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## Kaj Munk - An Introduction to a Controversial Danish Priest, Playwright, and Debater in the Inter-Bellum

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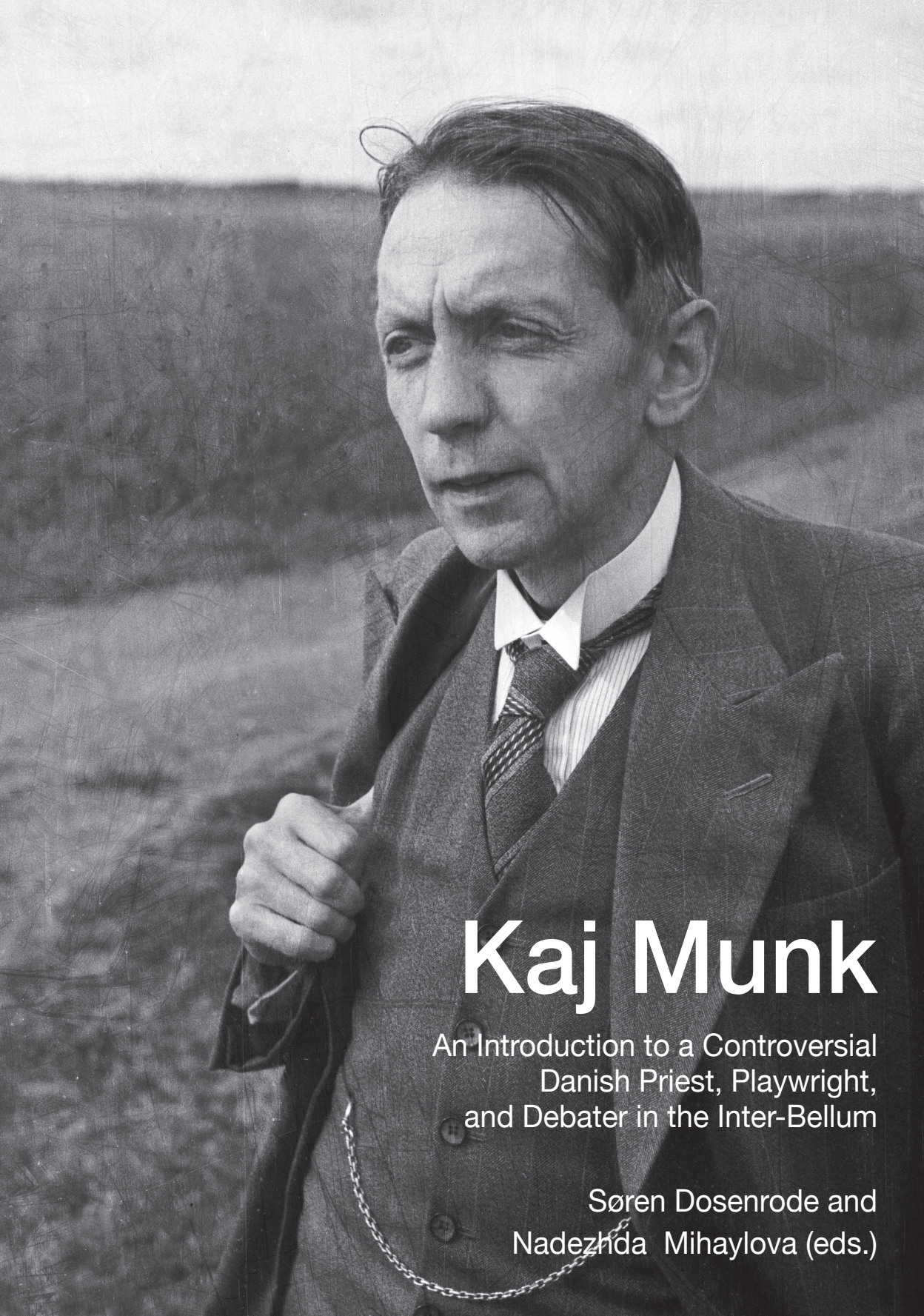
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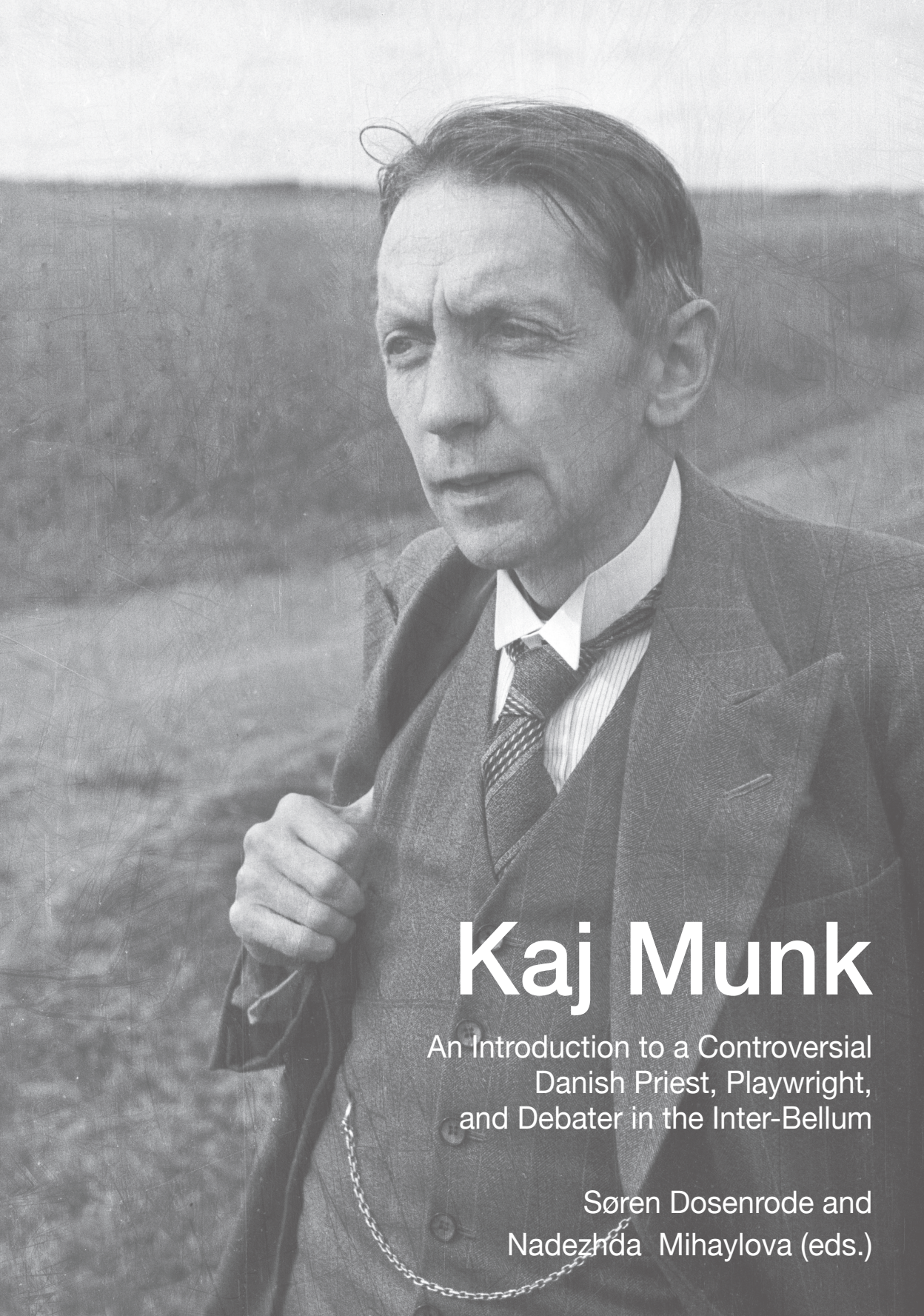
# Kaj Munk

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Søren Dosenrode and  
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Edited by Søren Dosenrode and Nadezhda Mihaylova

1<sup>st</sup> Open Access Edition

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# Preface<sup>1</sup>

The inter-bellum and the Second World War was an extreme era in terms of politics and also culture. Culture broadly understood was marked by the horrors of the First World War, and by the political instability in Central Europe that followed it, including constant attacks on democracy as a form of government. The Danish priest, playwright, author, debater, and resistance icon Kaj Munk (1889–1944) lived and was in his prime during this period, specifically during the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s. Munk was controversial during his life, and also after his death, killed by a German SS Group in January 1944. He tended to divide people sharply into admirers and opponents then, and this division has continued into the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although it is less outspoken now.

Munk was one of several important cultural personalities in Europe of that time, and is well known within the Nordic countries, but less so elsewhere, mainly because he wrote in Danish. With this anthology, we aim to introduce him to a broader international audience, while acknowledging that this anthology is only a tiny contribution towards this aim.

In Denmark, Munk is remembered today mainly as an important playwright and a resistance icon, inciting the Danish

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1 We would like to thank Amanda Hohwü Lundbye-Christensen, BA, for her valuable assistance in editing the manuscript. The same goes for Liz Sourbut PhD, who turned our Denglish into English. We would also like to thank the Universities of Aalborg and St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia for providing resources and facilities for this book project.

people to rise up against the German occupying forces. Regarding the former, Gemzøe and Pahuus (2019, 379) write:

Kaj Munk's writings are worthy of respect and attention, because – in his best works – he addresses the great questions of his time in such lively, unrounded dialogues, that extend beyond their time and appeal to answers and responsibilities in new times.

They add (377):

Kaj Munk is important as one of the few really significant dramatists in Danish literature. And he is interesting as a prism, a seismograph, often a battlefield for many strong, often problematic European ideas and thoughts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Munk was one of the first to argue for the importance of violent resistance in occupied Denmark, as early as the summer of 1940. Resistance against the German occupation was not particularly intensive in Denmark, rather the opposite. In 1942, in a Christmas letter (in Per Stig Møller 2000, 286), Munk wrote: "Around the world, people are being butchered, in Denmark it is pigs [being butchered] ..." To Munk, this failure to fight for one's freedom was horrendous, and he tried to stir up the people's fighting spirit (cf. chapter 1, this volume).

Kaj Munk was multifaceted, as suggested above; he encapsulated values that today we consider right (the fight against oppression and antisemitism) as well as wrong (his embracing of fascism and never becoming a democrat). He is well known in the Nordic countries, where we understand each other's languages, but less so elsewhere. Some of his writings, on resistance, were translated into Dutch after the Second World War, and through these he became an inspiration in the fight against Apartheid in South Africa. However, he remains unknown to a broader audience.

The present anthology was initiated and planned during the Seminar “Kaj Munk in the Context of Danish Literature in the Interwar Years”, held at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Department of German and Scandinavian studies, on 25 April 2023, with the partnership and participation of the Kaj Munk Research Centre at Aalborg University and the “Hans Christian Andersen” Centre for Research and Information.

The anthology consists of three parts. In the first part, Kaj Munk is introduced with a brief biography, including a description of his political views, violent resistance to Nazism, followed by a chapter on his approach to Christianity. This is followed by a chapter on his work as a journalist. His literary setting is also presented. Aspects of Munk’s dramaturgy are analysed in the second part, while the third discusses methodological questions.

To begin the first part of this book, analysing Kaj Munk’s personality and aspects of his work, Søren Dosenrode presents his biography, and analyses his political standpoint and his approach to violent resistance in the chapter “Kaj Munk – an overview”.

If one wishes to understand Munk, one must understand him as a priest, as a Christian. He looked upon the pulpit as a stage, and the stage as a pulpit. Thus, Christian Grund Sørensen explores Munk’s approach to Christianity in the chapter “The Theology of Kaj Munk – an introduction”. Munk was an extremely active contributor to Danish newspapers until censorship stopped him at the beginning of the war. This aspect of communication is investigated in Niels Jørgen Langkilde’s chapter “Kaj Munk as a journalist”. Johan de Mylius then sets the frame for Munk’s literary work in the chapter “Danish literature in the inter-bellum”. This chapter also forms a bridge to the second part of the book, which focuses on aspects of Munk’s drama and includes three contributions.

In this second part, we turn to aspects of Munk’s dramatic writing. In the first contribution, “Power and superiority in ‘Before Cannae’ by Kaj Munk”, Nadezhda Mihaylova examines a theme that dominated European literature in the period between the two world wars, and especially during the Second

World War, thus drawing parallels with literary tendencies outside Denmark, too. Elizaria Ruskova turns to Munk's two dramas "Herod the King" ("En Idealist") and "He Sits by the Melting Pot" ("Han sidder ved Smeltediglen"), first staged in 1928 and 1938 respectively. Although, as Ruskova rightly states, there is no "phenomenon" like Kaj Munk in Bulgarian literature, she nevertheless draws parallels with Biblical dramaturgy in interwar Bulgaria. The last contribution on Munk's drama is Antonia Gospodinova's research note, in which she compares Munk and the Norwegian author, poet, and playwright Nordahl Grieg, who also died during the Second World War. Grieg was an officer in the allied forces. In her chapter, Gospodinova finds and explores a number of hitherto undescribed parallels between these two very different contemporary men of letters.

The third and final part of the anthology, which explores approaches to the study of Kaj Munk and his writing, begins with Peter Øhrstrøm's presentation of a new user-friendly way to search the large archive at the Kaj Munk Research Centre, an approach that can also be used with other large archives: "Researching Kaj Munk – the timeline project". The final contribution is Ana Maria Martins da Costa Santos Langkilde's discussion of the choices and practical questions facing a translator, in the chapter "Translating from one language and culture to another language and culture – the case of Kaj Munk's 'Ordet'".

We dedicate this book to ambassadors Svetlan Stoev (Copenhagen) and Jes Brogaard Nielsen (Sofia) for their contributions to academic cooperation and cultural exchange between Bulgaria and Denmark.

Søren Dosenrode  
Nadezhda Mihaylova



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# Kaj Munk – An Overview<sup>2</sup>

*Søren Dosenrode*

This chapter aims to provide an overview, an introduction to the Danish priest, debater, playwright, journalist, resistance leader, and much more, Kaj Munk, who was born in 1898 and killed in 1944.<sup>3</sup> Other chapters in this anthology focus on Munk's drama, his journalism, and his approach to theology. This chapter consists of three parts; the first is basically a biography, the second analyses Munk's political stand, and the third approaches his view on resistance during the German occupation of Denmark (1940–1945). The chapter concludes with a consideration of Munk's legacy. But first, a few words about the Denmark into which Munk was born and where he lived his life.

Denmark in the late 1890s was a traditional, rural, agrarian country, especially at the periphery where Munk was born. Agriculture was the prevailing way of life for the majority of Danes, although industrialization was well on its way, especially in the larger cities. This modernization continued throughout Munk's life, and he resented it! The Danish population amounted to around 2.45 million when Munk was born (in 2023, it is around 5.9 million).

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2 This author has previously written on Kaj Munk, and this chapter will draw to a large extent on chapters in Dosenrode (2009 a,b,c), Dosenrode, Iversen & Lodberg (2014), Dosenrode (2015) and other publications, as well as original research.

3 As the majority of the literature on Kaj Munk is in Danish, quotations have been translated by this author.

The Danish political system at the time of Munk's birth was a democratic constitutional monarchy. Parliamentarism was introduced in 1901 and female suffrage was introduced in 1915. In spite of a failed and bloodless coup d'état by King Christian X in 1920, and political unrest in the 1930s, democracy as *the* form of government was never seriously questioned by the majority of Danes during Munk's lifetime – or afterwards.<sup>4</sup> After having lost around a third of the country to Austria and Prussia in the Second Schleswig War of 1864, Denmark pursued a foreign policy of neutrality. This worked during the First World War, when the country was armed, but did not succeed during the Second, when Denmark was practically unarmed. Denmark was overrun by the German army on 9 April 1940 and the King and the government decided to capitulate without much fighting<sup>5</sup> and to pursue a policy of cooperation to get Denmark through the war as easily as possible. This implied that criticism of Germany was not allowed, and (unconstitutional) censorship was introduced. This policy lasted until August 1943, when the government resigned, and the permanent secretaries of state took over an administrative governance under tight German control (“departementchefstyret”).

In the preface to his memoirs, “Foraaret så sagte kommer” (“The spring arrives slowly”) published in 1942, Kaj Munk writes that these memoirs are the story of a boy who did not know whether he should be a priest or a poet, and thus became both. He also writes that “Not one single person is shot in this book...” (Munk 1949, 9) but, as it turned out, there was a shot, when Munk himself was killed by a German SS group eighteen months after the publication of his memoirs, as the first

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4 The story goes that in the mid-1930s Emma Scavenius, wife of the Danish foreign minister Scavenius, attended a dinner and sat next to the US ambassador. The ambassador politely asked about her home country, and she explained that Denmark had a majority government and was stable. The ambassador smiled and exclaimed: “Oh I see, Denmark is a dictatorship”.

5 Denmark had followed a policy of disarmament throughout the 1930s and was thus extremely ill prepared for any defence.



Danish victim of the German so-called “clearing murders”.<sup>6</sup> Munk must be understood as a priest, a poet, a social debater, and a resistance leader (and a national hero), but his priestly work and his emphasis on a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the key to understanding him.

## Childhood and youth

Kaj Munk was born in Maribo on the island of Lolland on 13 January 1898. He continued to have a close bond with Lolland throughout his life, and liked to talk about his “native island”, “Fødeøen”. “It is possible that there are equally beautiful places in the world, but there is nowhere prettier than Maribo” (Munk 1949, 18).

Munk’s childhood was not easy, although it started well. He was born into a solid artisan family, with a father who was a master tanner who had married his housekeeper. But his father died when Munk was only eighteen months old and after that the family’s finances were not good. After a short while, Munk’s mother, Mathilde Petersen, was forced to sell the tannery and move to a small apartment close to the Catholic church in Maribo. A few years later, she contracted tuberculosis and also died. Kaj Munk was then five years old and the only child. His wider family took care of him, but the first two places where he was cared for were not a success. All seemed well when he came into the care of his mother’s cousin and her husband, Marie and Peter Munk in Opager on Lolland, south of the Danish main island Zealand. Munk describes how, at the beginning, he did not want to call his aunt mother.

I didn’t want to call Aunt Marie “Mother”, that’s not how you let down your dead ones, is it? But on Christmas Eve I felt so warm in my heart that I suddenly exclaimed: “When you’ve decorated such a nice tree for me, I really want to call you mother”. (1951 [1941], 53)

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6 The “Clearing murders” were murders committed by the German occupation forces as revenge when a German soldier or a Danish pro-German collaborator was murdered by the Danish resistance.

In his sermon for the sixth Sunday after Easter in 1941, Munk describes his childhood on Lolland, and how (due to his stepmother's care), he regained his strength, and now had to toughen up and participate in the life of the farm. He describes how his stepfather shook his head at his lack of practical abilities, and how his stepmother commented that, if he did not have practical skills, then at least he had a head and should become a priest. She said this to the local teacher Martinus Wested, who replied: "'It's a long road, Mrs. Munk; let him become a teacher.' 'That's not enough' was the answer given to the teacher from the little wife's heart and mouth" (Munk 1951 [1941], 55).

