

# DEMONS OF THE GOLDEN AGE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AND SØREN KIERKEGAARD

BY KLAUS P. MORTENSEN

1.

The Danish Golden Age, also known as Romanticism, falls in the first half of the 19th century. It is actually somewhat paradoxical to call this period a "golden age", for it was not exactly a glorious era in the history of Denmark. On the contrary, this was when Denmark lost her position as a medium-sized European power, partly through becoming involved in the Napoleonic Wars and joining on the losing side. In 1807 the British confiscated our fleet; in 1813 the State went bankrupt; and in 1814 we lost Norway. From the 1830s things improved again, and the period can be said to come to an end with the abolition of the absolute monarchy and the introduction of parliamentary democracy in the Constitution of 1849.

So it was in an impoverished community that the Danish Golden Age blossomed within the Copenhagen ramparts, borne by the Copenhagen bourgeoisie and its way of life, which for a good reason was quite modest. This can be taken as a demonstration of the widespread – but also extremely dubious – theory that culture and creative artists fare best in times of adversity. There is, meanwhile, no doubt that impoverishment had a decisive influence on the characteristics of the arts in Denmark in the first half of the 19th century, with their search for harmony, their restraint, and their idealistic character. It was a case of deriving as much as possible from the limited scope available. Consider, for instance, this picture from 1838 by the greatest painter of the Golden Age, Christen Købke (1810-1848) representing a view from the Embankment along the Sortedam Lake, then situated in the flat terrain outside the Copenhagen ramparts (fig. 68).

This is no grandiose or wild Romantic scene, but an intimate, secure, low-key piece of nature in which everything contributes to a harmonious whole. I shall not go into details about this picture, but limit myself to arguing that both in its basic mood and in its motif it encompasses the key concepts of bourgeois Romantic culture: the family, which again is

subsumed under the nation (the flag), which again is subsumed in natural scenery, a natural scenery, to be sure, that does not merely include plants and trees, but also the sky, to which the flag points and which the cross on the flag defines as the spiritual and Christian reality to which all earthly things are subject. This basic attitude with all its pervasive character of intimacy and quiet harmony has been called optimistic dualism or – with a term taken from German cultural history – Biedermeier. Biedermeier culture emerges in the first decades of the 19th century and dominates the scene from the 1820s and throughout the rest of the period, and it has left an indelible mark on Danish culture right up to the present day.

But we should not become hypnotised by this idealising art. The leading artists were fully aware that they were transforming reality in their work – not in order to escape from it, but with the long-term goal of fashioning, transforming and ennobling the behaviour of the individual and people's dealings with each other.

In broad terms, this way of thinking, encompassing many levels and forms, could be called the idea of culture and breeding. And although – not least for us the great-great-great grandchildren of that idea – it does not seem particularly noteworthy, but rather a little old-fashioned and redolent of lavender, it was revolutionary in all its modesty. Not in its immediate expression, but in its long-term consequences. In Romanticism we see the continuation of the bourgeois revolution's notion of the individual, the ego as something of value in itself. Slowly and imperceptibly, the Christian and feudal static view of Man is broken down. The individual becomes a dynamic entity with his own special course of development and his own potential for development. In this way of thinking childhood is accorded a positive status hitherto inconceivable. The child is no longer assessed from without and from above as an imperfect and wayward adult. It is now the natural tender



FIG. 68. Christen Købke (1810-1848): *A View of One of the Lakes in Copenhagen*, 1838. Oil on canvas. 53 × 71.5 cm. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. Inv. no. 359.

shoots of the future adult that are to be found in the individuality of the child. Breeding thus means not only that a person will behave well and follow the norms, but that he can be fashioned, formed through a proper upbringing in the family, which is the essential unit in society. But lastly – and not least – it means that the individual can fashion himself and release his own innate spiritual potential.

