



Kierkegaard in Process

Volume 4 (1), September 2019

kierkegaardinprocess@gmail.com

The Marvel, the Moment, and the Fullness of Time: Kierkegaard's Mystical Explorations with John Climacus and John the Silent

G. P. Marcar, Ph.D.

University of Otago, New Zealand

gpmarcar@gmail.com

Abstract

Interpreting the thought of Søren Kierkegaard is a notoriously difficult task. One reason for this is that some of his best-known works are written under enigmatic pseudonyms. Of interest here is Kierkegaard's decision that two of his pseudonyms—Johannes Climacus and Johannes de Silentio—be named after early medieval saints John Climacus (579-649) and John the Silent (454-558). Historically, these figures not only lived in adjoining centuries and geographical areas, but also displayed similar preferences for long periods of monastic prayer and silence. Within Kierkegaard's literary corpus, Johannes Climacus is first attributed to *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), while Johannes de Silentio is the authorial voice in *Fear and Trembling* (1843). This article will focus on the latter. Through an examination of concepts and motifs in *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments*, as well as with Kierkegaard's self-authored *Discourses*, this article will suggest that Kierkegaard's choice of medieval guises for his works may not be incidental; rather, just as the historical John Climacus and John the Silent share some poignant biographical similarities—chief among which are extensive silence and prayer before God—so too the works of their Kierkegaardian namesakes share a common message of doxological silence and divine incarnational love.

Keywords

Kierkegaard; Climacus; de Silentio; pseudonyms; mystical theology; silence; love.

1. Introduction

As Kierkegaard himself appears to have anticipated in his *Journals*,¹ *Fear and Trembling* (1843) is often considered today to be his most widely read and influential work. In three “problemata”, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author Johannes de Silentio sets out to explore Abraham’s decision to obey God and sacrifice his only son, Isaac, as described in Genesis 22:1-19 (an account which is also known as the “binding of Isaac” or the *Akedah*). By focussing on an apparent theological overlap between *Fear and Trembling* and another of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous texts published a year later, *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), this paper will aim to briefly provide a prolegomenon for viewing this most multivalent of texts, *Fear and Trembling*, and its most obscure of pseudonymous authors, Johannes de Silentio, in a somewhat different light.²

Kierkegaard is not ordinarily known as someone with an interest in medieval contemplatives. Indeed, Kierkegaard often appears to express outright contempt for the monastic lifestyle adopted by many theologians of this period, likening it at one point to a childish and reclusive game of hide-and-seek (WL 144).³ In this context, it may seem strange to observe how many of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, particularly in the early period of his authorship, are distinctly monastic in character. These include Victor Eremita, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous editor of *Either/Or* (1843)—whose Latin name literally translates as “victorious hermit”—and the pseudonymous author of the “religious” discourse titled “Guilty/Not Guilty?” in *Stages on Life’s Way* (1845), Frater Taciturnus (“Brother Silent”). More notably, however, Kierkegaard names the authors of both *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments* after two early medieval Christian saints: John Climacus (579-649) and John the Silent (454-558). Both these figures were monks in Middle-Eastern countries who spent significant amounts of time in silent contemplation. John Climacus spent forty years in silent prayer in Egypt, while John the Silent is similarly reputed to have lived alone in silence for seventy-six years in Syria.⁴

¹ Kierkegaard postulates that once “I am dead, *Fear and Trembling* alone will be enough for an imperishable name as an author. Then it will read, translated into foreign languages as well” (JP 6, 6491).

² For some of the most recent and extensive attempts to interpret this author and his text, see for instance Lippitt, 2003; Carlisle, 2010; Conway, 2015.

³ See also the critique of mysticism advanced by Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author, Judge William in *EO2*, 241-50.

⁴ For a brief account of John the Silent’s life, see for instance Butler, 1866: 174–80. See also Cyril of Scythopolis & Binns, 1991: 220-44. For an even briefer summary of what is known about John Climacus’ life, see Climacus, 1982: xxii; 4-5.