As early as eight or nine years old, Munk wrote poetry; among other things, this little poem:

Spring arrives slowly,  
Soon we can expect an excellent summer,  
Where the bird lives in its green home.  
For us it sings such a beautiful song,  
Yes, singing and chirping all day long,  
While the grass and flowers slowly grow.  
– Then we can hope for a fruitful year  
With sunshine and lots of joy.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps it is not the greatest poem, but for a child less than ten years old it is very good, and "poetry" became a passion that captivated him throughout his life, so much so that several times he considered becoming a poet "full time" instead of entering the priesthood. Munk later used the first line of this

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7 My rudimentary translation does not do the poem justice. The original text is:

*Foraaret saa sagte kommer,  
Snart kan vi vente den glimrende Sommer,  
Hvor Fuglen bor i sit grønne Hjem.  
For os den synger saa smuk en Sang,  
Ja, synger og kvidre Dagen lang,  
Mens Græsset og Blomsterne sagte gror frem.  
-- saa kan vi haabe paa, at vi et frugtbart Aar maa faa  
Med Sol og megen Glæde*

poem as the title of his memoirs, and the last line as the title of a collection of his written work, published in 1942.

During his years as a schoolboy, he met three people who were to make a special impression on him. The first was his teacher Martinus Wested, about whom Munk wrote: "I do not hesitate to say that his teaching was ennobling. His review of Bible history or Danish history consisted of an appeal to the noble instincts in us" (Munk 1949 [1942], 76). Among other things, Wested taught Munk to be happy for Denmark. This teacher recognized a special talent in the boy, and introduced him to the chaplain Oscar Geismar. Geismar prepared Munk for secondary school in Maribo, but he also opened up the world of literature to the boy, especially Oehlenschläger,<sup>8</sup> Ibsen,<sup>9</sup> and Shakespeare. The third person to have a lasting impact on Munk was the Reverend Bachevold. Bachevold taught Munk that faith is a sacred matter, and Munk himself told how, as a young high-school student, he once met Bachevold, who blessed him, something Munk could never forget, and he felt strongly that "something holy had been close" (Munk 1936b n.p.).

Munk went to "Maribo Private Realskole" ("Maribo private secondary school") in 1911, and was happy about it, in terms of the school, his friends, and the place. His friend Niels Nøjgaard writes: "with a joy of his own, the strangely loyal schoolboy now made his way through three years in the city of his father, which never lost its enchantment over him" (1946, 25). He finished school in Maribo in the summer of 1914, where he started at "Nykøbing Falster Katedralskole" ("Nykøbing Falster Cathedral School").

As Per Stig Møller rightfully stated, Munk's time in Nykøbing was not happy (Møller 2000, 78). He fell in love, but she was not good enough, and he became politically active, vehemently fighting against the sale of the Danish Virgin Islands to the USA. He also wrote his first drama, "Pilatus" ("Pilate"), just before his final exams. It was sent to a publisher, Pio, who wrote a kind comment but did not publish it (Dosenrode 2015, 15).

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8 Adam Oehlenschläger, 1779–1850, the "father" of Danish romanticism.

9 Henrik Ibsen, 1828–1902, (Danish-)Norwegian dramatist, who wrote modernist drama.

After his exams in 1917, Munk took up theology studies at the University of Copenhagen. Because his high school courses had not included Hebrew or Greek, he had to work hard on these two languages, but he did go to the theatre often, and continued writing poetry and drama which he tried, unsuccessfully, to get published. In 1921, he wrote the poem “Mester med den tunge tornekrone” (“Master with the heavy crown of thorns”). This poem describes the price of following Christ, even if it means martyrdom (Dosenrode 2015, 16).<sup>10</sup>

Munk received his master’s degree in theology (cand. theol.) in 1924, but even before his final exams, he was invited to give a “test sermon” (“prøveprædiken”) in the parish of Vedersø, on the western coast of Jutland. The purpose of this sermon was for the parish council to see and hear whether he had the ability and gifts to be their new parish priest (he was not the first applicant, but rather the fourth). He had the required qualifications and was offered the position, which he accepted, and, in spite of occasional threats to leave the parish, he remained in Vedersø until he was murdered.

By studying theology and becoming a priest, Munk broke the social patterns into which he was born, as the son of a craftsman, and being brought up by a smallholder. At his foster parents’ home he never had to go to bed hungry, but they did have to work hard, especially later on to make it possible for him to study. He did not turn his back on his past; on the contrary:

you little thatched house under the chestnut tree,  
how you taught me to love all small homes in Denmark.  
Because the greatness with you was, I suppose,  
that you were nothing special and that Father and Mother  
by and large were like everybody else. (Munk 1951 [1941], 57)

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10 Another version than that hitherto known, dated 9.6.1922, came to light after the death of Kaj Munk’s youngest son, Mogen, in late summer 2023. The question of discipleship and martyrdom is still the primary focus.

## Vedersø 1924–1944: Priest, Playwright, and Public Figure

The change from his native island of Lolland via Copenhagen to Vedersø was enormous. It was difficult for him to settle down; he felt lonely and often lacked financial means, as his salary was “modest”, to say the least. But he went on writing. Actually, even before his final exams at the university he had begun writing a biblical drama about King Herod, “En Idealist” (“An idealist”). It was sent off to the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, the national scene, and he received an answer six months later, that it was too long and had to be shortened. Munk (mis-)understood this answer as a rejection and decided to quit writing and focus solely on his parish. Thus, he burned most of the manuscripts that he had lying around, except “En Idealist”. The interaction between Munk and the Royal Theatre has been described vividly by Professor Hans Brix, who was the “censor” at the theatre, that is the person who would accept or reject new manuscripts. During the process of accepting “En Idealist”, Brix suggested to Munk that he should write a drama about “Peasants and the spiritual life in the country” to entertain himself while waiting for a decision from the theatre. The result was “Ordet”<sup>11</sup> (“The Word”) (Brix 1946, chapter XII, esp. p. 30; Møller 2000). Munk had experienced a woman dying while giving birth and was devastated. However, in “Ordet”, miracles happen. Both small ones, such as when stiffness and misunderstood hard faith is dissolved, and big ones, such as when the “mad” Johannes is cured, and the dead woman Inge is commanded to return to life in the name of he who rose from the grave, Jesus, and does so. As Peter Øhrstrøm rightly observes (2014), this drama is a contribution to the debate about worldviews or outlooks on life during the 1920s, when the Christian worldview was wrestling with an atheist, rational one.

“En Idealist” was finally accepted by the Royal Theatre in 1926, but was not performed then, and when it finally was staged in 1928 it was severely criticized and Munk felt ridicu-

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11 The title was originally “In the beginning was the Word”, from the Gospel of St. John.

lous and sad. However, he continued writing. In fact, he was extremely productive. An example of his productivity is the year 1926 when he wrote a drama on the Danish literary critic and atheist Georg Brandes, "I Brændingen" ("In the Durge"), "Kærlighed" ("Love", a drama with strong biographical parallels about a priest who does not himself believe in Christ, and has a relationship with a married woman), and the political drama "Fugl Fønix" ("Phoenix Bird") about the Versailles peace treaty.

This extreme productivity continued until his death. In the Kaj Munk Research Centre at Aalborg University, there are around 69 pieces of drama (some unfinished), around 300 sermons,<sup>12</sup> and more than 530 articles.<sup>13</sup> His youngest son, Mogens Munk, told this author that his father used to manage his administrative duties as parish priest early in the morning, and then spend the rest of the day writing or visiting parishioners.<sup>14</sup> However, if one looks in the archives of the diocese of Ribe, one finds several notifications of sick leave for Munk, probably due to stress. His productivity and ambitions came at a price.

According to Ricardt Riis, love and togetherness were extremely important, but also very difficult and confusing to Munk (2014, 175). In his biography, Munk writes of women:

Why on earth should I try to make a secret of the fact that I only know of one kind of intoxication, and that is woman? There is hardly any one of my books which has been written without such inspi-

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12 As a priest, Munk had to deliver a sermon on three out of every four Sundays, so he created many more but often did not write them down. In 2023, an important collection of all his known sermons was published by Sørensen and Øhrstrøm.

13 The collection of newspaper articles at the Kaj Munk Research Centre is not complete; an educated guess is that it represents about 75% of his journalistic work.

14 It has to be remembered that the typical Danish parish in the 1930s was very much smaller than they are today, and that the expectations of the priest were not to arrange "events" but to undertake basic pastoral work.

ration. What it has given me, and what the price was, is my own business. (Munk 1949 [1942], 259)

But he was not married... and he was lonely. This situation ended when Munk met Elise Marie Jørgensen, known later as Lise Munk 11 years younger than himself, whom he married in January 1929. During their marriage she gave birth to five children, and Munk finally settled down in Vedersø. Marriage did not stop Munk writing; in the same year that he got married, he wrote two more dramas: "Havet og Menneskene" ("The Sea and the People"), and "Kardinalen og Kongen" ("The Cardinal and the King"). However, the breakthrough as a playwright had not happened. This first came in 1931 with his historical drama "Cant", about King Henry VIII, who basically overturned England's church system to satisfy his own libido. In the words of Brix, "Cant" opened up the "gate of success for Munk" (1946, 117). This success was cemented with "Ordet", which was finally performed in 1932. Møller agrees: "with the two successes *Cant* and *Ordet* Kaj Munk had his breakthrough and became the most viewed playwright and the most discussed author [in Denmark]" (2000, 193).

Thus he became an important author, including of newspaper articles (from 1931 as a commentator for the important daily *Jyllands-Posten*), which gave him a platform as a debater on societal matters. Thus, we now turn to Kaj Munk's political stance.

## Political ideas and affiliations

When analysing Munk's political beliefs, there are a number of constants: his national mind (not nationalistic), his loyalty to the Royal Family, his anti-democratic approach and, related to this, his strong fascination with dictators (Dosenrode 2015, 249).<sup>15</sup> But first, a word on his approach to life, his worldview.

In terms of Munk's approach to life, Christianity played an important role, as did the ideals of greatness and strength. In

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15 The basis for the following analysis is primarily Munk's journalism, but with the sporadic inclusion of his drama and prose. A more detailed analysis was published in Dosenrode 2015, chapter 5.



an article from 2015, Mogens Pahuus analyses the ideals of strength and greatness in Munk's political writings. He opens it by quoting a letter from Munk, from 1926, in which Munk's approach to life is stated in two short lines: "1) It is important to be strong, 2) it is about being good" (2015, 56). These two qualities are central for Munk, and Pahuus concludes: "to Munk, goodness is a central value. But strength [...] is also a central value, and it is basically not subordinated to the other" (2015, 75). This analysis is taken further and elaborated in Gemzøe and Pahuus' important contribution "Kaj Munk's digtning og livssyn" ("Kaj Munk's Literary Work and Outlook on Life") (2019). They argue that these two concepts were engaged in a "duel" and also that they changed somewhat over time as Munk became more traditional in his approach to Christianity. Thus, strength and love underlie his approach to politics, and to Denmark.

According to Munk, Denmark was the very best, was sublime. His love for Denmark runs like a red thread throughout his entire production: poems, short notes, feature articles, short stories, and dramas. A good example is an article in *Jyllands-Posten*:

When we love Denmark and believe in her future, it is not because our geography tells us about her strength or our history tells us about our excellence and leadership capacities. What is national feeling? It is for us Danes, just that we are Danes, and that it is self-evident. And this, that we are Danish, that lives in our hearts as a duty to remain so. We are this [Danish], not out of choice, but because we are so. We remain so, not because we want to, but because we cannot do anything else. (Munk 1935 n.p.)

This is an interesting approach because it does not make being Danish better than being Swedish, German, or any other nationality. It thus circumvents nationalism and its inherent danger of aggression against other nations by right of being better.

His love for Denmark and being Danish also has an earnest side, as became apparent when war in Europe drew closer – as well as during the Second World War: Now willingness to sacrifice is paramount. In his disputed Ollerup speech, he scolds the junior partner in the Danish coalition government, “Radikale Venstre” (“the Social Liberals”): “The Social Liberals have thanked the Government because it spared us suffering. But what is suffering? Torn off limbs and so forth? Yes, but I know of greater suffering. Namely that the fatherland should perish” (Dosenrode 2009a, 39).

When Munk wrote that war, mutilation, and destruction are better than peace, it was *inter alia* because, to Munk, in Thostrup Jacobsen’s words, politics had a religious dimension, where God, right, and truth are absolute criteria of evaluation. The symbol of Denmark was, for Munk, the King. In 1927, Munk wrote a short story “Naar Kongen kommer” (“When the King arrives”), whose main character was modelled on King Christian X. “The King is well-behaved, good company, direct, used to managing many situations” (Munk 1944 [1942], 172). And when King Christian X turned 70 in 1940, this was a national celebration and Munk wrote a prayer of thanks for the King. Munk’s approach to Denmark and the monarchy is basically deeply national-romantic with strong religious connotations (Dosenrode 2015, 253).

How should Munk’s beloved Denmark be governed? He never became a democrat, and throughout his adult life he was attracted to dictators, “the strong men” (Dosenrode 2015, ch. 5; and Dosenrode 2020). It is worth remembering that the number of democracies declined during the 1930s and, in 1938, there were only eleven such in Europe, the rest were authoritarian or outright dictatorships. Democracy was just one of several options.

In 1934, Munk undertook a journey to the Holy Land and wrote a number of newspaper articles during the trip. In the same year, they were collected in the book “Vedersø-Jerusalem Retur” (“Vedersø-Jerusalem and back”). In the first two chapters, Munk attempts to retain an ironic distance from Hitler, but he remains impressed. Regarding Mussolini, there is

only praise. In the last chapter, Munk describes and defends the murder of Ernst Röhm,<sup>16</sup> ordered by Hitler.

All the sympathy this bold Austrian painter [Hitler] had compelled in states [...] he lost that night. The exalted muse of history bent over him and threw the royal robe of greatness and solitude around the shoulders that had flaunted dignity far too much. (Munk 1934, 147)

Munk also accepted the killing of Austrian chancellor Dolfuss, and he hoped that one day a man like Hitler would come to Denmark to save it (1934, 150).

In a number of newspaper articles, Munk made it clear that he was not impressed by democracy. For example, in an article in *Jyllands-Posten* entitled “The Parliamentary Theatre”, (April 1933), Munk describes the parliamentary debates as a never-ending gramophone record, and suggests that parliament should be closed down. Munk also described democracy as “majority dictatorship” (Munk 1936a). As late as July 1940, he says in his Ollerup speech: “Democracy lies in state [*lit de parade*]. I am not sorry for that. I have not had children with it. [...] I do not mourn democracy’s death, but Denmark’s. For did it turn out worse than for us? We got Hitler and kept Stauning<sup>17</sup>?” The same approach is clearly visible in his Gerlev speech from August of same year, in which he described democracy as a rotten fruit (Munk 1949, 174–187).

During the occupation, Munk made two or three half-hearted attempts to speak positively about democracy; however, one has the clear impression that this was not in order to be positive about democracy *per se* but to use it as a convenient weapon against the political parties cooperating with the occupying German forces. This impression is confirmed when reading the correspondence between Kaj Munk and Arne Sø-

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16 Ernst Röhm (1887–1934), a German officer and Nazi politician. Close ally of Hitler but potentially a competitor.

17 Thorvald Stauning, Danish social democratic prime minister (1873–1942).

rensen.<sup>18</sup> Munk reluctantly supported Sørensen's "Dansk Samling" ("Danish Union") during the parliamentary election in 1943. He wrote a pamphlet describing why one could not vote for the four old, coalition parties (Social Democrats, Social-Liberals, Agrarian Liberals, and Conservatives): "Can't we just vote for one of the four old parties, no matter which? No. Because they have given up the popular governance<sup>19</sup> which must be our inalienable property because it is ours and it is Danish" (1946 [1943] 252–253). In his letter of thanks to Munk for his contribution (18 March 1943), Sørensen writes that he has removed Munk's sentence "[...] and whatever we have thought of popular governance before and will think of it once again' because, to my mind, this sentence would render us open to hateful accusations of Nazism and opportunistic intercourse with popular governance." Munk did not become a supporter of democracy.<sup>20</sup>

## Munk and Resistance during the Second World War

Munk had begun to distance himself from Hitler in 1938 due to Hitler's anti-semitism, and when Hitler attacked the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Munk was disappointed.

What Hitler has done for Germany so far has been brilliant, apart from one deep and hideous shadow: the treatment of the Jews. Perhaps there was no more room for them in the *Reich*, if the ideal "Germany for the Germans" was to be fully implemented. But then an arrangement had to be made.

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18 Arne Sørensen (1906–1978) founded the Danish Union (*Dansk Samling*), a corporatist party positioning itself between socialism and fascism. It started out as antidemocratic but later embraced democracy. See also Dosenrode 2020.

19 Meaning: democracy, *folkestyre*.

20 See also Gemzøe and Pahuus 2019 (chapter 24, i.a. p. 364), where the authors convincingly argue the same regarding aspects of Munk's drama, where Munk may criticize Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia and Hitler's persecution of the Jews, but nonetheless admires their basic contributions to their respective states.

Instead of advancing against them so that thousands and thousands have suffered unimaginably. [...]. But this dark point aside, Hitler has practised so brilliant a deed for his people that Napoleon can hardly hold a reputation against him. Until now, when this last thing happened, which indicates that he has reached a line in his development that leads him away from himself. The power has taken the power from him. His big idea – Germany for the Germans – has been betrayed by this conquest. The victory over Czechia is a painful act, a terrible misfortune for the Leader, for his idea, for his country. The living will see it. But maybe no one does. (Munk 1939 n.p.)

Thus, two issues tarnish Munk's otherwise positive view of Hitler: his anti-semitism and the attack on Czechoslovakia. However, Munk did not distance himself from dictatorship *per se*.

After the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, the American president, Franklin Roosevelt, requested that Hitler extend an offer of non-aggression treaties to small European states, which he did. Denmark accepted – reluctantly – and signed the treaty on 31 May 1939. When Germany then invaded Denmark on 9 April 1940, the other Scandinavian countries did not sign such treaties (Aarhus Universitet 2023).

When Denmark was occupied, Munk fell into despair, a “what is the use of resistance?” mood. But this changed within a few months, and he began agitating for violent resistance (cf. Dosenrode 2015, 295). As Munk had been a very popular playwright and very active in societal debates during the 1930s, he was well known among the Danes. Today, one would say he had and was a strong brand, and he used this in his agitation. Although he occasionally donated money to the resistance movement, he did not join it himself. His role was to enflame the Danes to resist the occupational forces, and he was one of the first to do so. He became a beacon for resistance.

How could a priest encourage people to kill other people? The short answer to this complicated question is that Munk followed the Lutheran doctrine, which states that one is not allowed to resist if one is attacked oneself, then one has to turn the other cheek. However, when others are attacked, one has an obligation to defend them.<sup>21</sup> Munk's approach was revealed *inter alia* in a letter to Mr Paul Petersen, dated Vedersø 17 July 1943. Petersen had written to Munk to ask how, as a priest, he could encourage people to kill. According to Petersen, one should instead suffer the wrongs. Munk gave the following answer:

Facing the sufferings of Jews, the sufferings of Poland, the sufferings of Norway – you are keeping your hands in your pockets, Sir! Do you know what Christ would say to you on Judgement Day? He would say: “Paul, Paul! Oh, why did you not take your hands out of your pockets?” “Whoever shall offend one of these little ones, he deserves no better than a millstone was hanged about his neck and thrown into the sea.” You, you, you are complicit in offending the little ones. You see beasts throwing themselves on small children without lifting a finger. And that is called Christianity. Dear oh dear! And you believe that Glory be to God when his people act infamously! May the Holy Spirit guide you! (Dosenrode 2009b, 3)<sup>22</sup>

The same attitude is found in a letter to a female student, Elsebet Kieler, who referred to the Sermon on the Mount. Munk advises her to burn her books and learn to use a machine gun, ending the letter: “Now try to become a Christian person and learn to kill in the name of Jesus” (quoted in Møller 2015, 588–589).