It is with this fashioning of (God-given) human nature that the art of the time is so concerned, both in an individual and a collective, i.e. national, sense. This procedural nature-based way of thinking became truly universally accepted in Denmark as a result of the lectures delivered during the winter of 1802-1803 by the Norwegian scientist and philosopher Henrich Steffens (see fig. 1, p. 9), lectures in which he created a major sensation in the Copenhagen public on account of his provocative introduction of the German philosophy of nature and subject. Steffens attempts to describe the world as the overall expression of a gigantic process of individualisation

beginning in inorganic nature and continuing up through organic nature, flora and then fauna, and culminating in mankind. In mankind nature becomes conscious of itself. This interpretation – in reality a psychological interpretation – of nature as a formative, culture-producing process also encompasses human history, which proceeds in a similar number of stages, though not in a gradually rising curve as does nature. The history of mankind is shaped as a fall from an original totality, the childhood of mankind, when the gods still walked the earth. This was the Golden Age. It was – in the words of that time itself as formulated by Adam Oehlenschläger, the godfather of the Danish Romanticism: "the peak from which we have fallen and to which we shall again ascend".

On the basis of this formula, the fundamental structure of history is described as being in three phases. First an original golden age, then a gradual fall and then a similar gradual approach to re-establishing the lost golden age – of which Steffens rightly



or wrongly saw himself to be a herald. He was at least right insofar as we really do talk of the period today as the Golden Age.

The fascinating thing about this model is of course that it is not only a secularisation of the Christian view of history as expressed in the concepts of Paradise, the Fall and the Redemption, but also that, as suggested above, this secularisation expresses itself in a psychological interpretation of nature and history. This psychology is now transferred from the great, universal history (of nature) to the individual. Just as every Christian repeats the phases of the essential story in his own life, so, according to the idea of the formative process, each representative of the bourgeoisie repeats the three phases in his own life: first the innocence of childhood when the gods walk the earth – i.e. when the ego has not yet become conscious of itself as an individual, a reflecting being; then the fall into the self-consciousness of youth and the reflective, critical division, and finally the restoration of unity via the self-knowledge resulting from consciousness in manhood.

In this model of mankind's formative process, a completely new and potentially non-ecclesiastical view of mankind appears. It is characterised by a dual interest: on the one hand in the individual as something distinctive, and on the other in the individual as part of a higher order. This interest is manifested as two fundamental forces in Steffens' cosmic model: the universal, centrifugal urge for the distinctive or the individual, and the centripetal urge for unity. This duality is seen again in the thoughts on breeding at that time, partly as the dynamics arising from the contention between two opposing forces, partly as the different levels of potential emerging in these dynamics as a result of Man's attempts to establish a balance between the two forces and to reconcile them.

For Steffens, the means of achieving this are called spirit or intuition. But although this is something we associate with art and with visionary fantasy, for Steffens it is also a scientific principle. Art and science – not least speculative philosophy – are part and parcel of the same endeavour – or, to use the word at last: a *universal*, never-ending process of development and breeding.

In this way, Danish Romanticism can already at its start around 1800 be seen as striving for unity, but

consequently also as being conscious of a crisis: the notion of unity presupposes its antithesis – disunity exists as a latent possibility. The dimension of infinity residing in the fact that subjectivity continues to develop, and that new layers of the personality are for ever opening, is meanwhile a possibility that is meticulously encapsulated and muted by a great many of the artists of the day. Not because of external compulsion, but as a result of the self-restraint or self-censorship that was built into the bourgeoisie's understanding of itself and its insistence on its view of breeding and culture as having validity for all mankind.

The view that the Danish Golden Age was primarily seeking harmony is well founded. But culture was more complicated than it seemed at first sight. A number of artists fall either wholly or partly outside the theory – for instance Hans Christian Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard. But even if we limit ourselves to art that can be classified as Biedermeier, it is still true that harmony is achieved in the awareness that something else exists which of necessity must be toned down or kept out if that harmony is to be ensured. Thus, to use two of Schiller's concepts, the literature of the time was not naive, but sentimental ("sentimentalisch"), i.e. reflective.

There is a conscious covering up, a re-writing or an exclusion of forces that can threaten the harmony in Biedermeier culture. But this re-writing can – precisely because it is predominantly reflective – also be viewed as another way of referring to and dealing with the element that has been excluded whether consciously or unconsciously. So it is striking that in the *Bildungsromane* of that time, by far the greatest amount of space and artistic energy is devoted to the hero's time of crisis. It is quite clear that this provides the fascination, not the harmonious conclusion.

