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Pointing Fingers at the Genius: Reading Brandes Reading Kierkegaard

Some ten years after the 1877 publication of Georg Brandes's first major biography, *Kierkegaard. A Critical Exposition in Outline*, the author made it clear in a letter to Friedrich Nietzsche that the book was not just a historical record of the life and the work of the great philosopher. *Kierkegaard*, Brandes confides:

gives no adequate idea of [Kierkegaard's] genius, as it is a sort of polemical pamphlet, written to curb his influence. But in a psychological respect it is, I think, the most subtle thing I have published.¹

Under the guise of biographical document, *Kierkegaard* was in fact a hostile act, Brandes here openly admits, and the target was not mainly Kierkegaard but the people who had taken him into exegetic custody, namely the theologians. By reading Kierkegaard "critically," it was Brandes intention to snatch from them their most dangerous weapon and put him amongst Brandes's own ranks of the free-thinking, staging this fight as a drama about the freedom of modernity vs. the fetters of tradition. This is standard Brandes procedure, however, so what is supposed to be so "subtle" about it?

¹ Modified translation of A. G. Chater's translation in Georg Brandes, *Friedrich Nietzsche*. London: 1914, pp. 69-70.

The epigraph of the biography gives a hint. It is a quotation from the epigraph of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843) who, in turn, had taken it from German critic J. G. Hamann (1730-88) and it goes as follows: "Was Tarquinius Superbus in seinem Garten mit den Mohnköpfen sprach, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote." What it alludes to is the story about Tarquinius Superbus, King of Rome in 600 B.C., whose son, after having conquered the town of Gabii, now sent a messenger to his father for advice on how to keep the town. Not trusting the messenger, Tarquinius did not respond, but led him instead into the garden where he beheaded the flowers of the greatest poppies with his cane. The messenger, blind to the significance of this gesture, conveyed it to the King's son who understood his father's silent message and beheaded accordingly the greatest and most influential people in Gabii.

In the context of Kierkegaard and *Fear and Trembling*, the story about Tarquinius could be seen as a self-portrait of Kierkegaard, whose mistrust of language and great faith in action had placed him in an awkward position as an author. It was a position, however, which Kierkegaard had managed to pull himself out of with his use of "indirect communication" – a strategy of pointing to, rather than directly aiming at, what he meant to say. One must assume that Brandes got the message on both levels, for as a close reading of his book will show, the tributary quotation of Kierkegaard on the title page is not an acknowledgement on Brandes's part of subjugation to his predecessor. Rather, in *Kierkegaard* Brandes pulls apart his subject by subtly using Kierkegaard's own stylistic tools every step of the way. Brandes's main technique in *Kierkegaard* is to construct the character of his personality as three different "types," translating the Kierkegaardian triad of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious into three stages of Kierkegaard's own development from what I will call "the Genius" to "the Pervert" and finally "the Agitator." To flesh out these three manifestations of Kierkegaard's personal progression, Brandes further imitates Kierkegaard's style when he combines theoretical reflections with persuasive rhetoric in an impressive double Dutch that goes beyond the traditional limits of critical investigation and exposition.

The Genius

A quick glance at *Kierkegaard. A Critical Exposition in Outline* might give the reader the false impression that Brandes here confesses to the methodical positivism which French critic – and Brandes’s idol – Hippolyte Taine (1828-93) had seen fit to explain the phenomenon of “literature.” For Taine, literary works were simply the outer manifestations of the inner lives of poets, whose genius could be reduced to a single “dominant quality” as the flower of a particular environment, at a particular time and place in the world. The historical approach to literature, built on a framework of logic and biology, was an attempt on Taine’s behalf to bring down literary criticism from its spiritual pedestal in order to bring up the literary critic to the standards of other scientists.

To knock Kierkegaard off the pedestal on which the idolizing theologians had placed him was precisely Brandes’s motive for doing a “critical” study of Kierkegaard, grounded in scientific, psychological analysis rather than witless worshipping. In the process of doing so, Brandes does sprinkle a decent amount of climatic and botanical metaphors à la Taine over his exposition – e.g. when Brandes explains little Søren’s melancholy as an inherited dysfunction, going back to his father who, in turn, had caught it under the rainy skies and on the desolate moors of Jutland. The strict Christian upbringing and the times’ infatuation with German idealism accentuated the claustrophobic and melancholic tendencies in young Søren who throughout his formative years was caught in a state of alienation, not able to rebel against his father nor his religion.