In his *Journals* and elsewhere, Kierkegaard gives no formal clues as to why he chose these medieval monastic aliases for *Philosophical Fragments* and *Fear and Trembling*. Perhaps, however, some small insight may be gleaned from the shape of these aliases' theological thought. Unlike Johannes de Silentio's real-life counterpart, John the Silent—about whom relatively little is known—John Climacus does have a known theological text to his name. The historical Climacus authored the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which uses the analogy of Jacob's ladder from Genesis 28 to describe how (in thirty “steps”) the soul may ascend to God. The ladder begins with love, and ends with a process which (through prayer and stillness) arrives at love.⁵ It is from the foothold of this observation that this paper will proceed. After briefly describing what is arguably Kierkegaard's most profound account of divine love—Johannes Climacus' story of the “king who loved a maiden” in Chapter 2 of *Philosophical Fragments*, this article will proceed to highlight how Johannes de Silentio, in his introductory section to *Fear and Trembling* titled “Eulogy for Abraham”, appears to draw from the same theological and scriptural well as Climacus. I will then attempt to show how Kierkegaard's self-authored *Devotional Discourses*, although written significantly later, may be said to further underline and illuminate the doxological, silence-centred focus of Johannes de Silentio.

2. “The Wonder” of God's Love in *Philosophical Fragments*

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus seeks to contrast Christianity with what he terms the “Socratic understanding” of the truth and its discovery.⁶ In Chapter 2 of *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus embarks on a “poetic venture” which tells of “a king who loved a maiden”. This is intended to explore how and why “the Teacher” or “the God” might choose to reveal Himself to the learner within time. Climacus begins with an unequivocal affirmation that God's motivation is love, and winning the learner's love is His end (PF 25). Love for Climacus entails a desire for absolute equality with the beloved. For Climacus, that God in love

⁵ See Climacus, 1982; For an account which also draws a comparison between Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus with the historical John Climacus, see Howland, 2006: 11–13.

⁶ A side-question here concerns whether the views of Climacus align with those of Kierkegaard himself, or whether Kierkegaard is perhaps using Climacus to represent a perspective he does not necessarily hold. Space here does not permit a detailed discussion of this question, but it should be noted that a draft of *Philosophical Fragments* suggests that the text was under Kierkegaard's own name right up until the day before it was sent for publication. While scholars are left to speculate as to why Kierkegaard made this decision, one important implication stands out: when the content of *Philosophical Fragments* was written, it was done under Kierkegaard's own name. Even after publication moreover, Kierkegaard clearly retained a sense of authorial responsibility over *Philosophical Fragments*, as evidenced by his decision to include his own name as a ‘person responsible’ for the publication of the work.

seeks such equality with the learner is simply too incredible for human comprehension. He explains:

For if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed god could need him? This would indeed be the worst of thoughts or, rather, so bad a thought that it could not arise in him, even though, when the god has confided it to him, he adoringly [*tilbedende*] says: This thought did not arise in my heart...for do we not...stand here before the *wonder* [*Vidunderet*]...whose solemn silence cannot be disturbed by human wrangling over what is mine and what is yours (PF 36; SKS 4, 242).

Climacus' acknowledgment here that "the wonder" [*Vidunderet*] of God's initiative towards the learner "did not arise in [a human] heart" is a reference to 1 Corinthians 2:9, the full text of which reads "[w]hat no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." In what follows, I will seek to highlight Johannes de Silentio's allusions to 1 Corinthians 2 in his "Eulogy to Abraham". Acknowledgement of this, in turn, will facilitate a greater appreciation for the significance of de Silentio's reference to *Vidunderet*. Although translated in Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments* as "the wonder", *Vidunderet* is often translated as "the marvel" in de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling*,⁷ as a result of which the thematic link between "the wonder" in *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *Fear and Trembling* (1843) has hitherto gone unexplored.

3. De Silentio's "Eulogy to Abraham": *Fear and Trembling* and 1 Corinthians 2

In a well-known Irish joke, a man asks the way to Dublin, only to receive the reply "if I were you, I wouldn't start from here." Johannes de Silentio appears to have suffered from a similar lack of directional certainty, providing his reader with a preface and four separate introductory sections, before embarking upon *Fear and Trembling*. In the second of these introductions, "Eulogy to Abraham", de Silentio locates "greatness" in two interrelated characteristics: expectancy and love. He writes that "[n]o one who was great in the world will be forgotten, but everyone was great in his own way, and everyone in proportion to the greatness of that which he loved. He who loved himself became great by virtue of himself, and he who loved other men became great by his devotedness, but he who loved God became greatest of all. Everyone shall be remembered, but everyone became great in proportion to his expectancy" (FT 16). Being in a relation of love to God, as well as the centrality of expectancy to de Silentio's

