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## Kierkegaard and the Danish Golden Age: The Strengths and Limits of Source-Work Research

**Abstract:** This article offers some personal reflections on the methodology of source-work research based on my experience with the production of *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, which constitutes volume 7 in the series, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*. While source-work research is valuable in many cases for understanding Kierkegaard's texts, I suggest that it does have limitations in the cases of some of Kierkegaard's relations to his contemporary Danish authors.

On occasion of the completion of the first part of the series, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* (hereafter *KRSRR*), a conference was held, entitled "Kierkegaard Sources and Reception: The State of Kierkegaard Studies Today." This conference took place at the University of Copenhagen from April 30 to May 2, 2014. The participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the series at its then current state of production, that is, with the "Sources" and "Reception" sections completed. On that occasion, I presented a paper that constituted the basis for the present article. Now in 2017 with the completion of the final volume of the series,<sup>1</sup> I wanted to use this opportunity to revisit some of the questions concerning methodology that were discussed so fruitfully and constructively at that conference.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The series came to a conclusion with the publication of the index volume: Katalin Nun Stewart, *Cumulative Index to Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, Tome I, *Index of Names, A-K*, Tome II, *Index of Names, L-Z*, Tome III, *Index of Subjects, Overview of all KRSRR-Volumes*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 21).

<sup>2</sup> See Poul Houe's useful reflections in "Kierkegaard Sources, Influences, and Reception in the Present Age of Inter-texts and -textuality," in *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, no. 63, December 2014, pp. 2–12. This article also began as a lecture presented at the conference, "Kierkegaard Sources and Reception: The State of Kierkegaard Studies Today."

When work began on the KRSRR project, there were two volumes in particular that I was looking forward to working on, namely, volume 6, *Kierkegaard and his German Contemporaries*,<sup>3</sup> and volume 7, *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*.<sup>4</sup> With my previous research on Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel and the German Hegelian schools, I had long been interested in the connection between Kierkegaard and German culture. Likewise, with the two series, *Texts from Golden Age Denmark* and *Danish Golden Age Studies*,<sup>5</sup> I had long had a keen interest in Kierkegaard's complex relations to his Danish contemporaries in the period known as Golden Age Denmark. While with the German volume of KRSRR things turned out more or less as I had anticipated, the Danish volume turned out somewhat differently and was the occasion for me to reconsider certain aspects of *Quellenforschung* or source-work research. In this article I would like to share my experience in this regard. I will thus primarily be concerned with methodological considerations about the strengths and weaknesses of source-work research based concretely on my experience with this volume. This might come as a surprise to some people who know me as an outspoken advocate of source-work research,<sup>6</sup> but I feel that it is a valuable and healthy exercise to return occasionally to one's preconceived views and re-evaluate them in light of new information.

<sup>3</sup> *Kierkegaard and his German Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy*, Tome II, *Theology*, Tome III, *Literature and Aesthetics*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate 2007–8 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 6).

<sup>4</sup> *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory*, Tome II, *Theology*, Tome III, *Literature, Drama and Aesthetics*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 7).

<sup>5</sup> *Texts from Golden Age Denmark* is a translation series, which began in 2005 and has published to date 7 volumes of translations of primary texts from the period. *Danish Golden Age Studies* is a parallel monograph series, which began publication in 2007. Both series are produced by Museum Tusulanum Press in Copenhagen.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Jon Stewart, "Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel and *Quellenforschung*: Some Methodological Considerations," *Filozofia* (Bratislava), vol. 68, no. 1, 2013, pp. 17–26. (Spanish translation "Quellenforschung y la relación de Kierkegaard con Hegel: algunas consideraciones metodológicas," in *Ironía y destino. La Filosofía secreta de Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. by Fernando Pérez Borbujo, Barcelona: Herder 2013, pp. 43–76.)

## I Previous Work on Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries

The three-volume *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, which was published in 2009, represents the first attempt to investigate systematically Kierkegaard's relations to the different figures of the Danish Golden Age. But this is not to say that it did not have any forerunners. Prior to its publication, there were a number of other important works that prepared the way.