However, Brandes takes issue with Taine in his description of the genius of Kierkegaard. His originality, Brandes explains, resists that unifying “dominant quality” which Taine had held to be present in every great mind: “His [Kierkegaard’s] personality, is too great and his work too heterogeneous to put him on one formula.”² Already in his

² Georg Brandes, “Kierkegaard. En Kritisk fremstilling i Grundrids” in: *Samlede Skrifter*, København: Gyldendal, 1900 (1877), vol. xx, p. 361.

doctoral thesis from 1871, *Contemporary French Aesthetics*, had Brandes criticized Taine for his obsession with formulas and systems. Acknowledging Taine's fundamental role in turning the flimsy genre of literary criticism into a science, Brandes was here nevertheless worried that a purely scientific approach to literature might reduce it to a mere example of pre-existing laws, external to literature itself. No work and no writer, let alone a whole nation, could be epitomized to one dominant psychological trait, Brandes argued, leaning instead toward the painstaking questioning and artistic portraiture that had guided the other great French critic, Sainte-Beuve (1804-69), in his inquiries. He therefore suggested that the literary critic should handle the object of his study more gently and supplement the enlightening, but ham-fisted systematizations with a creative element in a give-and-take relationship between work, writer and critic. In Brandes, criticism goes from passive to creative accounting – that is, to an activity that comes very close to that of literature itself:

This is where scientific aesthetics becomes critical *art*. Here, we have no preconceived method, [as] all means are valid. Here, you will have to penetrate your subject from every facet it exposes, form your perceptions, your method, indeed: your style, according to the subject, the vision assisting when concepts are not enough, speaking to the reader's imagination, to his memories, his senses...³

Forming his method and style according to his subject and appealing to the reader's imagination and senses is precisely Brandes's line of action in *Kierkegaard*. Before starting the biography proper, Brandes on the opening pages paints a vivid portrait of the daily life of the philosopher as it would have appeared to the people surrounding him, and Brandes includes in this portrait a flashback from his own life: When, as a child he had not pulled down the legs of his trousers evenly, little Georg's

³ Georg Brandes, "Den franske Æstetik i vore Dage," in: *Samlede Skrifter*, København, 1903 (1871), vol. 13, p. 155.

nanny would warn him with a: “Søren Kierkegaard!” A light introduction to a weighty philosopher, no doubt, but for Brandes the suggestive portraits and anecdotes are just as important factors in the representation of Kierkegaard as is the chronological account of historical facts. For the point of the word painting is to show that appearances deceive when it comes to this particular genius, as Brandes states in his concluding remark: “as weird and monotonous it would have looked from the outside, [Kierkegaard’s life] from the inside was one of the most agitated lives ever lived in Denmark.”⁴ The autobiographical anecdote shows another instance of the times’ misconception of Kierkegaard whose trousers had made him more famous than his philosophy amongst the public. In this way, Brandes lets his intentions be known in the margins of his biography: This is a critic who is not interested in any received ideas about Kierkegaard, nor his trousers. Instead, he wants to give a psychological portrait of the *real* Kierkegaard, a picture of what his life looked like from within, and to that end Brandes throughout the biography makes diligent use of Hans Peter Barfod’s edition of Kierkegaard’s journals and private papers.

However, the opening of *Kierkegaard* also gets its authenticity from another source, because it is a direct adaptation of one of Kierkegaard’s own literary strategies. As Brandes will later observe, Kierkegaard would get inspiration from his daily human showers, picking up the current jargon in the street in order to dissect them with his sharp pen at night and use them as a stepping-stone to his loftier notions. In the same way, Brandes uses the talk of the town to advance his own idea of exposing the misconception that Kierkegaard has suffered – a misconception which Brandes saw manifested not only in public gossip but also in the way theologians had read and positioned Kierkegaard in their own camp. If the public had soiled Kierkegaard’s name by dragging him through the mud of gossip, the theologians had soiled his intellectual reputation by claiming him to be nothing but a religious thinker, according to Brandes, and his biography is an attempt to release Kierkegaard from the chatter of the public as well as from the grip of

⁴ Brandes, “Kierkegaard,” p. 238.

the theologians by grounding his study in psychological analysis, not in religion nor any other uncritically received ideas.

