***Stages on Life’s Way*** by Kierkegaard (as a number of pseudonyms)

Lectori Benevolo! [To the kindly disposed reader]

Hilarius Bookbinder relates that the manuscript he is about to publish was sent to him several years ago by a “literatus well known to me”, Unfortunately, before he could complete the task the literatus died and the books/manuscripts languished at his house until his son’s tutor happened to borrow it and encourage Bookbinder to publish it.

In Vino Veritas [In Wine Truth]

A Recollection related by William Afham [lit. by himself]

We begin here by distinguishing between recollecting and remembering. “Through memory, the experience presents itself to receive the consecration of recollection.” (p.26) Old people lose memory while retaining the “poetic farsightedness” (pp.26-7) of recollection, whereas youth is the opposite; a quick memory but no recollection. Afham says of recollection that it is “the power to… place at a distance.” (pp.26-7) An example he gives is someone who says little and “pursues one idea, one single idea, is preoccupied with it; another is an author in seven branches of scholarship…” (pp.26-7) The former has more to recollect than the latter.

Recollection is concerned with the eternal and for that reason “only the essential can be recollected” (pp.26-7) where the essential is that which “is conditioned not only by itself but also by its relation to the person concerned. The person who has broken with the idea cannot act essentially, can undertake nothing that is essential” (pp.26-7). Marrying is something essential, erotic love is frivolity.

Given the above, “what is recollected cannot be forgotten either… Memory is immediate and is assisted immediately, recollection only reflectively. This is why it is an art to recollect.” (pp.29-30) It is in this sense that he says he wishes to be able to forget.

Afham cites homesickness as an example of recollection. The difference between this and memory seems to be *mood* (a word Afham uses on pp.38-9). The former evokes a past *mood* rather than merely recounting details intellectually, as it were. “When memory is refreshed again and again, it enriches the soul with a mass of details that distract recollection.” (pp.31-2) The arousal of a mood also means that recollection “is the condition for all productivity. If a person no longer wishes to be productive, he needs merely to remember the same thing that recollecting he wanted to produce, and production is rendered impossible” (pp.31-2).

Given the above, recollection takes proficiency in illusion. The ideal, he says, “would be to be able to feel homesickness even though one is at home… [or] to let [the illusion] work on oneself with the full force of illusion even though one is fully aware.” (pp.30-1) This is why Afham calls recollection “reflection to the second power.” (pp.30-1)

In order to bring about a recollection, one must know a lot about contrasting moods, situations, and surroundings. “The situation of recollection is created by contrast” (pp.33-4). If one wants to recollect a banquet held in a splendidly lighted dining room, one must select an environment that is the complete opposite.

Recollection is, by nature, something that can be done by the individual alone; “a fellowship of recollection does not exist.” (pp.31-2) Memory is the opposite and can be effected through banquets, birthdays, etc. “Inasmuch as one is always alone with recollection, every recollection is a secret. Even if several persons are interested in what is the object of recollecting to the one recollecting, he is nevertheless alone with his recollection—the seeming public character is merely illusory.” (pp.32-3)

Afham now goes on to recollect a banquet attended by Johannes the seducer, Victor Eremita, Constantin Constantius, and two others who names he has forgotten. One, he calls the Young Man, the other, the Fashion Designer. At this banquet, each person will give a soliloquy on erotic love.

The Young Man, who has never loved, feels that erotic love is a mystery and a danger. It intervenes in a person’s life by turning it upside down and instead of the lovers being upset by it, they regard it as the greatest happiness. This makes love the comic. He asks what is the lovable? Why does one love the person one loves? No single reason can be given, and yet they still love.

Lovers desire each other, but all desire is essentially selfish. This love is selfish, not in relation to each other, but in the sense that in their union they form a single self. “And yet they are deceived; for at the very same moment the species triumphs over the individuals, the species is victorious while individuals are subordinated to being in its service.” (pp.62-3) The comic in this is that one whole human has become a half. What is even more ludicrous is that once two separated halves find each other the result should be satisfaction and rest, and yet this union results in a new life.

Consequently, the Young Man renounces all erotic love.

Constantin thinks man and woman are so different that no “real interaction” can take place between them. “She is properly construed only under the category of jest. It is the man’s function to be absolute, to act absolutely, to express the absolute; the woman consists in the relational.” (pp.68-9) The whole thing must be jest. Man attempts to hold the woman under a category to which she doesn’t belong; namely, the ethical. He paints women as fickle, simple creatures incapable of reflection; “She meant everything she said; now she is saying the opposite, but with the same lovable ingenuousness, for now she will die for the opposite.” (pp.69-70)

One last quote will capture Constantin’s opinion; “Beautiful is she and lovely when she is viewed esthetically—no one can deny it. But as is said so often, so I, too, will say: One should not stop with that but should go further. Look at her ethically; just start doing that, and you have the jest. Even Plato and Aristotle assume that woman is an incomplete form, consequently an irrational quantity that perhaps in a better existence can be led back to the male form; here in life one must take her for what she is. What that is will soon be manifest, for she, too, is not satisfied with the esthetic. She goes further; she wants to be emancipated—she is man enough to say that. If that happens, the jest will exceed all bounds.” (pp.77-8)

Next Victor Eremita starts by giving thanks that he was born a man, and not a woman. The real misfortune for her is “that her life in the romantic consciousness has become meaningless. Thus, one moment she means everything, nothing at all in the next” (p.78). Woman is man’s inspiration but this is the misfortune. She is “an undefinable quantity and made blissful in fantasy; I would, however, rather be a concretion that means something than an abstraction that means everything.” (pp.80-1) Men have become many things all because of women, although not the woman they get, but the ideal woman they imagine.

In this, woman inspires and awakens ideality *negatively*. By this, Eremita means she functions as inspiration only with her absence. “The more positively the proof is produced, the less it proves, for then the longing will be for something experienced, the content of which must be assumed to be essentially exhaustive, inasmuch as it is experienced… The more negative the proof, the better it is, for the negative is higher than the positive, is the infinite, and thus the one and only positive.” (pp.83-4)

For woman to be the negative, man must therefore stay out of any positive relationship with her. The best case is for her to appear at the right moment and then vanish again. Marriage in particular would be the worst possible case. Naturally, the seducer is also a failure because he “wants to assert himself by deceiving, but that he deceives, that he wants to deceive, and that he takes the trouble to deceive are also manifestations of his dependence on woman” (pp.87-8). Interestingly, Eremita also rejects the monastic life.

The Fashion Designer concedes that women have spirit and are reflective, only these traits are directed entirely towards the trivial and meaningless; namely, fashion; “fashion… is the only thing she is always thinking about, the only thing she is able to think together with and in the midst of everything else.” (pp.92-3) His conclusion is that women are so fixated on fashion that they are unsuitable for erotic love.

Johannes the seducer goes last. He rejects all of the others and claims that the only thing important in life is desire’s resolution. A part of this is obviously erotic love and he claims “the female sex, far from being more imperfect [VI 73] than the male, is more perfect.” (pp98-9) How this came to be so he chooses to relate in the form of a myth.

Originally there was only one sex; the male. Because they were so glorious, the gods, who despite having created man, became envious of him and feared him. They couldn’t compel him but came upon the clever idea of compelling him by a force that was weaker than his own, and yet stronger. This power was woman. By in large, the strategy worked but there were always some men who saw through the deception. “To be sure, they saw her loveliness, more than anyone else, but they suspected the truth of the matter. These I call devotees of erotic love, and I count myself among their number. Men call them seducers... These devotees of erotic love are the happy ones.” (pp.100-1) They eat the bait but are never trapped. So that the gods wouldn’t eventually be threatened by this power as they had been with the men, they did not let woman know how beautiful she was; “The gods finished her, but they hid everything from her in the ignorance of innocence” (p.102).