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21 For a detailed analysis of this question, see chapter 1 in Dosenrode 2009c.

22 The two letters are found in translated versions in Dosenrode 2009b, pp. 2–3.

Although Munk could not write as candidly in the newspapers as he did in the letters mentioned above due to censorship, he did make his point clear in newspaper articles, speeches, sermons, and plays. His resistance drama par excellence is “Niels Ebbesen”, named after a Danish squire who killed count Gerhard III of Holstein in 1340, at a time when large parts of Denmark were occupied by German (Holstenian) forces. In this play, Munk presents the characters in such a way that they are easy to identify as German politicians and soldiers of 1940. The drama ends with Niels Ebbesen speaking to his followers – and the audience – declaring: “[...], we must be free to live” (quoted in Dosenrode 2015, 322). This explicitly encourages resistance. To avoid censorship, Munk did not finish this play but travelled around Denmark to read it aloud in schools, city halls, wherever he could. The play was finally finished and printed in 1942, and the Danish Ministry of Justice had it seized, but a number of copies had already been distributed and were circulating “underground”.

Censorship in Denmark was basically self-imposed during the first three years of the occupation, and was administrated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through “voluntary” agreements with the press. Regarding theatre and books, pre-publication censorship was the rule, and the censorship of state radio was strict.<sup>23</sup>

As already described, Munk was censored both before and during the war. Before the war, the Danish government followed a policy of appeasement, trying not to provoke Germany and her allies. In 1936, Munk wrote “Sejren” (“The Victory”), which depicts a dictator who looks very much like Mussolini. The play was prohibited by the Royal Theatre’s censor after pressure from the Italian envoy, only to receive its first performance in Norway (Andersen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 43). Three years later, in 1939, the planned performance of Munk’s play “Han sidder ved Smeltediglen” (“He Sits by the Melting Pot”), a drama exploring Jesus’ Jewish origins and anti-semitism, had to be cancelled in Southern Jutland, which borders

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23 For a detailed description of censorship in Denmark, see Møller 2015, Andersen and Øhrstrøm 2021, or Dosenrode 2022.



on Germany, after pressure from the Minister of Justice, K.K. Steinke (Dosenrode 2010, 13).

This censorship meant that Munk's opportunities to publish slowly dried up. In the Kaj Munk Research Centre's archive, one finds a number of small notes with a semi-official appearance telling Munk that he cannot write or publish in this or that newspaper. When Munk's autobiography was published in the summer of 1942, newspapers were not allowed to review it, and from September 1943 Munk himself was not allowed to publish books, this being a consequence of the occupation forces having taken over the censorship at the end of August in that year (Andersen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 52–53; Dosenrode 2022).

In his last sermon, on New Year's Day 1944, Munk told the congregation that he could not celebrate mass, because he had been told that people from the parish had begun working for the Germans to build fortifications along the west coast of Jutland. He strongly condemned this, and also addressed his fear: "I know, that for months I have not been able to go to sleep without the thought: 'will they come for you tonight?'" (Sørensen and Øhrstrøm, 2021, 458). A few days later, "they" did come, fetched him, and shot him. The German hope was to silence Munk and to frighten the Danes away from resistance. They did not succeed. The dead Kaj Munk became a beacon for the Danish resistance movement.

## Kaj Munk's Legacy

After the war, Munk was celebrated as a hero, as former foreign minister and Kaj Munk expert, Dr Per Stig Møller expressed it in a radio broadcast: "Kaj Munk was what all Danes had wanted us to be, after the war."<sup>24</sup>

However, Munk had basically opposed the Danish government's policy of cooperation with the German occupying forces. Where the government said: "be quiet, do not provoke", Munk said: "stand up and fight". Thus, it is not surprising that the museum in his honour, which was promised by the Danish parliament just after the war, did not materialize. Neither the

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24 Quoted from this author's memory.

Social Democrats, the Agrarian Liberals, nor the Social Liberals wanted a monument to a person they felt had dangerously fooled around with Denmark's security.<sup>25</sup>

The cultural elite in Denmark was, and is, of a centre-left persuasion, and rather naturally Munk – being very national, very traditional, and not democratic at all – was not a role model to them. Added to this was the fact that Munk often wrote his dramas as a kind of commentary on a debate current at the time of writing, which rendered many of them obsolete after the war. For a time, he was forgotten.<sup>26</sup>

Munk's "renaissance" began with the writings of Bjarne Nielsen Brovst in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>27</sup> In 1997, Jens Kristian Lings founded "Kaj Munk Selskabet" ("The Kaj Munk Society"). In 2000, Per Stig Møller published his important book "Munk" (reprinted at least four times), and in 2005 The Kaj Munk Research Centre was established at Aalborg University, funded by the Danish state via the Finance Act, and the buildings of Munk's vicarage were donated by the state to a local fund to finally create a museum. Munk's drama found recognition when "Ordet" ("The Word") was added to the Danish "cultural canon" in 2007. This canon lists the most important Danish works of art. The 70th anniversary of Munk's murder was commemorated in 2014 in the Cathedral of Copenhagen in the presence of the Queen of Denmark.

Today, Kaj Munk is recognized for his great contribution to Danish literature<sup>28</sup> as well as for his role during the war. His "dark sides" are equally recognized, highlighting for us today

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25 It is worth remembering that, in the fairly free elections for the Danish Parliament's lower house, *Folketinget*, in March 1943, the parties supporting cooperation with the German occupying forces won 138 out of 148 seats, and that the *Dansk Samling* (Danish Union) opposing cooperation won only three seats, the same number as the Danish Nazi Party. Thus, the government's policy was strongly legitimized.

26 For a detailed analysis, see Sven Hakon Rosell 2011.

27 E.g. Brovst: *Kaj Munk - liv og død*, 1984, Centrum; 1984; *Kaj Munk og den stærke mand*, 1992, Centrum; 1992; *Kaj Munk - krigen og mordet*, 1993, Centrum; *Kaj Munk - krigen og mordet*, 1993, Centrum.

28 Gemzøe and Pahuus mark Munk as "basically one of Denmark's most significant dramatists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in reality, of the whole Danish literature" (2019, 361).

the dangers of totalitarian ideologies, as well as highlighting the responsibility of cultural personalities not to misuse their influence to undermine democracy.

In all of this, Munk is an important “angle of incidence” or prism into Danish and European history in the 1930s and 1940s, and additionally, in the words of Gemzøe and Pahuus: “Kaj Munk is important as one of the few really significant dramatists in Danish literature. And he is interesting as a prism, as seismograph, often a battlefield for many strong, often problematic European ideas and thoughts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (2019, 377).



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# An Introduction to the Theology of Kaj Munk

*Christian Grund Sørensen*

## Point of departure

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus states that “no prophet is accepted in his hometown” (Luke 4:24). This is a reference to the rejection of Christ by the majority of people during his earthly service. In the case of Kaj Munk, it may also serve as a reference to visualize the divided understanding and reception of the theological framework of this Danish pastor, preacher, and theologian. Like other leading theologians in Danish tradition, such as N.F.S. Grundtvig (1787–1872), Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), and K.E. Løgstrup (1905–1981), Munk would divide the waters in both the Church and theology. However, he did not form his own theological school in the same way. Munk was somewhat uncontemporary in his contemporary theological and ecclesiastical paradigms, even though he was well-respected by the general public. For this reason, he is well-known for much of his artistic production, but less generally acknowledged in the Church or academia for his preaching or theology.

Munk’s theological background was the framework of general contemporary European, Protestant theology. This consisted of a heritage of classical Lutheran hermeneutics, especially in the area of soteriology and ecclesiology, combined with the heritage of Schleiermacher’s (1768–1834)<sup>29</sup> liberal theology. In Denmark, this was often represented by the existential theology of Kierkegaard, the romanticism of Grundtvig,

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29 Friedrich Schleiermacher, German theologian (1768–1834).

and Christian idealistic movements like the YMCA. The school of historical-critical reading of scripture and the demythologization approach of Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976)<sup>30</sup> appears not to have been very influential for Munk, although he does mention it in his drama and preaching. The dialectical theology that, finding important advocate in Karl Barth (1886–1968)<sup>31</sup> together with Bultmann, challenged pre-First World War liberal theology, only gradually gained influence in Danish theological circles. German resistance theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)<sup>32</sup> appears not to have been influential in Denmark until the post-Second World War period. Munk and Bonhoeffer suffered similar fates. Sadly, there is no sign of mutual inspiration. In the field of ecumenical theology, Munk displayed respect for the Roman Catholic tradition, not least Mariology, contemporary free churches, and to some extent the Oxford Movement. Munk might be classified as a mainstream preacher of his time. However, this is hardly the full truth.

... Kaj Munk is not just a theological existence, but a serious and creative theologian who works mainly within a classical Lutheran theological framework, although he readily acknowledges kinship with other denominations, especially Catholicism. (Iversen 2008, 208).

Meanwhile, in his time, Kaj Munk was quite a popular preacher amongst the general Danish public. His sermons were sold in significant numbers during the Second World War. To a generation of common Danes, Munk arguably became the leading representative of Christianity at a time of increasing secularism. He aspired to preach to a dominant culture of modernity, striving to explore the borders between classic Lutheran theology and the emerging paradigm. The literary scholar Hans Hauge meaningfully suggests that Munk's theology and

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30 Rudolf Bultmann, German theologian (1884–1976).

31 Karl Barth, Swiss theologian (1886–1968).

32 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian (1906–1945).

church view answers “what a Brandesian<sup>33</sup> or cultural radical version of Christianity would look like” (2008). That is, rooted in modernity, as rooted in the heritage of Luther, Grundtvig, and pietistic Christianity.

Munk’s worldly and ecclesiastical endeavours abruptly ended when he was assassinated by the German authorities in early 1944. In general public opinion, Munk became a martyr, like the uncompromising St. Stephen of his sermons. As uncompromising was the Herod of his play “En Idealist” (“An Idealist”) (Munk 1923) or Kierkegaard, whose words figure in the latter play reminding us that: “Purity of heart is wanting one thing” (Munk 1923, preface). However, this perception of Munk as a martyr has somewhat limited the critical discussion of his theology, leaving it to be discussed either from an untimely hagiographic or trivializing perspective. Munk’s death may in some respects have overshadowed his life.

As prolegomena, the special relationship between the genres of Munk’s authorship should be noticed. In his voluminous and abundant production, theological content is closely intertwined with his different media of expression. Theological themes are present in many of Munk’s theatrical plays, in much of his poetry, in his fictional and autobiographical works, in his journalistic contributions, and of course in all his sermons. It may therefore be argued that theology is a key element to be taken into consideration in the interpretation and understanding of Munk’s works. It may even be argued that an interpretation of Munk that fails to take his existential roots in Christian theology into consideration runs the risk of missing vital sources of understanding. Sources for understanding Kaj Munk’s theology do not only emanate from his sermons in Church. However, in this introduction, the sermons do hold a special status in understanding the subtle conceptual interplay between Munk, his God, and his world. In his memoirs Munk states: “It simply tells the story of a boy who could not decide whether to be a priest or a poet, and who ended up being both” (Munk 1942b, preface).

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33 Georg Brandes, Danish atheist scholar (1842–1927).

## Theology and Kaj Munk

Is there such thing as a theology of Kaj Munk? The relationship between Munk and theology as a discipline is often disputed. It is well established that he was out of step with the dominant academic and ecclesiastical currents in the theology of his time. This was a probable reason why some contemporary cultural and Church notabilities rejected Munk as a professional and consistent theologian, and it still is. Munk's spiritual approach appears connected to Christian practice rather than Christian dogmatics, but at the same time he problematizes absence of dogma in Church and rejects radical demythization. This dichotomy may be a good reason for rediscovering and reinterpreting his theological thinking in the light of insights and paradigms of the new Millennium.

Munk displays few traces of being a dedicated systematic theologian in the sense of system construction. Nor did he much appreciate the tradition of systematic theology. In a comment on his theological studies at the University of Copenhagen, Munk dryly observes: "I have always regarded dogmatics as the Devil's way of doing Christianity" (Munk 1942b, XXXI).

This comment might have been aimed at the systematic, dogmatic approach alone. However, Munk extends it to also include his exegetical studies. "In New Testament [education] there seems to be a tradition at the university to make the study void of Spirit" (Munk 1942b, XXXI). What is wrong appears to be, not the Biblical sources and dogmatics in themselves, but that they are unconnected to personal reflections and zeal. Munk may have been inspired by the existential call in Kierkegaard's theology. He is not altogether judgemental in relation to the content of his education. However, he believes that the sparks of enthusiasm and the pain of contestation are imperative for a true, relational theology to emerge. Munk often refers to the narrower field of dogmatics to emphasize this concern. In a comment on the possible renewal of the Danish hymn book, Munk clearly differentiates between dogmatics and spiritual life.



The unspeakable Grundtvig (with the stubborn, specialized dogmatics and expressions that are like traces of cows in a flower garden) is skilfully left untouched, but the Grundtvig who struck the string of gold in competition with the very angels of God is versatile and richly represented. (Munk 1942a)

For the benefit of clarity, it might be convenient for Munk to be one-sided in relation to systematic theology. But he is not. The dogmatics of life-immersed Christian life is neither unhelpful nor contingent, he later comments in a public debate.

Pastor, the dogmatics you set up in your dogma-free Christianity, that it is ethics that is the main thing, is a gig on one wheel. You tempt me to say, by way of contradiction, that we can make our own ethics, if it comes to that; but in Christianity it is the dogmatics that count. Here it stands or falls: was Jesus a sublime moral preacher, or was he the one who had the authority to say: "Thy sins be forgiven thee", to say it in such a way that it could be a restoration to life, both temporal and eternal, for a fallen man? (Munk 1933)

Munk scholar Hans Raun Iversen rightly describes him as a preacher implementing "bottom-up theology" (1995, 96). This implies that there is a somewhat concealed theological reflection, which requires attention from the audience to decode.

Kaj Munk flirted with the fact that he was definitely not a theologian. His personal take on the common, priestly criticism of and partial contempt for academic university theology is formulated in drastic terms, making it appear far more profound than usual... (Iversen 1995, 96)

Møller defines Munk's theology as: "...A form of anti-theology. Dogmatics were unimportant to him; what was important was faith, which in everyday life is tested in the post to which one is assigned" (2014, 345).

Munk's approach to the structural or academic side of Christianity is thus rooted in an approach of practical theology. Lived Christian lives and experiences are central. His preaching and theological reflections were developed alongside his personal, pastoral, and professional practice. Thus, they were the results of a combination of inner psychological and spiritual struggles, observation and analysis of contemporary occurrences, and views in parish and society – and a certain amount of classic systematic theological reflection as a supplement.

## The role of sermons

A systematic problem in the research on Munk lies in the role of homiletic material, as opposed to other literary media types. In their comprehensive 2019 study, Danish scholars Gemzøe and Pahuus argue that Munk's sermons are less informative as sources for understanding his theology. They analyse a limited number of sermons in depth, dating almost exclusively from the last few years of Munk's ministry.

We have primarily focused on the conception of Christianity in the drama and only to a limited extent included Munk's sermons, articles, and his own statements and letters. It is our impression that Munk's strengths did not lie in the theological and philosophical consideration of Christianity, and that his most exciting contribution to the understanding of Christianity is therefore found in drama, where Munk brings his whole self – including imagination and emotions – into the understanding of Christianity. (Gemzøe and Pahuus 2019, 372)

This decision may account for some discrepancies between this rather negative judgement of Munk's homiletic production and

the studies of scholars such as Per Stig Møller and Hans Raun Iversen. Both of these scholars diligently include sermons in their theological analysis alongside other material. In Møller's view (2014, 337), these sermons are central to Munk's worldview communication and are therefore of considerable epistemological importance. This allows Møller to define rather clear dogmatic statements on Munk's part.

Literal belief in the dogma of the resurrection and the miracle of the resurrection is thus the prerequisite for believing in Christ and the Christian God. In this sense, Munk was a dogmatist, even if he did not like dogmatism. (2014, 395)

This conclusion may be derived quite clearly from homiletic material, although the same position may be argued by taking one's point of departure in Munk's miracle play "Ordet" ("The Word") (1932b).

## Background and growth

Given the nature of Munk's theology as influenced by relational, personal, and perhaps even psychological factors (Auchet 1997), it becomes important to understand some of his personal and family background. Munk's early childhood was marked by tragic events. At the age of five, he was orphaned. Fortunately, he was adopted by a childless couple in his family and was raised in a loving home. Munk often referred to a privileged childhood: "Richer than most: a dad and mom in Heaven and a dad and mom on earth" (1942b, VI). Both Munk's biological parents and his adoptive parents belonged to the pietistic revival and holiness movement "Indre Mission" ("Inner Mission"). Munk also took part in the meetings of another pietistic revival movement "Luthersk Mission" ("Lutheran Mission"). Even so, his childhood faith was marked by a fairly liberal and undogmatic pietistic spirituality.

When I reflect on Christianity in my childhood home, it appears to me happy and joyful with the

colour of Indre Mission. Mom kept me with the evening prayer my first mom taught me. She kept me with Sunday school and attending Church. But... I do not recall she has ever preached for me or forced me to engage in anything religious. (Munk 1941, *Prædiken til 6. søndag efter Påske* (A) 1941, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 87)

Munk also showed interest in the less pietistic and culturally more open Grundtvig movement. Through the Grundtvigian schoolteacher Wested,<sup>34</sup> and his friendship with a pastor of the same persuasion, Oscar Geismar,<sup>35</sup> the young Munk received impressions of both theological traditions. Møller considers this combination to have been vital for Munk's independent preaching. "As a child, he had already learnt freedom from all templates through the contrast between the Grundtvigian teacher Wested and the pastor of the Inner Mission, Bachevold" (Møller 2014, 337).

Coming from a non-academic family background, Munk, despite his interest in Christian spirituality, was not likely to enter academia. However, with the solid support of his adoptive parents, he was able to finish his theological degree at the University of Copenhagen. Student life brought Munk into the Danish KFUM movement,<sup>36</sup> where he was homiletically influenced by the Reverend Olfert Ricard (1872–1929). He was himself influenced by idealistic liberal theology, which prevailed in Folkekirken (the Danish Lutheran Church) during the early 20th century. However, in attending KFUM revival meetings, Munk did not experience any significant spiritual revival. "I went out on a bathing bridge and promised myself, I would stay there until the conversion had happened. One hour, two hours elapsed" (Munk 1942b, XXII).

This rejection of the necessity of expressions of an emotional conversion distanced Munk somewhat from both KFUM and

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34 Martinus Wested, schoolteacher (1875–1970).

35 Oscar Geismar, Danish pastor (1877–1959).

36 YMCA.

Indre Mission. As a student, he was influenced by several professors. Professor Eduard Geismar (1871–1939) introduced him to Søren Kierkegaard. His reading of the anticlerical scriptures of Kierkegaard (1855) appealed and inspired. However, Munk felt that Kierkegaard's furious attack on the Church robbed him of God himself.