In his account of Kierkegaard's early, pseudonymous production, Brandes argues that it was in fact Kierkegaard's own fault that he should suffer such misreadings, because his style is just as duplicitous as his personality. For Kierkegaard's way of relating to the world around him was characterized by two contradictory attitudes, Brandes explains, namely those of "reverence and contempt."⁵ This contradictory mindset of Kierkegaard shines through in his style, not only by the fact that they were published under pseudonyms, but also in the way they mixed different genres, so it was impossible to know exactly what they were – let alone what they meant. However, it is precisely this "heterogeneity of diction"⁶ that for Brandes distinguishes Kierkegaard's early work, the so-called "aesthetic" production. With the publication of *Either/Or* (1843), Brandes exults, Kierkegaard inaugurated in Danish literature "a whole new genre of books,"⁷ and he goes on to describe the innovative style of Kierkegaard as constituting:

not only a new 'literature within literature,' but also a language within language, a language whose style was far removed from that of monumental serenity or national purity, an excited, overloaded, detailed, and tortuous style ... where everything is passion – a body of language where everything is pulse.⁸

The ingenuity of Kierkegaard's style, in other words, is its plurality of styles whose main stylistic device is that of emphasis through contrast. As an example Brandes presents a paragraph from "The Seducer's Diary." Here, the narrator Johannes composes his image of women firstly by giving a poetic account of the variety of womanly charms. Each woman possesses her particular attribute according to Johannes the Seducer, and he reels off these attributes one by one as follows: "the

⁵ Ibid. p. 29.

⁶ Georg Brandes, "Kierkegaard," p. 311-12.

⁷ Ibid. p. 308.

⁸ Ibid. p. 310.

cheerful smile, the roguish glance, the yearning eye, the tilted head, the frolicsome disposition, the quiet sadness, the profound presentiment, the unshriven emotions, the beckoning brow, the questioning lips...etc.”⁹ For almost half a page the seducer continues his list of particular beauties, when suddenly in the following paragraph he juxtaposes these *poetic* expressions of womanly beauty with a *philosophical* determination of woman’s essential quality as “being-for-other.” By constantly moving from one genre to another – from the poetically beautiful “flowery path” to the sublimely awe-inspiring “abyss of philosophical depth”¹⁰ – Kierkegaard creates a style that cannot be placed in any existing categories. Brandes calls this hybrid an “in-between style” which not only combines poetic images with philosophical abstractions, but also transgresses the boundary between ‘high’ and ‘low’:

The style is here a style which is rarely *spoken* as lines usually are, and rarely *written* as a book usually is; it is an in-between style, almost like the epistolary form which owns the intimacy and pith of the spoken language, and the complicated sentence structure and organization of the written. It therefore a virtuoso style which plays with language, performs tricks with words, ties them in knots, and fillets them in bows.

In contrast to contemporary European prose, it appeals to the ear rather than to the eye, [as] it imitates some rhythm of singing oration that flatters the auditory senses. Kierkegaard does not carve language into a statue of stone, he transforms it into an infinite panorama, accompanied by music, which passes almost too quickly before the eye.¹¹

Brandes seems to contradict himself when he states at first that Kierkegaard’s style “appeals to the ear rather than to the eye,” and then

⁹ Quoted from Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, ed. and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 428.

¹⁰ Brandes, *Kierkegaard*, p. 312.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 310.

concludes the description of the effect of Kierkegaard's text as that of a "panorama," where the reader is turned into a spectator. However, the point Brandes wants to make is that Kierkegaard in contrast to contemporary realistic novels, models his language on music rather than on a mimetic representation of the world. Appealing more to the musical than the referential aspect of language, Kierkegaard's text becomes sensuous and alive, turning the stable "statue" of meaning of realistic novels into a metonymic string of pearls that slowly unfolds without settling into one single image. The use of several genres accentuate this lively restlessness of the Kierkegaardian text which resists subsumption under the traditional rules of genre.