Leaving the myth, Johannes goes on to talk about the difference between men and women. “The concept of man corresponds to the idea of man. Therefore one needs only one man in existence and no more. The idea of woman, however, is a generality that is not exhausted by any woman.” (pp.100-2) Woman is an “infinitude of finitudes… a workshop of possibilities” (pp.101-2). This is precisely what infatuates the devotee of erotic love. It is glorious that the gods made woman, but even more glorious is that they “never made one woman like another. With man the essential is the essential and thus always the same; with woman the accidental is the essential and in this way an inexhaustible heterogeneity.” (pp.104-5)

Marriage is the worst possible situation because then the gods prevail.

After the banquet the guests go for a walk and come across a man, Judge William, and his wife. Victor steals a stack of papers from the Judge’s house, which make up the next section.

At the end of this chapter, there is an interesting passage in which the author of this first section, presumably Afham, speaks directly to the reader. What he says is:

But who, then, am I? Let no one ask about that. If it did not occur to anyone to ask before, then I am saved, for now I am over the worst of it. Moreover, I am not worth asking about, for I am the least of all, and people make me very bashful by asking this question. I am pure being and thus almost less than nothing. I am the pure being that is everywhere present but yet not noticeable, for I am continually being annulled. I am like the line with the arithmetic problem above and the answer below—who cares about the line? By myself, I am capable of nothing at all, for even the idea of tricking Victor out of the manuscript was not my own notion, but the very notion according to which I borrowed the manuscript, as thieves put it, was in fact borrowed from Victor. Now, in publishing the manuscript, I again am nothing at all, for the manuscript belongs to the Judge, and in my nothingness… (p.112)

Some Reflections on Marriage in Answer to Objections

By a Married Man (Judge William)

The Judge praises marriage as “the most important voyage of discovery a human being undertakes; compared with a married man’s knowledge of life, any other knowledge of it is superficial, for he and he alone has properly immersed himself in life.” (pp.113-4) Indeed, only a married man is an authentic man. In order to be a good husband, “there is only one attribute that makes him lovable, and that is faith, absolute faith in marriage.” (pp.114-5)

Marriage, for the Judge, is a higher expression of erotic love. He compares Christianity and paganism regarding this; “In paganism there was a god for erotic love and none for marriage; in Christianity there is, if I may say so, a god for marriage and none for erotic love.” (pp.123-4)

Erotic love or falling in love is immediate. Marriage, on the other hand, is a *resolution*. As a resolution, marriage must come about from deliberation. However, for resolution to occur, the deliberation and the resolution must occur together, in the *moment of decision*. If this doesn’t happen, the act is either inspiration or whim.

Any human act that is to have meaning or significance must come about as a result of resolution; “A person’s total ideality lies first and last in resolution. Any other ideality is a trifle.” (pp.132-3) There are two kinds of resolution; positive and negative. A *positive resolution* consolidates life, guarantees a happy outcome, and brings rest to the individual. A *negative resolution*, on the other hand, keeps the individual constantly *in suspenso* and is continually ambiguous, even as regards a happy outcome. With the negative resolution the “individual has initiated conflict with life; therefore at no moment can he be finished; he cannot, like someone who has made and is held by a positive resolution, immerse himself day after day in the original basis of his resolution. A negative resolution does not hold him; he must hold it, however long it takes. Even if fortune favors him, and even if something most significant results for him, he still does not dare to deny the possibility that everything can suddenly have another interpretation.” (pp.133-4)

When it comes to resolution, the Judge warns that we must be careful of *probability* – “a spineless fellow, a dabbler, a Jewish peddler, with whom no freeborn soul becomes involved” (pp.134-5) and also of being too concerned with *outcome*. Probability and outcome cannot be part of any resolution because they seek finite guarantees rather than passionately embracing the resolution (which necessarily means encountering God). Probability and outcome have no hold over resolution “because what is being purchased is being purchased *à tout prix* [at all costs].” (pp.135-6)

Marriage is just such a resolution because it, unlike falling in love, is more like a duty. In the wedding ceremony, it is said “You *shall* love her.” There is something to do here, unlike erotic love which just happens and sustains itself.

“The negative resolution is for the eternal only; the positive, for both the temporal and the eternal, and thus the person is simultaneously temporal and eternal. Therefore, the ideality of the genuine resolution lies first of all in a resolution that is just as temporal as eternal… The genuinely idealizing resolution then has this characteristic: it is signed in heaven, and then it is countersigned in temporality.” (pp.137-8) The negative is abstract. The positive is concrete. Since human beings are both temporal and eternal, the true resolution must include both dimensions. “The more concrete a person becomes in the ideality, the more perfect is the ideality… Abstraction is ideality’s first expression, but concretion is its essential expression.” (pp.140-1) Marriage fits this bill because “there is nothing between heaven and earth so concrete as a marriage and the marital relationship” (pp.139-40).

The Judge moves on now to criticise reflection and the understanding. His age, he says, has become obsessed with reflection and in doing so, has lost the immediacy that is a central part of a person’s life. We can see this in love, in which the preposterous is to want to think the erotic or think oneself into it. Without immediacy, falling in love is impossible. Judge William talks about a category he calls “to choose oneself.” He says, of this, “it should never be applied to the erotic, as in speaking of choosing a beloved, for the beloved is the god’s [*Gudens*] gift and just as the person choosing, who chooses himself, is presupposed to exist, so also must the beloved be presupposed to exist as the beloved if the category “to choose” is to be used univocally in both connections. If that phrase “to choose” is used to mean wanting to set someone up as the beloved, instead of wanting to accept the beloved, then a deluded reflection promptly has something to hold to.” (pp.147-9) He goes on to say that “he who proposes must first be proposed to by the god himself, and any other proposing is a foolish having it all one’s own way. I decline to choose in this way; instead I thank the god for the gift—he chooses better—and to thank is more blessed.” (pp.148-9)

Applying this idea to love, we can see that one doesn’t *choose* whom one loves and as proof of this, one cannot give any *reasons* for why one loves their beloved, without reducing that love to something trivial. This is why paganism attributed love to Eros. It was something gifted to a human by a deity. Marriage became a “purely religious expression for one’s receiving the beloved from the hand of God. As soon as God is present in the consciousness, the wonder is there, for God cannot be there in any other way… The rueful knight of reflection goes further; he wants to fathom the synthesis at the basis of erotic love. He does not perceive that a veil is hung before his eyes and that once again he faces the wonder… Who lifted the veil? Who would dare to do that? The ideal beauty is veiled beauty” (pp.149-50). This is an interesting passage suggesting that even if it were possible to know everything about a particular subject, there might be good reason to leave it unknown. Of course, some mysteries will never lift their veil; “But what shall I say about the mystery that was, is, and will remain a mystery to me through the years, for I do not know that any explanation is coming” (pp.150-1).