⁷ See for instance FT 46; SKS 4, 140.

conception of faith, maps on easily to the central themes of Kierkegaard's 1843 *Upbuilding Discourses*—most obviously, his three discourses on how “Every Good and Every Perfect Gift Is From Above”, and “The Expectancy of Faith.” The thematic importance of gift and hopeful expectancy which *Fear and Trembling* shares with these discourses has not been overlooked in recent years.⁸ However, what has arguably garnered less attention is the nature of the *object* of this love and expectancy: God, or “the impossible.” The implications of this will be examined further shortly.

De Silentio goes on to state in his “Eulogy” to *Fear and Trembling*'s protagonist that someone may become great by “expecting the possible”, but “he who expected the impossible became greatest of all” (FT 16).⁹ This figure is Abraham, who was great by virtue of “power [*Kraft*] whose strength [*Styrke*] is powerlessness”, “wisdom [*Viisdom*] whose secret [*Hemmelighed*] is foolishness [*Daarskab*]”, “hope whose form is madness”, and love that is a rejection of oneself (FT 16-17; SKS 4, 113). In *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, Merold Westphal highlights the echoes between this passage in *Fear and Trembling* and 1 Corinthians 1 which speaks, using the same language as that of de Silentio, of how God has “made foolish [*til Daarlighed*] the wisdom [*Viisdom*] of the world.... [f]or the foolishness [*Daarlige*] of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger [*Stærkere*] than men.”¹⁰

Westphal notes that four months after *Fear and Trembling* was published, Kierkegaard delivered a sermon on 1 Corinthians 2, in which he further underlines the tension between human and divine wisdom.¹¹ Interestingly, although Westphal points to this sermon in order to support a connection between *Fear and Trembling* and 1 Corinthians 1, he does not explicitly explore any connection between *Fear and Trembling* and 1 Corinthians 2, on which the sermon in question is actually based. Of particular note is 1 Corinthians 2:3-7, in which Paul speaks of being in “much fear and trembling” (*Frygt og med megen Bæven*):

I was with you in weakness and in *much fear and trembling* [*Frygt og med megen Bæven*], and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom [*Viisdom*], but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power [*Kraft*], so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom

⁸ For an interesting account of congruencies between Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses* and *Fear and Trembling*, culminating in a contrast of the account of love within these texts, see Pattison, 2002: 195; for a commentary which highlights the centrality of gift and reciprocity to Abraham's faith in *Fear and Trembling*, see Carlisle, 2010; for a recent work which draws upon Kierkegaard's 1843 discourse, ‘The Expectancy of Faith’ in order to illuminate our understanding of Abraham's faith in *Fear and Trembling*, see Lippitt, 2015: 122–42.

⁹ For an approach which (akin to the one which follows here) perceives this as central to de Silentio's perception of Abraham's faith in *Fear and Trembling*, see Davenport, 2008: 196–233.

¹⁰ Here and in what follows, the Danish translation of the biblical text can be found in *Bibelen: 1871* (BookRix, 2013).

¹¹ See Kierkegaard, 1958: 159-177.

[*Viisdom*] of men but in the power [*Kraft*] of God. Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom [*Viisdom*], although it is not a wisdom [*Viisdom*], of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret [*Hemmelighed*] and hidden [*Skjulte*] wisdom [*Viisdom*], of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification [1 Corinthians 2:3-7, emphasis added].¹²

As noted above, 1 Corinthians 2 proceeds to the passage which Kierkegaard associates with “the wonder” [*Vidunderet*] of Christianity and source of its offensiveness: “[w]hat no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). It has been commonly asserted that the title of de Silentio’s *Fear and Trembling* is a reference to Philippians 2:12, where Paul’s readers are urged to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” This assertion finds support in Kierkegaard’s *Journals*, where he appears to link the phrase “fear and trembling” with this biblical passage.¹³ This paper, however, will aim to suggest a different angle: perhaps, rather than being solely (or even primarily) a reference to Philippians 2:12, de Silentio also has the “much fear and trembling” of 1 Corinthians in view. As in 1 Corinthians 2, the primary tension in Christianity’s message here is not simply between human speech and divine *wisdom* [*Viisdom*], but between human speech, divine wisdom and divine *power* [*Kraft*]. In addition, the language in 1 Corinthians 2 of divine “secret” and “hidden” wisdom connects with Abraham’s “wisdom [*Viisdom*] whose secret [*Hemmelighed*] is foolishness [*Daarskab*]” in de Silentio’s “Eulogy”.