So, unlike the traditional demand for unity of style, Brandes credits Kierkegaard for bringing new life to Danish literature by releasing it from the conventional genres. This liberation of language constitutes the *genius* of Kierkegaard, and it is this part of Kierkegaard that Brandes in turn wants to give air. Spending no less than a whole chapter (chapter 19) on describing Kierkegaard's style, Brandes not only presents us with an accurate description of a dimension of Kierkegaard's philosophy which hitherto had been completely overlooked, he also imitates the master of style in these descriptions which takes on more of the form of a lyrical eulogy than an argumentative treatise. Over the following next ten pages, Brandes reels off the many particular attributes of Kierkegaard's style in a breathless exhalation that abuses not only the conventional rules of grammar but also the Tainian norm of critical objectivity. Quoting extensively from Kierkegaard's texts as evidence of his brilliance, Brandes's critical portrait takes the form of a mosaic – or a panorama – of Kierkegaard's style, building his "argument" as a string of linguistic images rather than grounding them in scientific observations, thus imitating "the passionate style"¹² which Brandes saw as Kierkegaard's great contribution not only to Danish literature, but also to Danish civilization.

¹² Ibid.

The Pervert

The euphoric praise of Kierkegaard cools off, however, when Brandes reaches the next stage of Kierkegaard's development. For despite Kierkegaard's anarchistic tendencies in style, when it comes to the matter of content he is hopelessly "backward-looking," Brandes mourns, and this perversity made him blind to the advantages of the new progress made by English and French positivist thinking. As an example of his perversity, Brandes puts forth Kierkegaard's concept of "the singular individual" ("den Enkelte"). Here, Kierkegaard made a great discovery for modern philosophy, Brandes admits, but he betrayed his great insight into the constitution of the subject by translating it back into the old-fashioned category of "the Christian." However, Brandes can relate this flaw in Kierkegaard's character to the contradictory nature that was established in his childhood and which now expresses itself in the arbitrary forms of reverence of the past (tradition) and contempt for the present (the "new" currents). Kierkegaard's religious conviction was, in other words, a result of his peculiar upbringing and his peculiar psychological disposition, the "incurable mental derangement"¹³ that split him in two. Brandes then devotes the next couple of chapters (chapters 20-22) to a demonstration of how this is manifested in the so-called "ethical works" of the Kierkegaardian oeuvre where Kierkegaard's style is impaired by the absurd ideas he wants to convey.

Brandes's main example of Kierkegaard's defects on this "ethical" stage is the anti-Hegelian work, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). In order to argue for the validity of his own ideas about the paradox of Christian faith, Kierkegaard's style disintegrates into outright "gibberish," according to his Hegel-friendly critic, for instead of arguing his case against Hegel in a proper philosophical manner, he merely persuades the reader of his conviction with alluring images and mischievous pranks.¹⁴ This is the case when Kierkegaard puts Hegel on

¹³ Ibid. 285.

¹⁴ "If one took a closer look at the Kierkegaardian inquiries and expositions...then

par with the fictitious character of Per Degn from Holberg's comedy and equals the validity of his philosophy with that of a nursery rhyme: "ein, zwei, drei, kokolorum."¹⁵ As charming as this style may seem, Brandes warns the reader, "it is not the right instrument with which one can grasp truth," and he goes on to expose the disproportion between Kierkegaard's religious ideas and the ostentatious representation in which he dresses them.

So, whereas Brandes in the first part of his biography, praised Kierkegaard for his inventive "in-between style", he now reprimands Kierkegaard for confusing the genres. The difference is, according to Brandes, that Kierkegaard's passions in his ethical works are subsumed to the service of moral idealism, which renders his style "mannered,"¹⁶ in contrast to the early aesthetic works where the passions got a free reign and his style therefore had a liberating effect. This impairment in style is due to the imbalance between mind and body in Kierkegaard's life, Brandes argues, because he at this stage has let the reverent, backward-looking side take over and his passions – repressed and restrained from their natural outlet – now go to his head like "an inflammation of his mind."¹⁷ Brandes sees it as his duty to reveal the hideous psychological truth behind the alluring and mischievous stylistic images in the Kierkegaardian text, showing how its heterogeneous diction is but the artistic expression of a lyrical virus of the brain.

It is by exposing this supposed sickness of Kierkegaard's mind that Brandes hoped to "curb his influence," so that it does not spread via Kierkegaard's persuasive rhetoric, seducing his readers into Christianity. However, the way Brandes exposes the truth about Kierkegaard's rhetoric is by making use of the exact same rhetorical devices that he rebukes Kierkegaard for employing: Firstly, Brandes dismisses Kierkegaard's quite sophisticated ideas of the paradox by way of ridicule, calling it a "superstition" on par with past times' belief in

one would see that they are more like *images* than *arguments*. And an argument, as everybody knows, does not have the same effect as an example."

