamed answer that he decides to keep in the drawer, sure of the contradictory nature of wanting to transform into “direct communication” what only indirectly, through irony, can be introduced into reflection. In the unpublished manuscripts named *Little Contribution by Constantin Constantius Author of “Repetition”*, Kierkegaard engages in the rare attempt to explicitly explain himself and his category of repetition to contemporaries who have misunderstood it, preferring the Hegelian mediation.

Keywords

Becoming, Mediation, Ontology, Religion, Repetition.

Resumo: Em outubro de 1843, Kierkegaard publicou *A Repetição* sob o pseudônimo Constantin Constantius: um “livrinho engraçado”, no qual encena um dos conceitos mais originais e profundos de sua reflexão filosófica. Menos de dois meses depois Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860) escreveu uma resenha que suscitou uma polêmica reação de Kierkegaard. Uma controvérsia que, no entanto, tem a estranha peculiaridade de permanecer solitária. Kierkegaard, de fato, escreve uma longa e inflamada resposta que decide guardar na gaveta, certo da natureza contraditória de querer transformar em “comunicação direta” o que só indiretamente, por ironia, pode ser introduzido na reflexão. Nos manuscritos inéditos intitulados *Pequena contribuição de Constantin Constantius, autor de “A Repetição”*, Kierkegaard se engaja na rara tentativa de explicar explicitamente a si mesmo e sua categoria de repetição para contemporâneos que a entenderam mal, preferindo a mediação hegeliana.

Palavras-chave

Devir, Mediação, Ontologia, Religião, Repetição.

* The article is an English reworking of the Italian "Introduction" to the Italian translation of S. Kierkegaard, "Polemica contro Heiberg", ETS, Pisa 2020.



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1.

If an author writes in such a way that “heretics are unable to understand him” (SKS 4, p. 91; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, p. 225), the misunderstanding shouldn’t be unexpected, but rather desired. But when in 1843, soon after the publication of the pseudonymous work *Repetition* by Constantin Constantius, Kierkegaard read through the pages of Johan Ludvig Heiberg’s *New Year gift*¹, a misleading review of the volume, he became furious. But wasn’t it what he expected? To be misunderstood by a great representative of an age whose misfortune was that it “had come to know too much” (SKS 7, 249; KIERKEGAARD, 1992, p. 259), i.e. a “heretic”? Rhetoric, as it is well-known, can be a double-edged sword. The fact remains that the Philosopher was unable to resign himself for years: as a father of Platonic memory, he will try to defend his outraged son by immediately working out a response, or rather, many answers. First, an open letter to Heiberg signed by “Constantin Constantius”, to be published in a literary review, then a more articulated response. But they all remained only unpublished drafts or, sometimes, they merged into other texts in the form of footnotes or *en passant* comments.

What remains of this intense activity is today a folder – or rather, a sheet of paper folded like a folder – containing seven manuscripts at different stages of elaboration, the order of which reflects only approximately the chronology of the same, all preserved in the Kierkegaard-Arkiv of the Royal Library of Copenhagen: the Philosopher kept the preparatory manuscripts of his works with care.

On the upper left corner of the folder is the annotation “Not used”; below, there is a sort of title assigned to the material, that is: “Controversy concerning Heiberg’s *Repetition* in Heiberg’s New Year gift-book”, and next to it, again:

Since I have written such a little book [i.e. *Repetition*] in such a way that “heretics are unable to understand it”, explaining better any aspect of it would have meant ruining the game. Besides, all the talk of Heiberg is pure nonsense. I should not waste my time by letting it get me down to the spheres of the ephemeral. Of controversy readers will find enough by reading my books; no controversy that will keep a bored, curious, and excited audience occupied (KIERKEGAARD, *Pap.* IV B 108-109)².

¹ HEIBERG, 1843: the review of *Repetition* on pages 97-102. *Repetition* had been published on October 16th, *Urania* on December, 15th.