4. Faith, the Wonder and the Fullness of Time

De Silentio next describes how, if Abraham had not had faith, then Isaac would not have been born and “Sarah would surely have died of sorrow” (FT 18). However, Abraham did have faith, as a result of which “[t]hen came the fullness of time [*Tidens Fylde*]” (FT 18; SKS 4, 115), in which Isaac was gifted to Abraham and Sarah by God. Abraham “accepted the fulfilment of the promise, he accepted it in faith, and it happened according to the promise and according to his faith” (FT 18-19). Commentators on *Fear and Trembling* have often overlooked this brief description of how Sarah became pregnant with Isaac. The passage is, however, arguably more significant than it first appears. One year later in *Philosophical Fragments*, de Silentio’s pseudonymous cousin Climacus gives a specific and revealing definition of “fullness of time” (*Tidens Flyde*):

¹² 1 Corinthians 2:3-7. emphasis added, with words from the 19th Century Danish translation in parentheses.

¹³ See for instance JP 1, 420; JP 3, 3369; JP 6, 6198.

And, now, the moment [*Øieblikket*]. A moment such as this is unique. To be sure, it is short and temporal, as the moment is; it is passing, as the moment is, past, as the moment is in the next moment, and yet it is decisive, and yet it is filled with the eternal. A moment such as this must have a special name. Let us call it: *the fullness of time* [*Tidens Fylde*]. (PF 18 [emphasis original]; SKS 4, 288).

Seen through this lens, the “fullness of time” in which Sarah’s pregnancy with Isaac occurs in *Fear and Trembling* is an instance of “the moment” [*Øieblikket*], which refers to a temporal point in the present which is nevertheless “filled with the eternal”. Another term which de Silentio uses in this context which should immediately carry some resonance for those familiar with Climacus’ *Philosophical Fragments* is “the marvel” or “the wonder” (*Vidunderet*). A derivative of this term (*det Vidunderlige*) is first used by de Silentio to speak of Isaac’s miraculous conception in the “fullness of time” (FT 18; SKS 4, 288).¹⁴ Both here and in *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard’s use of the term *Tidens Fylde* may be a scriptural allusion to Galatians 4:4, which reads “[b]ut when the fullness of time [*Tidens Fylde*] had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law”. De Silentio here perhaps signals agreement with the longstanding tradition within Christian theology of viewing the conception of Isaac as prefiguring the immaculate conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Irrespective of this point, both Isaac’s conception and the incarnation of God in Christ demonstrates the power and love of the eternal/God’s intervention within the temporal, as proclaimed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 and described as *Vidunderet* by Kierkegaard’s monastically-inspired pseudonyms.

5. Silence, *Fear and Trembling*, and “the moment”

Another text which may help to illuminate the connections highlighted above between de Silentio’s *Fear and Trembling* and 1 Corinthians 2 is Kierkegaard’s self-attributed *Devotional Discourses*. In the first of Kierkegaard’s *Three Devotional Discourses on The Lily in the Field and the Bird in the Air* (1849), Kierkegaard discusses how the birds and the lilies may be exemplary to human beings in their silence. Simply because, Kierkegaard observes, it is an advantage that human beings *can* talk, it does not follow that being silent is an inferior practice to speaking (WA 10). Non-human animals are naturally silent, whereas it belongs to human beings to converse. Silence, for human beings, is therefore an “art-form”, which can be learnt “from the silent teachers, the lily and the bird” (WA 10). Kierkegaard here contradicts the common assumption that

¹⁴ This connection is subsequently reiterated by de Silentio in “Problema I”, where he speaks of “Abraham’s receiving Isaac by a marvel [*Vidunderet*]” (FT 63; SKS 4, 157. Cf. EUD 277).