Thulstrup's old series *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* contains scattered, usually rather brief articles on different Danish figures. Volume 9 of that series, entitled *Kierkegaard: Literary Miscellany*, features very compact articles on Jens Baggesen, Adam Oehlenschläger, Steen Steensen Blicher, Carl Bernhard, Hans Christian Andersen, Mathilde Fibiger and August Bournonville.<sup>7</sup> Volume 10, *Kierkegaard's Teachers*, includes somewhat more substantial articles on Mynster, Sibbern, Poul Martin Møller, Henrik Nicolai Clausen and Martensen.<sup>8</sup> Volume 12, *Kierkegaard as a Person*, contains a brief article on Kierkegaard's elder brother, the Grundtvigian, Peter Christian Kierkegaard.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the volume *Kierkegaard and the Church in Denmark* (vol. 13) contains articles on Martensen and Grundtvig.<sup>10</sup> Most of these articles, due to their brevity, remain rather superficial. The articles that are more detailed, for example, the one on Martensen, are often needlessly apologetic and polemical.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, these Danish figures appear in very different contexts in the series, and often in a way that seems a bit arbitrary. For example, the articles on the Danish writers in *Kierkegaard: Literary Miscellany* appear together with articles on concepts such as allegory and comedy, figures or motifs such as Agnes and the Merman and Figaro, and other non-Danish authors from quite different periods such as Dante, Bayle, and Chateaubriand. (It is unclear why the French philosopher Bayle was placed in this volume dedicated to literature.) Given that no account of the rationale of

<sup>7</sup> *Kierkegaard: Literary Miscellany*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1981 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 9).

<sup>8</sup> *Kierkegaard's Teachers*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1982 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 10).

<sup>9</sup> *Kierkegaard as a Person*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1983 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 12).

<sup>10</sup> Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and the Church in Denmark*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1984 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 13).

<sup>11</sup> Niels Thulstrup, "Martensen's Dogmatics and its Reception" in his *Kierkegaard and the Church in Denmark*, pp. 169–197.

these decisions is given, the reader is left guessing about the general systematic principle employed in the series.

Similarly, *Kierkegaard's Teachers* contains works on quite different kinds of figures, both Danish and German, many of whom were not really his teachers in the strict sense. For example, there is an article on Lessing, whom Kierkegaard lionizes in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but there is clearly something dubious in labeling Lessing one of Kierkegaard's teachers and putting him side-by-side with Michael Nielsen, the famous instructor and principal at the School of Civic Virtue, which Kierkegaard attended when he was young. As noted, there is an article on Martensen in this volume, and it is true that Kierkegaard attended Martensen's lectures at the University of Copenhagen and even took a tutorial with him; but Kierkegaard's complex relation to Martensen lasted a lifetime, and Martensen's role as a teacher in this relation is in fact only a very limited aspect of this much more complex story.<sup>12</sup> One could say much the same thing about the 5-page article dedicated to Peter Christian Kierkegaard in *Kierkegaard as a Person*.<sup>13</sup> While it is true that Peter Christian was of course Kierkegaard's brother and they had a common family history, their later relation is profoundly complex and there is much more that needs to be said about their different theological views.

So the *Bibliotheca Kierkegardiana*, while containing quantitatively a fair number of articles on Kierkegaard's relations to the different figures from the Danish Golden Age, in the end does not provide a satisfying treatment of these relations due to its lack of systematic organization and the somewhat arbitrary way in which these figures are treated. These volumes of the *Bibliotheca Kierkegardiana* appeared in the 1980s, and, with studies such as Thulstrup's own *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel and Speculative Idealism until 1846* from 1967,<sup>14</sup> interest was being generated in source-work research and Kierkegaard in the context of the Danish Golden Age.

<sup>12</sup> If any argument for this is required, see Curtis L. Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One: Why Martensen Mattered to Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press 2008 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 4). See also the collection, *Hans Lassen Martensen: Theologian, Philosopher and Social Critic*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press 2012 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 6).

<sup>13</sup> Niels Thulstrup, "The Brother Peter Christian," in *Kierkegaard as a Person*, pp. 26–30.

<sup>14</sup> Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaards forhold til Hegel og til den spekulative idealisme indtil 1846*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1967. (*Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. by George L. Stengren, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980. German translation: *Kierkegaards Verhältnis zu Hegel und zum spekulativen Idealismus 1835–1846*, Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer 1972.)