² Cf. TAFDRUP, 2012, K 15, p. 65. Where not otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

Of the contents of this folder, the editors of the last critical edition of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (1997-2013) have decided to publish only the texts of the manuscripts in fair copy. That is, only the texts that could probably have been sent by Kierkegaard himself to the printer without the need for a great deal of editing, thus free of the massive and often undue interventions of the first curator of the papers left by the Philosopher, Hans Peter Barfod (1834-1892)³.

These are manuscripts⁴ 5.1 (a reworked fair copy of the introduction to the text *A Little Contribution by Constantin Constantius Author of "Repetition"*⁵), 5.3 (fair copy of manuscript 5.2, i.e. the continuation of *A Little Contribution*)⁶ and finally manuscript 6 (*My dear Reader*)⁷.

There are no dates within the material in the folder titled *Polemik mod Heiberg* [Polemics against Heiberg], but it seems likely that Kierkegaard wrote much of it as an immediate reaction to Heiberg's critique, immediately after the publication of *Urania*, on December 15, 1843⁸. Other sporadic references indicate, however, that the material must have still been in elaboration in the late spring of 1844, a period in which Kierkegaard was writing *Prefaces*, under the pseudonym Nicolaus Notabene, which will be published simultaneously with *The Concept of Anxiety* by Vigilius Haufniensis, on June 17, 1844.

³ The first person that reorganized papers, books and materials left in Kierkegaard's apartment after his death was actually the Philosopher's nephew, Henrik Lund, who drew up a catalog in which those materials were ordered and described on the basis of their immediate discovery. Later, in 1865, the Philosopher's brother, Peter Christian, former bishop of Aalborg, gave a mandate to the editor Hans Peter Barfod – already his collaborator in the diocese of Aalborg – to examine, record and arrange the papers of Søren, which will be published only from 1869 (cf. Barfod, 1869). Barfod's work was later criticized because of the heavy interventions directly on the manuscripts, which had been corrected, deleted or even cut and pasted together. The aim and merit of the latest critical edition of *SKS* was, among other things, the work done on the manuscripts of the scattered papers, being traced back to the original writings of the philosopher, thanks to the help of the electron microscope, under the erasures and corrections of the editor. On the history of the publication of Kierkegaard's papers see e.g. CAPPELØRN-GARFF-KONDRUP, 1996; TULLBERG, 2009; WELTZER, 1936; NIELSEN, 2000; CAPPELØRN-HANNAY-KIRMMSE-POSSEN-RASMUSSEN-RUMBLE, 2011.

⁴ An English translation [with a different order and selection of texts, based on the earlier Danish edition of *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* (1908-48)] can be found in the *Supplement* section to KIERKEGAARD (2012), pp. 283-389.

⁵ *Et lille Indlæg af Constantin Constantius Forfatteren af "Gjentagelsen"*, *SKS* 15, 63-65; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, pp. 283-285.

⁶ Cfr. *SKS* 15, 66-83; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, pp. 300-319.

⁷ *Min kjære Læser!* *SKS* 15, 84-88; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, pp. 324 ff.

⁸ As it appears from the bookseller P.G. Philipsen's account book, Kierkegaard bought the volume immediately after its publication on 15 December 1843. The price was 2 rixtallers, 4 marks and 8 schillings, cf. ROHDE (1961), p. 118, cit. K 15, 73. In the auction catalogue of the Philosopher's personal library [now onwards "Ktl."], the book corresponds to no. U 57, cf. NUN - SCHREIBER - STEWART, 2016.

And it is in these two texts, in fact, that will be recast part of the unpublished material of *Little Contribution* or *Polemics against Heiberg*, while in the “Interlude” of *Philosophical Fragments* by Johannes Climacus – published on June 13 of the same year – will be described from a philosophical point of view the ontology of becoming which is at the basis of the same concept of “repetition”.

Certainly, Kierkegaard’s discontent was then to be further increased by a similar episode that had occurred a year earlier, after the publication of *Either–Or*, on February 20, 1843. Heiberg himself had published in his article *Literary Winter Croops [Litterær Vintersæd]* of 1 March⁹, a kind of introduction to the volume edited by Victor Eremita, in which he did not exactly use laudatory words against it¹⁰. He considered the second part of *Either–Or* to be artistically better, albeit with reservations, but in his view, the volume nevertheless had no real philosophical dignity.