For six months I did not set foot in a church. The only six months I have ever stayed away from my childhood's standpoint and resting place. The hoarse hatred of Søren Kierkegaard from his deathbed rattled down in my soul. (Munk 1942b, XXV)

Professor Valdemar Ammundsen (1875–1936) on the other hand elaborated on the liberal theology to which Munk had been introduced by KFUM. Alongside Munk's spiritual formation during his student years, he served as the *bellringer* at the college "Regensen" in central Copenhagen. This post was influential and dutiful in the social life of the students. Munk supplemented his theological studies with the writing of several theatrical plays inspired by Biblical characters such as Samson (1948), Pontius Pilate (1917b), and Judas Iscariot (1917a). More theatrical plays with a Biblical or spiritual inspiration were to come; however, it was not until the premiere of "An Idealist" (Munk 1923) in 1928 that Munk attracted public attention as a playwright.

During his years as a theology student, Munk was occasionally invited to preach. These sermons were preached in local churches in Lolland when Munk was at home for the holidays. The style and content of these sermons are interesting. It appears that several of the topics central to Munk's later life were already present in his very early years of theological reflection.

The first day of preaching for Kaj Munk displays three different versions of the same sermon. From a research standpoint, versions 1 and 2 are of the greatest interest. Version 2 was allegedly written in haste during a lunch break between two services. It contains a variety of topics that would later surface in sermons.

Jesus is on his way into the capital. Directly in front of him it lies, with its many towers soaring towards the sky. The many towers for which Copenhagen is well known. But the spires of the churches are almost concealed by the black smoke of the factories. Everywhere there is the noise of trams and bicycles and automobiles. Everywhere there is hustle and bustle. Everyone appear to be caught up in a feverish, agitated restlessness that literally testifies that these [people] do not know what would bring them peace. (Munk 1919, *Prædikenen til 10. søndag efter Trinitatis (A) (2) 1919*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 41)

This reference to Luke (19:42) in the final sentence is both dramatic and revealing of Munk's extraordinary excellence in combining the mundane and the holy in his preaching. Several of these early sermons are particularly interesting. Another example is the sermon about the fictional *Elifelet* from the following year. The Biblical pericope for the sermon is the narrative of the rich young man (Matt 19:16–26). Munk transforms this narrative into a contemporary, rural setting and equips Elifelet (a Hebrew diminutive of the Danish name Elif) with quite a realistic contemporary worldview and psychology. He digs into the heart and mind of this quasi-biblical character, thus revealing the actual spiritual challenge for the congregation. Elifelet receives the call from Christ to leave all his wealth behind:

He doesn't listen anymore... sell all that you own... sell all that you own – your father's farm – the place that contains your memories of childhood, the place where you invested your work when you were young, the place you have cared about and nurtured and kept and caused to blossom and thrive through the delicate work of your hands – give it to the poor, the ever-hungry, those who can never be helped whether through gifts or reforms..... leave the woman in whose arms you

most deeply and purely experienced the value of life – abandon the children you have rejoiced in knowing that they should live your life after you... He went away in sadness. (Munk 1920, *Prædiken til 6. søndag efter Trinitatis (B)*1920, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 57).

This sermon might be perceived as a traditional pietistic sermon of exhortation. A deeper analysis, however, seems to reveal other layers of homiletic reflection. Firstly, the sermon is vividly recipient-oriented. The narrative is tailored to provoke existential reflection within the target audience of rural Lolland. Secondly, the psychology of Elifelet is well-developed and may have been inspired by the complex visualization of an individual in a theatrical act. Thirdly, the sermon displays Munk's implementation of an anachronistic approach.

## Pastor's reflections

In 1924, Kaj Munk was appointed pastor of a rural congregation in Vedersø in Western Jutland. This first parochial ministry also became his last. At this time, his theological work blossomed and developed in a multitude of directions.

Munk accepted the obligation of preaching weekly sermons in local parishes. With a robust number of exceptions, he did so until his execution in early 1944. A large number of these sermon manuscripts have been secured and are now an important source of knowledge about the less well-researched strands of Munk's theological thinking. Of special interest are the sermons from his early pastoral years until 1929, when he married. These less-studied sermons bear witness to substantial personal and spiritual challenges and Munk's attempts to reflect upon these issues in a homiletic discourse. In his distinguished study of Munk in a "close reading in depth psychological settings" (Auchet 1977, 19), French author Marc Auchet comments on Munk's perceived state of mind:

Due to the location of the vicarage, he lived alone.  
His uncertainty about the priesthood and the great



volatility that characterised his behaviour, for example in his choice of wife, testify to a mental imbalance that can almost be characterised as neurotic. In this context, his wedding in 1929 and his literary breakthrough two years later marked a turning point. (1977, 40)

From a homiletic perspective, this analysis is convincing and illuminating. From the time of his marriage, Munk becomes less involved in questions of spiritual struggles and soul care. At the same time, his full sermon manuscripts almost dry up until the German occupation of Denmark in 1940. From this time on, Munk becomes a national icon of the resistance, preaching concretely into the contemporary cultural, political, and religious paradigms. German writer Christian Eisenberg describes Munk's theological, homiletic endeavours in these resistance sermons.

Since earthly and divine, world and God, cannot be separated from each other according to Munk, he does not leave everything worldly to itself either, but compiles the burning ethical questions in his sermons: Economic order, education, society, morality, war. The ethical maxim for the actions of the congregation is the clear commandment and word of God, which Munk understands in all radicality... (1980, 74–75)

Kaj Munk's focus in his last sermon is to a large extent exhortative.

Using the means of the biblical word to move a congregation so that it is called out of lukewarmness and indifference... Nevertheless, his way of preaching was perceived as a topical and concrete address, whose diction also reached the Vedersø village visitor. Since Munk was a stranger to speaking in general phrases and principles, he advanced

to concrete instructions and splendid examples that sought a connection to the life of the congregation. (1980, 33)

Concurrently, Munk was adding to his previously mentioned biblically inspired plays with several other plays including theological content. The understanding of Munk's plays in a theological perspective is a subject of discussion. Are the plays purely imaginative scenarios or do certain characters or discourses describe or discuss Munk's own inner theological framework? Assuming inspiration from the pseudonymous writings of Søren Kierkegaard, which Munk was acquainted with, it may be suggested that the genre-specific differences between preaching and drama are of importance. Homiletic preaching to a considerable extent entails direct communication whereas the reception of theatrical plays most often is designed to evoke the imagination and inner life of the audience in a less concrete manner.

"The Word" (1932b) discusses the possibility of divine intervention in the material world. Contemporary positions in Danish church life are also discussed; most prominently, the conflict between the representatives of the *godly awakenings* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Grundtvigian branch of Folkekirken, and Indre Mission representing the pietistic heritage. Several other plays also include distinct theological discussions, such as "I Brændingen" ("In the Surf") (1926b) and "Han sidder ved Smeltediglen" ("He Sits by the Melting Pot") (1938). The former addresses questions of cultural radicalism, atheism, and Christian faith. The latter speaks to the contemporary cultural and religious development in Germany, where the subtle persecution of Jews through the complicity of the *Mensch* (man) will soon lead to the *holocaust*.

A reflection upon the personal life and pastoral role of the pastor, a narrative discussion of the theology of ministry, is also present in Munk's thinking. The play "Kærlighed" ("Love") (Munk 1926c) is an example of this. The Reverend Kargo cannot believe in an omnipresent and omnipotent God, but he realizes the fruitful outcomes of his ministry with the faithful. Can he

accept this dichotomy? A deep love affair with the wife of a good friend emphasizes the crisis. Reverend Kargo's answer to a young woman in doubt depicts a position in which the role of love in emotional and carnal *eros* appears to override or flow together with divine *agape*.

True love is almighty. There is no sacrifice it will not bring, no law it will not keep, no consideration it will not break. No chain can bind it. But it can bind all chains. Therefore, it is almighty. And the only happiness of life is in experiencing it. (1926c).

Munk wrestles with the end of the drama, but perhaps Reverend Kargo is justified on his deathbed by Christ's trust in him, as opposed to the trust in Christ that Kargo is unable to muster. This apparently quite liberal understanding of love and obedience to God may suggest that Munk's theological thinking deviates from traditional positions. A partially autobiographical, posthumously published novel about Munk's falling in love with the wife of a friend suggests that Kargo's reflections were not unknown to Munk (1926a). However, as in the pseudonymous writings of Søren Kierkegaard that Munk became acquainted with as a student, it is imperative to maintain a distance between the author and his characters. Kargo may not resemble Munk. Kargo may represent an imagined human position with reference to real-world experiences. Munk's artistic works may require diligent interpretation if they are to serve as credible sources for his personal worldview.

## A Theological Profile

In a brief note on a student's sermon manuscript, Munk tentatively defines his theology.

What is Christianity? What is Christianity? Reverence for Christ. Regensen, 10.11.1923 8.48 am. (Munk 1923, *Prædiken til 2. Juledag (B) 1923*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 111).

These few sentences underline the relational character of Munk's theology. Christianity is equivalent to a relationship with Christ. For this reason, theological learning is related to Christ and one's experiences of life. There may be some inspiration from Kierkegaard in this approach. For Kierkegaard, a central point in Christianity is *The Moment*, the instance of Kairos where the vertical axis of God touches the horizontal axis of man. Munk was familiar with this reading. The Moment is of a transcendent character since it implies divine agency.

However, neither Kierkegaard nor Munk systematically connect this intervention and *metanoia* with the pietistic experience of conversion. In a message to Danish clergy, Munk elaborates upon this approach to theological epistemology:

The priest's real period of study should begin when he has finished his student days, and in any case not end until death. Perhaps his youth was spent in asking: What is God like? Let him then ask: What is man like?, a question no less important than the first for the one who is to bring the two parties into dialogue. Psychology, philosophy, politics, and literature are therefore far more important subjects for the clergyman than the care of his garden. (1941).

There are two main sources of pastoral education. Firstly, one's personal relationship with God. Here, Munk is in good harmony with his pietistic origins. Secondly, a dedicated and inquisitive interest in anthropology and human nature. The pastor should even prefer "pig merchants, college teachers, teenage girls, office managers and chorus singers" (Munk 1941) to colleagues and devoted believers.

It is notable that the Biblical scriptures are not central in this exposition. This is a paradox, because in his sermons Munk demonstrates a comprehensive interest in and knowledge of the Bible, and a close familiarity with traditional and contemporary exegesis. Munk's sermons primarily take their point of

departure in the prescribed Gospel text. However, he gives mixed signals in his views on Scripture and dogma.

The right Christmas cheer is that, however much or little you understand it, you own Christ, and that you go where he wills. True Christianity is not faith in the virgin birth and the resurrection of the flesh; true Christianity is that you are good to your servants. (Munk 1942, *Prædiken til 2. Juledag (A) 1942*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 401)

Munk hardly suggests that the resurrection of Christ is of no importance. However, in this context dogma must yield to social, Christlike responsibility. Neither is Munk often satisfied with abstract or spiritualized exegesis. In a sermon about the wedding in Cana, he first suggests different allegorical meanings.

Now you know that, among other things from beautiful wedding hymns that, like everything else, it is transmitted: Where the Lord will dwell, water can become wine; and it is also a wonderful thought that the joy of life does not come from getting electric lights and telephones and cars and tax breaks, but that, indeed, the fear of God through frugality is a great gain; that with small means much happiness can be created in a home when you give it into God's hands and ask him to bless it – when the eternity of prayer is cast over a short-term pleasure... (Munk 1925, *Prædiken til 2. søndag efter Helligtrekonger (A)1925*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 215).

Afterwards, Munk discards all these conventional, modernistic theological interpretations. "There is nothing about it in the text today; for it was a real miracle" (Munk 1925, *Prædiken til 2. søndag efter Helligtrekonger (A)1925*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 215).

An approach to conceptually reconciling Munk's mixed signals on the understanding and importance of Scripture may consist in acknowledging a Kierkegaardian inspiration in Munk's homiletics.

Truth cannot be stored. It exists only in a living state. And it must be utilized at the very moment it arises. If it is not, it dies and moulders and soon turns out to be corrupt. For the most dangerous of all lies is the dead truth. (Munk 1942, *Prædiken til 3. Søndag i Advent (A) 1942*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 385)

Munk's approach appears to be a stronger focus on the *fides qua*, the personal integration of faith, rather than *fides quae*, a focus on dogmatic content. This left Munk with the obligation to sit theologically between two chairs, denouncing both a traditional liberal theology and a pietistic, Bibliocentric theology.

## Anthropology – Theology of Man and God

Given the abundance of material, it is not possible within the format of this chapter to cover all aspects of Munk's preaching and theology at a satisfactory level. With this recognition, some central themes are presented and discussed below.

As previously mentioned, it can be suggested that Munk possessed a relationship-focused theology. This is especially clear in his early sermons. "Every sermon should include the themes of chastisement and comfort, for in every man there is something that needs to be chastised and comforted" (Munk 1925, *Prædiken til 4. Søndag efter påske (A) 1925*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 289). This dual approach allows Munk to focus on a classic Christian proclamation of God's sovereignty while at the same time focusing on contestations and spiritual care. As argued above in relation to Munk's biography, God is always a central factor in the interpretation of events. Munk hardly ever reproaches God for his childhood loss of parental solidity. Still, he is acquainted with the paradox of divine will and agency. In an early play, Munk reflects upon

the fate of Samson. Samson is in chains and experiencing torment for his disobedience of God's warnings. Yet he displays hope and trust in his approaching demise. "But God is great; almighty will he show his saving power in the greatest day of trouble" (Munk 1948). Little does Samson know that, despite divine omnipotence, deliverance entails his own death. The same theme is present in several sermons:

When sickness and death and gloom afflict us, it is the work of the evil one, although God both knows why it has to happen and therefore allows it, and can and will turn it around, so that rich blessing will come from it. (Munk 1928, *Prædiken til 14. søndag efter Trinitatis (B)*1928, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023b, 643)

This trusting homiletic confirmation may be challenged for being too simplistic, not taking heed of human emotion and experience. It is worth noting, however, that these reflections upon the image of God are in fact consistent with some of the darker periods of Munk's personal life. In his preaching, he appears to be wrestling with his youthful, pietistic view of God and his own trials of loneliness, comparative poverty, and comparative lack of success. Prayer is often combined with trials for spiritual growth.

It may mean that God will send me a radiant flood of summer and sunshine and health, of happiness and prosperity and love, if that is what it takes for my soul to mature. But it may also be the heavy misfortunes and the bitter pain, and then that is what I require from His hand. So then, before I pray that prayer, I must consider whether my soul is so dear to me that I can sacrifice so much to have it matured – therefore I say, that prayer tries – and if I cannot, then I must pray that the day may come when I can. (Munk 1924, *Prædiken til 12. søndag efter*



*Trinitatis (B)*1924, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 157).

As a more mature and even successful pastor, Munk's homiletical reflections upon the issue of prayer and theodicy<sup>37</sup> tend to become increasingly abstract and less coloured by his own experience. Although Munk gained in rational argumentation and eloquence over the years, the more vulnerable sermons of his early ministry have considerable value. In a late sermon about the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–17), Munk discusses two objections to the narrative of the miracle. One is the obvious question of truth. Is the miracle possible in a mechanical world? Munk argues in favour of this. If Christ is God, why should he not possess the power to accomplish the unbelievable? Munk's next homiletic objection is more subtle.

The other is: Even if it were true, what good would it do me? I have lost and will not get it back, even if an old woman somewhere in some unimportant place so and so many ages ago got it. (Munk 1941, *Prædiken til 16. Søndag efter Trinitatis (A)* 1941, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 205)

Here, Munk is directly addressing the contestation and frustration of the believer. He dares to ignite a spark of doubt, which is directed, not at the omnipresence or omnipotence of God, but at His uncorrupted goodness. Stemming from a classical, orthodox Lutheran understanding of God, it is interesting that Munk dares to challenge the prevalent image of God, often with an emphasis on the intelligibility of the Almighty.

Focusing on the second facet of the Trinity, Munk displays a dichotomous approach to the understanding of Jesus. Clearly, much of the pietistic heritage of his childhood and youth remained intact. At the same time, Munk was influenced by the idealistic Christianity of KFUM and the literary vitalism

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37 Theodicy: The problem of evil things happening to good people.

of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where the affirmation of life and action is central. In a sermon from 1941, Munk combines these two approaches.

It was not for nothing that you began your work of salvation by creating sparkling wine out of the water of the church at the wedding in Cana in divine chastity. I have seen the joyful love of God shining out of your form as you walked with the child by the hand among the tripping lambs and nodding flowers by the blue waters of Lake Genesareth. I have seen you so bursting with faith in the goodness of men that you could teach them to turn their left cheek when someone gave them a blow on the right. (Munk 1941, *Prædiken til Påskedag (A)*1941, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 51)

The wedding at Cana is a pericope to which Munk often refers. In an earlier sermon, he dramatizes a fictitious psychology of Christ. Jesus performed the miracle due to his own inner motivation and empathy.

He saw the great shadow it would cast over the young people's wedding day, and over their lives, if the guests were badly treated. He could not bear it – even his mother's prayer. So he stood in the doorway without anyone seeing him, and shone his blessing on their riotous and flaring joy. (Munk 1925, *Prædiken til 2. Søndag efter Helligtrekonger (A)* 1925, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 215)

Joy and love is the motivation of Christ. Munk's psychologizing of Christ is central. Water transformed into wine is an expression of care for the young couple. Human need motivates Christ to break the laws of nature. "And thank God that we are strengthened in this by the circumstance that Jesus' first miracle was a homage to the worldly joy of life" (Munk 1925, *Præ-*

*diken til 2. Søndag efter Helligtrekonger (A) 1925*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 215).

In a text from 1926, very probably a sermon, Munk dramatizes an entire dialogue with Jesus (Munk 2017). The genre is unconventional. Imagination of the drama spills over into the sermon and allows Munk to fabulate about theological questions, which may otherwise seem unclear. Munk appears quite relaxed in relation to introducing a dramatized Christ within this scaffolding. But the sternness of Christ also needs to be preached.

Why do we say this to a congregation that is cozy in a tiled stove and munching on confectionery? Because the Church wants Truth, and Christmas is to bring not the Gospel of Fun, but the Gospel of Christianity, and Christianity is not the baby Jesus but the Jesus-boy, who yesterday lay smiling in the cradle, has today become a man – the eaglet has grown claws – and terrible is his speech to the men who knew they lived life under responsibility, and took the responsibility lightly. (Munk 1922, *Prædiken til 2. juledag (A) 1922*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 103)

In Munk's preaching, the claws of the sternness of Christ are rarely aimed at individual parish members or individual persons. An exception to this are well-known contributors to the public discourse of society and worldview. Towards the end of Munk's earthly service, the contrast between these two aspects of Christ became increasingly ardent.

You would be lying about Jesus if you said he was a warrior. But you lie far worse when you turn him into a bland and feminine oil painting... And when he cleansed the temple, he could in reality have been arrested for disorderly conduct. All decent people in Jerusalem have denounced such meth-

ods. (Munk 1942, *Prædiken til 3. søndag efter Helligtrekonger (A) 1942*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 319)

This image of Christ fuels Munk's image of truth and therefore also his ideals of following.

Truth is not calm and dignified and exalted. It bites and tears and strikes. Truth is not for cautious people. They do not want truth, but a sofa. What a meaningless demand is this for the Church to be cautious. Was Christ prudent? Were the Martyrs prudent? (Munk 1941, *Prædiken til 23. søndag efter Trinitatis (A) 1941*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 249)

The third facet of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. In an early sermon, Munk shares one of his not so frequent systematic theological discourses.