In this context we have to understand the growing interest at that time in complexity and ambiguity, partly as a logical consequence of the tendency to reflection that is part and parcel of the Biedermeier search for harmony. We can summarise these propensities under two of the key concepts of the 1830s: the interesting and the demonic. These phenomena appear early in the period in a transferred form as an interest in the past (the Middle Ages, popular poetry, not least the medieval ballads, and among them sto-



FIG. 69. Wilhelm Bendz (1804-1832): *A Young Artist [Ditlev Blunck] examining a Sketch in a Mirror*, 1826. Oil on canvas. 98 x 85 cm. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. Inv. no. 280.

ries of demons and dangerous love) or the exotic. This has, with a hint of moral censure, been called escapism. But it would be more reasonable to talk of it as an alternative way to reality and the present. For in this setting the interest in the disunited, the different, the strange and the abnormal can be accepted

without giving offence. This interest is for its part borne by an indomitable curiosity mixed with fear, a boundary-crossing individual desire to chart those aspects of humanity that are still hidden in the dark – not least those aspects that are concerned with the erotic.



The notion of the erotic at that time bears the mark of the dynamic view of the identity of the individual. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the ideas of that time concerning mankind's potential for culture and breeding are based on a view that the erotic is a disturbing, but malleable force. Man's progress towards ever loftier – meaning spiritual – forms conceives of the erotic as a realm of possibilities stretching from immediate, unarticulated physical impulses to the very tenderest spiritual utterances. For a hardened later age accustomed to interpreting mankind's eros on the basis of the physical and sexual, the interpretations of the erotic at that time take on the aspect of an inversion of the natural order of the ingredients. For in many of the Golden Age poets it is on the basis of the supreme manifestation of nature, i.e. love, that the underlying, inferior forms are to be understood and interpreted. It is the working up of the ability to infuse and govern material and physical phenomena with consciousness that is the real aim of culture and breeding – and the precondition for the idealisation which we have observed in Købke's painting.

Meanwhile, we miss the essential element in this erotic thinking if we are content to follow Freud and categorise attempts to spiritualise the erotic as examples of Victorian repression or pure dissimulation. In many cases this is so. But it is also something else, something more than this in the major artists. First and foremost there is a bold attempt to interpret Man's physical (unconscious) nature and consciousness at the same time and to regard them as inter-linked entities – transcending all Christian notions of sin. Looking at it this way one can talk of a challenge to the deep-rooted Christian dualistic division into body and soul, which of course is still going strong in our modern world, though with a reverse kind of Freudian interpretation.

Such an attempt to resolve the dualism between the earthly and the spiritual can be seen from the picture which Vilhelm Bendz (1804-1832) painted of his colleague Ditlev Blunck in 1826 (fig. 69). Put very briefly, there is a line from the lower left corner with the skull and the artist's materials via a number of mirrored double portraits<sup>1</sup> to the line that not only divides the mirror but also marks a boundary between the lower sphere and the upper one where the bird, the symbol of the soul, is sitting in its cage –

and where the head is separated from the body of the reflective plaster figure. Here Bendz is defining the Romantic's path to the spiritual point of view. But at the same time he seems to have difficulty himself in believing in the reconciling power of the spirit – the bird is imprisoned.

Bendz' picture seems to be caught between two possible interpretations: an optimistic expectation that the material is only mortal if it lives in darkness, that is to say when it is not illuminated by consciousness, the spirit. But at the same time, in its very complexity, all its dual images and reflections, Bendz' picture seems to contradict the idea of unity, or at least to make it into a fragile postulate. As we shall see, this uncertainty in Bendz is later reinforced in other artists in the form of startling experiences of the actual nature of that illuminating consciousness. For as consciousness turns the searchlight on itself, it is seen that the sources of consciousness do not – or not exclusively – flow from what is divine and elevated, but also from the dark and the base. The demons were not outside, but were in consciousness itself.

The multifarious poetic activities unfolding in the field sketched here, are something to which we can only give their due by depicting them in a way at once nuanced and concrete. For this reason I will now leave the general presentation of the Golden Age and its interest in demons and refer to two specific examples relating to two of the most important texts of Danish Romanticism. First Hans Christian Andersen's enthralling story of *The Shadow*, and then Kierkegaard's equally enthralling novel *The Seducer's Diary*.