Again, after the initial surprise, Kierkegaard’s reaction was one of disappointment and anger, and again the Philosopher’s papers were filled with sarcastic comments¹¹, but he had decided to respond in kind publicly through the pen of his pseudonym Victor

⁹ HEIBERG, 1842-1844, pp. 256-292; cf. Ktl. U 56.

¹⁰ HEIBERG, 1842-1844, pp. 288-289; Engl. trans. in STEWART (2020), pp. 334-337: “[...] The book must be called a monster, for it is already impressive in its size before one yet knows what spirit lives in it. [...] This great mass is a temporary annoyance, which one must disregard. [...] We no longer live in the Golden Age but, as it well known, in the Age of Iron [*Jern-Alderen*], and expressed more definitely in the Age of the Railroad [*Jernebane-Alderen*]; what kind of a curious anachronism is this then with such a *farrago* in an age, whose task it is to dominate the greatest distances in the shortest time? [...] One finds oneself thus for the first in *Either*, and here one does not find oneself for the first very well, for one notices that one has not nearly as much time as the author. It is an unpleasant, awkward walk when one constantly has the feeling of wanting to be ahead of the one who is holding one under the arm. One comes across many piquant reflections; some of them are perhaps even profound; one does not know for certain, for when one believes one has seen a point (which the author calls a “point”), one once again becomes disoriented. One becomes impatient about the fact that the author’s uncommon brilliance, learning and stylistic ability is not united with an ability for organization, which could let the ideas spring plastically forward. Everything seems dreamlike, indeterminate and vanishing”.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. JJ:165, in SKS 18, 193; KIERKEGAARD, 1967, No. 5697: “Heiberg remarked in his outcry over *Either–Or* that it was really hard to tell whether some of the observations in it were profound or not. Professor Heiberg and his consorts have the great advantage that what they say is known in advance to be profound. This is partly due to the fact that not a single primitive thought is to be found in them, or at least rarely. What they know they borrow from Hegel, and Hegel is indeed profound – ergo, what Professor Heiberg says is also profound. In this way every theological student who limits his sermon to nothing but quotations from the Bible becomes the most profound of all, for the Bible certainly is the most profound book of all”.

Eremita, in *Fædrelandet*, No. 1168, March 5, 1843, with an article entitled Thanksgiving to Mr. Professor Heiberg, in which he did not spare his old mentor some dry rails¹².

Kierkegaard's resentment must therefore be read in direct proportion to his respect for the image that in his younger years the Philosopher had created for himself of Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860), poet, playwright, literary critic and philosopher, man of the world and undisputed *arbiter elegantiae* of Danish culture. Heiberg had studied in Paris and Germany, had brought French theater to Copenhagen, and after meeting Hegel personally in Berlin in 1824, had become to all intents and purposes his Danish spokesman. In the Thirties he dominated the cultural life of Copenhagen, he had a chair of Logic, Aesthetics and Danish Literature at the newly founded Royal Military Academy of Copenhagen, from which he spread the Hegelian philosophy as the only antidote to an age of crisis.

Heiberg, the future director of Copenhagen's Royal Theater, had also married its first actress, Johanne Luise Pätges (1812-1890), thus making his living room the gathering center of the country's Golden Age (*Guldalder*) intelligentsia.

Kierkegaard had managed to enter the circle of Heiberg, sporadically attended the cultural salon and thanks to Heiberg had made his literary debut between 1834-36. He had published brilliant satirical-polemic articles in the newspaper of his mentor, the *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, the first three of which were signed with the pseudonym "B", and the public had even considered the Author of the articles the same Heiberg.

Given the relationship between Kierkegaard and Heiberg, for whom the philosopher had always had words of praise in his writings, the "attacks" on *Either-Or* and *Repetition* must have deeply wounded the young writer¹³.

2.