What happened on Pentecost? ... No longer Buddha and Moses and King Tut, but the Holy Spirit began to be found in the following of Jesus. The Holy Spirit now began to be found in the following of Jesus, and finally only to be found there. And since it was something new and world-historically disruptive that happened, the Spirit broke forth with a force not previously known, and clearly and irrevocably took its place in the congregation it would never again leave, and which was to become the heart-child of all the congregations and confessions of the earth. (Munk 1928, *Prædiken til Pinsedag (B) 1928*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023b, 601)

When Munk comments on "the great Unknown, which the Church calls the Holy Spirit" (Munk 1924, *Prædiken til 12.*

*søndag efter Trinitatis (B)*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 157), it is most often related to the function of the Spirit in conveying the message and guidance of God. “In our churches, in our mission houses, in our meeting halls, in our schools, in our Bible, in our conscience – there we meet another voice: the Holy Spirit – who testifies about Jesus and leads us to Jesus...” (Munk 1925, *Prædiken til Juledag (B) (2) 1925*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 367)

This classic understanding of the works of the Holy Spirit is by no means unique to Munk. The Trinity is intertwined, yet in relation to Jesus Munk makes the exception of applying psychology, thus revealing the perceived heart and intention of Christ.

## Ecclesiology – Theology of the Church

From Munk’s perspective, there is a profound connection between Christ and his flock. The Church differs from a religious society in that it is rooted in transcendent agency in the shape of the cosmic events of crucifixion and resurrection.

The Christian Church is an institution that was only founded after the founder’s death. However – we understand that this must be so. His entire work had to be completed before the congregation could be founded. Had he only been a preacher and teacher, he could have founded it himself. But the whole of the other article of faith had to be finished before people could be made to believe in it. (Munk 1927, *Prædiken til Pinsedag (A) 1927*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 465)

Since the Church is rooted in the transcendent and the cosmic, it is at an essential level clearly distinguished from mundane organizations. However, Munk is no stranger to the experience that it is also a fallen Church. In his ecclesiology, there is room for diversity within this organization, but not for division. Munk would often admonish groups for doing exactly this:

The groups then curse and worship each other, each citing its own particular priesthood, quite forgetting that they all kneel before the same God... Many are our preachers, and they are different, and different are the sects following them... These different views are carried forward by the various sects or “directions”, whatever they call themselves, there is something for every taste, to use that unfortunate yet somewhat apt expression, and yet the spiritual death is gathering momentum at home and abroad. (Munk 1919, *Prædiken til 10. søndag efter Trinitatis (A) (1) 1919*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 29)

As a pastor, Munk instead recommends the all-encompassing local congregational Church. In an early sermon from Vedersø Parish, this is homiletically visualized through a sermon about the Vedersø church building. In Munk’s educational narrative, the building provides a metaphor not only for bricks and mortar, but also for the Church of “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5) that is active and in service on behalf of Christ himself.

For centuries the church has been lying here looking over the parish. And it has maintained its guard. In its Catholic days, young choirboys circulated around its altar, swung their censers and sang in loud voices... And the parish of Vedersø has knelt around the altar... And the priest at the church, he has sometimes raised his hand against the wild life down there, and sometimes he has been present at the drinking and revelry, and he has been carried home to his parsonage by strong men with his dangling head swaying back and forth. But no matter what the priest was like, whether he threatened or crossed himself, the church has been the same and thought the same. And the people who came and went and came again – well, in a way they have also been the

same – frail people who needed the discipline and comfort of the old church and also came and received it. (Munk 1926, *Prædiken til 22. søndag efter Trinitatis (B)*1926, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 413)

Over time, the local church became surrounded by other buildings. The school and the mill, but also the meeting houses of the Grundtvigians and the mission houses of the Indre Mission were built and entered a critical discussion with the medieval sanctuary. Even modernity began to close in.

And time passed, and the priests changed, and the parish began to take on a new face. One day the first car passed by the church, and one day the telephone came out here. Now people no longer gathered at the church door as in the old days. There were now other gathering places and more interesting experiences to chase after. But the church remained the same. (Munk 1926, *Prædiken til 22. søndag efter Trinitatis (B)*1926, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 413)

Vedersø Church indiscriminately accepts a fundamental responsibility for its parish. At the end of the sermon, Jesus Christ passes by Vedersø Church one night after visiting the 1910 World Mission Conference in Edinburgh.

When he came out into the cemetery, he stood still again. For a long time. He thought of the dead who slept in the graves, and of the young and old and the children who still slept in their beds. He stood there, surrounded by the entire Vedersø Parish for the last 1000 years. Then he raised his hands and turned slowly in all four directions of the parish with the words of blessing. “Lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace”. Then the angels inside the church sang Amen, and the old



church sang along. (Munk 1926, *Prædiken til 22. søndag efter Trinitatis (B)* 1926, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 413)

In the narrative of this sermon, Munk formulates the inclusiveness of his ecclesiology. This inclusion stretches even to situations where he defends the presence of somewhat heretical pastors in “Folkekirken” (“the Danish Church”). In an article, he asks himself a rhetorical question about this behaviour, which might appear inconsistent given his reasonably orthodox Christianity.

How can you chastise the Church in a theatre for preventing God’s wonders from happening by its unbelief, and at the same time fight in newspaper articles for a priest who holds this unbelief and openly acknowledges it to remain within the Church? (Munk 1932a).

In his play “Ordet” (“The Word”) (1932b), Munk argues for the possibility of the divine miracle. This was highly controversial amongst contemporary cultural radical intelligentsia and Munk was often ridiculed for this message. At the same time, he defended freedom of expression for pastors with whom he in no way agreed. Despite his inclusive dialogue ethics, he is quite precise in his definition and expectations of the Church and its divine office.

It is the duty of the Church to keep you aware of your sin, but also to whisper the merciful forgiveness of God into your ear. Both messages must be present and in the right order. In case of deviations, it all becomes useless, yes, it may even do incurable evil. The Church must preach sin and salvation from this, nothing else. (Munk 1919, *Prædiken til 10. søndag efter Trinitatis (A) (2)* 1919, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 41)

For Munk, a crucial part of the responsibility of Folkekirken was to counteract the deterioration of faith and values inherent in the modern paradigm. Not only the culturally radical, but often atheistic worldviews also fall within this scope. Cultural and material phenomena such as divorce, technology, and unemployment are also matters for the Church. In an article related to the Reformation Jubilee in 1936, he sums up the relationship between the Church and the people.

It is not uncommon to hear similarities brought up between our time and that time. Are there so many? It seems to me that now it is the world that is de-Christianized, while then it was the Church that was so. (Munk 1936)

The role of the Church now is very different from reformation days, Munk argues. It is a vehicle for exhortation and transformation in Munk's own society and lifeworld. However, when the German occupation was a condition in Denmark, Munk appears to have focused once again more sternly on the inadequacies of the Church.

The church has disarmed. Therefore it has become weak. It has brought shame on itself and tremendous harm to the world by giving in to its fear of reality. When the world did not believe that what the priest preached was serious, the priest stopped speaking seriously... And Evil, feeling the resistance against him neutralized, shot up and buried the world under his elephantiasis. (Munk 1943, *Prædiken til Nytaarsdag (A) 1943*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 411)

Munk's holy wrath is focused on several cultural issues, but primarily on the reluctance of Folkekirken to speak out and evoke action during the national crisis of the occupation. In his play "He Sits by the Melting Pot", Munk has Bishop Beugel explain the role of the Church during dark times of oppression.

I honour the Führer. I consider him as close to being a God as it is possible to be, even though he is only a human being. As a human being he needs a church to tell him when he fails. (1938)

This quotation is controversial and has contributed to allegations of Munk being friendly to the Third Reich. However, a reading of the phrase in context contradicts such allegations. The role of the Church in drawing attention to the unworthy and unacceptable is exactly what Munk desires for Folkekirken, not only the Bekennende Kirche in Germany, which rejected the Nazification of Christian dogma and Church life. In light of these late experiences, Munk appears to have changed and broadened his view of the Church. "There are those who would have us believe that the Church is merely a refuge for souls. The Church must not concern itself with anything other than how to save our souls" (Munk 1941, *Prædiken til 23. søndag efter Trinitatis (A) 1941*, Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 249).

In 1919, Munk would actually endorse this position. "The Church must preach sin and salvation from this, nothing else" (Munk 1919, *Prædiken til 10. søndag efter Trinitatis (A) (2) 1919*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2023a, 41). In 1941, his ecclesiological view broadened, and the ideal scope of the Church became life and the created world in all its aspects.

## Theology of resistance

Closely related to the previous reflections on anthropology and ecclesiology, Munk developed a theology of war, peace, and resistance. In doing so, he sought to avoid the Scylla of passivity and/or pacifism and the Charybdis of national glorification and *Gott mit uns* thinking. In a sermon for the occasion of the birthday of the beloved Danish King Christian X, Munk asserted that there is no such thing as a national church service. Even as a devoted patriot, he felt that he must renounce the legitimacy of a national Christianity. "The Pharisaic love of country had a strong element of the self-assessment that leads directly to crime" (Munk 1941, *Prædiken paa Kongens Fødselsdag 1941*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 199). At the same

time, a divine responsibility is bestowed upon the Danish people. This is (in most cases) a responsibility for resistance to both the German occupation, and the persecution of Jews. "When persecution is raised in this country against a particular group of our countrymen simply because of their descent, it is the Christian duty of the Church to cry out..." (Munk 1943, *Prædiken til 2. søndag i Advent (B) 1943*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 439).

Munk enters the discussion about the legitimacy of violent resistance. Is war necessary, or not? "How we would like to throw Christianity, all of Christianity, in the scale for the abolition of war... Has the devil not developed such perfection that now we face the choice: either war or humanity must die?" (Munk 1942, *Prædiken til 3. søndag efter Helligtrekonger (A) 1942*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 319). Munk considers traditional ecclesiastical pacifism but eventually rejects it. As Dosenrode confirms this was not a spontaneous decision but a persuasion slowly developed.

It was not obvious that a Lutheran pastor should call for active resistance. As we all know, Kaj Munk did just that. Kaj Munk's reasoning was well-considered and had developed over a long period of time. (Dosenrode 2015, 290).

From the early 1930ties Munk occasionally discussed the question of pacifism. At the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939 Munk contradicted many of his contemporary peers in cultural life and paid tribute to volunteers who joined the Finnish cause in active service. The obligation to resist is, however, linked closely not only to patriotism, but also to divine commission.

Lead us, Cross in our flag, lead us to fight in line with the chained Norway and the bleeding Finland in the struggle of the North against the idea that is opposed to all of ours, lead the old Denmark forward to its new spirit. Not by the grace of others and by the promises of others shall Danne-

brog become a free flag again; for freedom can only be given by God, and he gives it only to those who know to what that gift obliges. (Munk 1943, *Prædiken til Nytaarsdag (A) 1943*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 411)

A central perspective in this theology of resistance is a theological understanding of the enemy. German soldiers are representatives of the regime they have been *heiling*<sup>38</sup> and, as such, they are legitimate targets. As individuals they are in no way inferior to Danes. Only necessity justifies violent resistance.

Even in war it will be the case that, along with the joy we feel when we succeed in bringing down an enemy, there is pain, because this enemy, besides being an enemy, was also our fellow man. (Munk 1941, *Prædiken til 10. søndag efter Trinitatis (A) 1941*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 165)

Munk's theological solution to the conflict between charity and violence lies in the Christlike recognition of the enemy. Hate is not a legitimate attitude, even towards Adolf Hitler. The reason for this is inherent in Munk's anthropological thinking. War is a symptom of human depravity as it is a *conditio humana* in many other respects. In one verse of a poem written during a Second World War blackout, Munk addresses the stars in the sky:

Down here the lights are extinguished. In the darkness only screams are heard, threatening, gloating and wailing. For the earth knows only of war. (1940)

Making reference to the crucifixion of Christ (Luke 23:34), Munk calls for the congregation to interpret the atrocities of war into the general pattern of human anthropology. "For men are of many kinds, and are possessed with all kinds of spirits,

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38 Reference to the Nazi salutation "Heil".

and the Savior has taught us the prayer, 'forgive them, for they know not what they do'" (Munk 1944, *Prædiken til Nytårsdag (B) 1944*, cited in Sørensen and Øhrstrøm 2021, 457). Soon after this theological and ethical statement, Kaj Munk was assassinated, thus imbuing his last words with a certain aura of historical importance. Although soon subject to a considerable neglect, Munk provided a theological argument for resistance.

Kaj Munk's self-imposed exposure drew the attention of the German occupying forces, resulting in the decision to execute him. But Munk also drew the Danes' attention to the importance of resistance, and he provided the moral basis for the struggle. (Dosenrode 2015, 300).

In a historical perspective, this contribution in Christian ethics of resistance is remarkable. Munk provides a discursive framework, that may be relevant for future violent conflicts.

## Critique

As a preacher who stood outside of the recognized contemporary theological factions of Folkekirken, Munk encountered a variety of negative criticisms. Some of this critique was aimed towards the pietistic elements of Munk's faith. In particular, the miracle of the raising of the dead young mother in his play "Ordet" ("The Word") was unacceptable to theologians of a liberal or Barthian persuasion.

Partially separate from this more fundamental theological or political critique, a group of critics directed their opposition towards what they perceived as emotional instability and theological contingency. In a voluminous monograph dedicated to this critique, the Barthian pastor Knud Hansen defined the problem of Munk as follows:

He is far too controlled by the urge to take pendulum swings in all directions. He loves to get drunk in an orgy of whims and let them all have their

say at the same time, but in doing so, he has often achieved that nothing is heard... (1942, 87)

It may be noted that Hansen's critique is based primarily on Munk's theatrical plays and public debates in journalistic media. Hansen had access to only a limited number of Munk's sermons, probably a similar selection as Gemzøe and Pahuus (2019, 331). However, other writers share some of the criticism. Swedish Geo Hammar argues in "The life problem of Kaj Munk" (1945) that Munk's theology is inconsistent, a view supported by a contemporary Danish pastor: "To deal with religious problems in Kaj Munk's work is to enter the jungle of confusion and contradiction. The fragmentation and imbalance that dominated his psyche and imagination reaches its climax here" (Christensen 1949, 7). This approach appears to also be shared by some modern scholars.

It must also be emphasized that Munk, as we have read and interpreted him, cannot be said to have a specific and consistent understanding of Christianity – neither in his drama, in his overall writing, nor in his life. (Gemzøe and Pahuus 2019, 372)

Even though Møller is far from this rejection of Munk's thinking, and does recognize his theology as consistent, he also recognizes what he describes as a notable and presumably problematic *doublemindedness*.

He was a man of contradictions, always seeking division because the middle ground seemed lukewarm to him, but the opposing viewpoints he let different characters represent in his plays often painted inside himself and made him two-minded. He was both aware of and troubled by this... (Møller 2014, 17)

Marc Auchet recognizes these elements in Munk's thinking. They provoke confusion and perhaps even frustration in their



reception. However, he interprets these observations differently by turning the disadvantageous inconsistencies into a rhetorical-dialectic epistemological framework.

He was a dialectician by nature. No sooner had one idea convinced him than the argument against it appeared just as convincingly in his mind. This tendency, which was actually a weakness, became an outstanding quality in his writing: his plays show how well he mastered the art of dialogue. (1997)

Although Auchet's comment is originally related to theatrical drama, not theology or preaching, he offers an interesting understanding of Munk's apparent inconsistencies. Perhaps Munk was prematurely implementing some of the dialogical principles that are now integrated into the paradigm of late modernity?

## Kaj Munk as a Theological Inspiration

In this brief introduction to the theology of Kaj Munk, it becomes evident that the commonly dominant picture of Munk as a naïve pietist or an emotional preacher marked by confusion is not particularly accurate. Both pietism and ardent idealism are central aspects of his theology, but so is an understanding of a profound context between creation, social ethics, society, and history. In this sense, Munk is a holistic theologian. Few contemporary theologians have implemented reflections upon modernity, politics, gender, culture, and war in sermons as Munk did. Even fewer have done so with a concurrent focus on the classic Lutheran theology of cross, resurrection, and discipleship. In this article, only three themes have been selected: anthropology, ecclesiology, and resistance. Many important aspects have thus been neglected and hopefully this will inspire the reader to pursue further studies in the theology of Kaj Munk.

In several respects, traces of inspiration from both Søren Kierkegaard and N.F.S. Grundtvig may be confirmed. However, Munk also appears to display some unique theological ap-

proaches of his own. He is neither consistent nor inconsistent. He may rebuke modernist worldviews – and simultaneously integrate aspects thereof into his own theological thinking. For Munk, theology cannot be isolated to a particular sector. Neither can it be understood apart from the human experience, which in Munk’s days was lived in early modernity.

In the present-day concepts of “liquid modernity” (Zygmunt Bauman) or “late modernity” (Anthony Giddens), it appears that society is losing cohesion. Munk saw this approaching. His comprehensive theology was designed to strengthen cohesion between God and man, and also between the collective of society and the Church, understood as a fellowship rather than an organization. This is a cohesion founded on the notion of divine presence in the world.

Never, never, never ask if it’s useful, just if it is true.  
(Nøjgaard 1958)

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# Kaj Munk as a Journalist

*Niels Jørgen Langkilde*

## Introduction

This chapter introduces Kaj Munk as a journalist. My intention has been to write about Munk in the Danish context. Therefore, I include paragraphs about Danish and European societies in the 1920s, the 1930s, and the 1940s up until 1944, the year when the Germans killed Munk for his strong critique of Germany and the National Socialist movement.

Journalism that makes clear statements is still a risky business. But our democracy needs it and cannot live without it. This was stressed by my friends from Ukraine who were in Odessa in 1988, under Mercery' sculpture, that Mercery was the God for freedom of the press and free business. Munk was fighting for freedom of the press and his business was that of a publicist. Freedom was closed down in Denmark on 9 April 1940 by the German occupation, and on 29 August 1943, even more freedom of writing and speaking was taken away step by step, with almost all freedom being taken from Munk by September 1943. This led up to his killing by the Germans in January 1944.

Munk was not a classical journalist. He was a Christian and a national influencer. He published around 600 articles, books containing articles, and other journalistic products. From 1930, he held a hugely influential position in Denmark. His work was seen in theatres and read in newspapers, magazines, and books. No other writer of our time in Denmark has reached so many Danish people through dramas, books, and articles. His



dramas still hold a strong position. However, his articles have not weathered the passage of time so well. Like many journalistic works, they have been forgotten. His articles about nature and hunting are the ones that will remain in our Danish literature, together with his battles for the Jews and his struggle against the German occupation.

## Kaj Munk in Printed Periodicals

Kaj Munk wrote in many genres, and he wrote a lot. Among other things, he wrote:

- Poems, psalms, and songs,
- Stage plays, revues, and film manuscripts,
- Sermons and speeches,
- Children's books and aphorisms,
- Memoires and autobiography,
- A lot of letters, and
- About 600 articles, of which more than 550 first printings have been published by the Kaj Munk Forskningscentret and more than 13 books containing collections of his journalistic works have been published.

As of now, the Kaj Munk Forskningscentret has registered 12 journalistic products published between 1913–1930, 478 between 1931–1940, and 92 between 1941–44.<sup>48</sup>

### *Bibliography*

There are several bibliographies that can be used to find articles written by Munk. Some of them are printed in books published during Munk's lifetime, after his death, or after the Second World War ended in Europe in May 1945.

