
‘ORDET’ BY CARL THEODOR DREYER A KIERKEGAARDIAN MOVIE?

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Abstract

‘Ordet’ (The Word, 1954) by Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968) has been considered as a ‘Kierkegaardian movie’ for the following basic reasons: a) Kierkegaard is quoted in the script as responsible for the main character’s madness; b) the movie opposes sectarianism and secularized Christianity to the authentic faith in Jesus Christ’s word; c) as a Danish, Dreyer should have been influenced by the same Scandinavian-Lutheran tradition which affected Kierkegaard’s works. Several objections can be moved to such a content-focused approach. First and foremost, a film critic should primarily focus on the expressive elements of the movie, through which the author’s intentions are fully shown. Secondly, Dreyer’s movie is the screen version of Kaj Munk’s drama bearing the same title. Finally it is remarkable that Danish critics never considered Kierkegaard as an interpretative key to the movie. The aim of this paper is to provide a strict filmological analysis of ‘Ordet’, comparing its formal and stylistic aspects to Søren Kierkegaard’s existential communication. Focusing on pseudonymity, polyphony, marginal role of editors, contemporaneity with the truth, aut-aut between existential opposite choices, I will endeavour to demonstrate that there are some significant analogies between Dreyer’s direction and Kierkegaard indirect communication of inwardness.

Keywords: Ordet, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Søren Kierkegaard, film studies, existential communication

1. ‘Ordet’ by Carl Theodor Dreyer - a kierkegaardian mirage

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a source of inspiration for many literary works. Several scholars have effectively focused on the relation between Kierkegaard and literature [1]. Among them, I would mention Martina Pavlíková, who paid especially attention to Kierkegaard’s influence on contemporary Anglo-American writers, such as Don DeLillo [2, 3] and Wystan H. Auden [4, 5].

Also in film studies, Kierkegaard has become important as a key for understanding a large part of cinematographic works. In the last two decades the so called ‘seventh art’ has been increasingly considered a proper subject for attention by philosophers [6-9]. Kierkegaard’s influence doesn’t apply only to Scandinavian moviemakers, such as Ingmar Bergman [10, 11], Carl Theodor

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Dreyer [12, 13], Lars Von Trier [*Kierkegaard versus Trier*, Berlingske tidende, 16/03/2001, <https://www.b.dk/kultur/kierkegaard-versus-trier>, accessed 30/10/2017], but to Woody Allen as well [D. Štrajcn, *Doing Something Good by Doing Something Bad*, Apokalipsa, Ljubljana, in print].

Gilles Deleuze was the first, among philosophers, to consider cinema as a way of thinking through images. With regard to Dreyer, he recognized an evident connection to Kierkegaard's inspiration. "A whole line of inspiration can be traced from Pascal to Bresson, from Kierkegaard to Dreyer." [14] Although Kierkegaard never saw a film in his life (since the cinema was invented forty-five years after his death), he can be regarded as a pioneer of cinema. One of his particular methods is to introduce into his meditation something that the reader has the difficulty in identifying formally: is this an example, or a fragment of an intimate journal, or a tale, an anecdote, a melodrama, etc.? For example, in *The Concept of Dread* (trans. Walter Laurie [sic] (1944)), it is the story of the bourgeois who takes his breakfast and reads his newspaper with his family and suddenly rushes to the window shouting, 'I must have the possible, or else I will suffocate.' In *Stages on Life's Way* (trans. Walter Laurie [sic] (1940)) it is the story of the accountant who goes mad for one hour a day, and seeks a law which could capitalise and fix resemblance: one day he was in a brothel, but retracts no memory of what happened there, it is 'the possibility which makes him mad...'. In *Fear and Trembling* (trans. Walter Laurie [sic] (1968)), it is the tale 'Agnes and the triton' as an animated drawing, of which Kierkegaard gives several versions. There are many other examples. But the modern reader has perhaps the wherewithal to classify these bizarre passages: in each case it is already a kind of script, a verifiable synopsis, which thus appears for the first time in philosophy and theology." [14, p. 233]