¹² *Taksigelse til Hr. Professor Heiberg*, in SKS 14, 55-57; KIERKEGAARD, 2009. See on the topic STEWART, 2015.

¹³ On the relationship between Kierkegaard and Heiberg see also STEWART, 2009.

As it is well-known, *Repetition* – subtitle: *A Venture in Experimenting Psychology* – was a droll [*snurrig*]¹⁴ “little book”¹⁵ published on October 16, 1843 (the same day as *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes de Silentio and *Three Upbuilding Discourses* by Søren Kierkegaard), which was meant to ironically illustrate, in an “inverted” way, the dynamics of the movement of repetition, through the parallel story of the two protagonists, a shrewd intellectual – “an esthetic schemer”¹⁶ – Constantin Constantius, and his protégé, a melancholic young poet, both in search of a possible existential “repetition”. The text, therefore, did not have a “didactic” [*docerende*] form: it illustrated in a romantic and vaguely spicy way (there was a love story involved), a concept that was in reality profoundly “serious” whose foundation was ultimately religious, transcendent.

In the first part of the work we find the story of the unhappy love of the young poet, shipwrecked because of his capricious melancholy, because “his love made him indescribably happy at the moment; as soon as he thought of time, he despaired”¹⁷, then the story of the Author’s stay in Berlin (evidently autobiographically traced on Kierkegaard’s second stay in Berlin in May 1843). The two stories were connected by some sporadic and lightning-fast theoretical interludes on the concept of repetition.

Initially it seemed that the writing had to stop here, he added a second part to the text (written, apparently, after *Fear and Trembling*), with a changed ending, probably after Kierkegaard had learned in July 1843, that the abandoned fiancée, Regine Olsen, had become engaged again¹⁸. Finally, there was a letter to the real reader of the book, in which the Author illustrated in a sense the moral of the story, clearly explaining how his young poet confidant had misrepresented the meaning of the repetition, clearly lacking

¹⁴ SKS 7, 239; KIERKEGAARD, 1992, p. 263.

¹⁵ SKS 15, 85; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, p. 305 *passim*.

¹⁶ SKS 7, 239; KIERKEGAARD, 1992, p. 263.

¹⁷ *Papirer* IV A 215; KIERKEGAARD, 1967, No. 5628. Once *Either–Or* had come out in February, before publishing *Repetition*, Kierkegaard had noticed that his work lacks “a narrative, which I did begin but omitted, just as Aladdin left a window incomplete. It was to be called *Unhappy Love*. It was to form a contrast to the Seducer. The hero in the story acted in exactly the same way as the Seducer, but behind it was depression. He was not unhappy because he could not get the girl he loved. Such heroes are beneath me. He had capacities comparable to the Seducer’s; he was certain of capturing her. He won her. As long as the struggle went on, he detected nothing; then she surrendered, he was loved with all the enthusiasm a young girl has – then he became unhappy, went into a depression, pulled back; he could struggle with the whole world but not with himself. His love made him indescribably happy at the moment; as soon as he thought of time, he Despaired”.

¹⁸ See H. Blicher, *Tekstredørelse til “Gjentagelsen”*, in K 4, 26.

“a deeper religious background”¹⁹. The little book (160 pages) stopped there, who had ears to understand could understand, the others would have been, if nothing else, “made aware of the religious”, according to a mode of communication dear to the Philosopher and that he would explain clearly only later in *On My Work As a Writer*, in 1851: “Without authority to make aware of the religious, the essentially Christian, is the category for my whole work as an author regarded as a totality”²⁰.

Of course, the Philosopher must have been aware of being *misunderstood*, as we said at the beginning, but he did not expect to be *corrected* by Heiberg. Yes, because Heiberg’s text not only misunderstood Constantin Constantius’ words, but in presenting them to the reading public, it also claimed to correct them. Heiberg accused the Author of failing to distinguish between the essentially different meanings of repetition in the sphere of nature and in the sphere of spirit, and in this way, he has come into the error “that repetition should play the same role in a future philosophy as ‘that which one by an error has called *mediation* plays in the present one”²¹. Heiberg accused Constantius of having had before his eyes above all the categories of nature and of having unduly extended the validity of the concept of repetition in the sphere of nature, outside its legitimate limits, without however considering, so to speak, its “transmutation” in the terms of the spirit, which for Heiberg was precisely the Hegelian mediation.

