

The Writer as an Acrobat: Deleuze and Guattari on the Relation between Philosophy and Literature (and How Kierkegaard Moves in-between)

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Introduction: On the Mobile Relations between Philosophy and Literature

All philosophy is condemned, to the extent that it is dependent on figuration, to be literary and, as the depository of this very problem, all literature is to some extent philosophical.¹

The above-cited passage from Paul de Man's essay 'The Epistemology of Metaphor' describes a recurrent gesture in the history of philosophy: philosophical discourse, defending its epistemological rigour and its truth claims, seeks to suppress the literary, to mark the territory of the literary inside literature 'by keeping it, so to speak, in its place.'² As the figurality of language, according to de Man, permeates both literature and philosophy, there is no innocent reference either to 'the nonverbal "outside"'³ or to an inner presence of consciousness. Is it possible, then, to think the relation between philosophy and literature beyond suppression or imposition of a hierarchy?

Deleuze's philosophy not only attests to such a possibility but, more importantly, his own writings as well as his collaborations with Guattari explore the relations between these two realms in their multiple becomings, 'in a perpetual in-between movement, or *perpetuum mobile*,' as André Pierre Colombat aptly puts it, in which philosophy and literature 'are interconnected.'⁴ For example, whereas de Man's reading of (philosophical and literary) texts appeals to a third factor, namely, the rhetorical substratum of all language, Deleuze prefers the smooth space⁵ rather than the substratum, allows for philosophy-becoming-literature, talks about literature as 'an assemblage', e.g. Kafka's literary machine is 'plugged into' the bureaucratic machine in order to work (ATP 4). Art, science and philosophy are, according to Deleuze, 'caught up into *mobile* relations' – we could say cinematic/machinic relations – 'in which each is obliged to respond to the other, but by its own means' rather than 'stable' ones.⁶ Deleuze's engagement

¹ Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 50.

² Paul de Man, *Aesthetic* 34.

³ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 3.

⁴ André Pierre Colombat, 'Deleuze and The Three Powers of Literature and Philosophy: To Demystify, to Experiment, to Create,' *Deleuze and Guattari: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, ed. Gary Genosko (London-New York: Routledge, 2001) 208. For a helpful overview of Deleuze's diverse relations to literature, see also Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002) 103-123; Ronald Bogue, 'Deleuze and Literature,' *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, ed. Daniel W. Smith and Henry Somers-Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 286-306.

⁵ Smooth space as a Deleuzian concept denotes the unlimited, acentered, open space of the nomads, which privileges flows and movement in contradistinction to the striated space that is hierarchically constructed and evaluated. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'Treatise on Nomadology-The War Machine,' *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 351-423. (Hereafter ATP)

⁶ Deleuze, 'Preface to the English edition,' *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) xvi (my emphasis).

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with literature is an endeavour to chart this mobility, rather than to trace the common ground between philosophy and literature.

In *What is Philosophy?* (1991), Deleuze with Guattari offer the image of writers, such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche but also Kleist, Mallarmé, Kafka, and D. H. Lawrence, who, like acrobats, dancers, and athletes, leap, dance, and stretch between the two planes of literature and philosophy. And yet:

To be sure they do not produce a synthesis of art and philosophy. They branch out and they do not stop branching out [*bifurquer*]. They are hybrid geniuses who neither erase nor cover over differences in kind, but, on the contrary, use all the resources of their ‘athleticism’ to install themselves within this very difference, like acrobats torn apart in a perpetual show of strength.⁷

‘These thinkers,’ we would call them acrobat-writers, ‘are “half” philosophers but also much more than philosophers’ (WP 67). What accounts for such an excess – the ‘much more’ – is exactly the fact that they dwell as much as bifurcate/‘branch out’ in this differential ‘within’ philosophy and literature.