So, falling in love is a wonder and belongs to immediacy. “The question remains: How can this immediacy (falling in love) find its equivalent in an immediacy reached through reflection?” (pp.150-1)

Judge William goes on to talk about how he doesn’t appreciate his wife with the same aesthetic categories with which he would appreciate a painting or a sculpture. Indeed, it is “nauseating to me to hear the noise of words such as “slim,” “shapely,” “svelte,” etc. When I read these words in a primitive poet, flowing out of originality of mood and of the mother tongue, I am delighted, but I do not profane them, and, as far as my wife is concerned, I am not sure to this day whether she is slim. My joy and my being in love are not that of a horse dealer or the irascible unwholesomeness of a cunning seducer.” (pp.153-4)

Marriage possesses a security that the “restlessness of erotic love’s first bliss” (pp.157-8) lacks. Judge William adds to this with a comment that includes a reference to recollection; “And when I as a married man, a married man of eight years, rest my head on her shoulder, I am not a critic, who admires or sees the lack of some earthly beauty; nor am I an infatuated youth who celebrates her bosom, but nevertheless I am as deeply moved as the first time. For I know what I knew and what I am repeatedly convinced of—that there within my wife’s breast beats a heart, quietly and humbly, but steadily and smoothly; I know that it beats for me and my welfare and for what is mutually ours” (pp.157-8).

Judge William differentiates between superficial beauty and the beauty of the eternal (the feminine) in woman, criticising especially the “mistaken notion that a girl’s only beauty is the first beauty of youth, that she blossoms for only a moment, that this is the time of falling in love, and that one loves only once.” (pp.159-60) Indeed, “however fair that first beauty is, it is still not the truth; it is an envelope, a garment, from which only with the years does the true beauty extricate itself before the husband’s grateful eyes.” (pp.162-3) He goes on to say that a mother is more beautiful than a girl and a woman’s development isn’t complete until she is a mother. “As a mother, however, she belongs totally to actuality, and mother love itself is not like the longings and presentiments of youth but is an inexhaustible source of inwardness. Neither is it so that all this was present as a possibility in the young girl. Even if it were so, a possibility is still less than an actuality, but it is not so. Inwardness is no more present in a young girl’s breast than mother’s milk.” (pp.164-5)

Next, Judge William discusses the idea that woman is the weaker sex. He suggests this is incorrect in the same way that a silk cord can be just as strong as an iron chain, and “the chain that bound the Fenris wolf was indeed invisible, was something that did not exist at all — what if it were the same with woman’s weakness, that it is an invisible power that expresses its strength in weakness.” (pp.173-4) Women may be the weaker when viewed aesthetically, but this is to look at woman at “the first awakening of adolescence. But anyone who really wants to talk about her strength or weakness must, of course, see her when she stands fully armed, and that is as a wife and mother. Moreover, then she need never struggle or undergo tests of strength, and if one finally wants to talk about strength, then the first condition or the essential form of all strength is endurance. When it comes to this, the man perhaps cannot equal her.” (pp.174-5)

He thinks woman “loves her husband so much that she always wants him to be dominant, and this is why he appears to be so strong and she so weak, for she uses her strength to support him, uses it as devotedness and submission. What wonderful weakness!” (pp.175-6)

So, to return to falling in love: “a resolution [marriage] must be added to falling in love. But a resolution presupposes reflection, but reflection is immediacy’s angel of death.” (pp.192-3) Reflection in the resolution of marriage does not focus on immediate love; rather, it “turns toward the relation between falling in love and actuality… to marry is to enter an actuality in relation to a given actuality; to marry involves an extraordinary concretion. This concretion is the task of reflection.” (pp.193-4) But reflection, being concerned with the infinite, cannot be exhausted, and so “reflection is discharged into faith, which is precisely the anticipation of the ideal infinity as resolution. Thus through the purely ideally exhausted reflection the resolution has gained a new immediacy that corresponds exactly to the immediacy of falling in love. The resolution is a religious view of life constructed upon ethical presuppositions” (pp.195-7). The point here is that the religious is a new immediacy. The individual is thrust into a relationship with God. “In this way the wonder of falling in love is taken up into the wonder of faith; the wonder of falling in love is taken up into a purely religious wonder; the absurdity of falling in love is taken up into a divine understanding with the absurdity of religiousness.” (pp.198-9) Note, that since woman is incapable of reflection, she is catapulted straight from love into the religious.

In contrast to all of this, “pure intellectuality is a prodigious abstraction, and on the other side of abstraction there is nothing, nothing, not even the remotest hint of a religious idea.” (pp.206-7)

In the closing pages of this essay, Judge William explores the infinite abstraction of the religious which desires to belong to God alone. “For this love it is willing to refuse, renounce, sacrifice everything (these are the nuances); from this love it will not allow itself to be disturbed, diverted, captured by anything else. In relation to this love it refuses to have any duplicity in the accounting; every transaction must always take place in a pure relationship with God, who is not related to him through anything else.” (pp.209-10) The religious doesn’t want to grasp the concrete at all (in our theme here – the reality of falling in love and marriage). This, Judge William calls “the inhumanity of this abstraction… the inhumanity consists in his not wanting to have any concrete idea of what for most people is the reality of their lives.” (pp.209-11).

This means that the person who is a religious exception like this will ignore the universal (the concrete ethical). In this case, the religious person is an *unjustified exception*. “He recognizes entirely *in abstracto* the reality of temporality or, to stick to my theme, the reality of marrying. But he is unhappy, unfit for this joy, for this security in existence; he is depressed, a burden to himself, and feels he must be that to others... So, then, having accounted for life in this way, he finds consolation in a religious abstraction.” (pp.211-2)

Judge William is interested in knowing whether one can become a *justified exception*. For this to happen, first of all, the individual’s exceptionality must be based on concrete experience, not mere abstraction. This means that “no one can become a justified exception on his own. First of all something has to happen.” (pp.212-3) In keeping with the theme here; he or she must really fall in love. “The person who wants to break with actuality must at least know what it is he is breaking with.” (p.214) And since we are not just talking about the erotic, but also about marriage, the man must also *be* a married man.

Next, after the break with the concrete actuality has occurred (the marriage has been ended), Judge William requires “that after this he is to love life; if he becomes inimical to life, he is unjustified, because being an exception does not make less beautiful that from which he is excepted. That with which he broke he must love with an enthusiasm exceeding anyone else’s, and in this enthusiasm he must find each beautiful thing even more lovely and delightful than does the person who rejoices in happiness, because the one who wills to reject something universal has to be better informed about it than the person who is peacefully living in it.” (pp.214-6)

Furthermore, continuing on the path to justification, the “break itself must feel as a fatality and a horror… he must look upon the afterpains of the break as punitive suffering, for although his understanding despairs of discovering the guilt, since he is indeed actually in love, actually belongs wholeheartedly to his married life, even if the pain of tearing himself away is just as great, indeed, greater, than is the pain of shattering for the beloved, nevertheless the intense feeling of despair must still find its joy in making honorable amends to God” (pp.215-7).

By way of summary of this, Judge William says:

To repeat the most essential points, he must not feel himself above the universal, but lower; he must *à tout prix* want to remain within it, for he is actually in love and, what is more, is a married man; he must want to remain within it for his own sake and must want it for the sake of them for whom he is willing to sacrifice his life, whereas instead he now sees their misery as if he were someone whose hands and feet have been cut off and whose tongue has been torn from his mouth—that is, without a single means of communication. He must feel himself to be the most wretched of men, the scum of humanity, must feel it doubly precisely because he knows, not *in abstracto* but *in concreto*, what the beautiful is. Then he sinks down, desperate in all his wretchedness, when that single word, that final, that ultimate word, so ultimate that it is not within human language, is not forthcoming, when the testimony is not with him, when he cannot tear open the sealed dispatch that is only to be opened out there and that contains the orders from God. This is the start of becoming an exception, if there is such a one at all; if all this is not a given, he is without justification. (pp.218-9)

From the depths of a despair such as this, it truly requires immense faith to believe that God could intervene to bestow any divine meaning on the whole affair.

Guilty? / Not Guilty?