The milestone in research in this area came in 1990 with Bruce H. Kirmmse's now classic *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*.<sup>15</sup> This work presented to the international reader a wonderful gallery of figures from Kierkegaard's time and put them in their proper context. There were outstanding chapters on Oehlenschläger, Mynster, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, Martensen, Grundtvig, H.N. Clausen and Orla Lehmann. For many people, this book was their first exposure to the richness and complexity of the Golden Age and its importance for understanding Kierkegaard's thought. It can truly be said to have set off the trend of source-work research in international Kierkegaard studies. It should be noted that the agenda of this book was to try to understand Kierkegaard's views on society and politics, and on this score this work was also groundbreaking in the field. But this meant that, with its focus on politics, other issues such as philosophy, literature and drama were not treated in the same depth. This is, of course, not a criticism of this outstanding book since it can hardly be rebuked for doing something that it never intended to do. The point is simply that while this work gave the reader a first taste of the importance of a handful of figures, it never pretended to be a systematic attempt to cover Kierkegaard's myriad relations to the different figures of the Danish Golden Age.

In the same year that Kirmmse's book appeared, an important monograph was published in Danish that provided an outstanding example of a case study of source-work research in the area, namely, Carl Henrik Koch's *En Flue på Hegels udødelige næse eller om Adolph Peter Adler og om Søren Kierkegaards forhold til ham*.<sup>16</sup> This was a major work for a number of different reasons. Prior to this there had been only scattered short articles or book chapters on Kierkegaard's relations to his contemporaries, but this work represents one of the first genuine monograph-length studies on such a relation. The only other example of this was the handful of works that explored Kierkegaard's relation to Grundtvig.<sup>17</sup> But Grundtvig was the only figure who was deemed to be worthy of scholarly attention in this way, and this was due to the rich tradition in Grundtvig studies that continues to this day. But most of the other figures surrounding Kierkegaard were regarded as second-rate thinkers, who could be safely disregarded. This disposition was doubtless fueled by the apologetic

<sup>15</sup> Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Henrik Koch, *En flue på Hegels udødelige næse eller om Adolph Peter Adler og om Søren Kierkegaards forhold til ham*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1990.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Søren Holm's *Grundtvig und Kierkegaard. Parallel und Kontraste*, Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag and Tübingen: Katzmann Verlag 1956; Otto Bertelsen, *Dialogen mellem Grundtvig og Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1990.



tendency in Kierkegaard studies at the time. Kierkegaard had mercilessly criticized figures such as Martensen, Mynster, Grundtvig and Heiberg, and it was uncritically assumed that he must have been right in his criticism. These other figures were thus reduced to being the object of Kierkegaard's critique, but little else was really known about them. What Koch's book demonstrated was that much more needed to be said about these other figures such as Adler. The background information that Koch traced about the life and development of Adler on his own terms gave the reader an entirely new perspective on this enigmatic figure. Then against this background, the reader was able to see much more clearly and appreciate much more soberly Kierkegaard's criticism of him. This study showed that there was a wealth of important information to be uncovered about all of the figures of the Golden Age that Kierkegaard was in contact with, and that this information could help us to understand his thought.

Inspired by the work of Kirmmse and Koch, I edited an anthology *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark* that was published in 2003 as a volume in the *Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*.<sup>18</sup> This collection can in some ways be seen as a forerunner of the above-mentioned *KRSRR* volume. It was a combination of previously published pieces and new ones specifically commissioned for the occasion. The collection included twenty articles on figures, such as Sibbern, Poul Martin Møller, Hans Christian Ørsted, Mynster, Martensen, Grundtvig, Oehlenschläger, Hans Christian Andersen, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, Peder Ludvig Møller, Thorvaldsen and Johan Thomas Lundbye. It was divided into five sections, Philosophy, Theology, Literature, Literary and Dramatic Criticism, and Art. Needless to say, this division was instructive in the organization of the later *KRSRR* volume. This volume collected much of the material on the important figures of the Golden Age that was available in English and supplemented it in order to fill in the gaps. It went beyond simply introducing them but rather went into depth with regard to certain aspects of their work and thought and their relations to Kierkegaard. Working on this volume helped me to develop a clearer idea of what would be useful and sensible to do in the *KRSRR* volume and what pitfalls to avoid.