## 2.

At first sight, the two writers are as different as it is possible to imagine, and they are often talked of as such. On the one hand Hans Christian Andersen, characterised by fantasy and spirited, illogical language, and on the other Søren Kierkegaard, the man of intellect and a concept-packed, crafty style. The man of the people as against the rich man's son, the natural genius as against the super-intelligent academic. Behind the clichés a real difference is hidden. But also a common interest in the byways and traps of subjectivity, and thus in the demonic. From two different sides they move into the high tension field of the demonic.

*The Shadow* is a story about a dobbelgänger. As is well known, it tells of a learned young man who on a journey to the South parts from his shadow. Years later, the shadow comes to visit his former master, who is living in obscurity and writing about the good, the true and the beautiful. No one is interested in his feeble compositions. And the shadow gradually takes over. It ends with the original distribution of power being reversed. The learned man becomes the shadow's shadow on a journey during which the shadow meets a princess who falls in love with him. And when the learned man tries to reveal the true situation, the shadow has him executed at the same time as he marries the princess.

In this bleak story, the usual pattern of the folk tale is reversed. It is the villain who wins the princess and half the kingdom. So who, or what, is this shadow? It is obvious that the master and his shadow are linked in some way. As the starry-eyed learned man shrinks, so his shadow grows; and this process can again be seen as expressing a conflict between two aspects of one person, the light and the dark. The fairy tale delves into what happens when the two facets in the same person are separated from each other.

The rift occurs in a perfectly concrete situation. The learned young man is in a state half-way between dream and wakefulness, a condition in which the censorship imposed by his consciousness during the day is suspended. Here he has a vision of the entrancing maiden of poetry surrounded by resplendent flowers on the balcony opposite. When he awakens up fully, the vision has gone. Instead of examining the matter for himself, he sends his shadow. At this point the young man's newly awakened, vague erotic longing is divided into two. While he, a physical being with a body, surrenders himself to thought and imagination and becomes increasingly other-worldly, he leaves the down-to-earth task of exploring to his incorporeal shadow. The longing, which was originally undivided, in which eros and poetry were united in seeking one goal: the maiden of poetry, is now split into two. A superior and an inferior kind.

This does not mean that the shadow therefore represents physical sexuality, which the learned young man abhors. For the shadow itself has no sexuality, possessing no body in which to have it. When the shadow dances with the princess – who is so

much in love that she almost sees straight through him – she remarks euphorically that she has never before danced with such light partner. The reader runs cold at this point, knowing perfectly well why the transparent shadow is weightless in her arms.

Nor does the shadow ever make his way into the holiest of holies, the resplendent world of the maiden of poetry. As it tells its former master itself, it must be content to stand outside and look through the keyhole, for the radiance would have killed it. And from this it becomes clear that the shadow is a Peeping Tom, a voyeur who cannot tolerate the light of day, but who gains his insights secondhand and underhand. The shadow's real home is the opposite of the refulgent world of the maiden of poetry: its first refuge as a free shadow is the darkness under the cake-woman's skirt. Precisely because the shadow has no body itself, it can creep and observe everywhere and – in its own words – see everything and know everything. The shadow lives as a blackmailer, it has looked in through windows and keyholes and knows everything about people, which none of them wants anyone else to know.

As the shadow says: "I peeped where no one else can peep and saw what no others saw what nobody should see! When all's said and done, it's a low-down world we live in. I would never be a man, if it weren't generally considered to be worth while. I saw the most inconceivable things happening among women, men, parents and their own dear darling children. I saw ... what none are supposed to know, but what all are dying to know – trouble in the house next door ... If I had edited a newspaper, it would have had plenty of readers! But I used to write direct to the person in question, and there was panic wherever I went. They were terribly afraid of me – and, oh! so fond of me ... And that's how I became the man I am."

So in a certain sense the shadow itself is a dual being. According to the narrator, it is impossible to tell him apart from a human being. "It was, when you come to think of it, quite astonishing how much of a human being the Shadow had become. He was dressed all in black, made of the finest broadcloth, with patent leather boots and a hat that folded up into a matter of crown and brim ... Yes, there's no doubt about it, the Shadow was got up very smartly, and this it was that made him such a perfect man".