The latter is best illustrated with the creation of, what Deleuze and Guattari call, ‘conceptual personae’ or ‘intercessors’ (WP 64). Conceptual personae, such as Plato’s Socrates or Diotima, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra or Kierkegaard’s knight of faith in *Fear and Trembling* (1843), could be considered as a literary technique introduced in philosophy with the scope to articulate (philosophical) perspectives or theses. However, this view is partially reductive; the conceptual personae are not abstractions, although ‘they play a part in the very creation of the author’s concepts’ (WP 63). Inhabiting the in-between of philosophy and literature, a conceptual persona thinks, moves, and acts expressing new ‘possibilities of life or modes of existence’ (WP 73).⁸ Thus, Zarathustra is the subject of Nihilism as the knight of faith is the subject of religious existence. In other words, the conceptual persona is both a philosopher’s creation and the creation of a philosopher: ‘The conceptual persona is the becoming or the subject of a philosophy, on a par with the philosopher’ insofar as Nietzsche in becoming Zarathustra/Dionysus says “‘I dance as Dionysus’” (WP 64) or Kierkegaard in becoming the knight of faith may as well say: ‘I leap.’

Accordingly, the advantage of Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to literature is that the impasse of representation (i.e., literature represents life, philosophy thinks about life, literature influences philosophy, and vice versa) is overcome. This becomes particularly evident in their analysis of the three novellas written by Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Pierrette Fleutiaux respectively in plateau 8 of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980): ‘1874: Three Novellas, or “What happened?”’ The purpose of this paper is: initially, to trace the import of style in philosophy and literature as Deleuze and Guattari construe it in terms of the creation of the new; next, to explore how the relation between literature and philosophy is refracted in Novellas plateau, regarding the questions of secrecy and time; finally, to consider the way in which the

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (London-New York: Verso, 1994) 67. (Hereafter WP)

⁸ Kierkegaard’s literary personae dramatize perspectives on the world. This point is clearly elucidated by Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Becoming: Movements and Positions* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005). For a more comprehensive analysis on Deleuze as a reader of Kierkegaard, see Arnaud Bouaniche, “‘Faire le Mouvement’: Deleuze lecteur de Kierkegaard,” *Kierkegaard et la Philosophie Française: Figures et Réceptions*, ed. Jean Leclercq et al. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2014) 127-50.

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recourse to Kierkegaard's writings, especially *Fear and Trembling*, elucidates key philosophical terms coined by Deleuze and Guattari. This line of exposition has a twofold aim: to identify the distinctiveness of Deleuze and Guattari's approach to literature and to expound what Kierkegaard as a religious writer has to offer in the discussion of philosophy *as* literature.

The Question of Style in Philosophy and Literature

Deleuze, as early as in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), stated in a quasi-normative way that 'a book of philosophy should be in part a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction. By detective novel we mean that concepts, with their zones of presence, should intervene to resolve local situations.' As a consequence, concepts 'themselves change along with the problems', they act like characters in a drama.⁹ The same question about style and time returns and is posited with respect to the writing of a philosophical book but also to the reading of the history of philosophy. Deleuze maintains that 'the time is coming when it will hardly be possible to write a book of philosophy as it has been done for so long: "Ah! the old style ..."'¹⁰ In the history of philosophy the time of the new style has already begun with Nietzsche and yet the time of the new style should be reached in the future. It seems that Deleuze invites us to read and write about 'a real book of past philosophy as if it were an imaginary and feigned book', asking the questions 'What happened? / What is going to happen?', until our present text comes to meet the text of the past as its double.¹¹ Philosophy is not a sterile exegetical exercise but a creative act.