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 326.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 289.

werewolves¹⁸ - that is, as naive and ridiculous as a nursery rhyme. Then, when Brandes wants to expose Kierkegaard's literary tricks as mere rhetoric with no substance, Brandes himself makes use of one of the most alluring images in Western philosophy:

Taking off from *Either/Or*'s introductory quote from English critic and poet Edward Young – “Is reason alone baptized, Are the passions pagans” – Brandes explicates Kierkegaard's two main tendencies, reverence and contempt, with the allusion to Plato's famous allegory from *Phaedrus*. Here, Plato had shown the dualistic division of man through the image of a charioteer and his two horses, where the charioteer is having a hard time steering his wheels, as his two horses - one is black and the other is white – are depicted as precise opposites. While the black horse (representing the human impulse in man) is unruly and in its pursuits of worldly pleasures threatens to lead the charioteer astray, the white horse (representing the divine impulses) nobly “reminds” the charioteer of his otherworldly duties and moves him to temperance. Ultimately, the allegory provides Plato with a model of self-mastery when in the end the charioteer gains control over the black horse and with a tight grip of the reins lets the white one lead his way.

In Brandes's text, however, the Platonic image is turned upon itself, as Brandes turns the tables of traditional values. What he accordingly deems “good” in Kierkegaard's work is the early, “aesthetic” productions where Kierkegaard gives his passions – that is, his black horse – a free reign. In contrast to Kierkegaard, other great writers like Goethe, Hegel, Shelley, and Mill prospectively do not portray passions in the same liberal manner but have instead “hitched them to the triumphant chariot of spirit as magnificent, but obedient horses.”¹⁹ However, where Kierkegaard supercedes his contemporaries in style, he fails to match them on an intellectual level. For in opposition to Goethe & Co. Kierkegaard has “baptized” his intellect, Brandes writes with allusion to the quotation of Young, obstinately insisting on ideas that

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 327.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 306.

science has long proven invalid. What Brandes's deems "bad" in Kierkegaard, then, is that he in his later philosophical and religious works hinges his style to the chariot of morality and that this combination makes his style unnatural and "stiff-legged,"²⁰ giving the diction of the texts "a peculiarly slouching gait."²¹ So what disqualifies Kierkegaard in Brandes's picture is that the "free style" of his aesthetic works did not lead to free-thinking, and that Kierkegaard thereby inscribes himself in the metaphysical tradition he wanted to supercede.

However, also Brandes has a hard time holding his horses. Despite his wish to liberate Kierkegaard from the misconceptions he had suffered in the hands of the theologians and the public, Brandes falls back into this tradition of misreadings as he does not give Kierkegaard's sophisticated thoughts on religion an unprejudiced treatment but simply rejects it as "old-fashioned superstition." Rather, Brandes re-enforces the image of Kierkegaard as a poor wretch, calling his undeniable wit of the kind "you find among hunchbacks, Court jesters, and other weak and often molested creatures."²² However, it is not only on a representational level that Brandes fails to meet his designated plans, his efforts also fall short on a methodological level. Despite Brandes's intentions to treat his object of study with more scrutiny and care than Taine had done, meeting the writer and his works with no "preconceived method" in mind in order to give art what is its own, Brandes nevertheless subjugates Kierkegaard and his work to a pre-given criteria, namely that of modernity's steady gait toward ever greater freedom. Obviously, Brandes rides his own chariot – the chariot of Modern Progress – and having stripped Kierkegaard of his traditional values, Brandes in the last pages of the biography's now makes room for him in this vehicle, as Kierkegaard's style in his past agitatorial stage comes to function as the justification of Brandes's own methodological devices.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 325.

²¹ Ibid., p. 312.

²² Ibid., p. 239.