It is important to be aware that the first printed version is very often changed in reprints. And we are talking about all kinds of changes: A shorter form, a longer form, or the changing of words and sentences. In this chapter, the key references

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48 1913: 2; 1916: 1; 1923: 4; 1924: 1; 1928: 3; 1929: 1; 1931: 23; 1932: 34; 1933: 34; 1934: 41; 1935: 32; 1936: 81; 1937: 48; 1938: 59; 1939: 29; 1940: 62; 1941: 26; 1942: 33; 1943: 29; 1944: 4, and :1946: 1.

are to the first printed versions (Dahl et al. 1960; Dahl et al. 1964; Aage Jørgensen 2023; Pastor H.H. Sigumfeldt's bibliography 2023; Marc Achet og Hans Raun Iversens Bibliografi 2023; Kaj Munk Forskningscentrets Bibliografi 2023).

### *Kaj Munk in the Media*

From 1913, Munk wrote for 23 Danish newspapers as well as one in Norway and one in Sweden. *Jyllands-Posten* (Today: *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*), *Dagens Nyheder – Nationaltidende*,<sup>49</sup> and the three newspapers in *Berlingske Officin* were his main outlets. *Dansk Folkeliv* and more than 40 weekly magazines, journals, and other periodicals also published journalistic products by Kaj Munk. Only a few of these appeared before 1931.

The first was “Gennem Isen” (“Through the Ice”) in *Lollands-Posten*, published on 27 February 1913. Munk did not write it himself, instead he gave the story to the newspaper. The article “En Rottejagt” (“A Rat Hunt”), published in *Maribo Amtstidende* on 15 April 1913, is the first written by himself (Madsen 2022). Munk said that the piece in *Nakskov Tidende*, on 6 May 1916, was his first big article (Munk 1942a, 54–58; Munk 1939b). His first deal with the media was with *Dansk Folkeliv* in 1931. He wrote five articles before the magazine stopped publishing, but later in the same year he made a deal with *Jyllandsposten*. *Jyllandsposten* paid him, which *Dansk Folkeliv* did not.

### *Kaj Munk and the Newspaper Jyllands-Posten*

From 1931, Munk was a well-paid writer for the biggest newspaper outside Copenhagen, *Jyllands-Posten*, based in Aarhus (Today: *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*). *Jyllands-Posten* was his newspaper home until his death in January 1944. It began in the summer of 1931 and it was the well-known editor H. Han-

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49 *Nationaltidende*, a newspaper in Denmark, published by De Ferslewske Blade (1876–1961). This newspaper was conservative and written for non-socialists and officials. *Nationaltidende* was published twice a day and focused on international news and culture. The publishing house had economic problems in 1931 and *Nationaltidende* was published together with *Dagens Nyheder* from 1936 to 1954 under the title *Nationaltidende*. In 1936, the newspaper was taken over by Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening. *Nationaltidende* became more popular during the Second World War due to its strong nationalist position.

sen (1879–1956) who made the agreement with Munk. Altogether, he wrote 189 articles for *Jyllandsposten*. The newspaper paid for his trip to Jerusalem and published most of the articles from that trip. They were later collected in the book “Vedersø-Jerusalem Retur med Kaj Munk til Sønderjylland - Alperne - Italien - Ægypten og Det hellige Land” (“Vedersø-Jerusalem Return with Kaj Munk to Sønderjylland – The Alps – Italy – Egypt and The Holy Land”) (Munk 1934b). These articles were later reprinted in revised versions omitting the parts where Munk looks positively at the European dictators. Many – but not all – of his articles were printed in newspapers first. In 2008, *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* donated to Kaj Munk Forskningscentret consisting of the letters from Munk to *Jyllands-Posten*. You can study this relation more intensively at the centre (*Jyllands-Posten* 2008).

### ***Kaj Munk and the Newspapers Nationaltidende and Dagens Nyheder***

Munk was a guest writer for *Nationaltidende/Dagens Nyheder* and *Berlingske Tidende* (Today: *Berlingske*). At that time, *Berlingske* was *Berlingske Tidende*, *Berlingske Aftenavis*, and *BT*. In 2021, Kaj Munk Forskningscentret bought letters and two short stories by Munk sent to the editor, Aage Schoch (1898–1968). The short stories have been published, but not all the letters (Munk 1941b; Munk 1941c; Høgh 2022). Munk began writing for *Dagens Nyheder*, and here he wrote 31 articles. *Berlingske Aftenavis* (the edition that came out in late afternoon) published 40 articles, including his 12 poems, one for each month (Møller 2015), *Berlingske Tidende* published 26, and *BT* 4. *Nationaltidende* was Munk’s number two media outlet, with 122 journalistic products. Many of the articles in *Nationaltidende* were reviews. Also, *Nationaltidende* paid him very well.

### ***In Other Media***

Lots of media were asking Munk for contributions, and he helped many of them. Christian media and *Dansk Samling* were among these. The strong media had to pay. The five titles that each published more than 10 of his journalistic products cover

75% of his production. In his books, you will find only a small number. Sixty-four titles each contain only one article by Munk. He wrote introductions or parts of 20 books, together with others. He wrote introductions for ten theatre programmes and many of his letters were later printed in books, after the Second World War. As is well known, Vedersø was a poor area in West Jutland, and Munk only used local media a few times. He was a national writer. He was only involved locally as a priest.

## Kaj Munk's Reprinted Articles in Books

Munk quickly became an important public voice. Therefore, it was very natural to select his best writings to include in books.

Before Kaj Munk's death, we find:

- **"Vedersø-Jerusalem Retur – Med Kaj Munk til Sønderjylland, Alperne, Italien, Ægypten og Det hellige Land 1934"**, 4th edition 1934. First prints are in: *Jyllandsposten*, *Berlingske Aftenavis*, and *Dagens Nyheder*,
- **"10 Oxford-Snapshots – Klippet af en Dramatiker – Et Skuespil"**, Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1936 – 1-5. oplag, (one could argue that this is a dramatic work),
- **"Liv og glade Dage"**. Femten smaa Historier med løst Krudt til de muntreste af mine Kammerater, Naturens egne Drenge, de danske Jægere", Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck 1936. First prints are in: *Jyllandsposten* and *Dagens Nyheder* 1936, 2nd edition 1937, 6th edition 1945, 9th edition 1970 – 40,000 copies altogether.
- **"Himmel og Jord. Kronikker mm"** (1928–1939), Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1938 – 22,000–26,000 1944, 12th edition 36,000–40,000, 1947. First prints are in: *Jyllandsposten*, *Politiken*, *Berlingske Aftenavis*, *Dagens Nyheder* / *Nationaltidende*.
- **"Foraaret saa sagte kommer. Erindringer"**, Westermann, 1942, 12th edition 1948 – his most sold book.
- **"Med Sol og megen Glæde"**, Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1942, 6th edition 18,000–22,000 copies 1946. This work is a kind of documentation to his: "Foraaret saa sagte kommer".

Published after Kaj Munk's death

- **"Saa fast en Borg"**, Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1946,
- **"Resensiana"**, udgivet af Arnold Buscks Boghandel, 1946,
- **"Ansigter"**, Kronikker mm. af Kaj Munk." Redigeret af Niels Nøjgaard, Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1947,
- **"Naturens egne Dreng"**, Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1948 / a new larger edition of "Liv og glade Dage",
- Vol. 5 and 6, **"Dagen er ind og andre Artikler"** and **"En Digtets Vej og andre Artikler"** in **"Kaj Munk Mindeudgave"** 1949, and
- **"Aldrig skal Danmark dø"** Kaj Munks Avisdigte 1940 og censuren ved Per Stig Møller, Kristeligt Dagblads Forlag, 2015.

The two volumes of the "Kaj Munk Mindeudgave" ("Kaj Munk Memorial Edition") were published with a lot of changes to the texts. If the focus is Munk's writings, one must go to his articles directly or the books he published during his lifetime. After the Second World War, editors did not want to publish the large number of his articles containing positive commentaries on dictators such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

## Journalism

The principles and organization of traditional journalism are many and they change repeatedly over the years. In the 1930s, Denmark still had the so-called "four newspaper system". This means that each of the larger cities had four newspapers: One for social democrats, one for liberals, one for conservatives, and one for social liberals. Kaj Munk mostly wrote for the liberals, the conservatives, Christians, and the non-socialist newspapers and magazines. He only published twice in *Social-Demokraten* and twice in *Demokraten Aarhus*, both connected to the social democrats. And he only published five times in the main social-liberal newspaper, *Politiken*. In more recent times, journalism in public service media needs to be objective, fair, and trustworthy. Three other keywords are versatility, diversity, and quality (Fjernsynsloven 2020, §10).

If we match Munk's articles to these standards, we find him to be a man of his time, when journalism was closer to party statements and agitation. Today, we might call him an influencer, a Christian, and a national influencer. Munk had strong opinions, he was fighting for Christianity and traditional values. He did not give a fair presentation of all views, and he did not do a lot of his own research.

A large part of journalism is news and reportage. Munk wrote only a few articles involving news, including his very first one. Far more often, we find reportage, mainly in his travel articles, about both Denmark and abroad (Munk 1934b). In classical news articles, we first have the most important news, then the less important news, and finally background, with perhaps a cliffhanger for the next article. This was not Munk's way of writing. He was more academic, presenting a conclusion at the end. In his travel articles, however, he does not forget the cliffhanger. Journalism has always looked for conflicts and critiques that expose the power of the state, the region, and the city. This was much more Munk's style. He found the conflicts and made them bigger, and he was tough in his critique of the government and members of parliament, both in Denmark and abroad, but also local politicians (e.g., a vote about an alcohol licence for a hotel in Vedersø<sup>50</sup>) and the people working for the Germans. He also found enemies in Christian and cultural life, and he met them with a lot of critique and strong arguments. Humour was absolutely among his best weapons.

*Kaj Munk's contributions to newspapers and magazines were in many different genres, not only articles:*

Munk's writings included Christian columns, political works, and national statements; indeed, he was a Christian and national influencer. But in the newspapers and magazines we also meet his short stories, poems, popular songs, psalms, reused sermons, and newspaper sermons, support for the Royal Family in poetry and prose, hunting letters, nature essays, the weather, travel articles, his own memories and essays about

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50 March 1936. His recommendation in this short article was: Vote no to alcohol licence.

daily life, pictures in words of individuals from the past and his own time, necrologies (frequently controversial), many obituaries, and reviews mainly of theatre productions and books. It is therefore fair to call him a publicist if we also think about his dramas and books.

### *To write up to a war and during war under censorship*

Like almost all writers, Munk was engaged in an ongoing debate with his editors and publishing houses. His temper and dramatic skills are also seen here in the letters to and from editors.

What was new at this time was censorship. It was not allowed under the Danish constitution after 1849, but strong press for Germans and Italian employees at their embassies had effects – even before the German occupation of Denmark on 9 April 1940. Lars Christensen writes in “Det skarptlebede Sværd” (“The Sharpened Sword”) (2012) about this system of self-censorship overseen by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs until the Germans took over on 29 August 1943.

The Social Democratic Minister of Justice, K.K. Steicke (1880–1963), stopped Kaj Munk’s drama, “Han sidder ved Smeltediglen” (“He Sits by the Melting Pot”) (1938), from being performed close to the German border in Sønderborg. Munk wrote about this in an article “Ved Fejhed opnaaes Intet” (“Nothing is gained by cowardice”) (Munk 1939a).

Munk wrote fewer articles during 1943 because he was under censorship. *Jyllandsposten* was not allowed to publish his texts after 1 September 1943 (Andersen 2021). It was also forbidden for him to publish books from 8 September 1943. However, he could write between the lines, as many poets and writers before him have done. An important example can be found in *Akademisk Tidsskrift* of 23 June 1942. Here, you see him advocating resistance but, in the surface text, he appears to be writing about the need for washing. In “Aldrig skal Danmark dø” (Denmark shall never die”) (2015), Per Stig Møller has made an excellent analysis of how Munk’s poems in the newspaper changed due to the censorship.



### *Themes in Kaj Munk's articles*

- **Christianity**, where he defended Christianity against atheism, nihilism, Muslims, and communism (normally called Bolshevism). He was clearly a Lutheran priest and a deep and passionate believer. Christianity was much stronger in 1930–1944 than it is today in Denmark; e.g., "Ved Reformationsjubilæet" ("At the Anniversary of the Reformation") (Munk 1938a, 10–14), "Det kristenfjendske Tyskland" ("The anti-Christian Germany") (Munk 1936j) "Paaskens Indhold" ("Easter's Content") (Munk 1936e) "Velkommen, Oxford til Danmark" ("Welcome, Oxford to Denmark") (Munk 1935b), and "Endnu et Oxford-Snapshot" ("Another Oxford Snapshot") (Munk 1938a, 215–219).
- **Abortion**, where Kaj Munk defended the laws of his time. To Munk, as to most of the population at the time, abortion was killing (Dosenrode 2014).
- **War and politics** "To Diktaturstater to Overgreb" ("Two Dictatorship-two abuses") (Munk 1935d), "Det Sete afhænger af Aviserne" ("That View Depends on the Newspapers") (Munk 135), "Giv Agt! Nu gælder det –" ("Attention! Now it Counts –") (Munk 1938e), and more about the war between the USSR and Finland in "Ikke Frivillige til Finland nu!" ("No Volunteers to Finland Now") (Munk 1941d), and many articles with the theme of Italy's war against Abyssinia.
- **Policy with Democracy or Dictatorship as a central conflict.** Heroes such as Moses, David, Hannibal, Mussolini, Hitler, and King Christian X, e.g., "Aabent Brev til Mussolini" ("Open letter to Mussolini") (Munk 1938i).
- **Jews.** He defended the Jews again and again. He saw them as humans. This was not an easy position to take during those years. He also had criticisms of Jews, but he clearly saw the awful treatment they faced in Hitler's Germany. He knew very well the classical Lutheran and Christian critiques of Jews as murderers of Jesus. But this was not his way (e.g., "Hvor bor de Hjemløse" ("Where do the Homeless Live?") (Munk 1936d)).

- **Unification of the Nordic countries** was a central idea. He wrote about this in Nordic magazines.
- **Travelling:** "Hilsen fra London" ("Greetings from London") (Munk 1933a), "Oh, Paris!" (Munk 1938d), and the book based on a large number of articles: "Vedersø-Jerusalem Retur" ("Verdersø-Jerusalem Return") (Munk 1934b).
- **Nature:** "Mellem Fjord og Hav" ("Between Fjord and Ocean") (Munk 1936g), the book "Liv og glade Dage" ("Life and Happy Days") (Munk 1936a).
- **Hunting:** Kaj Munk follows St. Blicher, Ivan Turgenev, and Wilhelm Dinesen with his hunting letters and articles. The book "Liv og glade Dage" (Munk 1936b) is dedicated to Danish hunters, and this book still brings pleasure to Danes in 2023. "Regnsøverne på Heden" ("The Curlews on the Moor") (Munk 1938g), and "Ogsaa en Jagt" ("Also a Hunt") (Munk 1938h) are other examples.
- **Daily life:** "Lette Bølge, naar du blaaner..." ("Easy wave...") (Munk 1938c) tells with a great deal of humour how it feels to be seasick for many days aboard a small ship between Esbjerg in Jutland and Antwerp.

**Literature and theatre:** This theme appeared in many articles (e.g. "Om 'En Idealist' anden Gang – Ti Aar efter" ("About 'An Idealist' Second Time – Ten Years Later") (Munk 1938b) and "Den Sommer og den Sø" ("That Summer and that Lake") (Munk 1936f).

- **Aesthetics:** His views on art and literature are present, for example in "Et Oxford-Snapshot" ("An Oxford Snapshot") (Munk 1936h), but also in his reviews of "Circus Juris" ("Circus Juris") (Munk 1935a).
- **Polemic/controversy:** Writing polemic is connected with many other themes, answers to reviews, answers to Christian statements from priests, and in some of his necrologies (e.g.: many about the Oxford Movement. Published as a book, "10 Oxford-Snapshots" ("10 Oxford Snapshots") (1936a), "Manden Høffding og Kirken" ("The Man Høffding and the Church") (Munk 1931c), and "Henrik Pontoppidan" (Munk 1947, 13–16).

- **Portraits and Necrologies:** Munk wrote a lot of portraits of individuals. Many of these were words about a dead person, a necrology. He had great skills for this because he was able to understand all kinds of people. From the simple hunter in “Johan, Manden fra æ Havbjerg” (“Johan, the Man from Havbjerg”) (Munk 1936c), to the abovementioned professor Harald Høffding and the Nobel prize winner Henrik Pontoppidan, to Bishop Valdemar Ammundsen (Munk 1936k), and the old poet Steen Steensen Blicher (Munk 1943).

### Kaj Munk’s words, dialogues, and humour

Munk was a person, writer, and poet who thought dramatically. It is not surprising that we find dialogues with himself, written dialogues between him and others, and between others (e.g., “Oxford Snapshots”). This style includes many rhetorical questions, and this element is very useful when one wants to discuss politics, or when encouraging the reader to reflect. For example, in a travel report from Germany, he found space for 30 question marks (Munk 1934a). Quite a few of his articles have a question mark in the headline (e.g., “Gud er Kærlighed?” (“God is Love?”) (Munk 1916)). There are many significant changes of style in the same text. This is often done to conjure a smile or create a humorous atmosphere. Think about when, in “Vedersø-Jerusalem Retur” (Munk 1934b), Munk meets Saint Peter in Rome and has a funny dialogue with him.

When Munk uses dialogue, he of course uses so-called “spoken language” as he did so excellently in his dramas, but this is also prevalent in the texts where there is no dialogue. “Spoken language” provides space for only a few complicated words. Munk uses almost exclusively Danish words. In his language, there are many words and sentences from the Bible, which could be overt or hidden. In his articles, there are frequently references to actual debates in other media. Some of these are a little difficult to catch today. In the articles, you only find a few Latin words e.g.: “interdum dormitat bonus Homerus” (“Kejseren af Portugalien og Diktatorerne” (“The Emperor of Portu-

gal and the Dictators”) (Munk 1940)) and “*thi verum est index sui et falsi. Det er Spinoza-Latin og betyder: Sandheden fortæller ikke blot om, hvad der er rigtigt, men tillige om, hvad der er falsk*” (“Manden Høffding og Kirken” (“The Man Høffding and the Church”) (Munk 1931c)). Like Latin words, there are very few dialects or sociolects (“Johan fra æ Havbjerger” (“Johan from Havbjerger”) (Munk 1947, 13–16) and “Ringkjøbing” (Munk 1949). Unlike one of his favourite authors, the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, Munk is very easy and amusing for a large part of the population to read – even today.

### *Kaj Munk’s language as a journalist*

Munk was writing a modern, almost “spoken”, language in many of his articles. He very much liked to add humour and jokes. This humour was often very elegant, but he was not afraid to come up with simpler jokes. We can also see this in his dramas. He jumped quickly from humour to serious statements, as he also does in his dramas. His Christianity pops up all over the place. This is often incredibly open, but we can also find hidden sentences from the Bible. In his articles, Munk made a lot of critical statements about the men in power, the Danish Parliament, and other organizations misusing their power or using it in an inappropriate way. Remember that 43.5% of working people in Denmark were unemployed during the toughest period of the 1930s, January 1933.