Ordet's release in 1954 provided a special occasion for the critics to focus on theological contents of Dreyer's cinema. This occurred particularly in Italy, where – at the beginning of the 50s – Nino Ghelli [15, 16], Armando Montanari [17], Guido Aristarco [18, 19] identified some existential themes in the film, such as: anxiety, 'living for the death', 'being thrown into this world'. Moreover many speculations have been made about Dreyer's religious life, and they go so far as to say that his adoptive parents belonged to the 'Indre mission', a Lutheran-evangelic movement which sought for the 'rebirth' of Christianity. However, as Maurice Drouzy has demonstrated, through a meticulous biographical inquiry, they were all stereotypical legends [20].

Later on, many philosophers have approached *Ordet* through more proper lenses. However, in most of the cases, philosophical inquiries about the film were based on an asymmetric comparison. On one hand they took into account Kierkegaard's whole production, analysing it in its various aspects, and on the other they just either referred to the plot of the movie or they quoted few lines from the script, avoiding any stylistic examination of the film. This all entails the denial of the film itself and its linguistic peculiarities. In fact, if a philosopher can be properly understood by referring to his literary works, papers and so on, a film

can be fully appreciated in its artistic value only through the analysis of its form, which consists of scenes, plans, soundtrack, editing, et cetera.

Moreover, it has to be noticed that Dreyer's film is actually the screen version of Kaj Munk's drama. While Kierkegaard's influence on Munk is clear in itself, the presumed Kierkegaardian influence on Dreyer's film remains an unproven speculation since it is not supported by any stylistic evidences. With this regard, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti stressed the misconception of a content focused approach to the movie, claiming that: "the art work is not considered in its *real identity*, that is to say in its proper terms, in the form in which it has been expressed by the artist". Ragghianti adds: "a film production is not simply the material vehicle of voices and discourses, but it is concrete and 'in effect' exactly in those visual forms in movement", which makes a movie what it is [21].

Then it is noteworthy that the whole film critic community in Denmark (among them: Ebbe Neergaard [22], Børge Trolle [23], Caspar Tyberg [24]) didn't mention Kierkegaard at all, even though, as Danes, they could have taken advantage of the proximity to this source.

Especially, as far as Ebbe Neergaard is concerned, Dreyer paid tribute to him with the following grateful words: "I thank you because you expressed repeatedly the opinion according to which a moviemaker must be considered as an artist who creates and is responsible for his movie as a film masterpiece. It is the moviemaker's personality which imprints his mark on the film, or to say it with your same words: 'It is not so much the theme that reveals the film, but rather the form the moviemakers gives to it, because it is the moviemaker the one who creates the film, and he is the only who has the full responsibility and authorship on it'. These words, at that time, appeared to me as poured out from my heart, and they are still true today." [25]

More recently, Enrique Castaños Alés has defined *Ordet* as "the most profoundly religious movie in the film history", but he has also considered correctly "its artistic greatness [...] as the result of the harmonious conjunction between content and form". "In every true artistic product, technique, form and style constitute an indissoluble union and largely influence and determine the content, that is to say, what the artist wants to communicate (either it deals with his worldview and conception on man, or his personal interpretation of the historical period in which he lived) depends in a not negligible way on the specific material repertoire (vocabulary) and on the concrete semantic dimension of the object (the order among its elements)". "As far as the creator is concerned, *what* he says, what he communicates mostly depends on *how* he says it". [26]

A comparison between a moviemaker and a philosopher can take place, legitimately and in a way that is respectful for both of them, only if we ground it on a common meta-level. Both Kierkegaard and Dreyer can be considered as two artists who are expert in communication [27] and, in this respect their authorships can be sensibly compared.

