

Acknowledgements

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As libraries all over the country are being summarily closed, this might be an opportune moment to note their priceless value, particularly to a writer in a remote area. Nairn Library, under the auspices of Highland High Life Libraries, supplied the patient, highly specialised support of librarians Louise Sorrell, Dawn Allison, Helen Williamson and Laura Blaikie, while Andrina Gammie, library assistant at the High Life Highland Library Support Unit in Inverness tracked down and forwarded rarer titles, re-renewing on request. Thank you all.

During the writing I often enquired casually about people's feelings and childhood experience of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, so gathering spontaneous adult reactions to the work. During such

encounters I hid my project for fear of diverting attention from fresh and unadulterated response to the main topic; many a gratefully absorbed if unattributed remark enhanced my background sense of Andersen's lasting societal influence. Studiously avoided was any discourse relating to Kierkegaard, the man or his work. In the public arena this was easy, as he is comparatively little read, but neither did I seek expert input. The perils of a solitudinous approach to biography are obvious, but just as plain to me, thanks to Kierkegaard and Andersen, was the potentiating power of pure subjectivity in interpreting their story.

When it came to the technical skills of addressing a new audience, writing friends offered generous help. Janet Sutherland shared unwavering confidence in the project, along with advice on the more arcane aspects of annotation and footnoting; I continue to learn much from her as writer and poet. Lucy Hamilton's mastery of condensed form provided stylistic inspiration. Tony Frazer of Shearsman Books offered kind encouragement at exactly the right moments. Jude Welton went to great lengths to convey advice from a former colleague. Warm thanks to Cynthia Rogerson for our book-talks/dog-walks along the beach. My thanks to biographer Jennifer Morag Henderson, who unhesitatingly made time to help solve a technical dilemma.

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Areas of expertise touched on in this book, including theology, history, psychology, art and literature, are familiar to me only as a lay person. All errors and omissions, misunderstandings and misrepresentations in the book are mine alone.

Kate Ashton
Nairn, February 2025

Acknowledgements for Images

The following illustrations relating to Hans Christian Andersen are reproduced courtesy of the Museum Odense, Odense, Denmark. My thanks to Ejnar Stig Askgaard, senior researcher, for his help in accessing these: Hans Christian Andersen's birthplace, Odense; Vilhelm Pedersen's illustration for 'The Little Mermaid'; portrait of Edvard Collin; portrait of Henriette Wulff. Also, Andersen's sketches from his travels: 'The Simplon Road Across the Alps', 19 September 1833; 'Genoa', 2 October 1833; 'The dancing dervishes of Pera', from a letter to Henriette Wulff, 29 May 1841; 'Piazza del Trinita, Florence', 11 April 1834; portrait of Andersen from 'The Story of My Life', 1855.

Illustrations relating to Søren Kierkegaard are reproduced courtesy of the Royal Danish Library, with particular thanks to Laurids Nielsen: 'Unfinished sketch of Kierkegaard by his cousin Niels Christian Kierkegaard', circa.1840, in a private collection; 'Bishop Mynster', painting by C. A. Jensen (1792-1870); photographic portrait 'Regine Olsen Schlegel, 1855'; 'diamond ring given to Regine on their engagement, returned, and refashioned by Kierkegaard into a cross' which he wore until his death in 1855; 'letter to Regine: Kierkegaard sketches himself standing on the Knippelbro, peering through a spyglass'. Image of 'Regine Schlegel by photographer Niels Willumsen (1812-1870)' in juxtaposed portraits of her and Kierkegaard.

Preface

As any expert or lay reader will recognise from the bibliography, this account of the parallel lives of two great men does not pretend to present a fully researched biography of either. Two authoritative biographies have provided factual chronology and background, chosen for their accessibility and clarity, but most of all for authorial warmth toward their subject: Lowrie's *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*¹ and Wullschläger's *Hans Christian Andersen, The Life of a Storyteller*.² For the rest, I have relied on Kierkegaard's *Journals*³ and Andersen's *Diaries*.⁴ Rather than any unqualified attempt at academic rigour, my aim has been to offer some more subtle and intuitive insight into the emotional and spiritual kinship between Søren Kierkegaard and Hans Christian Andersen. This, thanks to many extraordinary biographical synchronicities, is perceptible in both their individual histories and writings, as well as in their often fractured and fractious personal relationship.

Like many another child, I came to Andersen as a six-year-old, when after a long hospital stay my parents arrived to collect me bearing a small volume of fairy tales as homecoming gift. Of the long taxi ride back

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1. Walter Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974).
 2. Jackie Wullschläger, *Hans Christian Andersen, The Life of a Storyteller* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).
 3. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. and trans. by Alexander Dru (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).
 4. Hans Christian Andersen, *The Diaries of Hans Christian Andersen*, ed. and trans. by Patricia L. Conroy and Sven H. Rossel (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1990).

from London to Stevenage my salient memory concerns that book – its prince gazing out over cobalt waters from which arises a golden-tressed mermaid – how I clasped it close to my chest to keep it safe: the same 1950s edition I have used as source material here. Nearly half a century later, my son made me a birthday present of Andersen’s complete diaries. Kierkegaard’s ageless wisdom arrived at another moment of need, a lifechanging crisis in my thirties, when my late sister gave me his journals. I have been reading them alongside the works ever since.

The pattern and relevance of an unwritten literary and relational history between Kierkegaard and Andersen took longer to reveal itself, emerging gradually from the expanding worldview that came with many years living and travelling in mainland Europe. The more familiarised with the continent, the more aware I grew of how profoundly the strangely interrelated works of these two Danes had permeated European culture, fanning out from here to shape the spirit and imagination of the wider western world. At the same time came a dawning realisation of the transformational effect on my own life of this hidden vein.

Later still, I sensed a story seeking to be told, but how to find a form sympathetic and sinuous enough to convey the deep confluence of these two mighty rivers? Contemporary prodigious minds at work in the same small corner of nineteenth-century northern Europe, each recognising in the other their individual confrontation with the societal ambience and stigmata of their day; sometimes a violent clash of words and temperament, more often an unspoken awareness each of the other following their particular personal and creative course. The streaming now toward the other, now apart, of these discrete creative currents revealing something of the mystery and majesty of solitary artistic effort in shaping meaning from random circumstance and contributing that cognisance to an all too often unreceptive world.

Each life demonstrates the paradoxical writerly yearning both to reach and remain hidden from others; every flawed striving toward love resounds with the same dread which invites divine inspiration. Each tentative moment of jubilation is a trembling on the edge of faith, each failure a rebirth. The incidental interplay between these two great men and minds creates a new conceptual space within which each is constantly reilluminated, reanimated and defined, offering infinite shifts in perception and perspective that reveal the sacred individuality reflected in the other and their work – even and especially when they lose sight of it themselves.