human superiority over animals lies in their exercise of speech (cf. EUD 85). “The poet says: Speech is the human being’s advantage over the animal—yes, quite true, if he is able *to be silent*” (WA 13). In his *Journals*, Kierkegaard even goes so far as to say that it is an “advantage” of non-human animals that they cannot talk:

[w]hen, for example, I see a deer in heat, I see what it means, that the deer is in the grip of a powerful drive, and there is nothing further to say about it. If it could talk, we would perhaps hear some rubbish about its being motivated by a sense of duty, that out of duty to society and the race it wants to propagate the species, plus the fact that it is performing the greatest service etc...Language, the gift of speech, engulfs the human race in such a cloud of drivel and twaddle that it becomes its ruination (JP 3, 2337).

For Kierkegaard, language too easily becomes a tool which facilitates human hypocrisy and selfishness. To become silent, by contrast, is the “beginning” of “the fear of God [*Gudsfrygt*]” in which humanity’s self-serving thoughts and desires are muted (WA 11). This God-fright is, in turn, the “beginning of [human] wisdom [*Viisdom*]” (WA 11; SKS 11, 17). Whereas the ability to talk is a mark of superiority over non-human animals, Kierkegaard warns that this same ability can be harmful in the context of God. This is because whereas God is love (*Kjerlighed*), the human being is akin to a silly child who does not know what is in his or her best interests. For this reason, human beings and God cannot “converse” except in “much fear and trembling”. Kierkegaard writes:

Only in much fear and trembling [*megen Frygt og Bæven*] is a human being able to speak with God, in much fear and trembling [*megen Frygt og Bæven*]. But to speak in much fear and trembling [*megen Frygt og Bæven*] is difficult for another reason, because just as anxiety makes the voice fail physically, so also much fear and trembling [*megen Frygt og Bæven*] makes speech fall into silence (WA 11; SKS 11, 17-18).

Among the notable features of Kierkegaard’s four-fold reference to “fear and trembling” (*Frygt og Bæven*) in this passage is that the phrase is always coupled with “much” (*megen*). This arguably suggests that, in using this phrase, Kierkegaard is not primarily thinking of the “fear and trembling” (*Frygt og Bæven*) of Philippians 2, but the “much fear and trembling” (*Frygt og med megen Bæven*) of 1 Corinthians 2. Indeed, not only does 1 Corinthians 2 include the phrase “much fear and trembling”, but a number of other parallels can be discerned. In his *Three Devotional Discourses* (as in de Silentio’s *Fear and Trembling*), Kierkegaard highlights the impotence of human speech before God. This clearly resonates with 1 Corinthians 2:4, where Paul states “and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom.” For Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, Kierkegaard in this *Devotional Discourse* and Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, “much fear and trembling” is commensurate with an awareness of the

inadequacy of human speech or wisdom. As such, it is the prelude to silence and genuine wisdom which appreciates the power of God.

Kierkegaard further writes in *Three Devotional Discourses* that silence is the proper form of prayer. “[W]hen prayer has really become prayer it has become silence” (WA 12). Silence involves the absolute subordination of one’s will to the will of God, and a corresponding refusal to assert one’s will over that of others. Kierkegaard locates this silence within nature. Although one might hear sounds such as the forest’s “whispers” or the “roaring” of the sea, all of nature is, for Kierkegaard, essentially “silent” (WA 13). As nature does not possess a will of its own, the noise which each creature makes is in perfect uniformity with every other. In this, the bird and the lily’s mode of being provides a template for true human prayer, wherein individuals subordinate their own wills to that of the eternal in order to seek God’s kingdom. For Kierkegaard, these non-speaking creatures thereby teach human beings to be silent, which is constitutive of true prayer and seeking *first* the Kingdom of God. Being preoccupied with their own concerns and failing to be silent prevents human beings from appreciating the operation of the eternal within the temporal, “the moment” which is also the “fullness of time” (in which “the wonder” occurs). Seen thus, silence is definitive for one’s relationship to the eternal/God. As Kierkegaard states:

everything depends on the moment [*Øieblikket*]. Indeed, the misfortune in the lives of the great majority of human beings is this, that they were never aware of the moment, that in their lives the eternal and the temporal are exclusively separated. And why? Because they could not be silent (WA 14; SKS 11, 20).