A Story of Suffering

An Imaginary Psychological Construction

By Frater Taciturnus

This section begins with Frater Taciturnus recounting how he was out on a lake with a naturalist friend when he pulled up from the lake a box. Inside he found a manuscript, some jewellery, a poster advertising a comedy, and a page from the New Testament. He placed an advertisement should the owner of the box want to retrieve its contents, but nevertheless, published the manuscript (which appears here).

The manuscript takes the form of dated diary entries which alternate between the time when the writer was beginning a romantic relationship and one year later when the relationship had ended because the writer, even though he loved the woman and would never love anyone else, realised that he couldn’t make her happy. The way he ends the relationship after a few months by trying to make her dislike him. The reason he ended the relationship (which was actually a breaking-off of their engagement) was that he was intellectual and reflective, by nature; “I have lived only intellectually. When I read in the poets the speeches of lovers, I smiled because I could not understand that such a relationship could occupy them so much. The eternal, a relationship with God, a relationship to the idea—this stirred my soul, but I could not grasp something so intermediate.” (pp.261-2) Due to his reflective nature, he was prone to depression and this caused him a lot of suffering which he didn’t want to initiate the woman into, and which he realised would not work in a marriage; “Our relationship cannot become a marriage. Why not? Because I am inclosed by my depression. I knew that from the beginning and believed that my task was to conceal it; so I have understood it, but a marriage is not like that. But if she would nevertheless put up with what would amount to a morganatic marriage? But I myself will not put up with that, for as I see it now it would be an insult to her.” (pp.407-8) Of course, there is also the problem that she lived in immediacy, making them complete opposites; “Religious presuppositions she does not seem to have at all.” (pp.261-2) And again, “I cannot understand it in any other way than that I am making her unhappy. There is and continues to be a vast misrelation between us. She does not understand me, and I do not understand her; she cannot rejoice in what gives me joy and cannot sorrow over what gives me sorrow. But I began this, so I will persevere, but I insist on being honest. I confess to her that I regard her relationship with me as a sacrifice on her part; I have asked her forgiveness for sweeping her along out into the current.” (pp.282-3) He is all about the idea; “if it were one to one, I would be no match for her, but the trouble is that I am more than one since I have the category and the idea on my side. Therefore I am not qualified to be a hero, for it is not my victory I am seeking; it is the victory of the idea, and I am willing to be annihilated.” (pp.408-9)

In order to break up with her in such a way that she doesn’t feel any responsibility or lingering feelings towards him, he resolves to act in such a way that she cannot help disliking him. “Change all the agony in my breast into foolishness on my lips, all the pathos therein into nonsense when it is uttered. Take away, take it away, hide every trace, every look, every feeling, every hint of a feeling that could please her, hide it all so well that no truth glimmers through the deception. Transform me; when I sit beside her, let me sit like a nodding mandarin, with a thoughtless smile on my lips, reeking of nonsense… What I shall venture to do now is to pull myself away from her, if possible, scramble her image of me into sheer inanity and utterly confound her… All sympathy for me must be wiped out, and she must also be run weary in reflection.” (pp.380-2)

After the break up, he goes through a period of intense suffering in which he compares himself to a murderer (presumably for having killed the woman’s happiness), the difference being that no verdict can be issued in his case because his victim is still alive. This was terrible to him because it meant everything was left *in suspenso* and the whole affair could have no meaning. During this time he assiduously tries to orchestrate things so that his ex-fiancee will be able to move on with her life. He still sees her by chance occasionally (he thinks she is going out of her way just to pass him in the street or catch glimpses of him), but puts on a show of complete indifference so as not to give her any hope. To ensure his ex-fiancee gets over their break-up, he even writes a fake letter to a friend and arranges things so that it will find its way into her hands. The letter contains “confidential” information about their relationship but is full of untruths that he hopes will paint him as a “depraved person”. His desire is for his ex-fiancee to read it, make her suffering autopathetic (i.e. free of all sympathy), free her of blame, and allow her to move on with her life. Only by getting her to move on with her life could he be free to move on with his, although he will never be without suffering; “As soon as she is free, I certainly shall not be without sorrow… then I shall remember her, but then I shall also have found relief; I shall be sad and say with Ossian: Sweet is the sorrow of melancholy. Then I shall have peace” (pp.307-8).

The challenge here for him is that she must “become free through her own resolution and not free by way of some observation and view I have slipped to her.” (pp.312-3) This is the reason for the whole pretence. If he gives her the keys, she will be free, but the fact that he was her liberator will mean he will always still have some hold over her.

He summarises the situation he placed himself in, in the following way:

Am I guilty, then? Yes. How? By my having begun what I could not carry out… What then is my guilt? That I did not understand it sooner. What is your responsibility? Every possible consequence for her life. Why every possible one, for this certainly seems to be an exaggeration? Because here it is not a matter of an event but of an act and an ethical responsibility… What can serve as your excuse? That my total individuality predisposed me to something… namely, “that a depressed person should not torment his wife with his sufferings but like a man should inclose them within himself.” What is your consolation? That I, in acknowledging this guilt, also sense a Governance in it all… What is your hope? That it can be forgiven, if not here then nevertheless in an eternity… Why, then, do you not have it? Because I could not make myself understandable to her… Because I could not obtain it. When by letter I broke the engagement, I requested it. This she would not understand and therefore forced me to use the only means left to rescue her: to place the misunderstanding of deception between us… So I chose not to make myself understood but to give her to understand that I was tired of her, that I was a deceiver, a muddlehead. Her rescue depended on my holding firmly to this… An official forgiveness between two who do not understand each other is an empty gesture and just as dubious as a contract drawn up in writing between two people, one of whom can neither write nor read handwriting. (pp.435-8)

What is my offense? To have made a person unhappy. Unhappy in what way? In possibility in such a way that according to what she said and by virtue of possibility I have a murder on my conscience. What is my punishment? To endure this consciousness. What is my hope? That a compassionate Governance will in actuality reduce the sentence by helping her. What does my understanding say about her? That there is no real probability of the worst. What consequence does this have for me? None at all. An ethical commitment cannot be discharged by any calculation of probability but only by assuming the ultimate possibility of responsibility. (pp.450-1)

One point of interest is that although they were only engaged to be married, at one point in the engagement, after he has tried to break things off, he returns to his apartment and finds a note she has written for him saying “she cannot live without me, it will be the death of her if I leave her, she beseeches me for God’s sake, for my salvation’s sake, in memory of all that binds me, in the blessed name I rarely mention because my doubt has kept me from appropriating it, even though for that very reason my veneration for it is unmatched.” (p.379) He concludes from this that they are already married. He continues, “So, then, I am wedded to her! What else does a wedding ceremony mean than that one gives love a religious expression, a religious obligation. It has happened.” (p.379)

*Passages in the Diary Entries of Philosophical Interest*

In relation to any idea, there must always be a middle term. Anyone who tries to establish a direct relation to the idea is *demonic*; “every individuality who solely by himself has a relation to the idea without any middle term (here is the silence toward all others) is demonic; if the idea is God, then the individual is religious; if the idea is that of evil, then he is in the stricter sense demonic.” (pp.268-9)

*A Leper’s Self-Contemplation* (pp.269-72): A story about compassion, suffering, and sacrifice.

A leper is in a graveyard, cast out of society for his disease. He talks about a salve he made. This salve doesn’t cure leprosy but hides it. Anyone who uses it won’t appear to have leprosy but will still infect anyone he comes into contact with. He gave it to a friend of his, Manasse, and this man used it and ran off to the city to extract revenge on the city dwellers who cast him out, by infecting them.