When Deleuze was asked in an interview (1988) how he sees 'the question of the philosophical style,' he defined style in philosophy as 'the movement of concepts ... a modulation, and a straining of one's whole language towards something outside it.' He goes on to compare philosophy with the novel:

Philosophy's like a novel: we have to ask 'What is going to happen?' 'What's happened?' Except the characters are concepts, and the settings, the scenes are space-times. One's always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it's trapped, to trace lines of flight.¹²

Modulation, a term borrowed from poetry, music, and painting (or even respiratory systems, life sciences), expresses temporal relations and variations in the same manner that the questions about the future ('What is going to happen?') and about the past ('What's happened?') seek to decipher the sequence of events not from a localised point in the present, as these questions are traditionally understood, but from a point that is continuously shifting. The question of style and the question of temporal sequence seem to interflow in an unexpected mode: the act of writing, for Deleuze, is to liberate life and 'to make us see' things that we weren't previously aware that they existed (N 141). Between what has passed and what is going to pass, things 'come to pass, a spark can flash and break out of language itself' (N 141) until everything becomes pure passage of life. Not because language strives towards the inexpressible or breaks in a moment of revelation but because writing creates lines of flight, new space-times, 'mapping, even realms that are yet to come,' (ATP 5) as Deleuze and Guattari put it in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For

⁹ Deleuze, 'Preface,' *Difference and Repetition*, xx.

¹⁰ Deleuze, 'Preface,' *Difference and Repetition* xxi. (ellipses in the original)

¹¹ Deleuze, 'Preface,' *Difference and Repetition* xxi-xxii.

¹² Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 140-141. (Hereafter N) For Deleuze's own philosophical style of writing, see Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze's Wake: Tributes and Tributaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) 9-26.

Deleuze, what suggests the presence of style is ‘when the words produce sparks leaping between them, even over great distances,’ (N 142) invoking thus the genesis of something beyond the semantic field of the words themselves.

The question of style is not addressed in the field of rhetorics but the style of a writer, Deleuze and Guattari remark, with her specific materials (the syntax, the creation of new words that violate the maternal language) ‘summons forth a people to come’ (WP 176-7). Carsten Meiner rightly notes that the style thus understood ‘seems to have an existential function.’¹³ In an important essay entitled ‘Life and Literature’ (1993), Deleuze underscores the existential aspect of writing as follows: ‘Writing is a question of becoming [*devenir*], always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed’ and to become means to become other (a woman, an animal, a minority), something ‘unforeseen and nonpreexistent [*non-préexistants*].’¹⁴ Hence, both philosophy and literature strive to bring forth the ‘nonpreexistent’; insofar as writing ‘consists in inventing a people that is missing ... a people to come [*à venir*] ... a possibility of life,’¹⁵ correspondingly, Deleuze seems to suggest, the writer herself as much as the philosopher are in the process of becoming, they are ‘a people to come.’

Thus far, the multifarious relation between movement, becoming, and transformation has surfaced many times while reading Deleuze and Guattari’s texts. In this respect, we see the notion of temporality implicated in this construal of becoming, an issue to which we will turn in the next section.

The Novellas Plateau: Secrecy and Time

The Novellas plateau begins by distinguishing between the literary genres of novella, novel and tale on the different questions that these genres pose to the readers. In novella, everything revolves ‘around the question, “What happened? Whatever could have happened?”’ whereas the tale breathes in and out with the question ‘what is going to happen?’ The living present of the novel as duration is constituted by integrating ‘elements from the novella and the tale’ in varied modes (ATP 192). The distinctions drawn between these genres while corresponding to the three dimensions of time (past, present and future) should not be viewed, as Deleuze and Guattari warn, in a strict chronological sequence. The present is traversed by movements (of lines) that ‘are contemporaneous with it’; one line moves by casting everything ‘into the past *from the moment* it is present (novella) while another *simultaneously* draws it into the future (tale)’ (ATP 193, emphasis in original). The moment renders the present – ‘*from the moment* it is present’ – quite precarious as the latter is *schizzed* into two different directions. As Deleuze writes in *The Logic of Sense* (1969), ‘each present is divided into past and future, ad infinitum’ and therefore the present forms an unlimited line ‘the two extremities of which endlessly distance themselves from each other.’ The time of the pure event is not tensed in the present – it is happening – but is both the time of novella (‘*it just happened*’) and the time of the tale (it ‘is always about to happened’).¹⁶

¹³ Carsten Henrik Meiner, ‘Deleuze and the Question of Style,’ *symploke* 6.1 (1998) 160.