In a sense we can say that Heiberg understood Kierkegaard’s writing in the opposite way: if Kierkegaard in fact proposed “repetition” as a new category of the evolution of the spirit that alone would have allowed to escape from the immanence to which the necessitarian mediation was nailed, thanks to its foundation in transcendence (in virtue of freedom the man who, while remaining such, becomes spiritually “new man” through conversion), Heiberg had understood the Kierkegaardian repetition according to the movements always equal to themselves of nature, so only the “mediation” would be the true spiritual category capable of evolution and progression:

What is said here is very true and very beautiful, should one understand it with the right restrictions and remember that in repetition one will know, see and find something more

¹⁹ *Gjentagelsen*, SKS 4, 95; Engl. trans., p. 229.

²⁰ *Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed*, in SKS 13, 19; KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 12.

²¹ Cf. HEIBERG, 1843, p. 97; Engl. trans. in STEWART, 2015, p. 72.

and higher. He who has no sense of repetition is dead to life and therefore cannot feel the courage to begin again, either in the critical epochs offered to him here on earth or in the new condition after death. But what attracts of repetition is not repetition itself, rather what man makes of it, and here comes precisely the mediation to occupy the place that the Author wrongly thinks it should leave to the repetition. The latter, in its abstract, purely objective subsistence, without being mediated through subjectivity towards something higher than itself is, on the contrary, spiritless and boring. Who could want to repeat life completely unchanged from cradle to grave, to repeat all their mistakes and stumbles, every pain and misfortune? Of course, even joy and good fortune would not repeat themselves unchanged since precisely in repeating themselves unchanged, they would not be the same as before. That many pleasures in repeating themselves leave a far weaker impression the second time than the first is commonly recognized in the saying that when one has had a good time in a place, one should not return. The writer who simply sought repetition would therefore not have to repeat his trip to Berlin. On the contrary, the repetition of the reading of a book, of the enjoyment of a work of art can accentuate and in a certain way overcome the first impression, because one penetrates more into the object and takes possession of it inwardly. But in this way it is not in the repetition itself that what is pleasant is to be sought, but in what the repetition entails, that is, what man himself makes of it²².

The reason for this misunderstanding, however, was for the Kierkegaard/Constantin Constantius of the *Little Contribution* clear: Heiberg had not read the book to the end-first thing-and in fact, the Philosopher noted, the quotes from his work in the review never went beyond page 73,²³ while what really mattered was to be found in the second part of the work, i.e. after page 73, as well as in the final letter to “the real reader of the book”. Secondly, Heiberg was played, so to speak, by indirect communication, as the good professor he was, so what is said corresponds literally to what is said, without any ironic reversal.

Because it was obvious, Kierkegaard wanted to imply, that Constantin Constantius' way of looking for repetition was misleading, the protagonist himself said: “I am unable to make a religious movement; it is contrary to my nature²⁴.”

Thus, Constantin Constantius was forced to “explain the joke”, not least because of the interlocutor's lack of ironic elasticity. But it must be said that the way he did it is extremely interesting: indeed, the *Little Contribution* is enlightening towards the category of repetition. In other words, Constantius elaborated an explanation – perhaps ironic in

²² HEIBERG, 1843, pp. 100-102.

²³ Of *Repetition* in the edition of SKS 4; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, p. 204.