The remarkable thing about this portrait of the shadow is that the narrator agrees with the shadow: he, too, despises people. For the world of human beings, where the shadow is at work, is the place where you are what you *appear* to be. Humanity is something you acquire by dressing up in it as though it were a suit of clothes: clothes make the man. In other words: humanity is the same as *looking like* a human being; genuine humanity does not exist; everything is imitation. In this way, the shadow's dual nature is a product of the world in which it moves – it is separated out of the learned, cultured gentleman. *The Shadow* thereby becomes not only a psychological configuration, but also an acid characterisation of the social source of that configuration: the chronic bourgeois duality, double moral standards, hypocrisy and dissimulation behind a respectable Golden Age facade. And indeed, the shadow's power is not of its own doing, for it grows out of all those things that are swept under the carpet. This applies to the shadow's very coming into existence, which is due to the learned young man's refusal to accept his own passions, and it applies to its growth and success in the world. And in this, Hans Christian Andersen is tackling a state of affairs that a Henrik Ibsen was to examine further in his great dramas from the end of the century.

But Andersen's pinpointing of the demonic in *The Shadow* is not complete with this. The demonic is not, of course, only found in the learned social surroundings to which he belongs, but it is also present in the narrator telling the fairy tale. The fairy tale contains a reflection on the narrator himself in his task of disclosing – or on the demonic character of the artistic consciousness. As we have already seen, there is a close relationship between the narrator and the shadow. Not only in their views on human-like qualities, but also in the fact that they are both incorporeal dual beings. Like the shadow, the narrator is discreetly separated from the cultured, bourgeois world. The shadow is in this way also a portrayal of the artist as a demon of consciousness, deriving sustenance from his insight into the murkier, concealed sides of people of culture. Thus, the shadow of the fairy tale has its own shadow in the narrator, who comes into being by seeing through and ironising at the shadow's manipulations. In him, the shadow has met its match.

Thus, what the fairy tale demonstrates is that the cultural dualism brought about by the transformation of reality interferes with the mechanism of its own demonic and destructive dualism. As an artistically conscious being and strategist, the teller of fairy tales is the logical conclusion of the Biedermeier duality. The figure without body or fate turns the artistic consciousness into a liberated, all-seeing and all-demolishing power. In this sense, the culture of the Golden Age devours itself in Andersen's grisly fairy tale.

3. Kierkegaard's *The Seducer's Diary* is, as the title itself suggests, a diary novel. The writer of the diary, the no longer entirely young Johannes, is a man who plays a well-considered double game. He is a declared seducer, and the diary follows the story of a seduction from its tenuous beginning, when Johannes is seeking a victim, right through to the fulfilment of the seduction, when Johannes has deserted Cordelia, as is the name of the young woman whom he has seduced.

However, Johannes is not an entirely ordinary seducer; he is no don Juan. He is, in Kierkegaard's words, a *reflective* seducer, whose delights are not of a physical nature. For Johannes is a person who is not capable simply of existing. He is not spontaneous, but constantly scrutinises himself. The pleasure he seeks is thus one related to consciousness. And herein lies the demonic. His aim is to take possession of the young woman's innocence, in the sense of her consciousness, her self-understanding. The plan, which in fact is carried through, is to lead this young woman, who has not yet been erotically awakened, to the point when she acts both passionately and fully consciously, but at the same time in such a way that everything that she sees as symptoms of her own feelings and thoughts in reality are symptoms of Johannes' concealed manipulation or possession of her entire being. In this way and in this special sense, Cordelia is to become his. In a spiritual sense, she is to become *his* creation – and so she does.

In this terrifying ambition to take the place of God, the intellect's will to power is driven to its ultimate conclusion. In order better to understand this kind of demon, we must look at what it is that drives Johannes. He is a melancholic. More than any thing

else he fears the boredom that accompanies his reflective nature. Nothing can surprise him. "Dreadful thought, so then the world has been brought to a standstill from utter boredom. Cursed chance, I await you. I shall not defeat you by way of principles (...) no, I shall invent you: Emerge, I invent you, I devour my own poem and that shall be my nourishment."