¹⁴ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London-New York: Verso, 1998) 1.

¹⁵ Deleuze, *Essays* 4.

¹⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: The Athlone Press, 1990) 62-63 (emphasis in the original). A full treatment of the event in Deleuzian sense would require more space than this article. In broad lines, the event is the unanticipated new that is not yielded to the senses, whilst it is actualised as transformation. For an illuminating account of the pure event and the notion of becoming with reference to the

Bearing in mind these remarks, it follows that the presence of the present in novella is construed differently from that of both the tale and the novel. Though the question ‘What happened?’ directs one to the/a past, the novella itself does not aim at uncovering of a memory or unearthing of something past but rather ‘plays upon a fundamental forgetting’ (ATP 193). Thus, Deleuze and Guattari write that ‘the novella has a fundamental relation to *secrecy* (not with a secret matter or object to be discovered, but with the form of the secret, which remains impenetrable)’ (ATP 193, emphasis in the original). In other words, the novella does not contain a secret as an irretrievable content, something inexpressible in words, or as an event unknowable because of its missing details, but what happened becomes purely ‘imperceptible’ (ATP 193). The temporality of novella is defined by its relation ‘in the present itself, to the formal dimension of something that has happened, even if that something is nothing or remains unknowable’ (ATP 194).

Therefore, the secrecy and the temporal cannot be extricated from each other. From one part, the question ‘What happened?’ is hollowed out of its hermeneutical value, works against itself, becomes ‘the ungivable “What happened?”’ (ATP 197) Deleuze and Guattari initiate a ‘perceptual semiotics’ (ATP 194) between the body postures assumed and the secret: I may hump guilty-ridden, become exhausted, and bend under the burden of the secret – ‘the better hidden the more ordinary it was’ (ATP 197). The novella thus ‘enacts’ the secret by a means of enfolding unlike the tale that unfolds events in the process of narration. The primary body posture of novella is ‘like inverse suspense’ (ATP 193-4). The text, and the time in the text, is curved and moulded into the form of secrecy, the enfolding, until all forms dissolve into ‘a pure abstract line’ (ATP 197). As Claire Colebrook suggests, Deleuze and Guattari transform ‘the ontology of the secret’ by moving away from the secret as content to secrecy as structure that determines the interpretive horizon of the subject; additionally, by gesturing beyond the form-content opposition they affirm ‘a proliferating secrecy’ or imperceptibility that is life itself in its multiplicity of relations.¹⁷

For Deleuze and Guattari, the novella names the specific way a text combines the several lines that traverse and compose us: ‘Lines of writing conjugate with other lines, life lines, lines of luck or misfortune, lines productive of the variation of the line of writing itself, lines that are *between the lines* of writing’ (ATP 194, emphasis in the original). There are three kinds of lines: A rigid line of segmentarity, a line largely defined by the certificate of birth and death. Everyday life is marked by finite pieces of information, finite actions and sets of time periods, segments of space (territories), in which we move and acquire our identity until the post-mortem rigidity: I have a date at 4 pm, I live at the West Side of the city, I have a class to attend between 7 pm and 9 pm, and so on. There is also a line of molecular or supple segmentation made up of ‘micromovements,’ ‘tiny cracks,’ ‘secret lines of disorientation or deterritorialization’ (ATP 196-97, emphasis in the original), whence the possibilities of another life, a life no less real and present, struck as ‘a moonbeam’ (ATP 195). Finally, a point is reached when no segmentarity is tolerated, all previous positions are de-posed. This line of flight is like making the other two lines explode, as Deleuze and Guattari note; it is ‘absolute deterritorialization’ (ATP 197). The lines of flight cannot be represented or captured by any means because we are ‘in the process of drawing them’ (ATP 199).

time of novella, see Paul Patton’s chapter ‘History, Becoming, and Events,’ *Deleuze Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) 81-99.