In the following pages I will focus on Kierkegaard's and Dreyer's respective 'strategies of communication', which, in my opinion, have strong analogies. First, I will shortly summarize the film story. Secondly I will take into

account pseudonymity in Kierkegaard authorship and the absence of any opening titles in *Ordet*. Then, assuming that handwritten manuscripts stand for inwardness, I will draw a parallel between the treatment of the handwritten manuscripts by Kierkegaardian pseudonymic editors and Dreyer's editing style. Successively, I will focus on temporalization devices, both in Kierkegaard and Dreyer, culminating in the concept of 'contemporaneity with the truth'. Finally I will try to provide evidence of the fact that both Kierkegaard authorship and *Ordet* face us with works which do not supply any conclusion. My claims are that: a) *Ordet* is an example of existential communication in film; b) through a high skilled maieutic strategy, the director put us in front of an ultimatum with respect to which we must make a decision.

2. 'The word' - a summary

Ordet is the second film adaptation of Kaj Munk's drama bearing the same title (which it was written in 1925 and went on stage in 1932). The first screen version was directed by the Swedish moviemaker Gustaf Molander in 1943.

The story took place in the Jutland region. Morten Borgen is a rich farmer who lives in 'Borgensgaard' with his three sons: Michael, Johannes and Anders. The oldest son, Michael, is married with Inger. They have a young girl and they are waiting for a new baby to come. The middle son, Johannes is mad and he believes he is Jesus Christ. Theological studies – especially Kierkegaard – have filled his mind with doubts and finally have driven him crazy. The youngest son, Anders, falls in love with Anne, daughter of Peter the Tailor. But while Borgen is a Grundtvigian, Peter belongs to the Protestant sect called 'Indre Mission', which goes against both the official Christianity and Grundtvigian religious way of life. When Anders asks Peter for Anne's hand in marriage, Peter refuses and the two patriarchs go into an argument. In the meanwhile, Inger has serious complications with her pregnancy. The Doctor practices a therapeutic abortion in order to save her life, but after a while she dies – as Johannes predicted. After Inger's death, Johannes runs away at night from Borgensgaard. He will come back on the funeral day and, despite the fact that he looks like coming back to his senses, he claims to be able to resurrect Inger. Nobody trusts him, except little Maren, Michael and Inger's first daughter. Thanks to the faith of the little child, Johannes calls Inger to wake up and the miracle happens. Eventually, Borgen and Peter reconcile.

3. A masterpiece with no signature

Kierkegaard's authorship was based on a charitable intent: to make his contemporaries aware of what Christianity demands. According to Kierkegaard, preaching Christianity in a Christian nation was an even more difficult mission than preaching it to the pagans, because it firstly required making the so called Christian aware of the illusion in which they lead their religious life [28]. The Christians had lost the true sense of Christianity and pastors were especially

responsible for the falsification of the Christian truth. They lived a hypocrite existence, pretending to be witness of faith but avoiding to do what Christianity basically requires: “suffering for the doctrine” [29]. Kierkegaard encouraged this fundamental realization, adopting a Socratic strategy. He refused to be considered a Christian, but at the same time he claimed to be a ‘poet of Christianity’ – that is to say, someone who knows what Christianity is and who is able to show it in clear terms to the others.

“Although Kierkegaard is mentioned only once in *Ordet*, Munk’s play and, even more so, Dreyer’s film may each be viewed as a theatrical or cinematic transposition of Kierkegaard’s thinking about the conflict of authentic Christian faith with the mores of modern Christendom.” [30] It doesn’t appear a coincidence that Borgen’s middle son is called Johannes as ‘Johannes the Baptist’, the prophet who came to prepare the path to the Lord and preached against Pharisees and Sadducees (Mathew 1.7). The attack to the clergy and official Christianity is one of the main themes in Kaj Munk’s drama as well as in Kierkegaard’s late production. As we know, in *The moment*, Kierkegaard openly accused the Danish clergy of apostasy and invited his fellow countrymen to abandon the Lutheran worship. Kierkegaard’s attack against Christendom had a large echo in the Protestant world, as we can read in Roman Králik [31-35].