Our leper then talks about compassion, noting that the very people who are best placed to offer it (the fortunate, healthy, rich, etc.) don’t, so the ones who are most entitled to it (the poverty-stricken, sick, etc.) don’t receive it. Instead, the opposite happens. The leper is cast out, and in his exile, he shows compassion for the fortunate/healthy by removing himself from the latter’s presence so as not to infect them. His suffering makes their happiness possible.

The diary writer talks about modern religiousness lacking seriousness. People think of God as “a kind elderly uncle who for a sweet word does everything the child wants, just as the child wants it. That is why one is so very fond of this uncle.” (pp.273-4) Everything about this religiousness is wonderful and happy. No mention is made of infinite resignation or the absolute relationship of spirt with spirt.

A relationship with God is the absolute – meaning it is bound in both time and eternity. One should then never speak to God as if talking to another person; “one should never appeal to God for help with a wish, because one thereby binds oneself absolutely… I am obliged to hold to my word. I must at all times firmly maintain that it was and is my only wish, so earnestly, so eternally my only wish that I dared to give it a religious expression. In other words, if after the passage of some time I come with a new wish and promptly send for God again just as fussy parents send for the physician for nothing, what then? Then I have made a fool of God and also made manifest that I am a comic character who, far from being a hypocrite, assumed that to *pray to God* was the same as petting papa on the cheek and saying: *Bitte, bitte* [Please, please].” (pp.276-7)

He also expands on the idea of resignation (and emphasising the woman’s lack of religious presupposition), saying that even when he broke off the engagement, she still didn’t comprehend resignation. “Either she believed: now I shall die and then it will be over, but that is not resignation; or she hoped altogether spontaneously, but that is not resignation; or she picked herself up internally by virtue of her natural healthiness and was stimulated precisely now to take hold of temporality—but that is not resignation.” (pp.278-9) Resignation is infinite in nature and therefore cannot be eliminated or reduced in any way.

*Solomon’s Dream* (pp.289-92):

Solomon dreams that his father, David, was, despite being king and receiving the praise of the people, guilty in the eyes of God. The “dream intimates that God is not the God of the godly but of the ungodly, and that to be singled out by God one has to be an ungodly person, and the horror of the dream is this contradiction.” (pp.290-1)

He praises Saint Simon Stylites (a saint famous for living for 37 years on top of a pillar as a means of relating to God) for his passion in establishing and maintaining his relation to God. However, he also criticises him for doing it in front of other people, thereby making it external.

He values the will and passion more than thinking. “It is my conviction that the will is of primary importance even in connection with thinking, that talents ten times as good without an energetic will do not constitute as good a thinker as talents ten times as poor combined with an energetic will: the superb talents help to understand much, the energetic will helps to understand the one thing.” (pp.298-9)

*A Possibility* (pp.318-333): A story about the power of possibility, recollection, and reflection

This story takes place in a small town called Christianshavn. At the beginning, he compares Christianshavn to Copenhagen. The latter is a noisy, bustling place where haste and hurry dominate, while in the former “peacefulness reigns.” (pp.319-20) It is easy to get along in the capital because there are many distractions to distract one from oneself. In Christianshavn, on the other hand, “here one feels abandoned and imprisoned in the stillness that isolates, where one cannot get rid of oneself, where one is encompassed on all sides by lack of diversion.” (pp.319-20)

The story centres on how a particular “mentally disordered” man, who always seemed to be looking for something and was kind to children, came to be this way. In his youth, he was quiet and reserved, and spent a lot of time alone. Over time “he became more and more a stranger to the world” (pp.326-7) although he didn’t realise it because he was always busy. “Only once did an intimation of it dawn in his soul; he became a stranger to himself, or to himself he seemed to be like someone who suddenly stops and concentrates on something he must have forgotten without even being able to grasp what it is—but it must be something. And indeed there was something he had forgotten, for he had forgotten to be young and to let his heart be cheered in the manner of youth while days are still there.” (pp.326-7)

He goes drinking with some colleagues one night and they get drunk and go to a brothel. He was so drunk, he didn’t even remember what happened that night, but afterwards he became very sick. As the worst point of his illness, a recollection came over him of what he had done that night. His health improved but now he was plagued by a *possibility*; the possibility that he had fathered a child that night.

At this point, his “troubled recollection still might not have become a fixed idea [reflection] for him” (pp.328-9) had his cousin not made a chance witticism one day that no man, not even the married man, could know for sure how many children he had.” (pp.329-30) After hearing this, the man fell to brooding as that fixed idea slowly took hold and he became more and more isolated and mentally unstable.

Ultimately, “what made him an old man although scarcely an adult in years, was this unhappy child or whether there was one; and what made him mentally disordered was that every more specific way to finding out was barred to him since the two whose company had been his ruin had long ago gone to America and vanished; and what made the disorder so dialectical was that he could never know for sure whether it was a result of the illness, a feverish hallucination, or whether death had actually come to the aid of his memory with a recollection of an actuality.” (pp.328-9)

The writer of the diary also takes a couple of digs at Hegel; “Woe, woe to the boy who could not answer yes or no to a direct question… Just imagine that this paragraph-madness, this curriculum-craze, and this systematic sliding about have so taken over…” (pp.336-7)

Love has worth only when the eternal is present also; “In my opinion, all this beauty and cleverness, together with love and the eternal, have infinite worth, but without that a relation between man and woman, which nevertheless essentially wants to express this, is not worth a pipe of tobacco. In my opinion, when falling in love is separated from this—please note, the eternal from falling in love—one can properly speak only of what is left over… When falling in love—that is, the eternal in falling in love—is absent, then the erotic, despite all possible cleverness, revolves around less than four marks and eight shillings” (pp.337-8).

God doesn’t communicate with us the way we talk with other humans. “But he is the strongest of all, the only strong one, because he simply does not speak that way with a person. The person with whom he wants to be briefly involved he takes hold of in such a way that he speaks to him through the person himself. Their conversation is not a pro and contra exterior to each other, but when God speaks he uses the person to whom he is speaking, he speaks to the person through the person himself. This is why he has the power and at any moment he wishes can crush a person. But if it were so that God had once and for all spoken, for example in Scripture, then, far from being the most powerful, God would be in the tightest squeeze, for a person can easily argue with something like this if he is allowed to use himself against it… This is why one cannot utilize the dialectical with him, for God uses the very dialectical power of the person involved precisely against this person himself.” (pp.362-4)

*The Reading Lesson* (pp.371-7): A story about a tyrant

There is an interesting passage in which the writer criticises other people for their foolishness and lack of seriousness; “I really do believe that no matter what I say, provided it is not the truth or my most sincere opinion, I would even be regarded as sagacious; by doing the latter I would unconditionally provide grounds for my deportation.” (pp.389-90) If he were to say he wanted to break up because he wanted to be with other girls, people would have encouraged him. If he were to say he had grown tired of her, people would have nodded in understanding. But if he were to tell the truth and say that he loved her and only her and that is why he had to break it off, people would say “away to the loony bin with him” (pp.389-90).