²⁴ SKS 4, 57; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, p. 187.

its reference to Hegelian phenomenology? – that illustrated the “activity” of the concept of repetition in the sphere of individual freedom:

When applied in the sphere of individual freedom, the concept of repetition has a history, inasmuch as freedom passes through several stages in order to attain itself. (a) Freedom is first qualified as desire [*Lyst*] or as being in desire. What it now fears is repetition, for it seems as if repetition has a magic power to keep freedom captive once it has tricked it into its power. But despite all of desire’s ingenuity, repetition appears. Freedom in desire despairs. Simultaneously freedom appears in a higher form, (b) Freedom qualified as sagacity. As yet, freedom has only a finite relation to its object and is qualified only esthetically ambiguously. [...] But since freedom qualified as sagacity is only finitely qualified, repetition must appear again, namely, repetition of the trickery by which sagacity wants to fool repetition and make it into something else. Sagacity despairs. (c) Now freedom breaks forth in its highest form, in which it is qualified in relation to itself. Here everything is reversed, and the very opposite of the first standpoint appears. Now freedom’s supreme interest is precisely to bring about repetition, and its only fear is that variation would have the power to disturb its eternal nature. Here emerges the issue: Is repetition possible? Freedom itself is now the repetition. [...] Consequently, what freedom fears here is not repetition but variation; [...] If this will to repetition is stoicism, then it contradicts itself and thereby ends in destroying itself in order to affirm repetition in that way, which is the same as throwing a thing away in order to hide it most securely. When stoicism has stepped aside, only the religious movement remains as the true expression for repetition and with the passionate eloquence of concerned freedom proclaims its presence in the conflict. What is developed under (c) was what I wanted to set forth in *Repetition*, but not in a scientific-scholarly way, still less in a scientific-scholarly way in the sense that every teller in our philosophical bank could count 1, 2, 3. I wanted to depict and make visible psychologically and esthetically; in the Greek sense, I wanted to let the concept come into being in the individuality and the situation, working itself forward through all sorts of misunderstandings. In order that their inclusion would be admissible, these misunderstandings had to legitimize themselves as either witty or intriguing situations, or as nuanced moods, or as ironic oddities. I believed that I owed it to my reader and myself to save my soul from giving instruction, seriously and with the pomposity of a parish clerk, on what everyone must be presumed to know. Thus repetition (a) and (b) constantly make fun of repetition (c)²⁵

Here, then, is the movement of repetition explained like in a handbook for the use of Professor Heiberg. But then Kierkegaard must have reconsidered, as if to say not only that explaining the joke cancels the joke itself, but above all, that explaining it cancels its maieutic function, and this is more serious, because its function is nullified.

The Philosopher therefore decided not to publish his *Little Contribution* at all, but when, on February 1, 1844, Heiberg issued a *Postface to Urania*²⁶, in which he described his Yearbook as a New Year’s gift “intended for the aesthetically educated public”,

²⁵ *Polemik mod Heiberg*, SKS 15, 66-67; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, pp. 302-303.

²⁶ HEIBERG, 1844.

Kierkegaard conceived the idea of pouring some of the material from the *Little Contribution* into two writings he was working on at the time, *Prefaces* and *The Concept of Anxiety*.

The year 1844 is for the Philosopher a time of feverish activity, in a letter to his brother Peter Christian in May, he writes that he is working “with ever greater horsepower”²⁷. On February 24 he had delivered his *Dimissory Sermon*²⁸ at the Trinitatis Kirke for the end of the pastoral seminar, while he was probably working on the polemical text of the *Post-Scriptum to Either–Or*, which was never published²⁹. Around the first of March he seems to have started working on *Philosophical Fragments*. In April–May he rewrites in fair copy and concludes *The Concept of Anxiety* and on May 20 he sends to the printer *Three Upbuilding Discourses*. In *Prefaces VII*, Kierkegaard inserts a first draft of a preface never used for *The Concept of Anxiety*³⁰, while in *Prefaces I, III* and especially *IV* we find several materials coming from the *Little Contribution*. More interesting, however, is a footnote in *The Concept of Anxiety*³¹, in which the controversy is recalled on the occasion of the discussion of sin as not belonging to the sphere of ethics, for which ethics, it is said, wrecks on the concept of sin through repentance. In this context the category of “repetition” in its religious nature emerged precisely.