Finally, we must also mention the importance of the commentaries in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (hereafter *SKS*) in preparing the ground for the volumes in *KRSRR*. These commentaries identified the places where Kierkegaard made use of different writers, theologians and thinkers from the Golden Age. It made the

work of the authors in *KRSRR* infinitely easier since they simply needed to go to *SKS* and gather together the passages that were relevant for their figure. Always the point of departure for the *KRSRR* articles, *SKS* supplied, as it were, the raw data that the authors needed to organize and interpret. By doing so, these authors showed to the international Kierkegaard community how *SKS* could be used in connection with concrete research projects. One need only think of the commentaries to *Prefaces*, where Kierkegaard's polemic with Heiberg comes into view, or the commentaries to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, where he criticizes Grundtvig's conception of the relation of Christianity to history. One might also mention the subtle allusions to Adler, identified in *SKS*, that appear in *The Concept of Anxiety*. One can thus regard the relation of *SKS* and *KRSRR* as a kind of *Wechselwirkung*: on the one hand, *KRSRR*'s section on "Sources" would never have been possible without *SKS*, and, on the other hand, the active use of *SKS* by scholars today owes much to the work of the authors of *KRSRR*, who led the way in the international research by showing the value of the commentaries and giving a model for how to use them.

## II The Collection *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*

This was the background when *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries* was published in 2009.<sup>19</sup> This volume has as its goal to explore as systematically as possible Kierkegaard's relation to the different figures of the Danish Golden Age. It attempts to improve upon the lack of systematicity in the *Bibliotheca Kierkegardiana* by dedicating a specific volume just to this task, and dividing this volume into three separate specialized tomes: Tome I: *Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory*, Tome II: *Theology*, and Tome III: *Literature, Drama and Aesthetics*.

Tome I features articles on a number of lesser-known figures such as Andreas Frederik Beck, Jens Finsteen Giødward, J.L.A. Kolderup-Rosenvinge, Ditlev Gothard Monrad, Peter Michael Stilling and Frederik Ludvig Zeuthen, along with articles on better-known figures such as Johan Ludvig Heiberg, Poul Martin Møller, Rasmus Nielsen, Hans Christian Ørsted, and Frederik Christian Sibbern. With articles on figures such as Lehmann, Kolderup-Rosenvinge and Monrad, this volume presents a useful supplement to the

<sup>19</sup> *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory*, Tome II, *Theology*, Tome III, *Literature, Drama and Aesthetics*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 7).

<sup>18</sup> *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 10).

understanding of Kierkegaard as a social-political thinker that was found in Kirmmse's work. In some ways it can be said that this volume is more dominated by the theme of social-political thought than philosophy.

Tome II, that is, *Theology*, features articles on a number of familiar figures: Adler, Henrik Nicolai Clausen, Grundtvig, Martensen and Mynster. These are all very substantial articles that build on existing research traditions. There are also more pioneering articles on lesser-known figures such as Magnus Eiriksson, Just H.V. Paulli, Andreas Gottlob Rudelbach and Eggert Christopher Tryde. One strong feature of this volume is the coverage given to the Grundtvigian theologians, such as Hans Frederik Helweg, Peter Christian Kierkegaard, and Jacob Christian Lindberg. These articles demonstrate the full extent to which Kierkegaard was exercised not just by Grundtvig himself but by the entire movement of Grundtvigianism. This fact is rarely recognized in the international research.

Tome III, *Literature, Drama and Aesthetics*, expands upon and covers in more detail some of the ground treated in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana's* volume *Kierkegaard: Literary Miscellany* with articles on major figures, such as Hans Christian Andersen, Jens Baggesen, Steen Steensen Blicher, Mathilde Fibiger, Meir Goldschmidt, Thomasine Gyllenbourg, Carsten Hauch, Christian Molbech, Adam Oehlenschläger and Christian Winther. In addition to these literary figures, there are also articles on the actress Johanne Luise Heiberg, the actor Joachim Ludvig Phister, and the ballet master August Bournonville.