Figure 1. The first frame of the movie.

Ordet represents a very singular case in film history, since the director’s name, and actors’ names as well, doesn’t appear on the screen. *Ordet* opens simply with the title “Kaj Munk ‘Ordet’” (Figure 1). For this reason Antonio Giménez-Rico has defined *Ordet* “a masterpiece with no signature” [36]. Guido

Cincotti suggested considering it nothing but a profession of humbleness by Dreyer [37]. However, if Dreyer wanted to pay homage to Munk, he could have acknowledged his artistic debt even without removing his own name from the film.

I would suggest to profit of Kierkegaardian pseudonymity in order to understand Dreyer's anonymity. Kaj Munk (1898-1944) was a Danish pastor who was killed by the Gestapo during the World War II. In Denmark he is very famous and considered as a national hero of independence from the Nazi tyranny. Munk is also celebrated by Lutheran Church as martyr of the Danish Resistance. With this regard, it is noteworthy to remember that Dreyer used to compare Denmark under the Nazi occupation to Christ's Palestine subjugated by the Roman Empire [38].

We could say, thus, that Dreyer 'left the pulpit' to Munk not only because he considered him as a source of inspiration, but also because he recognized his life as consistent with Christian faith. As Kierkegaard states, religious communication requires authority, and Munk had it, both as a pastor and as martyr. To say it with Kierkegaard's same words, Munk redoubled truth in his own life.

4. Existential communication and maieutic strategies in film

The first picture of the movie reproduces Kaj Munk's sign, which is on the front-page of the handwritten manuscript of his piece.

Kierkegaardian pseudonymic editors deal with manuscripts, diaries, notebooks. Handwritten manuscripts and their calligraphies stand for inwardness and personal truth. Manuscripts are always secret and wrapped in mystery. Editors apparently stumble into them by chance. Victor Eremita – the fictional editor of *Either/Or* – discovered some unpublished papers in a *secrétaire* [39]. The editor of A's papers claims he has found the *Seducer's Diary* in a drawer [40]. Frater Taciturnus, editor of *Quidam's Diary*, discovered it inside a box which laid on the bottom of a lake [40, p. 190].

The discovery of a manuscript always entails an act of violence, at least symbolic, in the form of both vandalism and theft. Victor Eremita hits the *secrétaire* with a hatchet in order to open it [39, p. 3]. 'A' gets *The Seducer's diary* by opening a drawer, which was usually locked [39, p. 303]. After the banquet of *In vino veritas*, the same Victor Eremita breaks in through a window, into Assessor Wilhelm's house, and in a while he jumps out with a manuscript [40, p. 85]. But as he "already had his hand with the manuscript half in his pocket", William Afham slipped it away from him [40, p. 86]. On his part, Frater Taciturnus fished out a treasure chest of the lake of Søborg. "The box was locked, and when I forced it open the key was inside: inclosing reserve is always turned inward in that way." [40, p. 189]

Frater Taciturnus describes the discovery of the box as a sacrilege. After the instrument sank into the deep of the lake, he pulled it up and a bubble rose from the depths. Then he realizes that it was "a sigh from below, a sigh *de profundis* [out of the depths], a sigh because I wrested from the lake its deposit, a sigh from

the enclosed lake, a sigh from an enclosed soul from which I wrested its secret. If I had had any intimation of these two minutes earlier, I would not have dared to pull." [40, p. 189] Nevertheless, his expression of regret is not sincere. Suffice it to say that he forced the box he discovered. Only to feel guilty not long after. "To think that by my meddling I had brought disorder into the archives of heavenly justice! But now it is too late, and I beg the forgiveness of heaven and the unknown person." [40, p. 189]

All the editors repent for violating the secretness of the papers with their unauthorized publishing. Editors apologize for that and promise they will pay a reparation to the author whenever he will reveal himself.