Moreover, in this case a theoretical explanation did not conflict with the nature of the writing, which, as Kierkegaard will retrospectively say through the pen of Johannes Climacus, “it differs essentially from the other pseudonymous works in that its form is direct and even somewhat didactic [*docerende*]³².”

In his work *Fear and Trembling* (Copenhagen: 1843). Johannes de Silentio makes several observations concerning this point. In this book, the author several times allows the desired ideality of esthetics to be shipwrecked on the required ideality of ethics, in order through these collisions to bring to light the religious ideality as the ideality that precisely is the ideality of actuality, and therefore just as desirable as that of esthetics and not as impossible as the ideality of ethics. This is accomplished in such a way that the religious ideality breaks forth in the dialectical leap and in the positive mood – “Behold all things have become new” [II Cor., 5, 17] as well as in the negative mood

²⁷ SKS 28, 28; KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 170.

²⁸ Papir 306, SKS 27, 297-311.

²⁹ KIERKEGAARD, 1987, pp. 414-429; *Papirer IV B* 59.

³⁰ Cf. K 4, 540-562.

³¹ It is interesting to notice that Deleuze described this footnote as a “very important text” (DELEUZE, 1968, p. 126; Engl. transl. 2001, p. 315).

³² SKS 7, 245; KIERKEGAARD, 1992, pp. 269-270.

that is the passion of the absurd to which the concept “repetition” corresponds. Either all of existence [*Tilværelsen*] comes to an end in the demand of ethics, or the condition is provided and the whole of life and of existence begins anew, not through an immanent continuity with the former existence, which is a contradiction, but through a transcendence. This transcendence separates repetition from the former existence [...] With regard to this category, one may consult *Repetition* by Constantin Constantius (Copenhagen 1843). This is no doubt a witty book, as the author also intended it to be. To my knowledge, he is indeed the first to have a lively understanding of “repetition” and to have allowed the pregnancy of the concept to be seen in the explanation of the relation of the ethical and the Christian, by directing attention to the invisible point and to the *discrimen rerum* [turning point] where one science breaks against another until a new science comes to light. But what he has discovered he has concealed again by arraying the concept in the jest of an analogous conception. What has motivated him to do this is difficult to say, or more correctly, difficult to understand. He himself mentions that he writes in this manner so “that the heretics would not understand him”. Since he wanted to occupy himself with repetition only esthetically and psychologically, everything had to be arranged humorously so as to bring about the impression that the word in one instant means everything and in the next instant the most insignificant of things, and the transition, or rather the constant falling down from the clouds, is motivated by its farcical opposite. In the meantime, he has stated the whole matter very precisely on page 34: “repetition is the interest [*Interesse*] of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics comes to grief; repetition is the watchword [*Løsnest*] in every ethical view; repetition is *conditio sine qua non* for every issue of dogmatics”. The first statement has reference to the thesis that metaphysics as such is disinterested, something that Kant had said about esthetics. As soon as interest steps forth, metaphysics steps aside. For this reason, the word is italicized. In actuality, the whole interest of subjectivity steps forth, and now metaphysics runs aground. If repetition is not posited, ethics becomes a binding power. No doubt it is for this reason that the author states that repetition is the watchword in every ethical view. If repetition is not posited, dogmatics cannot exist at all, for repetition begins in faith, and faith is the organ for issues of dogma. In the realm of nature, repetition is present in its immovable necessity. In the realm of the spirit, the task is not to wrest a change from repetition or to find oneself moderately comfortable during the repetition, as if spirit stood only in an external relation to the repetition of spirit. [...] but to transform repetition into something inward, into freedom’s own task, into its highest interest, so that while everything else changes, it can actually realize repetition. At this point the finite spirit despairs. This is something Constantin has suggested by stepping aside himself and by allowing repetition to break forth in the young man by virtue of the religious. For this reason, Constantin mentions several times that repetition is a religious category, too transcendent for him, that it is the movement by virtue of the absurd, and on page 142 it is further stated that eternity is the true repetition. All of this Professor Heiberg failed to notice. Instead, through his learning, which like his *New Year’s Gift* is superbly elegant and neat, he kindly wished to help this work [*Repetition*] to become a tasteful and elegant triviality by pompously bringing the matter to the point where Constantin begins, or, to recall a recent work, by bringing the matter to the point where the esthete in *Either–Or* had brought it in *The Rotation of Crops*. If Constantin had actually felt himself flattered by enjoying the singular honor of having been brought into such undeniably select company in this manner, he must, in my opinion, since he wrote the book, have gone stark mad. But if, on the other hand, an author such as he, writing to be misunderstood, forgot himself and did not have ataraxia enough to count it to his credit that Professor Heiberg had failed to understand him, he must again be stark mad.