Munk was not a classical journalist, but he did employ some of their skills. For example, his work is easy to read. He only used a few unfamiliar words, and very seldom used German,<sup>51</sup> English, or French paragraphs. He used Danish dialect a few times. This element gave, and still gives, his conversations with ordinary people an authentic image. Munk did not write in the dialect of West Jutland, but he did employ their style and way of thinking, with a lot of understatement, which he used with elegance. Like a journalist, Munk liked to put his views “on the tip”, he liked provocation, and he liked debate. His style was far from an academic one, with its footnotes, words

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51 E.g., German words in *Nationaltidende* 20 November 1936.

from other languages, and complicated grammar. Munk was writing from the position of a man who was part of the Danish and Christian people living outside the big cities. In his language, he was a defender of the poor, the unemployed, and the small farmers.

### *Kaj Munk's Universe*

As a journalist, Munk was a Christian of his time. When he travelled out of Denmark and wrote home, he knew his audience and acquired a lot of important and new information with his own personal touch. Like journalists today working in autocratic systems or dictatorships such as Russia, China, Iran, or North Korea, he knew that these governments were also among his readers. He wrote positively and critically about the countries he visited, their systems of government, and attitudes among ordinary people. The classic problem for a foreign reporter is to gain an overview and to select trustworthy people. Munk had the same problems.

Munk was not a traveller like Hans Christian Andersen, who had introductions to well-known poet, scientists, or Danes abroad. He was not like Sophus Schandorph, who settled abroad for a long time and grew into the local life. He was also far removed from Gustav Wied when, in his younger days, he took a boat trip to Spain and back. Munk prepared for the trip not by reading lots of guidebooks but from the Bible. This you see in Rome, in Egypt, and in Jerusalem. He meets Saint Peter in Rome; in Egypt he talks with the Sphinx and discusses Moses, and in Jerusalem King David. He also writes about Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Engelbert Dollfuss, but he did not meet any of them.

### **Kaj Munk's antipathies**

#### *Materialism and Capitalism*

Munk was strongly opposed to both Materialism and Capitalism. These were mainstream ideas in the 1930s. In the 1935 election, the anti-capitalist Socialdemokratiet (The Social Democrats) received 46.1% of the votes to Folketinget (the Danish House of Commons). This was the best result ever for this par-

ty. Munk did not like the Social Democratic Party because it was very much a socialist party dominated by a kind of materialism. At that time, the party wanted to split the relationship between the state and Folkekirken (The Danish Church).

Munk never joined a Danish political party. He was his own man, but during the Second World War he supported a small party, Dansk Samling. He wrote for their magazine several times and made donations in the form of rights to print some of his books containing poems and sermons. Many priests were members of this party; it was the most critical of the German occupation of Denmark during the period 1940–1945, and many members played an active part in the Danish resistance movement. Like Munk, parliamentarism was not their cup of tea.<sup>52</sup>

In the 1930s and 1940s, the wings of Danish Church life were strong. The more orthodox participated in “Indre Mission,” the more liberal in “Grundtvigianerne” (these were the followers of the Danish priest and poet N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872)), and the centre in “Kirkeligt Centrum” (“The Christian Centre Movement”). “Tidehverv” (“The Danish Barthians”), which took inspiration from Karl Barth, was very small at this time. Munk did not like these movements (Munk 1932). The Oxford Movement was also present, with its strong anti-materialism and anti-communism. Munk took an ambivalent approach to this movement (Munk 1935b). This is easy to read in his many articles designed as small dialogues about the movement. He collected most of these dialogues in a book entitled: “10 Oxford-Snapshots” (“10 Oxford Snapshots”) (Munk 1936).

### *Socialism, Social Democrats, PM Thorvald Stauning, and Unions*

From the end of the 1920s and for the rest of Munk’s life, there were major problems with unemployment. In 1922 over 30% of the workforce was unemployed, in March 1931 it was 24%, in 1933 38%, and briefly over 40%. This was not only a very large social problem, it was also the reason for a lot of strikes,

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52 More about the relation to this party in: Søren Dosenrode: Kaj Munk, Arne Sørensen og Dansk Samling, pp. 54–65 in: *Munkiana* 68, 2020.

lockouts, and conflicts on the streets and in the courtrooms of Danish society. One of the reasons for these conflicts was a Christian, non-socialist movement for workers and employers. The socialist unions and the socialists in the government and the big cities created a lot of problems with blockades and both legal and illegal activities. The Danish courts were called upon to handle these problems again and again.

It was a period in Danish history with many conflicts, and most of the four strong parties had their own newspapers in the bigger cities. Munk also saw and wrote about these huge problems. His perspective was to focus on the unemployed workers and the need to help them.

On the same day that Adolf Hitler took over in Germany, three large parties in the Danish Parliament made an agreement to try to solve many of the problems in the awful political-economic situation. This was called “Kanslergadeforliget” (“The political appointment made in the street Kanslergade”), after the street where the Danish Prime Minister, the Social Democrat Thorvald Stauning (1873–1942), had his flat and where the agreement was finalized.

This agreement did not stop the conflicts. The Government was created of two parties: “Socialdemokratiet” (The Social Democrats) and “Det radikale Venstre” (a minor social-liberal party). The strange element during these years was that the government and its majority in Parliament needed to resolve a lot of conflicts. This was not part of the Social Democrats’ traditional policy. The Danish Parliament failed to resolve these conflicts. Again and again, Danes faced the same problems during these years, and therefore the new parliamentarianism (which began in 1901) was not seen as a great success. Munk did not believe in the skills of the government, the prime minister, or the members of parliament. His critique was harsh and often voiced.

### *Communism and the Finland war*

The many conflicts in Denmark from end of the 1920s and during the 1930s created space for “Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti, DKP” (“the Danish Communist Party”). This party wanted a



revolution like the one in Russia in 1917. The Social Democrats ruled the unions, but the Communists – generally called Bolsheviks by Munk – were strong in a few unions. Munk saw an enemy in Communist ideas and practices. It became very clear to him, and he often wrote and spoke about it after the Soviet Union's attack on Finland on 30 November 1939. In *Jyllands-Posten*, 24 December 1939, he writes: "Nu er det nået til os selv, Norden er i Krig, de Vilde er brudt ind over vor Tærskel" ("Now the war has reached us, The North is at war, the savages have broken in over our threshold"). He sold the manuscript to his drama "Ordet" ("The Word") and gave his fee, 10,000 DKK, as a donation to the work of the Red Cross in Finland. In *Nationaltidende*, on 28 January 1940, he wrote in "Dagen er inde" ("The Day Has Come") that the Finnish defence is a defence against Communism and Nazism – it is a crusade (Møller 2014, 260–262). Munk's view on the war in Finland changed when the Soviet Union was attacked by Germany in 1941. Now the Danes should stay at home – no one should support Germany by supporting Finland ("Ikke Frivillige til Finland nu!" ("No Volunteers to Finland Now!")) (Munk 1941d). During the Second World War, in the summer of 1943, Munk donated to a Communist resistance group – but for armed activities, not propaganda. In doing so, he was following the old adage: The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

### *Islam*

Kaj Munk had no illusions about Islam. He saw it as an enemy of Christianity. In this view, he followed the fundamental books of the Danish Church.<sup>53</sup> There were not many discussions about Islam in the 1930s. We have much more discussion in our day. In Munk's days, there were almost no followers of Islam in Denmark or the rest of Europe, apart from the Balkans. His views are to be found, for example, in "Vedersø-Jerusalem Retur" ("Vedersø-Jerusalem Return") (Munk 1934b), where he states that he did not like the Muslims' views on women. When Munk arrived in Jerusalem, he became sad that

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53 To read these, see e.g., here: Den danske Folkekirkes Bekendelsesskrifter ved Leif Grane, 1st ed. 2nd print, Det danske Bibelselskab 1981.

the British General Allenby had not shut down the mosques at Temple Mountain. Without this being done, he could not see the day when the Jewish people could raise their Temple again.

### *Japan*

It is an old tradition in Europe to talk about “the yellow peril”. This refers to a fear that millions of people would come from Asia to invade Europe, as Genghis Khan (ca.1165–1227) did. Most of this was a fear of Chinese people, but not for Munk. He saw Japan as the big new danger in the East. Here as well, he was better informed than most of the public of his time.

### *Spiritualism*

In the 1930s, spiritualism was often in the media. Munk argued strongly against this religion (Munk 1933d). In spiritualism, he saw a group of people cheating other people for profit. We can also see his antipathy to spiritualism in his review of Thit Jensen’s “Stygge Krumpen” (“Ugly Krumpen”) (Munk 1936i).

## **Positive elements in Kaj Munk’s universe**

Just as Munk was passionate about a lot of things, he was also passionate about other ideas and people.

### *The Bible, Protestantism, and active Christianity*

The Bible and the classical Protestantism of the Danish Lutheran-Evangelical Church (Folkekirken) was the foundation for Munk’s articles. He was ready to discuss many elements of Christianity and was open and tolerant about other views within Protestantism. He was not connected to the big movements or parties within the church. However, from time to time, he was tough against Roman Catholic Christianity. This is clear in his many articles about the Reformation Jubilee in 1936 and in “Vedersø-Jerusalem Retur” (“Vedersø-Jerusalem Return”) (Munk 1934b).<sup>54</sup> In Jerusalem, he met priests from Orthodox Christianity at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Their behaviour made him angry. But he became much angrier in the Ger-

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54 First print: ”To Herskeres Hærskue” in: *Jyllandsposten*, 25 March 1934.

man evangelical Church in Jerusalem when he heard that the priests were saying good things about Adolf Hitler. But Munk never forgot his many good childhood visits with family members to the Catholic church in Maribo. In addition, we can see him writing very positively about what Denmark lost with the reformation of the Danish Church in 1536. He misses the position of the Virgin Mary, the care taken with celebration, the bread and wine, the incense, the masses for death, and the candles (Munk 1936i).

Munk had a dream of a Christian – and national – revival in Denmark. The drama in such a movement spoke deeply to him. He was writing about this during the 1930s, and it finally came after the German occupation of Denmark, on 9 April 1940. But this was not enough for Munk. He wanted it stronger.

A strong part of Munk's Christianity was support for the poor, unemployed workers, and small farmers.<sup>55</sup> Farmers experienced very difficult years in Denmark during the 1930s. He came back to this again and again. As we see in "Ordet", it was Munk's opinion that Good is still active in the world. He was strongly opposed to Karl Barth's (1886–1968) Danish followers in Tidehverv, with priests such as Tage Schack (1892–1945) and people like Hal Koch (1904–1963), Niels Ivar Heje (1891–1974), and Knud Hansen (1898–1996) (Munk 1932).

### *Hans Christian Andersen*

Munk liked Hans Christian Andersen very much. This is clear to see in his first major article: "Gud er Kærlighed?" ("God is Love?"), published in *Nakskov Tidende* on 6 May 1916. After this, we see his affection again and again; for example, in his essay about Hans Christian Andersen in Vedersø: "Den Sommer og den Sø" ("That Summer and that Lake") (Munk 1936f), "Barnet og Dyndkongen. Besøg i Store Vildmose" ("The child and the King of the Marsh: Visit to Big Vildmose") (Munk 1937a), which included a long extract from one of Hans Chris-

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55 Munk was a big supporter of poor people, including with public readings. For example, on 30 November 1938, the income from his reading to 4,000 people in Copenhagen was donated to Kirkens Korshær, a Christian organization for the poor.

tian Andersen's Fairy Tales, "Dynd-Kongens Datter" (The Marsh King's Daughter"), published in 1858. It is about "Store Vildmose" ("Big Vildmose"), which is a large Danish marsh in the North of Jutland. We find another example in "Kejseren af Portugalien og Diktatorerne" ("The Emperor of Portugal and the Dictators") (Munk 1940).

### *Georg Brandes*

In his time, the critic Georg Brandes (1842–1927) was a very important and powerful person in Danish cultural life. Munk did not like Brandes' atheism ("Teologen Georg Brandes" ("The Theologian Georg Brandes", 1926) (Munk 1942b, 160–162), but he liked his ideas about great men, the so-called aristocratic radicalism. Brandes wrote after a democratic period about great men in world history: Julius Cesar, Michelangelo, Voltaire, and Shakespeare. He was also the main introducer of Nietzsche. This focus on heroes attracted Munk, and he felt he was a great man to fight with respect and a good deal of admiration. In Munk's eyes, he made a lot of incorrect choices, but he was important.

In his "Samlede Skrifter" ("Collected Works") (1899), Brandes writes about his view on life:

Under mit Livs mangeaarige Kampe, stadigt med Flertallet imod mig, udvikledes hos mig en afgjort Uvilje til Underkastelse under Flertallet Autoritet...Først Frihedsideen og den lidenskabelige Kærlighed til Frihed....Dernæst Retsideen...Endelig troen paa ledende Aander, den oprigtige og gennemførte Genidyrkelse, Grundet paa Overbevisningen om at det store Menneske alene er Kulturens Kilde. Alle mine Skrifter er uden Undtagelser Udtryk for denne Tro og denne Kultus...

(In English: During the many years of my life's struggles, always with the Majority against me, there developed in me a decided reluctance to submit to Majority Authority...First the idea of Liberty

and the passionate love of Liberty...Then the idea of Justice...Finally the faith in guiding spirits, the sincere and complete worship of Genius, founded on the conviction that the great man alone is the source of culture. All my writings, without exception, are expressions of this faith and this Cult..."

Munk wrote his play, "I Brændingen" ("In the Surf"), about Georg Brandes in 1926. Shortly after Brandes' death, in 1927, Kaj Munk rewrote the play in March 1929, and published it. He had to pay 500 DKK for it, and only 550 copies were printed. On the front page was written: "Forkastet af Det kgl. Teater" ("Rejected by The Royal Theatre"). The dedication was: "Til Mesteren, der er død" ("To the Master, who is dead") (Nielsen 1992, 9–10). This play also gave Kaj Munk options for more polemical articles railing against the reviews he and the play received (Munk 1937c). Betty Nansen's Theatre was the first to stage it, followed by Aarhus Theatre in 1937.

### *Strong leadership*

Kaj Munk was attracted to strong leadership. He knew of – and used in his plays and articles – a lot of strong leaders from the Bible. Some good, others terrible. Leaders such as Jesus, Paulus (Saint Paul), Peter (Saint Peter), King David, Moses, Herodes (Herod), and Pilatus (Pilate). When we talk about strong leadership, we speak with the words of our time. Strong leadership in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s meant dictatorship or "Ein Führer", in Danish: "En fører." For us in 2023, dictatorship is dreadful and totally opposed to our fundamental democratic spirit. The word "Fører" still has bad associations with Adolf Hitler. After the First World War, Europe and the USA were unstable and faced many rebellions. Most people desired peace. Politicians in democratic countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Denmark, together with the dictatorship in the Soviet Union, did far too much to protect the peace. Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland had to pay a high price for this peace policy. So did Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. All of them lost their independence.

In our time, we have seen something similar with Putin in Russia. In our time, Putin has organized:

- 1990 Transnistria taken from Moldova with Russian support,
- 1999 Russia takes Chechnya,
- 2008 Taking South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia,
- 2014 Taking Crimea from Ukraine, and
- 2014–2022 Taking part of Donbass from Ukraine, and
- 2022- ? War against Ukraine.

In our time, there have been many opinions, leaders, and countries who trusted in Russia's desire for peace, as we saw with the peace-keeper Adolf Hitler. As we have seen with many journalists, politicians, and intellectuals trusting in Russia's talk about peace, we have seen the same, but more slowly, in Communist China. Journalists, politicians, and intellectuals have been very soft as critics of Xi's Communist China:

- 1949 Xinjiang,
- 1950 Tibet,
- 1999 Macao from Portugal,
- 1997 Hong Kong by agreement and after China broke the agreement with the UK, and
- Fighting about the South-Chinese Islands and Sea, and strong threats against Taiwan.

Journalists, politicians, and intellectuals held all kinds of views about Josef Stalin, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini, and those views changed a lot during the 1930s. There were many statements made, both critical and noncritical, before the Second World War began. We find the same in Munk's writings.

Munk had no trust in the democracy or the politicians of his time. He lost his trust when the Danish democracy sold a part of the country, The Virgin Islands, to the USA in 1916. He trusted instead in strong leadership. Strangely enough, he did not like the UK. Here you had a strong democracy and leadership

until the middle of the 1930s. However, he was critical of this large superpower due to its capitalism.

In the 1930s, among other things, Adolf Hitler and Germany took the following decisions:

- 1936 Germany takes back the Rhein areas,
- 1938 Munich peace declaration gives a part of Czechoslovakia to Germany,
- 1938 Germany occupies Austria after years of intermeditation,
- 1939 Germany takes Memel and Bohemia, and
- 1939 Germany attacks Poland and the Second World War begins.

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We can find many positive statements from Danish politicians (e.g., Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning, Prime Minister Vilhelm Buhl, and Axel Larsen) and poets (e.g., Harald Bergstedt, Karen Blixen, and Valdemar Rørdam) during the 1920s and 1930s about dictators like Josef Stalin, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini. In Munk's many articles and books, we can find the same. In our time, there are many politicians and poets saying good things about and understanding dictators like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. The names change but the admiration of strong leadership still goes on in Danish and European culture, yes even in World culture.

In Munk's universe, the strong leader/ the dictator/ "føreren" should collect the entire people (in contrast to the socialist class struggle) and be elected by the people. He saw strong leadership as a defence against the liberal's egoistic individualism, and anarchy on the streets. He hoped that a strong leader could bring about the national and Christian revival. One of his ideas was to bring the Nordic countries together and have one Emperor or dictator in charge (Munk 1938f; 1940; 1941).

Munk saw options in Germany for a better life after Hitler took over. But he was not without his doubts from the very beginning, see for example, in "Det nye Tyskland" ("The New Germany"):

Ad hvilken Vej skal Forjættelserne indfries? Har hans oratoriske Triumfer vidst af anden Teknik en den: at lægge enkelte Befolkningsdele for Had hos andre, nemlig Jøderne, Kommunerne og Socialdemokraterne?

(In English: In what way are the promises to be fulfilled? Did his oratorical triumphs have any other technique than this: to expose certain parts of the population to the hatred of others, namely the Jews, the Communists and the Social Democrats?) (Munk 1933b).

An important part of Munk's ideas about leadership was his strong support of the monarchy. On many occasions, in the newspapers, he wrote positively about the Royal Family of Denmark, mainly King Christian X (1870–1947).

### *Hunting and Nature*

Nature is good, and Nature will fight back was Munk's opinion – and he was right. He knew Danish nature very well as a hunter. And reading him now, in 2023, shows us how much the climate has changed since the 1930s (e.g.: “Sjældent og sent men godt” (“Rare and late but good”) reprinted as “Endelig Sommer” (“Finally Summer”)) (Munk 1938a, 199–203)). Nature and hunting were closely connected for him, and for the other hunters he mingled with (“Johan, Manden fra æ Havbjerger” (“Johan the Man from Havbjerger”)) (Munk 1936c). He also fought locally against transforming wild habitats into farmland. We find his strongest statements about hunting and nature in “Liv og glade Dage” (“Life and Happy Days”) (1936).

