

A Rhetorical Poetics of Søren Kierkegaard: Pseudonymity, Polyphony, and Fictionality

Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) uses various literary devices and genres throughout his authorship. The study of Kierkegaard's literary art has a long history, especially in his native Denmark (Billeskov Jansen 1951; Henriksen 1954). Yet some scholars claim that Kierkegaard never wrote any novels (Mooney 2018; Ziolkowski 2018). This debate seems to revolve around the genre or domain of writings, but it fails to address how Kierkegaard uses literary means, also in his main philosophical treatises.

The main aim of this ongoing study is to read Kierkegaard as a literary author, or a philosopher-novelist in Quinton's (1997) terms. Three literary devices that will be discussed throughout the study are pseudonymity, polyphony, and fictionality. Pseudonymity is an age-old problem that has intrigued readers of Kierkegaard since his days. Kierkegaard does not use pseudonymity in its common sense (to hide the real author) but to divide his oeuvre into various separate authorships (Westfall 2007). Meanwhile, many of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are closer to fictional characters or editors than pen names (Pattison 2019). Taking these reformulations as a point of departure, this study approaches the fictionality of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. This study, drawing on the rhetoric of fictionality, employs the definition of fictionality as an intentionally signaled communicated invention (Gjerlevsen / Nielsen 2020; Walsh 2007). Inventedness is signaled paratextually (Genette 1997; Jacobsen 2022). For instance, pseudonyms' names are explicitly invented. Moreover, pseudonyms are presented as fictional characters. Each character presents their life-view (*Livs-Anskuelse*), a truthful way of living, in a constant dialogue with other pseudonymous characters. Here, I approach pseudonymity as polyphony in Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) sense, as Kierkegaard does not prefer any life-view over another. Bakhtin was a keen reader of Kierkegaard, although he needed to conceal any references to a Christian thinker in the Stalin era (Ringgaard Lorensen 2014). Life-views are tested through various trials and suffering, which makes these depictions resemble *Bildungsroman* (Garff 2006). Here, I mainly focus on *Repetition* and *Stages on Life's Way*. Pseudonyms also perplex the authority. By means of fictionality, pseudonyms allow Kierkegaard to distance himself from the authorial position and pretend to be only a reader, as he does in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In his posthumous autobiography, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard reinterprets his pseudonymity in such a strict manner that it hardly leaves room for polyphony, yet adds some new layers of fictionality.

As a result, the dissertation constructs Kierkegaard's rhetorical poetics. By contributing to the framework of rhetorical poetics (Phelan 2017), this study is interested in how and with what effects Kierkegaard employs fictionality and pseudonymity in his communication to the reader. Kierkegaard could have delivered similar ideas without these devices, but with a totally different effect. In practice, this study reads Kierkegaard through major theorists of narrative studies: Gérard Genette (narrative levels, paratextuality), Mikhail Bakhtin (polyphony, *Bildungsroman*), and James

Phelan (rhetorical poetics). Hence, the study will argue that Kierkegaard not only illuminates but also fruitfully challenges many approaches in narrative studies.

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