The tightly-bound interlinkage between prayer, silence and subordinating one’s own will to God is clearly also present in Kierkegaard around the time in which *Fear and Trembling* was composed. In a discourse published shortly after *Fear and Trembling* in 1844, “One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and Is Victorious—in That God Is Victorious” (the original drafted title of which was “By struggling aright in prayer, the marvel comes to pass that God in heaven and you are victorious, because you are victorious in that God is victorious”) (EUD 460), Kierkegaard points towards the relation of the sky and the ocean as illustrative of how the believer, through the subordination of prayer, mirrors the eternal:

God can imprint himself in [a person] only when he himself has become nothing. When the ocean is exerting all its power, that is precisely the time when it cannot reflect the image of

heaven, and even the slightest motion blurs the image; but when it becomes still and deep, then the image of heaven sinks into its nothingness (EUD 399).¹⁵

This imagery and emphasis, which bears more than a little familial resemblance to the thought of the monastic theologian Meister Eckhart,¹⁶ arguably has a poetical parallel in de Silentio's re-telling of the Danish parable of Agnes and the merman. In the story, a young girl (Agnes) is seduced by a merman, who drags her into the sea with him. In de Silentio's first retelling of this story, Agnes is presented as entirely innocent, and selflessly loving. In response to the merman's initiative, Agnes comes to him, having found in him "what she was seeking, what she was searching for as she stared down into the bottom of the sea" (FT 94). Just as the merman intends to take Agnes, "Agnes looks at him once more...in absolute faith and in absolute humility" (FT 94). Agnes is here presented by de Silentio as the consummate Christian lover. Agnes does not seek her own advantage. She does not discover the merman's sins, but instead "believes him" (FT 94; cf. WL 225-300). Confronted with Agnes' selflessness, the merman is disarmed; he cannot seduce or deceive Agnes. "The sea no longer roars, its wild voice is stilled; nature's passion, which is the merman's strength, forsakes him" (FT 94). The love of God in Christ (here presented to the merman by Agnes) engenders a subjective stillness and silence, akin to a deep and placid sea. For Kierkegaard and de Silentio, it may also be suggested that this oceanic imagery represents the stillness of doxological, God-centred love, whose ceaseless outward flow and inward ebb—selfless giving and receiving—are one and the same thing (see WL 280-82).

Just as Johannes Climacus describes how apprehension of the eternal/God's love towards humanity in becoming incarnate leads one to "adoringly [*tilbedende*]" confess that he stands "before the wonder [*Vidunderet*]...whose solemn silence cannot be disturbed by human wrangling" (PF 36; SKS 4, 242), so too is the merman rendered silent by Agnes' love towards him.¹⁷ It is also this "solemn" and doxological silence

¹⁵ See also UD 121 and 192-3. Interestingly, this language is also espoused by Kierkegaard's fictional representative of the 'ethical', Assessor Vilhelm ('Judge William') in *Stages on Life's Way* (1845). Despite previously giving a sustained critique of mysticism in *Either/Or* (1843) as a self-orientated, asocial and irresponsible lifestyle, Vilhelm here extols love transfigured in the 'resolution' of marriage using the now-familiar, quasi-mystical ocean imagery and language of "the fullness of time"/"the wonder": "[M]arriage is the beautiful focal point of life and existence, a center that reflects just as deeply as that which it manifests is high: a disclosure that in its concealment manifests the heavenly. And every marriage does this, just as not only the ocean but the quiet lake does, provided the water is not turbid...Marriage is the fullness of time [*Tidens Fylde*]...It is divine, for falling in love is the wonder [*Vidunderet*]" (SL 117; SKS 6, 14-15).

¹⁶ For a recent article which persuasively and comprehensively makes this case, see Becker, (2012): 3–24.

¹⁷ For a work which similarly attempts to read de Silentio's story of Agnes and the merman alongside Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments*, see Howland, 2006: 87–91.

before God, I suggest, which provides a background for understanding Johannes *de Silentio*.