¹⁷ Claire Colebrook, ‘The Secret of Theory,’ *Deleuze Studies* 4.3 (2010) 291-92.

It is appropriate here to recall that Deleuze and Guattari conjoin writing with creating new possibilities of life, liberating a new space-time. How do they read these life lines/lines of writing in Henry James's novella *In the Cage* (1898)? The heroine is a young girl who works at the Post Office; she dispatches telegrams for her upper-class clients, counting 'numberless' words, receiving and sending intimate but segmentary contents of their private lives. 'In a framed and wired confinement,'¹⁸ in her cage, in her territory, she conjures up stories from these bits of information. She becomes particularly entangled into the secrecy of the telegrams exchanged by a rich couple as well as into the secrecy of their love affair. She soon leads a kind of a 'double life': 'As the weeks went on there she lived more and more into the world of whiffs and glimpses, she found her divinations work faster and stretch further.'¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari remark that the girl sensed that the man is in danger because of a secret, though the secret itself is never defined and does not need to be defined by Henry James. Telegram texts, material and yet immaterial segments, seem to illustrate best the line of molecular segmentation, on which we are close to something that has already happened but 'the ungraspable matter of that something is entirely molecularized, travelling at speeds beyond the *ordinary thresholds of perception*' (ATP 196, my emphasis). In terms of (linguistic) communication, this line abounds with 'silences' and 'innuendos' in contrast to the clear-cut segments of 'interminable explanations,' of 'questions and answers' we encounter on the first line of rigid segmentarity (ATP 198). At the end, the interpretive skills of the girl are stretched to the point that she cannot withstand any form of 'gaps and blanks and absent answers.'²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari cite and underline the phrase '*There were no longer shadows to help her see more clearly, only glare*' (ATP 197)²¹ as a point of maximum intensity and maximum affectivity whereby everything has changed and everything becomes imperceptible; it accentuates a turning point in her life in which she has reached a new line, a line of flight.

In its most ordinary sense, Deleuze and Guattari aver, 'the secret always has to do with love, and sexuality.' But in becoming imperceptible, the secret and the form of secrecy has changed again. It means becoming 'a clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage': clandestine because his secrecy is not covered (a clandestine passenger is 'like everybody else'); motionless because his movement is like jumping 'linearly' on a train in motion (ATP 197-198), an allusion to the Kierkegaardian leap of faith. For Deleuze and Guattari, Kierkegaard's knight of faith serves as a figure, as a conceptual persona, of this clandestine motion, which occurs beyond the ordinary threshold of perception:

As Kierkegaard says, nothing distinguishes the knight of the faith from a bourgeois German going home or to the post office: he sends off no special telegraphic sign; he constantly produces or reproduces finite segments, yet he is already moving on a line no one even suspects. (ATP 197)

The reference here is to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, which was published under the pseudonym Johannes de silentio. In Kierkegaard's recounting of the Genesis story (Gen 22, 1-

¹⁸ Henry James, *In the Cage* (London: Martin Secker, 1919) 5.

¹⁹ James 28.

²⁰ James 141.

²¹ The translator of *A Thousand Plateaus* draws attention to the original English text, which conveys rather the opposite meaning from the French translation that Deleuze and Guattari had in mind (ATP 535, note 6). Cf. James 134: 'She knew at last so much that she had quite lost her earlier sense of merely guessing. There were no different shades of distinctness – it all bounced out.'

14), Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah under God's command to sacrifice Isaac, his only begotten son, is made in faith that he will receive his son back and in keeping silence about the purpose of his journey. The moment that Abraham raises the knife with his hand, an angel of God prevents Abraham from completing the sacrifice, giving back to him his beloved son. The knight of faith repeats Abraham's journey-movement at every moment of his life by infinitely resigning everything and by receiving everything back again '[in] temporality, [in] finitude.'²² By performing this 'double-movement' (FT 36) – renouncing and receiving back – the knight of faith 'belongs entirely to the world,' writes Kierkegaard, without revealing 'a bit of heterogeneous *optical telegraphy* from the infinite' (FT 39, my emphasis). There is nothing external that would 'distinguish him from the rest of the crowd'; in fact, he does resemble a 'bourgeois philistine,' engaging himself in the most mundane tasks and activities (FT 39).

And yet, yet the whole earthly figure he presents is a *new creation* by virtue of the absurd. He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasps everything again by virtue of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspect anything else. (FT 40-1, my emphasis)

For Johannes de silentio what the knight of faith achieves continually and repeatedly, at every moment, it is 'to change the leap into life into walking, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian ... and this is the one and only marvel' (FT 41). The marvel does not consist in the fact that the knight of faith performs the impressive movement of leap, but in transforming his leap into a walk, he becomes imperceptible, like everybody else. He properly installs himself 'in a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility' (WP 173), which only life and literature can create.

Even if there is no mention of 'a bourgeois German' (ATP 197) going to the post office in Kierkegaard's text, the line of association – the telegraph line – exists. The introduction of the term 'thresholds of perception' is crucial as it leads to plateau 10 of becomings, '1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...', where Deleuze and Guattari continue referring to Kierkegaard's text. The knight of faith, 'the man of becoming' (ATP 279), as they renamed him, moves in a straight, abstract line, unsuspected by the others; he does not follow pre-traced lines of faith (lines as guides) but he draws the lines on which he moves concurrently with his movement/becoming. 'Becoming everybody/the whole world (*tout le monde*)' equates with an act of creation and recreation – means both 'to make a world' and to make 'the world a becoming.' Most importantly, in becoming everybody/becoming the world/becoming imperceptible, one does not transcend the world but 'the world that becomes' overlays the first world until there are not two worlds but a kind of transparency. In this way, it is possible one 'to be present at the dawn of the world' (ATP 280).

Via Kierkegaard's knight of faith, Deleuze and Guattari elucidate the fact that the lines of flight, contrary to the ordinary significance of the words, are not an escape from the world but reside in immanence (ATP 204). Not without some awkwardness they remark that 'it is odd that the word "faith"' is used by Kierkegaard to describe the infinite movement and the returning to

²² See, Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 49 (Hereafter FT). From the extensive secondary literature on *Fear and Trembling* I cite: E. F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991); John Lippitt, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

the world to receive back the finite – the lost girl²³ or the lost son – insofar as the knight of faith ‘regathers the finite’ (ATP 282). From one part, movement always occurs ‘below and above the threshold of perception,’ in a kind of interval (ATP 280-1). All we can perceive are segments, dislocations of bodies in space, finite parts of an infinite movement in time, a movement that we ignore its beginning and end. But to become everybody requires ‘asceticism’, dismantling of ‘everything that roots each of us (everybody) to ourselves’ (ATP 279), an excess of love that overflows into creation, into new thresholds of perception. Is this a new faith then?

At first sight, Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of *Fear and Trembling* underscores the pedestrian of walking rather than the sublime of the leap. According to their interpretation, ‘in jumping from one plane to the other,’ that is, the plane of transcendence and the plane of immanence, the knight of faith continually expresses the relation between the two planes reaching ‘the absolute threshold’; therefore, what it cannot be perceptible (the plane of transcendence) becomes perceived (ATP 281-2). The knight of faith changes perception (ATP 282) by changing himself in his passion, whilst he himself becomes imperceptible. To add another layer, it is also Deleuze and Guattari who jump with maximum velocity from plateau 8 to plateau 10, from Henry James’s novella to Kierkegaard’s text among others, showing ‘an athleticism of becoming’ (WP 172) in their own writing of *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Novella’s Time: Kierkegaard’s Novellas and the Turning Point