As Victor Eremita, Frater Taciturnus and 'A' are simply editors of their respective manuscripts, also Dreyer want to be consider no more than the film editor of Kaj Munk's *Ordet* [41]. As handwritten manuscripts are revelations of souls, Borgensgaard's inner rooms are the settings of secret and private stories. Camera moves within the four walls of Borgensgaard as a probe, capturing the family's everyday life scenes. Repetitive, inertial, anti-spectacular gestures such as sipping coffee, smoking a pipe, preparing biscuits, putting the trousers on, exchanging a kiss. Dreyer turns the banality of the quotidian into the poetry of the quotidian. The soundtrack plays a fundamental role in creating a suggestive sound space made of footsteps, the blowing of the wind, the mooing of the cows. This realism of the quotidian, as we can call it, finds its legitimacy in Dreyer's opinion about sound film: "The true sound film should give the impression that the camera-man has sneaked into one of the city's home just as a drama is being played out in the family. Hidden under his cloak of invisibility he plucks out the most important scenes of the drama and disappears as noiselessly as he came." [42] Dreyerian camera-man's intrusion reminds us of Victor Eremita's thief skill and moreover resounds with what Johannes Climacus claims about literature: "existing individualities must be portrayed in their agony when existence is confused for them" [43].

As Kierkegaard has remarked, the inwardness reveals itself through the opposition between the inside and the outside. While an objective truth is suitable for a direct communication, subjective truths, as inwardness, need indirect communication. Inwardness cannot be expressed in a direct way. With respect to the aim of the present paper, it is noteworthy that Dreyer makes this basic rule his own in order to capture the inner life of the farm. Moreover, the rule of opposition between inside and outside is fully achieved by the strategic use of 'off-screen' technique. Dreyer leaves purposely something or someone out of the screen in order to make it present, by evoking it or him/her, in a more suggestive way. To put it in Kierkegaardian terms, we could say that Dreyer show us some-*what*, which is apparently insignificant, in order to reveal a much more significant *how*.

This is especially evident in the scene of the abortion. We come to know about some complications in Inger's delivery through a phone call. While Morten Borgen is still at Peter the Tailor's home, someone calls from Borgensgaard to let him know that his daughter in law is in danger of life. Peter the Tailor answers the phone. The next scene is a medium-long shot in which we see the doctor putting

on the gloves. With a Pan left and a backtracking, the camera frames Inger lying on a table covered with a white bed sheet from the waist down. She hangs to Mikkel's arms. She moans and suffers. On the background two servants are preparing for the delivery. Then, with a cross-cutting Dreyer shifts from inside to outside, framing Morten and Anders riding a cart in a long shot with a Pan right. Between the inside and the outside there is a sharp contradiction. As the inside is static, the outside is dynamic; as the inside is low lightened, the outside is in the bright evening light. When Dreyer shifts back to the delivery room, Inger is framed in an upside-down close-up. Through the cross-editing, Dreyer hides the change of frame length, approaching cautiously to the scene's dramatic focus.

A few scenes later (Sc. XI, frame 46) a medium shot frames the doctor, sitting on the down right corner [38, p. 49-50]. Mikkel stands on the left side bringing a light. Inger's body is almost completely off-screen, except for the top of her knees covered by the same sheet. We cannot see her face, but the sound off gives us an insight of her grimace of pain. Then, when the doctor breaks the foetus with the scissors, we can only see a slight movement of his shoulder and hear the metal-on-metal grinding sound followed by a scream. Finally when the doctor asks Mikkel for a basket to collect the little made-apart corpse of his aborted son, Mikkel makes a gesture, with both his hands, in order to mime the proper length of the basket, which is the length of the corpse itself. We have never seen it, but by virtue of this pregnant gesture it becomes real in a more distressing way than it would have been if it were represented in any objective way. To say it in Victor Eremita's words: "he has hidden a more significant interior under a rather insignificant exterior" [39, p. 4].