 “*Mundus vult decipi* [The world wants to be deceived]” (pp.389-90). People don’t want the truth. They just want the individual to conform to the mediocre; “If one just says something silly and drinks *dus* with humanity *en masse*, then one comes to be, like Per Degn, loved and esteemed by the whole congregation.” (pp.390-1)

The writer of the diary is highly individualistic. He says that “each person prepares the way of the Lord within himself… One understands that the single individual has essentially with himself to do, that performance is the incidental, which one is not to anticipate and essentially does not dare to attribute to oneself, and which only in the retrospection of eternity will be seen for what it is—essentially God’s extra bonus and incidentally the individual’s work. In other words, life and the Governance in it are something more than a flat sum of all individual human beings’ deeds. Therefore a person must have his absolute idea *in mente* wherever he goes.” (pp.392-3)

However, each person can influence others as a teacher. This is dangerous because if the student learns from a teacher, they “might *bona fide* become a thoughtless follower” (pp.395-6), and value the teacher rather than the message. This is why he values deception. “…I have reached the conclusion that I benefit a person most by deceiving him. The highest truth with respect to my relation to him is this: essentially I can be of no benefit to him… and the most adequate form for this truth is that I deceive him, for otherwise it would be possible for him to make a mistake and learn the truth from me and thereby be deceived, namely, that he would believe that he had learned it from me… Even if the wisest of persons spent six hours a day on someone, even if he spent six other hours considering how best to do it, if he continued in this for six years, he would be a deceiver if he dared to say that he had benefited him *essentially*… A person can teach language, the arts, manual skills, etc., to another, but ethically-religiously one cannot essentially benefit another. And this is why it is beautiful and inspiring to express this in the utmost exertion of the deception” (pp.393-5). The ideal for him is to “structure [his] life ethically in [his] innermost being and to conceal this inwardness in the form of deception.” (pp.403-4)

There are no good arguments or reasons for praying. Prayer is a wonder; “in prayer he is lifted to a new and infinite wonder that God in heaven is the only one who does not become weary of listening to a human being. And this holy wonder in turn will keep the one who is praying from thinking whether he receives what he is praying about. Falling in love is not beautiful if one looks to see if it pays, and even if one sees that it pays exceptionally well, it is not a happy falling in love. Prayer was certainly not devised in order to rebuke God but is a favor that is graciously granted to every human being and that makes him more than a nobleman. But if one understands to the point of wonder—indeed, to the point where wonder shipwrecks one’s understanding—that it is a favor, then arguments are perceived to be not necessary, either, for it is only the problematic that is commended by arguments. Every external reflection *eo ipso* nullifies prayer, be it reflection squinting at the temporal advantage or be it reflection on the individual himself and his relation to others, as if a man were so earnest that he could not pray within himself and alone but had to step forward and benefit the whole congregation with his intercession and his example as one who prays” (pp.399-400).

Meaning is crucial to the writer of the diary; “To me the most appalling meaning is not as appalling as meaninglessness, and this is all the more dreadful, the more thoughtlessly it smiles.” (pp.411-2)

*Nebuchadnezzar* (pp.412-416): A story about humility before God

This story is about Nebuchadnezzar, the king who built Babylon. He was proud, rich, and arrogant until one day God changed him into a cow for seven years. After seven years he became Nebuchadnezzar again with the difference that he was now humble and pious.

Spiritual existence is all about enduring contradiction. Immediate existence, on the other hand, is about avoiding contradiction because in contradiction all immediacy is lost. “In all immediate existence, the point is not to come to see contradiction, for then immediacy is lost; in spiritual existence, the point is to endure contradiction, but also to keep it at arm’s length in freedom.” (pp.419-20)

A spiritual existence also depends on embracing suffering and the terrifying. Avoiding suffering is only of importance to one who wishes to live in finitude. “My depression hunts for the terrifying in all directions. Now it seizes me with all its dreadfulness. Flee from it, I cannot and will not—I must bear the thought; then I find a religious reassurance, and only then am I free and happy as spirit. Although I have the most inspired conception of God’s love… in time and temporality one must be prepared to suffer everything. It is my conviction that it is only a Judaizing relic, a truncated particularism in Christianity, or ordinary cowardliness and laziness that has the idea of being in relationship with God and of being exempted from such things. Officious spiritual or secular advice about keeping the terrible away is simply nauseating to me, because this advice does not understand what the terrible is. Indeed, anyone who is busy willing or became great by willing something in this finite world does well to keep and has been compelled to keep the terrible away, lest it change him and his goal into nothing or hinder him from attaining the fancied greatness. But the person who wills religiously must have receptivity precisely for the terrible; he must open himself to it and needs only to take care that he does not stop halfway, but that it leads him into the security of the infinite. This takes place gradually with each instance of the terrible. He becomes intimate with it, intimate with the thought that what he most fears will happen to him, but he also becomes expert in practicing this thought in his assurance of God’s love.” (pp.428-9)

We ought to fear God. The writer remarks that it is interesting “that there is more fear of God in the out-of-the-way places where there are two or three miles between each little cottage than in the noisy cities, that the sailor has more fear of God than the inhabitant of a market town, why, indeed, unless it is that these people experience something and experience it in such a way that there are no escapes. When the storm rages in the night and in it the hungry howling of the wolves sounds forebodingly, when someone in distress at sea has saved himself on a plank—that is, has to be rescued by a straw from certain ruin, and consequently one cannot send a message to the next cottage because no one dares to venture out into the night, and thus one can save one’s shouts: then one learns to be content with something other than confidence in night watchmen and policemen and the efficacy of distress signals. In big cities both people and buildings are packed in together much too tightly.” (pp.433-5)

*Letter to the Reader* – From Frater Taciturnus

In this final section Frater Taciturnus gives us his analysis of the preceding story (which it turns out he is the author of). The erotic relationship was only of minor concern to him. In general, his main interest was in using it “for orientation in the religious” (pp.455-6).

Unhappy Love

Unhappy love is the classic object for poetry. It “implies that love is assumed and that there is a power that prevents it from expressing itself happily in the lovers’ union.” (pp.461-2) This power must come from outside. This is important. “Poetry is connected with immediacy and thus cannot think a duplexity.” (pp.462-3) The duplexity Taciturnus is referring to here is dialectic, and “that which is intrinsically dialectical in itself contains the contradiction in itself. The poet’s task, however, is single, because the contradiction comes from outside… In poetry, therefore, love does not relate to itself but it relates to the world, and this relationship determines whether it becomes unhappy… The esthetic hero must have his opposition outside himself, not in himself.” (pp.463-5)

In our day, “love, like all passion, has become dialectical… All immediate love such as that [*Romeo and Juliet*] is incomprehensible…” (pp.465-6) These days, Taciturnus thinks, people “reject poetry and yet have no higher passion” (pp.466-7). The consequence of love having been “given up as an absolute passion” (pp.466-8) is that novelists take over. “If poetry is to continue to exist, it must discover another passion, one just as legitimate as love was for poetry.” (pp.467-8) The modern day hero is “a man who will work for a finite goal, will, as he says, sacrifice his life for it… Such a character, however, is completely unusuable for poetry” (pp.467-8). There is, and can be, no inspiration for modern authors because all “inspiration has its source in the passion of infinity… There is no inspiration in faith in oneself… All inspiration has its source either in faith in one’s passion or, deeper, in faith in a providence” (pp.468-70).