In this volume, a rarity appears in that there are two articles on Johan Ludvig Heiberg, one in Tome I dedicated to his philosophy and one in Tome III dedicated to his literary criticism.<sup>20</sup> The reasoning behind this is fairly straightforward: it was thought that Heiberg's work was so diverse that it was impossible to reduce it either to the one category or the other. Moreover, Kierkegaard's use of it was so extensive that it merited two separate articles. With the exceptions of Plato and Aristotle, only in one other instance in the series is a single figure accorded two separate articles, namely, in the case of Jean Paul Sartre, whose early work is treated in volume 9, *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, and whose later work, that is, from his Marxist period, is treated in a separate article in vol. 14, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social-Political Thought*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Jon Stewart, "Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Kierkegaard's Criticism of Hegel's Danish Apologist," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory*, pp. 35–76; George Pattison, "Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Kierkegaard's Use of Heiberg as a Literary Critic," in Tome III, *Literature, Drama and Aesthetics*, pp. 169–187.

<sup>21</sup> Manuela Hackel, "Jean-Paul Sartre: Kierkegaard's Influence on His Theory of Nothingness," in *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2011 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 9), pp. 323–354; Michael Burns,

### III Critical Analysis and Reception

What can we say by way of critical evaluation of *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*? Readers agree that the strength of the volume lies both in its coverage and in the depth of research of the individual articles. With regard to coverage, it is the most extensive treatment of Kierkegaard's relation to the different figures of the Golden Age that can be found today. It introduces to the international reader a number of figures who are hardly household names even in Denmark. When read together with the works of scholars such as Bruce Kirmmse and Carl Henrik Koch, this volume can be a useful resource for both students and researchers who wish to gain a greater appreciation for Kierkegaard in his original context. When one thinks about Kierkegaard's conflict with the *Corsair* and his attack on the Danish State Church as well as his countless feuds with different local personalities, there can be no doubt that he was a very Danish figure and that his writing and thought was stamped by this. In this sense this volume vindicates the importance of source-work and research and of the interpretative approach that tries to see Kierkegaard and understand him in his own time and place instead of tearing him from this and placing him in the context of later schools of thought.

Moreover, the longer articles on the major figures such as H.C. Andersen, Mynster, Martensen, Grundtvig, Goldschmidt, Poul Martin Møller, and Sibbern all do an outstanding job synthesizing the previous research and presenting an overview that will serve Kierkegaard studies for years to come. I find myself constantly recommending these articles to interested students, and I have often seen young scholars who, when working on related projects, used these articles as their point of departure. In this sense it is clear that this volume has already established itself as a useful tool in Kierkegaard studies.

One of the reasons that I think these articles are so strong is that most of them, instead of repeating old clichés, do some major rethinking of the connections. Anders Holm's article on Grundtvig completely revises the standard understanding of this relation in Kierkegaard studies.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Curtis Thompson's article on Martensen shows a much more receptive picture of Kierkegaard in this relationship than has ever been seen before, again turning

"Jean-Paul Sartre: Between Kierkegaard and Marx," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social-Political Thought*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2011 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 14), pp. 159–175.

<sup>22</sup> Anders Holm, "Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: The Matchless Giant," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, pp. 95–151.



on its head the accepted view.<sup>23</sup> Søren Jensen's articles on the Grundtvigians represent entirely new material for the international reader and present a dimension of Kierkegaard thought that is almost never discussed in the research outside Denmark.<sup>24</sup> Johnny Kondrup's outstanding article presents a new, far more sympathetic image of Meir Goldschmidt than Kierkegaard scholars are used to seeing.<sup>25</sup> In all of this, it can truly be said that we have entered into a new period of Kierkegaard studies in the sense that the previous paradigm of research as Kierkegaard apologetics is well and truly over.

To the best of my knowledge, there are to date no critical reviews of specifically this volume.<sup>26</sup> However, this volume is included in the review of the series by Mads Sohl Jessen in the *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*. There the following is written of this volume specifically:

As a Danish PhD scholar working on a study of Kierkegaard's hidden satire on his Danish contemporary Johan Ludvig Heiberg, I am equally impressed by volume 7 on Kierkegaard and his Danish contemporaries. Here, readers are offered a fresh perspective on Kierkegaard's relations to people in his everyday life in Copenhagen. Those intrigued by the Golden Age of Danish culture will find a number of rich offerings in volume 7.<sup>27</sup>

The true test of the value of a series like this is whether it is being used regularly and whether it inspires people and spawns new projects. A quick look at recent secondary literature shows that this volume has indeed been used extensively in the work of Kierkegaard scholars, young and old.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Curtis L. Thompson, "Hans Lassen Martensen: A Speculative Theologian Determining the Agenda of the Day," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, pp. 229–266.