6. Conclusion

It is the contention of this paper that when *de Silentio* is read alongside his Johannine contemporary, Johannes Climacus, the full significance of “the marvel” or “the wonder” (*Vidunderet*) and the “fullness of time” (*Tidens Fylde*) can be appreciated. In addition, taking a sideward glance at Kierkegaard’s 1849 *Devotional Discourse* on how the birds and the lilies can teach humanity to appreciate “the moment” through their silence and in “much fear and trembling”, arguably provides further insight into the message which *Fear and Trembling*’s author—Johannes “of Silence” or “the Silent”—wishes to convey to his readers. Through *Fear and Trembling*, it may be suggested that Kierkegaard gives a voice (and a theology) to this historical figure, who otherwise lacks any significant record concerning his theological thought. Such a suggestion is consummate with recent work highlighting the extent to which Kierkegaard was influenced by the German Pietist tradition, “Rhineland mystics” and medieval monastic figures such as Meister (occasionally also named “Johannes”) Eckhart.¹⁸ As mentioned at the outset, this article is only intended as a prolegomenon. Most notably, nothing has yet been said about the possible implications which these observations from *de Silentio*’s “Eulogy to Abraham” might have for the main arguments contained within the “Problemata” of *Fear and Trembling*’s main text. A fuller and more extensive exploration of the insights which might be gleaned from this approach towards Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous corpus remains the remit of a much larger project.

¹⁸ See for instance Barnett, 2011; Piety, 2015: 42-63; Šajda, 2015: 167–79; Barrett, 2016: 25-43; Šajda, 2016a: 237-55; Šajda, 2016b: 265-87.

References

- Barnett, C. B. (2011), *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, Farnham: Ashgate.
- Barrett, L. C. (2016), 'Kierkegaard and Johannes Tauler on Faith, Love, and Natural Desire for God: A Way beyond a Catholic/Protestant Impasse' in: *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 32.1, (25-43).
- Becker, H. (2012), 'Mirroring God: Reflections of Meister Eckhart's Thought in Kierkegaard's Authorship' in: *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2012*, (3-24).
- Butler, A. (1866), *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints: Volume V.*, Dublin: James Duffy.
- Carlisle, C. (2010), *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: A Reader's Guide*, London: Continuum.
- Climacus, J. (1982), *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trs. C. Luibheid & N. Russell, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Cyril of Scythopolis & Binns, J. (1991), *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, tr. R.M. Price, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publicans.
- Daniel W. C. (2015), *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davenport, J. (2008), 'Faith as Eschatological Trust in Fear and Trembling' in: *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, (196-233).
- Howland, J. (2006), *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1990), *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, (Kierkegaard's Writings V), trs. eds. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (1983), *Fear and Trembling | Repetition*, (Kierkegaard's Writings VI), trs. eds. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- (1958), *Johannes Climacus (or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est) and A Sermon*, tr. T. H. Croxall, Stanford University Press.

(1985), *Philosophical Fragments | Johannes Climacus*, (Kierkegaard's Writings VII), trs. eds. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

(1995), *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, trs. eds. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Charlottesville, VA: IntelLex Corporation.

(2013), *Stages on Life's Way*, (Kierkegaard's Writings XI), trs. eds. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

(2009), *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, (Kierkegaard's Writings XV), trs. eds. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

(1997), *Without Authority*, (Kierkegaard's Writings XVIII), trs. eds. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

(2013), *Works of Love*, (Kierkegaard's Writings XVI), trs. eds. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Lippitt, J. (2015), 'Learning to Hope: The Role of Hope in Fear and Trembling' in: *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: A Critical Guide*, ed. D. Conway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (122-42).

(2003), *The Routledge Guidebook to Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, London: Routledge.

Pattison, G. (2002), *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Theology, Literature*, London: Routledge.

Piety, M.G. (2015), 'The Stillness of History: Kierkegaard and German Mysticism' in: *Konturen* 7, (42-63).

Šajda, P. (2015), 'Kierkegaard's Mystical and Spiritual Sources' in: *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. J. Stewart, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell (167-79).

(2016a), 'Meister Eckhart: The Patriarch of German Speculation who was a *Lebemeister*: Meister Eckhart's Silent Way into Kierkegaard's Corpus' in: *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, ed. J. Stewart, London: Routledge, (237-55).

(2016b), 'Tauler: A Teacher in Spiritual Dietethics: Kierkegaard's reception of Johannes Tauler' in: *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, ed. J. Stewart, London: Routledge, (265-87).