Taciturnus’ task, as he sees it with this story, was: “an unhappy love affair in which love is dialectical in itself and in the crisis of infinite reflection acquires a religious aspect.” (pp.474-5)

Misunderstanding

The same as we saw above with unhappy love applies here. For poetry, the reason for the misunderstanding between two people must arise in some third party, the removal of which, would result in understanding. If misunderstanding becomes dialectical however; that is, “the misunderstanding lies in the relation to each other of the heterogeneous ones themselves” (pp.476-7), then the reason for the misunderstanding is the misunderstanding itself and “the two could go on misunderstanding each other but nevertheless also basically understand each other.” (pp.475-6) Taciturnus notes here that misunderstanding only exists when the heterogeneous which are brought together are “of such a kind that there is a possibility of a relation, for otherwise the misunderstanding is not—therefore it can be said that as the basis of the misunderstanding there lies an understanding, that is, the possibility of an understanding. If the impossibility is present, then misunderstanding is not present. With the possibility, however, there is misunderstanding…” (pp.475-6)

With this in mind, Taciturnus now explains how it relates to his story: “I have placed together two heterogeneous individualities, one male and one female. Him I have kept in the power of spirit in the direction of the religious; her I have kept in esthetic categories. As soon as I posit a point of unity there can be plenty of misunderstanding. This point of unity is that they are united in loving each other. The misunderstanding, then, is not due to some third factor, as if they understood each other and were separated by some alien power—no, ironically enough, everything favors their misunderstanding. There is nothing to keep them from having each other and talking together, but right there the misunderstanding begins… Love itself has an ethical and an esthetic element. She declares that she loves and has the esthetic element and understands it esthetically; he says that he loves and understands it ethically. Hence they both love and love each other, but nevertheless it is a misunderstanding. The heterogeneous are kept separate by category” (pp.480-2).

He goes on to indicate the five decisive points in the heterogeneity between the two:

1. He is inclosingly reserved – she cannot even be that. She can’t be this because all inclosing reserve requires a “dialectical reduplication that for immediacy is altogether impossible.” (pp.488-9)
2. He is depressed – she is full of the joy of life.
3. He is essentially a thinker – she anything but that. In saying he is a thinker, Taciturnus is not saying he has read many books or is something like a professor. “He, however, is essentially an independent thinker, and in the sense that he must always have the idea along with him in order to exist. This engrosses him with the passion of an independent thinker, not with an assistant professor’s affected trustworthiness based on assurances.” (pp.493-4) His being a thinker also lends a comic element in the way that “he has been able to go on living without the least acquaintance with the world and especially with the opposite sex.” (pp.492-3)
4. He is ethical-dialectical – she, esthetically immediate. “He cannot understand what her suffering is essentially (if there is any), namely, to lose possession of another person; she does not understand at all what his suffering is essentially—responsibility and guilt.” (pp.494-5)
5. He is sympathetic – she in the sense of immediacy is innocently self-loving.

“The upshot of the whole process of misunderstanding is really that they nevertheless do not really love.” (pp.498-9) He lacks the immediacy which is the basic of the erotic, and she lacks the resignation to life her from self-love.

The Tragic Needs History More than the Comic Does

Tragedy needs to draw on some historical foothold to sell his play to the spectator. Comedy, however, doesn’t need this; “He may give his characters whatever names he pleases, he may have the episode take place wherever he wants it, if only the comic ideality is there so there is sure to be laughter… This means, then, that poetry does not believe itself capable of awakening ideality in the spectator by itself, does not believe that the spectator has it, but that the historical, that is, the fact that it is historical, will probably help him to gain it. With regard to the comic, however, it never occurs to the poet to want to appeal to history or to undergird the comic figure with the help of history,” (pp.500-2).

However, Taciturnus questions why this would be so; “…does it help one to believe in what is great by knowing it is historical? No, not at all. This knowledge merely assists one into an illusion that is infatuated with the palpably material. What is that which I know historically? It is the palpably material. Ideality I know by myself, and if I do not know it by myself, then I do not know it at all, and all the historical knowledge does not help.” (p.501) The historical can be of no help in bringing us to an understanding of the ideality. This is important because it means that “[t]here is nothing, therefore, more foolish in the religious sphere than to hear the commonsensical question that asks when something is being taught: Now, did it actually happen this way, for if it did one would believe it. Whether it actually happened this way, whether it is as ideal as it is represented, can be tested only by ideality, but one cannot have it historically bottled.” (pp.501-3) Spirit cannot be verified or validated by the historical. “It is spirit to ask about two things: (1) Is what is being said possible? (2) Am I able to do it? But it is lack of spirit to ask about two things: (1) Did it actually happen? (2) Has my neighbor Christophersen done it; has he actually done it? And faith is the ideality that resolves an *esse* in its *posse* and then conversely draws the conclusion in passion. If the object of faith is the absurd, then it still is not the historical that is believed, but faith is the ideality that resolves an *esse* in a *non posse* and now *wills* to believe it.” (pp.502-3)

The aesthetic result is external and can therefore be shown. The religious result, on the other hand, is purely internal and therefore isn’t visible. The ethical result is demanded instantly, “if I exclude every other thought and think only of the ethical, I demand with ethical sanction to see the good triumph with a boundless speed, to see the evil punished with boundless speed.” (pp.504-5)

Combining the aesthetic and the ethical then, allows the latter to play out over time in such a way that the result is visible. “This result is esthetic-ethical and therefore can be shown in the external to a certain degree. But there is a dubiousness about this result, for the ethical cannot regard the esthetic in any other way than to regard a direct union with it as a misalliance.” (pp.504-5)

If, however, we combine the aesthetic and the religious, the latter “then plays the same role as the esthetic, but as the superior; it spaces out the limitless speed of the ethical, and development takes place. But the scene is in the internal, in thoughts and dispositions that cannot be seen… The principle of the spirit is that the external and the visible (the world’s gloriousness or its miserableness for the existing person, a result in the external or the lack of it for the one acting) exist to try faith, consequently not to deceive but in order that the spirit can be tested by placing it in the realm of the indifferent and taking itself back again. The external makes no difference—and, first of all, the result lies in the internal and, second, is continually postponed.” (pp.505-6).

The idea of a lack of result in the religious gets really interesting when Taciturnus says; “What is expressed here about the lack of a result in the religious, I can also say in this way: the negative is higher than the positive… a positive is finished, and once one has heard it, one is also quickly finished. Here is result in overabundance.” (pp.506-8) He takes a dig at Hegel here who can tell you all about a positive infinity. The problem for Taciturnus though is that this means nothing for a human being; “The only thing a latecomer perhaps does not understand is how a living human being or a human being during his lifetime becomes such a being that he can be calmed and reassured in this positive infinity, which usually is reserved for the deity and eternity and the deceased… For a finite being, and that, after all, is what human beings are as long as they live in temporality, the negative infinity is the higher, and the positive is a dubious reassurance. Spiritual existence, especially the religious, is not easy; the believer continually lies out on the deep, has 70,000 fathoms of water beneath him.” (pp.507-9)

The religious doesn’t deal with the historical at all; indeed, it “makes every historical foothold meaningless. It is never finished, at least not in time, and therefore can be represented as such only by a deception.” (pp.508-10)

Repentance

“Poetry cannot use repentance; as soon as it is assumed, the scene is internal. Naturally the system cannot use it either; for the system, after all, has to be finished, the sooner the better, and not until it is finished has it nothing to repent, and in order to become finished it sees to it that it is free of repentance. The systematic abbreviation of the pathological elements of life is sheer ludicrousness the moment it wants to have anything but a metaphysical significance. Thus the system is exclusively metaphysics, and as such that is quite in order, but it is not a system that embraces existence, for then the ethical must be included, and to abbreviate the ethical is to make a fool of it.” (p.510)

The problem with the man in the story is that “he is unable to take himself back in repentance, that at the extreme point he becomes suspended in a dialectical relation to actuality” (pp.510-1). The “actuality” that suspends the man is precisely the woman he loves. She is a “gladfly” that “will not let him slip out and thereby absolutely into the religious.” (pp.510-1) In addition, for repentance to appear, there must also be guilt. Unfortunately, for our man, this whole situation has become dialectical in another way, for it is unclear to what extent he is guilty; “if Quidam of the construction had had an actual sin, it would have been far easier to clear him of it, for then the dialectical would have been avoided.” (pp.510-1)

Suffering

“The esthetic hero is great by *conquering*, the religious hero by *suffering*. To be sure, the tragic hero also suffers, but in such a way that he simultaneously conquers in the external.” (pp.519-20) Aesthetics is concerned with the immediate and suffering must come from without, hence being visible, not concealed within the individual. It is from this that Taciturnus holds that sickness is an example of suffering that does not qualify as aesthetic. On the other hand, to leave the aesthetic, we drop the externality and make the suffering relate to the idea.