The Agitator

Brandes begins his narration of the last stage of Kierkegaard's life with a story he quotes from French critic, philologist and historian, Ernest Renan (1823-92). It is an anecdote about the Roman missionaries' conversion of the Saxons to Catholicism which, according to Brandes, reflects the turn Kierkegaard's life took in the years before his death in 1855. To prove their faith, the Saxons were asked to destroy the icons of their former gods and as no-one was willing to commit this symbolic action, a priest suddenly rose from the crowd and struck down the idols with an axe. Translated into Kierkegaard's story, the priest's action stands for the Kierkegaard's attacks against the Danish state church in his controversial pamphlets of *Ojeblikket*, and Brandes ends his story – both the anecdote and the story of Kierkegaard's life – with the suggestion that Kierkegaard's disavowal of the Christian institution had led not only him but the entire culture to a crossroad: “By him Danish intellectual life was driven to the extreme point where a leap is required – a leap down into the dark abyss of Catholicism, or to the point where freedom beckons.”²³ Using Kierkegaard's concept of “the leap” rather than Hegel's mediative dialectics to describe the transition from the Dark Continent of tradition to the enlightened point of modernity, Brandes makes it clear that Kierkegaard is now on his side, and he can only regret that Kierkegaard died at this crossroad – for had he lived, Brandes conjectures, he would have taken the freeway, leaping into Brandes's arms of unprejudiced thought rather than into the 70,000 fathoms of water.

It can come as no surprise that Brandes regards *Ojeblikket* Kierkegaard's finest literary achievement. As this last stage of his life, Kierkegaard's perversion is finally straightened out when he points his wit and sarcasm in the right direction – that is, against the clergy rather than against Hegelian philosophy. Acting out his convictions rather than communicating them indirectly, Kierkegaard here fulfills his intellectual potential and, Brandes observes, his original intention. For

²³ Ibid., 361.

behind both strategies lies the same impulse, namely that of the agitator: “He who rightly defined his authorship’s trademark with the words: *to direct attention*, was necessarily well suited to be an agitator.”²⁴ Directly or indirectly, it is the same difference to Brandes who, of course, can see a direct connection between the genius philosopher’s literary strategies with those of his own critical activity: to expose Christian morality as ideology. In this way, Kierkegaard’s literary attacks on the Christian institution confirm Brandes’s slogan that books are more than just words, they are weapons in a cultural warfare against unenlightened tradition. Before he goes on to quote extensively from Kierkegaard’s articles, Brandes makes a comment on this particular style of writing which is difficult to describe, he observes, because it straddles two modes of communication – language and action:

It would be impossible to describe his line of action. You have to see it for yourself, the way he chisels his contempt in the linguistic expression, hammering out the word so it shapes itself into the greatest possible, the most scathing defamation – without for one moment ceasing to carry meaning.²⁵

What characterises the agitatorial works of Kierkegaard’s production, according to Brandes, is that he here backs up his great stylistic skill with action for a definite cause. In contrast to the style of the ethical works, Kierkegaard’s agitatorial pieces do not restrict themselves to paying lipservice to morality, but expose instead the hypocritical forms morality has taken. These works are therefore more in tune with the liberating, passionate style of the aesthetic production, but with the distinction that Kierkegaard is no longer merely concerned with language and the literary tradition, but with social and political issues – “actual issues,” as Brandes puts it. As pleasing as the aesthetic style was to the ear of the beholder, it did not carry as much weight as the agitatorial style where the meaning of the words are carved into the

²⁴ Ibid., 353.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 354.

words themselves so that there can be no doubt as to what they mean. Or in what direction they are pointing.

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With this *grand finale* there can be no doubt as to what direction Brandes's book is pointing, either. If the story of Tarquinus Superbus gave a hint, the story about the Saxons conversion makes it clear: *Kierkegaard. A Critical Exposition in Outline* is addressed to the cultural warfare which Brandes had declared on Danish intellectual life years before the publication of his biography. The portrait of Kierkegaard, then, is not only Brandes's exposition of Kierkegaard's development but that of the entire culture – from passionate but primitive genius over the period of dark superstition and perversion of truth, to the final stage of freedom of thought as introduced by the man of action: the agitator. Brandes expressed this fact clearly in his letter to Nietzsche but much more subtly he communicated it indirectly in the biography itself: By quoting Kierkegaard's epigraph from *Fear and Trembling* and imitating his actions on a methodological and stylistic level, Brandes's kinship to Kierkegaard seems like that of Tarquinus to his son, communicating via actions and repetition of gestures. Brandes's pointing finger, then, not only shows the genius of Kierkegaard but also his own role as his successor and liberator, releasing Kierkegaard as well as the entire Danish culture from the darkness of tradition to the future light of free-thinking.