This is something I need not fear, since the circumstance that hitherto he has made no reply to Professor Heiberg indicates sufficiently that he understands himself³³.

In order to fully understand, however, what Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms write in explanation of the movement of repetition, we must wait for Johannes Climacus and his *Philosophical Fragments*, if it is true that – as Kierkegaard/Climacus himself will tell us in 1846 – the writings of pseudonyms “constitute elements in the realization of the idea” that he had; they represent “the relation between Esau and Jacob, that the larger shall serve the smaller”, thus “the large pseudonymous books serve my *Fragments*”³⁴. Although then, perhaps fearful of having gone too far, the Philosopher retraces his steps and corrects himself: “But I do not want to be so presumptuous as to say this, since I prefer to say that while the books have their own significance, they also have significance for my little fragment of production”³⁵. If repetition, in the homonymous work of 1843, was in fact presented in its peculiarity with respect to the categories of memory and hope, for which it was said that “hope is a beckoning fruit that does not satisfy; recollection is petty travel money that does not satisfy; but repetition is the daily bread that satisfies with blessing”³⁶, now, having reread the three categories in the light of the ontology of becoming presented in the *Interlude of Philosophical Fragments*, the meaning of the movement of recovery became comprehensible, the only one able to “explain the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus”³⁷. That is, to explain the “having become actual” that substantiates what is defined as past, “historical”, in the light of the change from possibility (a relative non-being) to reality, therefore a change in which no necessity is contemplated (a “free” movement), founded precisely the same possibility of recovering the past – what is no longer –, in a constitution of meaning that also contemplates the future. This is precisely through repetition or “retaking” (*at gjentage*, lit. “to repeat” is a compound of *at tage*, “to take”, and *igjen*, “again”). If faith is the organ that allows us to see what we cannot see, therefore to grasp the “relative negative” of the past (its current

³³ SKS 4, 324-327; KIERKEGAARD, 1980, pp. 17-19.

³⁴ SKS 7, 245; KIERKEGAARD, 1992, p. 269.

³⁵ SKS 7, 245; KIERKEGAARD, 1992, p. 269.

³⁶ SKS 4, 10; KIERKEGAARD, 1983, p. 132.

³⁷ SKS 4, 25; KIERKEGAARD, 1983. Joakim Garff writes about Johannes Climacus author of *Fragments*, that “you would almost think he had read Constantin Constantius and taken note of it”, cf. GARFF, 1995, p. 180.

“no longer being”, but also its “not yet having been”), and to believe that what has been can continue to be in the present and future, it is only through faith that I can perform the movement of repetition. The change that takes place in sinful man in the moment of conversion, that is, that takes place in the “moment”, is therefore similar to that from non-being to being (*Tilblivelse*), Climacus explained, that is, that of birth, but of a birth thanks to which man comes into the world in a certain sense for the second time³⁸.

Reread in the light of these categories, it is evident that *Repetition* of 1843 was a joke, in which Heiberg had fallen for in full: those who do not understand the joke do not laugh, and his response was in fact completely serious, a slap on the wrist and a correction. However, not even Kierkegaard lent himself to the game, and on the other hand he himself said that he could only joke “in all earnestness”³⁹.

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³⁸ I wrote a monograph in Italian on this topic, cf. BASSO (2019).

³⁹ *SKS* 4, 217; KIERKEGAARD, 1985, p. 8.

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