<sup>24</sup> Søren Jensen, "Hans Frederik Helveg: A Receptive Grundtvigian," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, pp. 153–188; Søren Jensen, "Jacob Christian Lindberg: An Acceptable Grundtvigian," pp. 211–228.

<sup>25</sup> Johnny Kondrup, "Meir Goldschmidt: The Cross-Eyed Hunchback," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome III, *Literature, Drama and Aesthetics*, pp. 105–149.

<sup>26</sup> See Paul Cruysberghs, Johan Tøls, and Karl Verstrynge, "Kierkegaard Literature from 2005 to 2013: A Descriptive Bibliography," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2017, pp. 441–553; see p. 468.

<sup>27</sup> Mads Sohl Jessen, review article, "Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources," edited by Jon Stewart, Ashgate, 2007, in the *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, no. 58, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, J. Michael Tilley, "Rereading the Teleological Suspension: Resignation, Faith, and Teleology," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2012, pp. 145–169; Lee C. Barrett, "Kierkegaard on the Atonement: The Complementarity of Salvation as a Gift and Salvation as a Task," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2013, pp. 3–24; Thomas Gilbert, "Why a Danish Golden Age? Structural Holes in 19th Century Copenhagen," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2013, pp. 403–434; Alessandra Granito, "Gesellschaft und Kritische Philosophie. Kierkegaards und Jaspers' Analyse der geistigen Situation Europas im Vergleich," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2016,

## IV Methodological Reflections

From my work on the volume, I learned something important that enjoined me to rethink my understanding of the use of source-work research. The working assumption behind source-work research is that a given thinker reads a number of sources and that these sources play some kind of formative role in the development of that thinker's thought. This methodology recognizes the embeddedness of a thinker in a real world with concrete relations. It shows that a thinker cannot be abstracted from his or her own time and place. While it is true that one is at one's liberty to transfer figures like Shakespeare or Kierkegaard into our modern world and have them address modern problems that they never knew anything about, and that this might provide certain insights for us today, nonetheless it lies outside the original thought, intentions and writings of these figures themselves. If one wants to know what the thinker from the past really thought or had in mind while writing, then one needs to see him or her in the context of their own world and avoid importing any modern notions that would be anachronistic.

While this all still seems by and large correct to me, *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries* did bring to my attention a certain limitation with source-work research especially as it is applied to Kierkegaard. I recall discussing the matter in some detail with Brian Söderquist as I was writing my article on Rasmus Nielsen,<sup>29</sup> and he was writing his articles on Andreas Frederik Beck and Peder Ludvig Møller.<sup>30</sup> We both came to the same conclusion parallel to each other. When I embarked upon my article on Rasmus Nielsen, I

pp. 217–233. Takaya Suto, "On Kierkegaard's Reaction to H.N. Clausen," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2017, pp. 267–289; István Czakó, *Geist und Unsterblichkeit Grundprobleme der Religionsphilosophie und Eschatologie im Denken Søren Kierkegaards*, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter 2015 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, 29). Gerhard Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit. Das Glaubensverständnis des jungen Kierkegaard und seine philosophisch-theologischen Voraussetzungen*, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter 2014 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 30). Magnus Eiríksson: *A Forgotten Contemporary of Kierkegaard*, ed. by Gerhard Schreiber and Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum 2017 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 10).

<sup>29</sup> Jon Stewart, "Rasmus Nielsen: From the Object of 'Prodigious Concern' to a 'Windbag,'" in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory*, pp. 179–213.

