

Michael Edward Moore, review to appear in *The European Legacy*: (14:7), 2009.

Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks. Volume 2, Journals EE-KK. Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Brue H. Kirmmse, Vanessa Rumble, K. Brian Söderquist and George Pattison. "Published in cooperation with the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre Copenhagen." (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). xxii +672 pp. US\$124.50.

In 1846, when Søren Kierkegaard reflected on his life and work in stuffy, conformist Copenhagen, he dejectedly spat "My life is wasted." By the time of that entry, Kierkegaard had produced, at a blinding pace, a large number of highly original and brilliant works. During the period comprising this volume of journal entries (from 1836 to 1846), Kierkegaard completed the following books: *Either/Or*, *Repetition*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Stages on Life's Way*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and *Edifying Discourses*. Much of the journal material resonates with those works. It is breathtaking to contemplate the intensity and strain of such a period of relentless writing. With the assistance of this vital section of his journals, we catch a glimpse of the inner life and daily existence of the man during this period of hyper-productivity, but as it happens, only a glimpse at a distance. Emmanuel Levinas once complained that Kierkegaard was one of those who introduced into modern philosophy the tendency to "philosophize with a hammer." But there is little hammering in these journals. Kierkegaard seems much more the theologian than the philosopher here. Rather than the heat of battle, we find the chill of autumn and a sense of loneliness: "it is true that in autumn everything reminds us of ruin." Or in 1837: "I stand like a solitary spruce" or "every flower of my heart turns into a frost flower." The refrain of regret is constant, as is the mysterious pleading of some obscure fault. There are dense shadows moving within other shadows.

According to Kierkegaard, the deeds of the past "lie like oak leaves before the feet of the person who treads among them." What deeds? Did his remorse about jilting Regine take on such savage dimensions? He felt surges of emotional pain, and suffered from an endless restaging of this long-ago drama, to such an extent that it invaded his interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. Just as Abraham (in Kierkegaard's dialectic) tried to make Isaac believe that he – Abraham – had gone mad and really wanted to kill him, so as to prevent Isaac from hating God, so the real Kierkegaard pretended to go out on the town, and to the theatre, to convince Regine that she had been jilted by a terrible *dandy* who had no real regard for her. Thus Kierkegaard saddled his mule, and rode toward his own Mount Moriah. Such an obsessive return of old deeds was what he called, in 1840, the "total presence of the past." Jilting Regine was something about which he could speak openly in his journal. But there was something else, something dire.

Within that shadow lay another, more obscure still: "this inclination, this taste for the secret of sin." This may have to do with his father's oppressive effect on his life. Ever since the brilliant short life of Kierkegaard by Lowrie, it has been known that Kierkegaard believed that the sins of his father had been visited on him. He recorded his father's old fault in a journal entry of 1846: "How dreadful the

thought of that man who once, as a small boy tending sheep on the Jutland heath, in much suffering, starving and exhausted, stood up on a hill and cursed God..." This sin against the Holy Spirit was accepted by Kierkegaard as the source of a deadly fate for himself. The sources of unhappiness were interwoven. One minute he might be writing about his dismissal of Regine, and the next minute he would be writing about his father: "My relationship to Father, his melancholy, the eternal night brooding deep inside me..." Kierkegaard must have pondered the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge* (Jer 31:29). But even this ancestral fault does not seem to explain what Kierkegaard recoiled from in his own character, with so much agony. Why does he so passionately and pointedly quote Hamann: *Periissem nisi periissem*? Something deeply hidden was involved. He feared its effect on his character and sanity: "a human being who has long concealed a secret goes insane." What secret? A thin ray of hope came to him from his observation that the canon law coolly stated: "The Church does not judge what is hidden" (*De occultis non judicat ecclesia*). Kierkegaard declared plainly, in fact, that the mystery would never be solved by reference to these journals: "After my death no one will find among my papers...what has *really* filled my life." And I believe him.

The journals, when read at length, appear to confirm the common image of Kierkegaard as a man stranded on a pinnacle of rock, friendless and chilled to the bone. It must be admitted that this was also his self-perception. Little joy breaks through. Kierkegaard identified with Socrates and (as Pierre Hadot explained in a classic essay) often put on the mask of Socratic irony. His humor was distilled into strong ironic vinegar, and this added to his own suffering. For according to Kierkegaard, that is the nature of irony: "Irony is suspicious of both right and left. A true ironist has therefore never been in the majority. Unlike the jester." The jester may catch the crowd laughing and draw them over to his side, but the ironist hovers overhead, birdlike and without fellowship. "There is a bird called the rainseer and that is what I am like; in our times when a storm starts brewing, individuals of my sort turn up." The Socratic position was an historical destiny as well as a philosophical task. It was also unpleasant and untenable: "Irony is an abnormal development which, like the abnormality in the livers of Strasbourg geese, ends by killing the individual."

He felt like excess baggage, and unwanted. A culminating image of his ironic humor and tendency to despair is this picaresque figure: "Now and then I get a strange desire to make an *entrechat* with my legs, to snap my fingers, and then – die."

This edition is a masterpiece of philology and erudition. The printing is beautiful, with all the subtleties of columns, marginal comments and later additions made clear. The entries are provided with an absorbing set of notes, which themselves are worthy of considerable study. The books that Kierkegaard was reading, from de Wette to Hamann, the probable or known editions and other literary references are all made clear, and much else besides. There are beautiful reproductions of certain text pages, tags and bindings which allow the reader to appreciate the *documentality* of the journals. The presence of the author was made

so clear in this edition that quite unexpectedly I began to feel a strong sense of friendship for Kierkegaard.

Little freaks and jokes, which sometimes recur in the journals, are almost sad in the apparent absence of fellowship in Kierkegaard's life. Without the comprehensive range of a complete edition like this (11 volumes are planned), we would not usually be provided with examples of Kierkegaard's writing which do not build up our picture of the "great man": "One way to prevent the theft of your watch: Let the hair on the back of your neck grow, braid it into two pigtailed which are wound around your neck, and hang your watch from it." The journals convey the humor and inwardness of one who could only accompany himself. Another fascinating dimension of the journals are the many dramatic scenarios he composed – there is one concerning a pastor burdened with guilt and bearing a weight of responsibility, who observes a group of children swimming happily in a lake, and he is suddenly struck by the contrast between their situation and his own. Kierkegaard was fascinated by the figure of Lady Macbeth, and imagined several scenarios in which he was seemingly drawn into her role.

In these journals it also appears that Kierkegaard's anti-modernism could take the conventional form of nineteenth-century conservatism. Many provocative, unanticipated, often sad aphorisms will be discovered here, many revealing a tremendous personal charm. Thus Kierkegaard mocked his own mixture of emotionalism and classicism: "How curious that one day I walk in *cothurni*, the next day – in boots." We learn of his affectionate interest in patristics: "the very reverend tree-lined avenue of Church fathers, in whose shade I can still rest." We are able to read his many prayers, in which we find how absolutely he could take refuge in God, in states of prayer securing him so much solace and comfort that he wished he could *stay* inside the prayer. A fitting conclusion to this review is the following prayer of transcendent friendship, self-denial, and noble faithfulness to self. According to Kierkegaard, it was the original motto for *Fear and Trembling*:

"Write" – "For whom" – "Write for the dead, for those whom you love in a former time" – "Will they read me then?" – "No."