Johannes' project is the impossible one of *willing* to live spontaneously. On the one hand he ardently longs to be surprised by life and grasped by it in the shape of chance. On the other, he wants to take hold of chance as a challenge, to irradiate it with consciousness and form or to guide it so that it does not compose poetry about him, but he composes poetry about it, thereupon to enjoy and devour his own product. It is in this reality-devouring context that Cordelia plays her part in Johannes' life. She becomes his poetry, and he finally swallows it.

Whence then comes the deep contradiction in Johannes' demonic being between longing to be grasped by life and the wish to fill everything with consciousness. *The Seducer's Diary* is only part of a larger work called *Either-Or*. The short text entitled *Shadow Pictures*, which forms part of the great work's aim of pinpointing the many facets of the seducer theme, arrives at a definition of the figure of Faust. This is that Faust has lost his immediacy and seeks to erase his consciousness of this loss by turning to sensuality, not as enjoyment, but as a diversion, forgetfulness. In the words of the text: "What he thirsts for is *the spontaneity of the Spirit*. Like the shadows of the underworld, when catching a living person sucked his blood and lived as long as this blood warmed and nourished them, so Faust seeks to live spontaneously in order to rejuvenate and be strengthened."

Johannes is no Faust, for Johannes has no physicality left. But Johannes' fundamental motif is the same: he longs to live in immediacy. The special quality about him is that at the same time he is terrified at relinquishing the control panel provided by consciousness.

This, among other things, can be seen from a passage in the first part of the diary, when Johannes the observer has not yet introduced himself to Cordelia. In it, he describes his excited, expectant state in this way: "My soul roars like a rough sea in the tempests

of passion. If anyone could observe my soul in this condition, it would seem as if the soul made its way to the bottom like a dinghy." But that person would be mistaken. For Johannes' consciousness does not founder in the maelstrom of passion. The clearly sexual undertones in the image are about a quite different expression of potency, in which instead, consciousness rises unseen above passion and studies it. The passage goes on as follows: "He doesn't notice that way up on top of the mast there is a sailor on the look-out. Roar Ye wild forces, move Ye powers of passion, even if Your waves throw their foam towards the clouds You do not have the strength to tower above my head; I sit calmly as the King of the Cliff." This indicates a doubling of the self. Johannes is his own observer. To enjoy is to enjoy yourself as one who enjoys, which properly speaking makes it impossible to enjoy in a true, spontaneous sense.

Johannes' true demonic desire is expressed in this parable. The image of the boat is also continued as a leitmotif in the story of the seduction, in which Johannes becomes the one who secretly steers Cordelia's boat or passion in the direction he wants.

However, the portrayal of this soul vampire and his impossible project does not exhaust the demonic. For when Johannes' project is presented as impossible, it is because a consciousness superior to Johannes' own is at work in the diary. Johannes' story is also the story of a seduction in a deeper sense, residing in the very ability to reflect. For it is not Johannes who possesses it. It is it that possesses him.

In reading the foreword to the diary, we can just glean the real situation. For it is a copy of some papers which the copyist, called A, has seized his opportunity to read in secret. And this A can say of Johannes that he is caught in his own game. According to A, after Johannes has left her, Cordelia lives on, turned in on herself, unable to decide who she herself is and consequently what is real and what is unreal. She has become like Johannes by dint of the mental cloning to which she has been subjected. As for Johannes himself, A tells us that he, too, is unable to distinguish between his own fantasy and reality, and he portrays him as one who may well be living in this world in a physical sense, but who actually belongs to another, transparent, ethereal world. And A foresees that Johannes, who has led others astray, will himself go astray – into himself, and turn all his



astuteness inwards upon himself. "The numerous excits to his fox-burrow are of no use, in the very moment his frightened soul believes to see the falling rays of daylight, it proves to be just another entrance, and so like a quarry, haunted be despair, he incessantly looks for a way out only to find an entrance by which he returns into himself."