<sup>30</sup> K. Brian Söderquist, "Andreas Frederik Beck: A Good Dialectician and a Bad Reader," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory*, pp. 1–12; K. Brian Söderquist, "Peder Ludvig Møller: 'If He Had Been a Somewhat More Significant Person...,'" in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome III, *Literature, Drama and Aesthetics*, pp. 247–255.

rolled up my sleeves for what I thought was going to be a *tour de force* of source-work research. I knew that Kierkegaard had known Nielsen personally and even had intensive contact with him for a time. I further knew that Nielsen was a very productive writer, and so my natural assumption was that I was going to find many traces of Nielsen throughout Kierkegaard's works. My presupposition here seemed initially to be confirmed when I realized that there was an enormous amount of material in Kierkegaard's journals that was relevant for Nielsen. So I threw myself into the work and meticulously traced their personal relationship through the letters and the journals, where Kierkegaard is constantly reflecting on this relation and commenting on virtually everything that Nielsen says and does. It did not take too long before the draft for my article had grown completely out of control, and I had far more material than could possibly be squeezed into a single article, even with an indulgent editor. So initially I thought that this was all very promising.

But then the more I studied the material, the less convinced I became. It slowly became very clear to me that Kierkegaard was highly exercised by the person of Nielsen in his own life, and this material might be of use for a biographer. But it was not clear at all if any of this was relevant for the development of Kierkegaard's thinking on any broader issue of interest to, for example, philosophy or religion. Kierkegaard's comments about Nielsen can be characterized as largely *ad hominem* reflections. He did not like certain aspects of Nielsen's character, and he felt that Nielsen had fully misunderstood his strategy with the use of the pseudonyms. Moreover, he felt that Nielsen had "plagiarized" from their private conversations. From his side, Nielsen was very much attracted by Kierkegaard's works and took it upon himself to promote them and to defend Kierkegaard against his critics. But Kierkegaard reacted negatively to all of these efforts. As Nielsen published one work after another, he received one cold reproach after another from Kierkegaard until eventually their relationship was more or less discontinued.

The problem here for source-work research is that it is difficult to see Nielsen as a source for Kierkegaard's thinking, if by "thinking" one means his ideas as expressed in his books and articles. In other words, for his personal life there can be no doubt that Nielsen was an important source for Kierkegaard, but for his work or intellectual life, this seems not to be the case. Kierkegaard thoroughly rejected most everything that poor Nielsen ever wrote, and so it is not easy to find any clear traces of Nielsen's actual thought in his texts, and why should one expect to find such traces? So in this case source-work research renders very limited results (again, of course, with the exception of biographical studies).

It is true that in some of his critical reflections about Nielsen's misuse of his works, one can glean indirectly some insight into the way Kierkegaard conceived of his strategy with the pseudonyms. In Kierkegaard's journals it is explained in depth why he thinks Nielsen cannot desist from giving lectures and explaining things directly, and why because of this Kierkegaard believes that Nielsen has completely misunderstood his authorial approach. In this sense it can be said that indeed my exercise was not wholly in vain, and that something interesting did come from this investigation, but here again one cannot really say that Nielsen is used as a source. On the contrary, he is rejected as a source for anything useful, although in this rejection Kierkegaard makes certain reflections that can be seen as insightful. So it could be argued that in order to research and understand this insight on its own, one would not have to do any source-work research.

As I noted, Brian Söderquist indicated that he came to largely the same conclusion in his examination of Peder Ludvig Møller and Andreas Frederik Beck in connection with his articles on these figures. Kierkegaard discussed Peder Ludvig Møller as an important figure in the *Corsair* controversy, but here his assessment is entirely negative and *ad hominem*. One cannot really say that Kierkegaard ever used Møller as a meaningful, positive source of ideas, despite Møller's rich literary corpus. Likewise, he utterly rejected Andreas Frederik Beck's reviews of *The Concept of Irony* and the *Philosophical Fragments*.<sup>31</sup> His comments about Beck are again wholly dismissive and negative. I think we have to recognize here that Kierkegaard, for whatever his personal virtues and merits might have been, was in many regards a highly polemical person. His relations to most all of his contemporaries were marred by personal conflicts. Again this is all rich material for biographers or people who want to study Kierkegaard's psychology or personality, but it is not so clear what this tells us about the development of his thought. In any case, it is problematic to