With this quote, we can see that the man in our story is tragic in that, being sympathetic in nature, he considers it important that he suffers more than the girl. If he were an aesthetic hero, he would have acted differently; “I see my idea of existence being stranded on this girl, *ergo*, she must go; my road to a great goal runs over her downfall.” (pp.520-1)

Non-aesthetic suffering is based on an idea. “But what is the idea-relationship that could be to the point here [in our story]? It is, of course, a relationship with God. The suffering is within the individual himself; he is no esthetic hero, and the relationship is with God.” (pp.524-5)

Tragedy works on the spectator by arousing fear and compassion (or pity) but at the same time taking away the egotism of the spectator so that he “loses himself in the hero’s suffering, forgetting himself in him.” (pp.525-6) The difference between the aesthetic and the religious here is in what arouses fear. The former wants the spectator to “fear fate and to have compassion for the person who suffers under it—the subject, however, must be great and quantitatively conspicuous.” (pp.527-8) The latter however, “wants to teach the listener not to fear fate, not to lose time in pity for the person who falls before fate. All this has become less important to him, which is why he, unlike the estheticist, sees all people, great and small, as equally exposed to the blows of fate. But then he says, “What you must fear is guilt, and your compassion must be for the person who falls in this way, for the danger is first here. Yet your compassion must not go astray so that you forget yourself over some other person.”” (pp.527-8) The religious is about the individual. “For the religious person, fear and compassion are something different and are purified not by turning outward but by turning inward. The esthetic healing consists in this, that the individual, by staring himself into the esthetic dizziness, disappears from himself, like an atom, like a speck of dust, something thrown into the bargain along with what is the common lot of all human beings, of all humanity, disappears like an infinitely brief fractional consonance in the harmony of the spheres of life. The religious healing, conversely, consists in transforming the world and centuries and generations and millions of contemporaries to something vanishing, transforming jubilation and acclamation and esthetic hero worship into a disturbing diversion, the idea of being finished into a phantasmagoric hallucination—so that all that remains is only the individual himself—this particular individual placed in his relationship with God under the qualification: guilty/not guilty.” (pp.528-9) Taciturnus says that the religious speaker always speaks in a monologue (this is preaching) and is always occupied only with himself. He doesn’t care whether anyone is listening, he doesn’t indulge in theatrics or “ripping the clouds asunder to show heaven open, the judgment day at hand, hell in the background, himself and the elect triumphantly celebrating; he does the simpler and less pretentious thing, the humble feat that is supposed to be so very easy: he lets heaven remain closed, in fear and trembling does not feel that he himself is finished, bows his head while the judgment of the discourse falls upon thought and mind.” (pp.530-1) Even if everything he says is misunderstood and no one was moved, the religious speaker can nevertheless be confident that one person went home strengthened; the speaker himself. This is fine because “the religious speaker always has his primary aim: the speaker himself.” (pp.531-2)

Self-inflicted Suffering – Self-torment

In aesthetics self-torment is always comic because aesthetics “maintains the hero in a sound condition on the basis of the immediate relation between strength and suffering (within/from without). Therefore it considers any inward direction a desertion, and since it cannot have the deserter shot it makes him ludicrous.” (pp.533-4) Self-torment viewed religiously, on the other hand, is quite different. The religious individual’s fear (which is the self-inflicted suffering) is for himself. Religious self-torment is a matter of discovering the ever-present possibility of danger and at the same time being joyous. “The question is whether one has not become joyful in the wrong place; and where is the right place? It is—in danger. To be joyful out on 70,000 fathoms of water, many, many miles from all human help—yes, that is something great! To swim in the shallows in the company of waders is not the religious.” (pp.537-8)

At the end of this section, Taciturnus also has a dig at novels; “Readers of novels, of course, make other and greater demands and feel that when everything revolves around only two characters it must be boring, which it is indeed if it does not also revolve around the categories. If it does, even one character can be entertaining, and 6 billion 477,378,785 people cannot revolve around more. A reader of novels, of course, is excited only when something exciting is going on, as one says upon seeing a crowd. But if the crowd revolves around nothing, then there is still not anything going on.” (pp.542-3)

Repentance of Nothing

To repent of nothing can be understood in two ways. In one, it means “continually to cut down the bridge of the past behind one in order continually to be able to act at the moment.” (pp.542-3) This is perfectly ethical and commendable. In the other, however, it means repent of nothing in order not to be delayed; “there are many people who rush through life with the haste of anxiety. There is nothing they fear more than the dialectical, and when they say “Repent of nothing” with regard to the past, they could with the same right say “Deliberate about nothing” with regard to the future.” (pp.543-4) this is extremely unethical.

For Taciturnus, only “the person who in deliberation has exhausted the dialectical, only he acts, and only the person who in repentance exhausts the dialectical, only he repents.” (p.544) Repentance is not a positive movement outwards or towards something; rather, it is “a negative movement inwards, not a doing but by oneself letting something happen to oneself.” (p.544)

Next, Taciturnus summarises the categories:

There are three existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the religious. The metaphysical is abstraction, and there is no human being who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical, the ontological, is, but it does not exist, for when it exists it does so in the esthetic, in the ethical, in the religious, and when it is, it is the abstraction from or a *prius* [something prior] to the esthetic, the ethical, the religious. The ethical sphere is only a transition sphere, and therefore its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The esthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfillment, but, please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack with gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space, and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful. (pp.544-5)

Since the ethical sphere is a passageway – one which the individual does not pass through once and forever – and since repentance is its expression, repentance is the most dialectical. Repentance then looks backwards with an impulse that “signifies precisely the difference between the esthetic and the religious as the difference between the external and the internal.” (pp.544-5)

A Concluding Word

Here Taciturnus talks a little about himself. He is not religious, he says; instead, he is merely capable of seeing the religious from all sides. The fact that he is able to look at the religious like this makes him better than the sophist (who can only see one side) but the fact that he does not thereby become a religious person makes him a kind of sophist. “The very least one in the sphere of religiousness is infinitely greater than the greatest sophist. The gods have alleviated my pain over this by granting me many a beautiful observation and by equipping me with a certain amount of wittiness, which will be taken away from me if I use it against the religious.” (p.556)

He classes sophists into three categories:

1. “Those who from the esthetic reach an immediate relation to the religious. Here religion becomes poetry, history; the sophist himself is enthusiastic about the religious, but poetically enthusiastic” (p.556).
2. “Those who from the immediate ethical enter into an [VI 452] immediate relation to the religious. For them religion becomes a positive doctrine of obligation, instead of repentance being the supreme task of the ethical and expressly negative. The sophist remains untested in infinite reflection, a paragon of positive epitomization.” (p.556)
3. “Those who place the metaphysical in an immediate relation to the religious. Here religion becomes history, which is finished; the sophist is finished with religion and at most becomes an inventor of the system… they are magnanimously unconcerned about themselves. But the religious consists precisely in being religiously, infinitely concerned about oneself and not about visions, in being infinitely concerned about oneself and not about a positive goal, which is negative and finite because the infinitely negative is the only adequate form for the infinite, in being infinitely concerned about oneself and consequently not deeming oneself finished, which is negative and perdition.” (pp.556-7)