5. Becoming contemporary with the truth

Manuscripts lack of precise temporal and personal data. With regard to *The Seducer's diary*, Victor Eremita observes that: "here and there in the diary a date is given, but the year is lacking" [39]. The editor thus tries to extract it, as follows: "Admittedly, every year has an April 7, a July 3, an August 2, etc., but it by no means follows that April 7 is a Monday every year. I have done some checking and have found out that this specification fits the year 1834." [39]

As editor *in primis* of *The Seducer's diary*, 'A', confines himself to make few remarks. "His diary is not historically accurate." [39, p. 304] The names used in the diary are fictional: "most of the names are so odd that it is altogether improbable that they are historical" [39, p. 305]. As far as Cordelia's letters are concerned, "they are not dated" [39, p. 310], but as 'A' hastens to observe: "even if they were it would not help me much, since the diary becomes more and more sparse as it proceeds" [39, p. 310]. "In fact, at last with only a single exception it abandons dates altogether, as if the story in its development became so qualitatively significant that, although historically actual, it came so close to being idea that specifications of time became unimportant." [39, p. 310-311]

Frater Taciturnus deals with the same challenge, when he tries to date Quidam's diary (literally: someone's diary) discovered in the lake of Søborg. With the aid of the Magister Artium Mr. Bonfilis's table of correspondences, the editor is able to extract the year by using the date (month, day) carved on the ring which was discovered along with the manuscript. "I have calculated and calculated and finally worked out that the year that fits the given dates is the year 1751." [40] Then he ironically reminds some facts which are presumed to be of some importance for the reader. But they are totally meaningless and redundant. "That remarkable year when Gregor Rothfischer joined the Lutheran Church, a year which for anyone who with one deeply profound eye cyclopeanly contemplates the marvels in the course of history is also noteworthy in that precisely five years later the Seven Years' War broke out." [40]

The problem of the reliability and authenticity of dates and names has to be regarded as a false problem. The lack of precise chronological references provokes, in fact, a sense of 'time suspension' which is suitable to let the reader empathize with the story as if he was part of it. In other words, the manuscript is on purpose devoid of determinate historical, chronological and onomastic elements, in order to promote a choice between different existential possibilities which are presented as contemporary to the reader.

Temporalization in *Ordet* has some analogies with Kierkegaard's works. Dreyer tries to communicate a 'universal uniqueness', a subjective truth. In order to let it occur, the movie takes place in an undetermined time period. Modernity is simply suggested by some objects such as the phone and the doctor's car. The pictures of Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) and Johan Vilhelm Beck (1829-1901), which are respectively hung on the back of Peter Borgen and Peter the Tailor, represent – more than a time indicator – religious icons, which symbolize the opposition between different souls of Christianity.

Dreyer favourite devices are very long and articulated uncut scenes which make the duration of the tale and the duration of the story coincident. This fosters developing a deep 'sense of contemporaneity' between fiction and reality. By swinging, the camera gives to the film a biological rhythm, which is breath and pulse of Borgensgaard. In Dreyer's movie, time is first and foremost an inner dimension, which can be smelled as coffee or tobacco. Time is physically represented through the creased clothes of the farmers, through the ritual repetitiveness of the quotidian. Setting and props play a fundamental role in the process of internalization of time. Dreyer builds up the scene through unique pieces, such as furniture that belonged to generations of farmers. Stoves give off heat, familiarity and authenticity, since the setting has 'to speak' to *each* spectator as if he was the *only* one who is admitted to such cosy rooms, full of recognizable and worn-out objects.

6. Editing without editors

Discovered papers and manuscripts reveal an internal order which makes any editing apparently redundant. The editor factually contributes to the

arrangement of the texts and in a subtle and deceitful way introduces a hierarchy among them. Victor Eremita recognizes at first glance that the papers he has found are separated in two different groups: papers of A and papers of B. But after that, Victor settles arbitrarily a sequential order, which cannot anyhow be inferred from the papers themselves [39, p. 7].