31 Frederik Andreas Beck, "Om Begrebet Ironi, med stadigt Hensyn to Socrates af Søren Kierkegaard," *Fædrelandet*, nos. 890–7, May 29 and June 5, 1842, columns 7133–40, columns 7189–91, and column 7191. (This work appears in English translation in Paul Muench, "Andreas Frederik Beck's Review of Kierkegaard's *On the Concept of Irony*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2018, pp. 359–395.) Anonymous [Andreas Frederik Beck], "Philosophische Smuler eller en Smule Philosophie (Philos. Brocken oder ein Bischen Philosophie)." Af S. Kierkegaard. Klöbenhavn (Copenhagen), Reitzel, 1844, 88. "Neues Repertorium für die theologische Literatur und kirchliche Statistik," vol. 2, no. 1, April 30, 1845, pp. 44–48. (This work is reprinted in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1979, pp. 127–131. It appears in English translation in Jon Stewart, "Andreas Frederik Beck's Review of *Philosophical Fragments*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2016, pp. 307–314.)



see these figures as sources in the way that one understands this in source-work research.

The best argument that one has here is that although these figures are not themselves sources, nonetheless they do play a negative role in the development of Kierkegaard's thought. While it is true that Peder Ludvig Møller did not contribute positive ideas that Kierkegaard appropriated and developed, he was in fact instrumental in Kierkegaard's changing views of the press and society that would come to expression in works such as *A Literary Review of Two Ages*. Similarly, one could say that Mynster and Martensen were useful negative sources in Kierkegaard's critical conception of the Danish State Church and what he called Christendom. But the critical methodological question remains about whether this is a genuine example of source-work research or whether this is an example of the limitations of it.

In some ways this can be seen to raise larger questions for the organization of the series as a whole. One might argue that it would have been better to find another place in the series for these articles on Nielsen, Beck and P.L. Møller, since they do not seem to fit into the category of source-work research, although, of course, it would have been impossible to know this at the outset. One might have considered creating a volume in the "Resources" section of the series dedicated to historical people whom Kierkegaard had contact with, something like the way in which the *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* has a volume dedicated to specific places in Copenhagen that Kierkegaard knew and mentioned.<sup>32</sup> Such a volume could be thought to provide an overview of the many people who passed through Kierkegaard's life without any implication that they may or may not have influenced his thought in some important way. The problem with this is, of course, that it would overlap significantly with the volume at issue, *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, and it would be very difficult to adjudicate where the source-work research stops and the biographical information begins. For such a volume to be effective, it would need to include a large number of the figures that Kierkegaard had contact with, and so this would imply having new articles on Grundtvig, Martensen, Mynster, Heiberg, etc., but these would then need to focus just on the personal relation and exclude everything else. Needless to say, it would be a very difficult job to separate these two things since, his personal relation with these figures doubtless played an important role in his intellectual disputes with them.

In any case I think that this is an instructive example of the dialectical relation of any methodology. Clearly there is no one single methodology that is suitable for all kinds of work in the humanities. Every method has its own strengths and weaknesses, and when one chooses a method, one must try to find one that is best suited to the object of study. But there will be cases when even the best methods will not render a fruitful result. I submit that with some of the cases mentioned here we find ourselves at the very limit of what source-work research can provide. Any methodology that is made absolute and pushed beyond a certain limit will end up in absurdity. To use a method, any method, responsibly means to recognize its limits.

Make no mistake: I still do believe that source-work research is a highly useful and fruitful method for Kierkegaard studies. The volumes in the "Sources" section of *KRSRR* are clear testimony of this. Kierkegaard was a profoundly eclectic author who was constantly being enriched by his readings; he was constantly making use of and appropriating ideas, theories, formulations and insights from other thinkers. He had many sources and a study of them and their context is important for understanding his writings. But this does not mean that we should be blind or dogmatic in our use of source-work research. It is not a magic wand. Like any method, it has its strengths and weaknesses, its uses and its limits.

<sup>32</sup> Niels Thulstrup, *The Copenhagen of Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1986 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 11). See also the very useful Peter Tudvad, *Kierkegaards København*, Copenhagen: Politiken 2004 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Copenhagen: Rosinante 2013).



# Kierkegaard Studies

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Edited on behalf of the  
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by  
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in cooperation with Peter Šajda

# Yearbook 2018

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**DE GRUYTER**