The question that is raised here is for what reason Deleuze and Guattari turn from a modernist novella as it is Henry James’s *In the Cage* to a text such as *Fear and Trembling*, which does not belong to the genre of novella. Johannes de silentio marvels at the movements that the knight of faith performs but he comes as far as this limit; he cannot give an account how/when faith originates but awkwardly remarks: ‘only then does faith commence, *nec opinante* [unexpected], by virtue of the absurd’ (FT 69). What Kierkegaard offers is the threshold of perception at the limit of the ordinary and the marvellous, but in doing so he invokes and rebuts the temporal structures of the novella, particularly of the German Romantic tradition. We will try to follow the trajectory of this refutation from his Journal notes to the pseudonymous authorship.

The German Romantics not only wrote novellas but produced a theoretical discourse reflecting on the formal aspects of novella under the category of the new. One of the definitive characteristics of novella is the narration of ‘an unheard-of event that has occurred’, according to Goethe’s famous definition, while Tieck considered that the plot of the novella should be built around ‘a strange, striking turning point (*Wendepunkt*).’²⁴ The novella often creates the effect of the marvellous or uncanny by interweaving in its plot-structure something ‘mysterious’ and ‘unfathomable.’²⁵ Kierkegaard’s critical stance towards the romantic indifference to actuality is reflected in his comments regarding Tieck’s plays in *The Concept of Irony* (1841). He writes that one who reads Tieck and the rest of the romantic poets ‘gain[s] a notion of the unheard-of and highly improbable things that take place in their poetic world. ... Nothing becomes everything, and everything becomes nothing; everything is possible, even the impossible.’²⁶ Kierkegaard uses the word ‘turning point [*Vendepunkt*]’ to designate the critical point of change in history

²³ The reference is to Regina Olsen, Kierkegaard’s fiancée, with whom he broke his engagement.

²⁴ Santiago Rodriguez Guerrero-Strachan, ‘Récit, story, tale, novella,’ *Romantic Prose Fiction*, ed. Gerald Ernest Paul Gillespie et al. (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2008) 365-7.

²⁵ Peter Hutchinson, ‘Novella,’ *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, ed. Paul Schellinger (New York: Routledge, 2014) 948-50.

²⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 302-3.

where the new breaks forth and the old is annulled.²⁷ More often, he uses the expression ‘*discrimen rerum*’ as the break of sin in the individual²⁸ or he talks about the moment as ‘a *discrimen* [boundary]’ that divides the past, the future, and the eternal (CA 90-1).

In Kierkegaard’s Journals, there are a number of entries regarding his relationship with his father or his broken engagement with Regina that could be rearranged and read as a novella, or explicitly refer to this specific genre.

In a novella titled ‘The Mysterious Family,’ I could perhaps reproduce the tragedy of my childhood: the terrifying, secret explanation of the religious that was granted me in a fearful intimation, which the powers of my imagination then hammered into shape – my offense at the religious. It would begin in a thoroughly patriarchal-idyllic fashion, so that no one would suspect anything before that word suddenly resounded, providing a terrifying explanation of everything.²⁹

Equally ambiguous are the entries around the ‘great earthquake’:

Then it was that the great earthquake took place, the frightful upheaval that suddenly forced upon me a new, infallible law of interpretation for all phenomena. Then I sensed that my father’s advanced age was not a divine blessing, but rather a curse.³⁰

There are allusions to a sin of his father, but the text with much assuredness points towards the burden of guilt that the whole family must bear and the death of his siblings as punishment: ‘that our memory would be entirely blotted out, that no trace of us would remain.’³¹ What happened? Whatever could have happened? How could a single event – a word or an earthquake – become the rule of interpretation for everything? As George Pattison has argued:

Seen in the enigmatic mirror of such texts, ‘Søren Kierkegaard’ becomes the title of a dramatic tale that might be construed as a modern Antigone and that might equally well have provided the plot for a novella or play by one of the writers of the modernist breakthrough of the later nineteenth century – an Ibsen, a Strindberg, a Dostoevsky, or such twentieth-century continuers of that tradition as Kafka or Bergman.³²

Whereas ‘the actual content’ of the sin committed by Kierkegaard’s father may be ‘more or less accidental’, most important, writes Pattison, is the theological thought that Kierkegaard developed about repentance and the forgiveness of sin.³³ For ‘the movement of sin, and the movement of faith in which sin is overcome’ remains ultimately something ‘unrepresentable ... a secret and a mystery.’³⁴

On 16 October 1843, nearly two years after breaking his engagement with Regina Olsen and a few months after being informed about her own engagement, Kierkegaard published *Repetition*

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concept of Irony* 260.

²⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 50. (Hereafter CA)

²⁹ SKS 18, 188/JJ: 147 (1843). As translated in Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) 352.

³⁰ SKS 27, 291-292/Pap. 305:3 (1843-45). As translated in Garff 132.

³¹ SKS 27, 291-292/Pap. 305:3 (1843-45). As translated in Garff 132.

³² George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest of Unambiguous Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 159-160.

³³ George Pattison 167.

³⁴ George Pattison 170.

under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius.³⁵ As the storyline goes, Constantin met a young man of a melancholy nature and soon became his confidant. The young man was humbly in love with a girl, but, as Constantin recounts the story, the whole love affair became a burden to him. Unable either to move forward and complete the relationship with a marriage or to break off and give an explanation to the girl, the young man escapes to Stockholm from where he sends a number of letters addressed to Constantin. What had happened? There is no explanation how life 'has mocked him [the young man] by making him guilty where he was innocent.'³⁶ The young man awaits a marvel that would make possible to get the girl back. Instead, he reads in a newspaper that the girl was married to someone else, deeming this as a divine sign that he is now been released from any commitment (R 220). This contingent event is actually a mockery of the 'turning point' in the narration; nothing new occurs, no transformation affects the young man, no repetition is achieved. What is lost – the lost girl – is not restored to him through forgiveness. At the end of the book, Constantin revokes any genre identification – 'it is not a comedy, tragedy, novel, novella [*Novelle*], epic, or epigram' (R 226) – as if any aesthetic category would be a mystification of the past.

The lines of life and the lines of writing intermingle, as Deleuze and Guattari would have noted. The temporality of novella is extended beyond the limits of the genre. Journal notes, letters, suicidal notes, and in general every text with 'blanks and gaps' bear resemblance to telegram texts. What is that which needs explanation and in what does this explanation consist of? What makes the secrecy of the secret is precisely the explanation, the enfolding of one into the other. Kierkegaard's insight here is – and at this point he moves away from the Romantic novella to an area closer to modernism – that not only there is a turning point that marks a radical change, but (a) the turning point of change is itself 'invisible' (b) the repeatability of the turning point at every moment undoes the past and makes everything new (CA 17-18n). However, this movement of repetition requires faith and it is faith in repetition, in forgiveness.

Conclusion

From what precedes, it is evident that temporality and transformation within time constitutes a common problematic for philosophy and literature. By focusing on Kierkegaard's knight of faith we are in position to better understand the figure of the acrobat-writer. What gives strength to the acrobat is not the confidence that he will not fall down while leaping or his forgetting that he fell in the past but the faith that he will repeat the movement of the leap anew, at the threshold of the ordinary and the marvellous. Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari's remarks about Kierkegaard as an acrobat-writer who leaps between literature and philosophy are justified in view of his authorship; except that Kierkegaard may be stretching from and towards another plane, that of theology.

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³⁵ See the 'Historical Introduction,' Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ix-xxxix.

³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Repetition* 185-6. (Hereafter R)