The *Seducer's diary* is “a large quarto volume, exquisitely bound”, which the aesthetical ‘A’ discovers ready-made on top of “a mass of loose papers” [39, p. 303]. Then, when he receives a collection of letters from Cordelia, he interleaves them in the right places, thanks to some guiding-clues which he finds in the diary.

With regard to the handwritten manuscript which Frater Taciturnus discovers in the box fished out of the lake, we read that it was “a very carefully and neatly handwritten manuscript on very fine letter paper. There was an orderliness, a meticulousness about the whole thing and yet a solemnity as if it had been done in the sight of God.” [40, p. 189] Finally, Hilarius Bogbinder in himself can be considered as an allegory of Kierkegaardian editors’ marginal role. He is nothing but an extrinsic principle of order, which confines himself to stitch together, guide through the press, and publish the manuscript.

In *Ordet* the story is apparently ruled by the same predetermined order which applies to discovered papers in Kierkegaardian works. Dealing with the role of writing text in Dreyer’s movie, David Bordwell has pointed out that: “the book expresses permanence, linearity, an accomplished coherence within a closed temporality. If the story’s action can be represented by a book, such an action is necessarily already accomplished since the beginning.” [44]

Ordet is characterized by a strict logical-chronological order, which is the result of the perfect coincidence between story and narrative time. Internal editing, which is typical of plan sequences, and matching cuts – based on look, position and movement – give the illusion of continuity. As Claude Perrin said: “Dreyer is at once present and absent in his films” [45]. Just as Kierkegaard, Dreyer’s aim is to make himself invisible, to disappear from the scene. It applies both to Kierkegaard and Dreyer what William of Afham says about Constantinus Constantius in *In vino veritas*, that in ‘his omnipresence’ “one actually did not notice his presence” [40, p. 30].

It is typical of Dreyer to shoot long uncut scenes. Dreyer follows the characters on the scene with coordinated camera movements either towards or from them, as in a sort of harmonious dance. Characters’ entrance itself confers order to the tale. For instance, in the first scene, camera follows Anders who, after waking up and realizing that Johannes is no more in his bed, goes to his father’s room. When he goes out after his brother, with a Pan right Dreyer moves to Inger and subsequently, with an articulated movement, frames Mikkel. In this case, movement’s continuity suggests a family relationship between the characters in itself [37, p. 14-15].

Panning shots also effectively represent the opposition between different existential perspectives. This includes the scene III, in which Johannes stands alone on a hill and shouts against his relatives: “woe betide you, impostors, to you, you... and you”. Moving the camera to the right Dreyer focuses on Mikkel,

Anders and Morten Borgen. The Pan right marks sharply the opposition between Johannes and his relatives in terms of faith [37, p. 16].

7. Dreyer's ultimatum

Pseudonymity and polyphony are the main features of Kierkegaard's communicative strategy [46, 47]. Kierkegaard wrote most of his literary works under pseudonyms. He invented different poetic identities and presented his audience opposite points of view on existence. In this way Kierkegaard intended to compel the reader to take a decision about his own life, to make his subjective perspective clear to himself, becoming a self in turn.

Ordet can be regarded as a polyphonic movie. The characters are many and none of them plays a role of absolute protagonist. As Raymond Carney has remarked: "The Hollywood tendency to focus on one or two privileged points of view (as embodied technically in the use of shot/reverse shot editing patterns and, more generally, in the point-of-view editing convention itself) is replaced by Dreyer's work by a recognition of the irreducible multiplicity of actors and positions to be accounted for at any moment" [48]. By no means a character can become a 'star', because he or she is never separated from a complex contest of dependencies and mutual responsibilities. Technically speaking, Dreyer uses medium long shots in order to attain equidistance from his characters. As Kierkegaardian pseudonyms, each character represents a different and unique perspective on existence, opposite to the others'. None of the different viewpoints has the absolute primacy. They all stay in balance as in a Kierkegaardian *aut-aut*.