Here it emerges that the reflective Johannes is no longer master of himself, but is caught in the claustrophobic space of self-reflection. The demony is fundamentally not an expression of an individual cynicism or desire, but an aspect of the actual ability to reflect that has liberated itself. The ability to reflect has become an automatic, apparently unstoppable, all-resolving force. It is in this sense that Johannes is himself a man seduced, a human being who succumbs to forces which he controls only in his own opinion.

What is more, A, who has surreptitiously seized the opportunity to read and copy Johannes' papers, has himself been dragged into the dual world of the intellect – in his own words: "I too have been torn away into that kingdom of mist, in that dream-world, where one is constantly frightened by ones own shadow."

Yet the seductive infection of demony is not at an end here. For Victor Eremita, too, who published A's papers, is affected by his insight into Johannes' story: "Thus also I who has absolutely nothing to do with this story, yet is removed by even two rows from the original author, I too fell quite uneasy, when I in the quiet of the night has occupied myself with these papers. It seemed to me as if the seducer slid like a shadow across my floor, as if he threw an eye at the papers, as if he fixed his demonical look on me."

Victor Eremita's assurance that he is not involved in the story is Kierkegaard's ironical, coquettish attempt to implicate his reader in the demonic game in which the boundary between reality and the products of the ability to reflect – between the body and the shadow, as the demonic is called in Kierkegaard too – is suspended. What happens to the reader, of course, is that the normal fictitious narrator is suspended and replaced by a veritable cabinet of mirrors of narrators in which a narrator appears behind the narrator, who again turns out to have a narrator behind him, who for his part is himself being narrated. (It is a similar doubling up to what we have seen

in Bendz, who paints a portrait of a painter painting a portrait painter who – surrounded by sketches – is painting the portrait of a painter). The dangerous infection radiating from Johannes' self-reflection thus spreads via the narrators to the reader. But the process stops at the implicit narrator called Kierkegaard, who in this way points to himself as the person sitting at the centre of the story's web.

If *The Seducer's Diary* is an element in a critique of self-reflection, an indication of its destructive potentials, it is nevertheless at the same time itself a product of far-reaching self-reflection. In Kierkegaard, self-reflection, self-doubling thus turns against itself. This out-of-control merry-go-round could be stopped only by positing an absolute authority beyond human consciousness, as happens in Kierkegaard's radically subjective theological final position.

#### 4.

With the description of the system of Chinese boxes stemming from the constant self-doubting and shifting positions resulting from the ability to reflect, Kierkegaard throws an ambiguous light on the confidence in the integrated individual and the centripetal forces of human consciousness, upon which the idea of culture and breeding rests in its ideal form. And at that point his path crosses Andersen's. Where the old folk stories portrayed (among other things) the demons of the body, here the representatives of fantasy and the intellect, Andersen and Kierkegaard, present the demons of consciousness – the destructive potential of subjectivity and the ability to reflect. These demons of consciousness expel the old metaphysics' orderly pattern of thought, which allocates individuality a place in a higher supra-individual order, put there by God or the world spirit before Man appeared. It is this orderly way of thinking we see disintegrating in texts such as *The Shadow* and *The Seducer's Diary*. Here the demons occupy the void left by the retreating old order. In *The Shadow* a lofty erotic longing and the notion of the true, the good and the beautiful are turned inside out. And in *The Seducer's Diary*, Johannes in his megalomaniac seduction project seeks to occupy the place in which God, the Creator has so far held sway, in order to create a human being in his own image.

Seen from this point of view, the Golden Age

demons do not suggest coquettish play with what is dangerous and forbidden and displaced, but rather an early warning that the ideas of culture and breeding could not stand the internal pressures to which they were exposed. Internal, because the demons of course do not come from outside, although at first glance it might look as though they do. They are born of the very same interest in the individual and

in human emotional and consciousness-bearing potential as bore the ideas of culture and breeding. In this sense they are the unforeseen and unpredictable repercussions of the idea of culture and breeding. And we still live with them, today, long after the Golden Age was relegated to a museum.

Translated by Glyn Jones

1. For a more detailed analysis of Bendz' portrait of Blunck see my essay *Billed-dannelse* in *KRITIK* 120, 1996 which also contains references and comments to the pioneering analysis of Mogens Nykjær on the painting in his book *Kundskabens Billeder*, Copenhagen 1991, p. 75-91.