With this regard, it is noteworthy to remember about Victor Eremita's *Either-Or*. "We sometimes come upon novels in which specific characters represent contrasting views of life. They usually end with one persuading the other. The point of view ought to speak for itself, but instead the reader is furnished with the historical result that the other was persuaded. I consider it fortunate that these papers provide no enlightenment in this respect. Whether A wrote the aesthetic pieces after receiving B's letters, whether his soul subsequently continued to flounder around in its wild unruliness or whether it calmed down – I do not find myself capable of offering the slightest enlightenment about this, inasmuch as the papers contain nothing. Neither do they contain any hint as to how it went with B, whether he was able to hold fast to his point of view or not. Thus, when the book is read, A and B are forgotten; only the points of view confront each other and expect no final decision in the particular personalities." [39, p. 13-14]

In the same way, although the film ends with a miracle, the resurrection of Inger, we cannot consider *Ordet* a 'happy ending' movie in proper sense. As Børge Trolle said: "This too tangible miracle does not persuade at all, because it can provide neither liberation nor relief" [23, p. 56-57]. Dreyer's film realism presents the miracle as an existential possibility, something that can truly happen, providing to believe it through faith. The miracle appears as a real fact and the resurrection of Inger takes vividly place under our eyes as spectators, but there is

still something disturbing our tranquillity. The miracle, far from being a certainty, is an objective uncertainty.

Dreyer faces us with an *ultimatum*: either to believe or not to believe. Like in Pascal's wager, nobody can avoid the wager. Whether he will or not, he must wager, since avoiding choice is a choice after all. We cannot escape from that. Dreyer has caught us in a trap. Once the miracle happened, Anders sets in motion the pendulum, which stopped after Inger's death. Time starts flowing again as the blood does in Inger's vessels. Mikkel says to his wife: "life begins now for us". But this pendulum serves as a game clock. It's our time to make a choice. Its 'tic-tac, tic-tac' counts the subjective interval in which each single individual has to make his decision. From now on, there are no more spectators. We all are part of the play. The so called 'fourth wall', which separated fiction and reality, has fallen down. With an *aut-aut* Dreyer puts an end to the aesthetical disengagement.

8. Conclusions

In this paper I tried to make a parallel between *Ordet* by Carl Theodor Dreyer and Kierkegaard authorship, taking account of the formal and stylistic aspects both of the film and of the literary production. Focusing on their respective communication strategies, I stressed the following analogies.

- 1) As large part of Kierkegaard's works, also *Ordet* can be considered a pseudonymic masterpiece. In fact, as Kierkegaard claimed not to be Christian but to preach Christianity without authority, Dreyer attributes to Kaj Munk (which was a pastor and a martyr and, as such, redoubled in his own life Christian truth) the authorship of his movie in which modern Christianity is strongly criticized.
- 2) As Kierkegaard's editors (Victor Eremita, 'A', Frater Taciturnus, Hilarius Bogbinder) also Dreyer deals with a handwritten manuscript which is Kaj Munk's original drama.
- 3) Handwritten manuscripts represent inwardness, which Kierkegaardian editors steel and publish with repentance and concerns. Because inwardness cannot be communicated in a direct way, Dreyer uses editing devices and off-screen technique in order to develop an indirect communication.
- 4) As Kierkegaard's manuscripts are deprived of precise dates and real names in order to put the reader in 'contemporaneity with the truth', with regard to *Ordet* we realize that time is not an objective dimension but a subjective one.
- 5) Finally, as in Kierkegaard's writings the reader is called to make a choice between opposite existential possibilities, also in *Ordet* the spectator is faced with an *ultimatum*.

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