### *Literature and theatre*

Hans Christian Andersen and Georg Brandes have already been mentioned. Also important in Munk's universe is the priest and poet Steen Steensen Blicher (1782–1848) (Blicher 1943, foreword). Blicher is still very well known for his short stories and his writings about hunting. He was also a priest in



a poor part of Jutland, not far from Munk in Vedersø. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was also very important to Munk. His fight with the Danish Church at this time was an inspiration and we find many references to him in Munk's articles. The poet and priest N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) was another person about whom Munk often wrote. Not only in his plays ("Egelykke" ("Egelykke"), 1940), but also in articles – many around the 150th anniversary of Grundtvig's birth. Munk also wrote about the movement of his followers, Grundtvigianerne. In "Ordet" ("The Word") (1932), and in articles, he shows that he understood this movement very well and took a positive critical approach to them. Nis Petersen (1897–1943) was Munk's cousin. They knew each other well and Munk wrote about him in several articles. The most important of these was Munk's article at his death in 1943 (Munk 1943). Munk also supported Petersen economically. Other poets included Soya (1896–1983) (Soya 1944, Preface), Helge Rode (1870–1937), and Valdemar Rørdam (1872–1946) (Rørdam 1940, 7–12).

It was not only literature that was an important part of Munk's universe. Theatre, film, and music were also very important in his articles. Like Hans Christian Andersen and many other poets, he was not happy about many the reviews of his book and plays. There is a lot of polemical writing from Munk with this background. He was a fighter and therefore also wielded a tough polemical pen.

At the very beginning of his journalism, he wrote in *Dansk Folkeliv*, on 16 January 1931, about Danish theatres. He began the article like this:

Kender De nogen, der gaar i Teater? Virkelig. Og-saa nogen, der laaner Skuespil og læser dem og drøfter dem? Nej, ikke sandt, lad os nu ikke komme uden for Virkeligheden. Jeg kendte en Mand i 1928, der endog købte Skuespil. *Købte*. Han er indlagt nu...

(In English: Do you know anybody who goes to the theatre? Really. Also, someone who borrows plays and reads them and discusses them? No, not true, let us come back to reality. I knew a man in 1928, he also bought plays. *Bought*. He is in a hospital for the mentally ill now...) (Munk 1931a).

After having seen twelve stage plays, he was not happy at all. In an extremely tough and very funny way, with a lot of jokes, he criticizes the low quality of the theatres' plays. He asked for big drama, intense feelings, and deep thoughts. Regarding theatre, Munk was always ready to be polemical and have discussions. The combination of art and making money was awful for him. He was also very tough on the audience.<sup>56</sup>

As previously mentioned, Munk was full of good words for the takeover of Germany by National Socialism. But he was not impressed by their new theatre writers.

De ser altsaa: der spares ikke paa Uejlighederne, for at det nye Tyskland ogsaa paa den dramatiske Kunsts Omraade skal kunne vise, hvad det duer til. Men endnu synes det Hitler'ske Styre trods al god Vilje at have været mere kommanderende end inspirerende.

(In English: So, you see: no inconvenience is spared, so that the new Germany can also show what it is capable of in the field of dramatic art.

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56 "Det er saa svært at føre Tidens nye Tanker frem, naar Tiden netop ikke tænker, og svært at tolke de store Følelser for et Publikum, der ikke kender dem og ikke savner dem, hos hvem baade Tanker og Følelser er erstattet med Bekvemmelighedsbegær (jeg nævner i Flæng: 8-cylindrede Vogne, Børnebegrænsning, Centralvarme, Konebytning, Hundehaarsfrisure og Selvmord)." In English: "It is so difficult to promote new thinking, when the times just do not think, and it is difficult to interpret big feelings for an audience, who do not know them and do not miss them, an audience where both thoughts and feelings are replaced with a desire for convenience (I mention among others 8-cylinder cars, child restraint, central heating, wife-swapping, dog hairstyling, and suicide)."

But still, despite all the good will, Hitler's rule seems to have been more commanding than inspiring.) (Munk 1934c).

Munk often came up with critiques of journalists. In 1931, he wrote about their incorrect attitudes to his plays, only, in the next paragraph, to thank them for 500 DKK for a study trip (Munk 1931b). Munk's income was very high because his success in the theatre brought a very good income. But his journalism also increased his income. He could travel to see plays in European capitals, and this gave him good opportunities to give his views and reviews on modern theatre.

### *Support for and understanding of the Jews*

The history of the Jews is very long and complicated. In Europe, there has been a long tradition of antisemitism. King Christian IV (1577–1648) invited the first Jews to Denmark in 1634, and after that time more came. As recently as 1807–1820, Denmark was fighting against the Jews, with words and more physically. In the 1930s, Denmark had around 8,000 Jews (Møller 2014, 246). After Adolf Hitler took over in Germany, many Jewish refugees came to Denmark. The government was afraid to give them permanent visas and stopped Jews from Germany with a J-passport from coming into Denmark, so many had to go on to another country.

At the time of the German occupation of Denmark, on 9 April 1940, nothing happened with the Jews. When the cooperation with the Germans ended on 23 August 1943, twelve well-known Danish Jews were sent to prison, together with a lot of Danes. During the night between 1 and 2 October 1943, the Germans tried to take the Jews in order to send them to Germany. It only succeeded in sending 474. Around 7,000 had fled to Sweden in small boats during the days before and after because the plans were not kept secret. Only 53 people – mostly old and sick – lost their lives in Germany. This makes it clear that Jewish history in Denmark was in some ways like the destiny for the Jews in Bulgaria.

In the 1930s, Denmark experienced organized anti-semitism. Some of it had roots in the very small Danish Nazi Party, but other groups were also created after the First World War, when European antisemitism was growing. Munk saw this antisemitism during his visits to Germany, and he was among the first to say no to this (Munk 1933c). He did this also at a time where he hoped that Germany, under Adolf Hitler's leadership, could become something new and better. He also told the Danes about the problems faced by the Jews in Germany:

Som De ser, Hr. Ingeniør, jeg har gjort mig den yderste Umage for at forstaa, hvad der synes en Dansker uforstaaeligt. Men hvad jeg aldrig kommer til at forstaa er den hitlerske Bøllefaçon til at gøre op med Jøderne paa. Mener han, at de er den Pest for Tyskland som han siger, maatte han dog se at skaffe sig dem fra Halsen; der maa blive Raad til at give dem de Penge, de har tjent, for at blive dem kvit, og saa ud af Landet med dem, ah! Men at røve dem alle Eksistensmuligheder og forbyde dem at rejse, det er en Optræden, der nok kunde kalde paa behjertede Kristnes tydelige Protest.

(In English: As you can see, Mr. Engineer, I have made the utmost effort to understand what a Dane finds incomprehensible. But what I will never understand is the Hitlerian bully's method to do away with the Jews. If he thinks they are the plague in Germany, as he says, he had to see to getting them from around his neck; there must be options to give them the money they have earned, to get rid of them, and then out of the country with them, ah! But to rob them of all opportunities for existence and to forbid them to travel, that is an act that could probably call for the clear protest of devout Christians.) (Munk 1933c).

His later defence of the Jews made him unpopular among the antisemites. But he did not stop defending the Jews in his articles, plays, and poetry. One of the best-known, most widely read and discussed articles about Jews was his open letter to Benito Mussolini (Munk 1938i), but he underlined that Jesus was a Jew against many attempts to deny it, including from the editor H. Hansen (Munk 1936j).

The Danish Church, Folkekirken, was also among the defenders of the Jews. On 29 September 1943, the Bishop of Copenhagen, Hans Fuglsang-Damgaard, on behalf of all the Danish bishops, sent a letter to all Danish priests in Folkekirken to be read on the coming Sunday. This was a strong protest against German attitudes towards the Jews (Lausten 2020, 179).

## Kaj Munk's brand power: His instant views in many media

A strong position in literature is easier if a poet uses other media, or if his texts can be used in other media. An interesting life story and lots of conflicts in the media also create a stronger position for the poet. As the only Christian martyr in recent Danish history, Munk had a very strong life story.

Our system in science today includes, among other things, to count how many times your scientific papers are mentioned by other scientists. In literature, for a writer, it is of course also important if you can write so that other media recount your point of view or start a debate. Here, we find that Munk was an excellent PR officer and a master of controversy. He appeared live on the radio, he was in ladies' magazines, in newspapers, in weekly papers, etc. He was used very often as a speaker at both small and large events. Those events were also used for PR. This made him a well-known man in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, and also in the public offices in Germany.

In Danish literature, we have Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), Gustav Wied (also from Lolland, 1858–1914), Herman Bang (1857–1912), Nobel prize winner in 1917 Henrik Pontoppidan (1857–1943), and Nobel prize winner in 1944 Johannes V. Jensen (1876–1956). All of them could be called mul-

ti-media poets. Their works had many readers, but their texts could also be used in the new media. They are also known for their conflicts due to their strong views on literature, culture, or politics. Zakarias Nielsen (1844–1922) was one of the most widely read poets of his time. But he only appeared in print with novels, short stories, and poems. No big conflicts, no use in new media, but strong in old media (“Forsamlingshuse” (“Assembly halls”)) in the countryside. The Danish Nobel prize winner (1917) Karl Gjellerup (1857–1919) wrote plays, poems, novels, and short stories, but he was not for use in the new media. (In Bulgarian you find “Pilgrimen Kamanita” (“The Pilgrim Kamanita”)). He had a few important conflicts with the brothers Brandes, but Gjellerup’s views frequently changed, and it was difficult for him to be “the talk of the town”. An important part of Munk’s brand was his trust in strong leadership and dictatorship. This banished him from a few books about Danish literature. His pro-Jewish views have also given him problems from some left-wing Danes, who were connected to antisemitism.

## Summary

Kaj Munk was a devout Christian and national influencer without strong connections to any of the wings of the Danish Lutheran Church, Folkekirken. He understood and respected most of the active Christians, and also defended other opinions in the church than his own. Munk wrote a lot, but only a few of his works as a journalist are used and read today; these are mostly his articles about hunting and nature – which are in many ways unique.

Munk’s articles were very widely read, also in reprints in his and other books. Many of his articles started debates with multiple participants. Munk was a mirror of his time in his statements, he reflected the key ethical, national, and social problems in his Christian way. His articles were full of humour. Munk was patriotic, almost a nationalist, during the Second World War. He was one of the organizers of the national rebirth of Denmark from 1940 after the German occupation. His hunt-

ing and nature letters still bring joy to readers in our time and indirectly tell us an important story about climate change. They will remain, together with his defence of the Jews, and his articles opposing the German occupation of Denmark.

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# Kaj Munk in Danish Literature between the First and Second World Wars

*Johan de Mylius*

## Introduction

Finding a simple answer to the question of Kaj Munk's place in the Danish literature of his period – between the two world wars – is almost as difficult as rendering a simple description of the common features of the entirety of Danish literature during that very same period. Both questions are complex, and the possible answers even more so.

Already the subject “Kaj Munk” holds in itself a number of possible themes: The playwright Kaj Munk; the contributor of various sorts of articles to newspapers; Munk as a political figure in the arena encompassing Mussolini, Hitler, and the Danish resistance against the German occupation, his fate, and his final rise as a national symbol in life and death, executed, as he was, by a terrorist group in January 1944; Munk as a vicar and his sermons within the frame of the Danish Lutheran church; Munk in the dual position between his life and service in the distant region of West Jutland and his successes in the theatres of Copenhagen; Munk as a provocateur and a sincere Christian in the sense of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855);<sup>57</sup> Munk between literary elite and rural reality; Munk in myth and real life; etc.

Consequently, I shall restrict myself to describing a few central points and in doing so will avoid a number of otherwise equally necessary reflections and complications. I do so not

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57 Danish philosopher, the founder of existentialism.

least because both Munk himself and the scope of contemporary Danish literature of his period are generally unknown to the foreign public.

### Three Aspects

Although Kaj Munk holds a significant place in Danish culture, and more specifically in Danish literary history, his name is mainly known to the general public for three reasons:

- 1: Among his numerous plays, mainly for just one drama, entitled “Ordet” (“The Word”), written in 1925, and receiving its stage première in 1932. A number of his other plays are more or less known by their titles, but nowadays are neither staged nor read. This is not in any way unusual, since Danish theatres in general avoid staging older texts, with our comedy writer Ludvig Holberg’s (1684–1754)<sup>58</sup> plays from the 1720s being the outstanding exception. Laughter survives, the rest is oblivion.
- 2: Munk’s fate in real life; that is, the story of his political attitudes related to first Mussolini, then Hitler, and finally his open opposition to the German occupation of Denmark from 1940 onwards, leading up to his assassination in January 1944, when he was taken by a German SS group and executed. Again, such interest in his personal life is not restricted to Munk alone. It is also true of many other writers and poets, that posterity retains an overwhelming interest in their personal lives, more or less overshadowing their work.
- 3: A few of Munk’s poems and songs have achieved huge popularity: “Den blå anemone”<sup>59</sup> (“The Blue Anemone”) (1943) and “Du ved det nok mit hjerte” (“You Know That Well, My Heart”) (1938), the latter being a short hymn that is included in the latest edition of the Danish hymn book (2006).

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58 Historian, philosopher, and comedy writer. The bulk of his comedies appeared during the period 1722–1728.

59 Written in 1943 as an encouragement to the Danish resistance, but at the same time an expression of common joy caused by the first signs of springtime in nature, renewed life. It was first distributed in a private printing (300 copies) to friends as a Christmas greeting shortly before he was shot, then published in his *Sidste Digte/Last Poems* in 1944.

These three aspects would each take us in different directions, in terms of describing Munk in the context of Danish literature between the two world wars. But I shall leave them behind for a while, and instead concentrate on the theatre and Munk's achievements there.

## Theatrical Background

When we consider the period of approximately 1800–1850, in retrospect it is obvious that the theatre (i.e., The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen) was THE centre of cultural life in Denmark, and hence the target of a considerable number of Danish poets in their striving for success (and income). But all that changes in the so-called “modern breakthrough”. Here, the focus shifts from the stage to novels and short stories, favourite genres of the new and broader public, who demanded recognizable reading based on realistic characters and detailed rendering of life and environments. Still, from the 1880s onwards, the theatre was staging the decisive new debates and problems, but not primarily in works by Danish authors. The Norwegians Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson took the lead, and were soon followed by the Swedish August Strindberg. These were names that achieved global fame and became representative of a new naturalism and realism. Drama produced by Danish authors confines itself to authors such as Edvard Brandes (1847–1931) (the brother of Georg Brandes), Gustav Wied (1858–1914), and Einar Christiansen (1861–1939), the latter still dominant when Munk made his entry. And then a contemporary of Munk: Kjeld Abell (1901–1961), to whom we shall return later.

The theatre that opened its doors to Munk in Copenhagen is one that was dominated by the aftermath of naturalism/realism from before and after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Besides a more traditional repertoire, the smaller Copenhagen theatres were also producing the popular revues, a genre also adapted by serious authors like Kjeld Abell and Poul Henningsen (1894–1967).

The actual backdrop for Munk's appearance on the stage is first of all the leading playwright of the previous 30–40 years, Henrik Ibsen. This Norwegian-Danish authorship (I call it so



on purpose, not only Norwegian, but Norwegian-Danish, due to the language and also because Ibsen's spiritual background was intimately connected to the "modern breakthrough"<sup>60</sup> in Denmark) primarily follows three phases: post-romanticism, naturalism, and symbolism. As everyone knows, it is the second phase that made Ibsen a leading figure in Scandinavian literature for decades and secured him immortality in world literature and theatre based on plays such as "Et dukkehjem" ("A Doll's House") (1879), "Gengangere" ("Ghosts") (1881), and "Vildanden" ("The Wild Duck") (1879–1884). As Wikipedia will have it: Ibsen is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after [Shakespeare](#), and "A Doll's House" is the world's most performed play.

Ibsen's theatrical model during this mid-period is a revival of classicist theatre, with its basic logical limits as to place, time, and action. It is an analytical theatre, a theatre of conversation. Dramatic action mostly takes place before or outside of the actual presentation. Nobody is murdered directly in front of the spectators. Its realism is a sober, strict one. Long before the influence of Freudian psychology, it excavates the roots of the present from the past, bringing the hidden and repressed to an explosion. It is a theatre that seeks truth at all costs, whether liberating or destructive. The dangers and limits of this were soon realized by Ibsen himself, as stated by Doctor Relling in "The Wild Duck": Average people will hardly survive being deprived of their illusions.

## A Wild Theatre

Munk introduces a completely different and *wilder* theatre to the Danish audience. An explosive theatre, in which action is shown directly *on stage*, here and now, not before the actual presentation and not outside of the setting. It is Shakespeare's theatre and not either Ibsen's drama or the classic French-inspired theatre, modelled as it is to be a modern heir to previous popular, visual, and riveting drama, certainly not an intellec-

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60 The so-called "modern breakthrough" introduced by the critic Georg Brandes in 1871, dominated debate and literature, with its full effect emerging in the 1880s.

tual, rationalist drama. Munk's theatre is, as it were, a megaphone for the revolutionary and powerful forces exposed in contemporary Russia, Germany, and Italy. While Denmark kept a low profile in attempting to shelter from the storms raging outside its peaceful borders, Munk insists on passion and wilful commitment on the stage, in the church, and in public debate – his three platforms.

This should direct our attention towards an affinity between Munk's drama and the expressionism in post-war literature of approximately 1918–1930. His first and longest play, "En Idealist" ("An Idealist") (1928), a historical-biblical drama about the ruthless King Herod from the time of Jesus, is perhaps the most obvious example of the influence of expressionism on Danish theatre. It is a display of violence, blood, and the darkness of a twisted mind.

Munk shed light on his intentions behind this monstrous drama in an article published in the newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* in 1928, entitled "Omkring En Idealists Urpremiere" ("Concerning the Première of An Idealist"). Here, he polemically sets off from a confrontation between contemporary Danish "zeitgeist" and the ancient tradition of heroic seaman-ship down through the centuries, right back to the Vikings, all in conformity with the mighty power of the ocean around Denmark. This leads him to proclaim: "Will and passion are also inherent in the national character of the Danes". And with reference to the royal hymn, "King Christian stood by the high mast on his ship in smoke and steam"<sup>61</sup> he addresses the present:

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61 "Kong Christian stod ved høien Mast/i Røg og Damp", written by the preromantic poet Johannes Ewald (1743–1781) as part of his national-heroic drama *Fiskerne/The Fishermen* (1779). It has achieved the status of a Royal Danish anthem. The more popular (since the 1890s) Danish national song is the one played at all national Danish football and handball matches, "Der er et yndigt land/There is a lovely country", written in 1819 by Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), the initiator of the romantic school of poetry. The King Christian celebrated in Ewald's poem is King Christian IV (1577–1648).

From this, it would seem unlikely that we Danes today should be immune to the new mighty artistic power arising in all the world. A youth has grown up who does not visit the theatre with the intention of sitting nicely and neatly watching nice and neat stuff. His appetite for life is much too vehement to be satisfied with tea and biscuits and to be brought to silence and good behaviour by tranquil plays, whose authors have been all too anxious that anything might happen on stage. The eyes of these young people have seen too much of the blood-red mist of reality to patiently endure hours of minute and detailed psychology. Film would be their preference. *There something happens*. Fighting, fleeing, cheating, forgiving, kissing, and murder. *There* they find it mirrored, a life not emerging from speculations in a bloodless poet's weak brain, but created by God's own fiery and eruptive will, life as it exists out there in the world they grew up in, a world where populations rose against each other with their existence at stake, where distress broke all laws, where good and evil did not exist, everyone was his own purpose and his own god, where heads were chopped off, limbs and brains crushed, and peace was accompanied by labour struggles, fraud, and intoxication of the senses, poverty, and plague. (Munk 1948, 26–29)

Furthermore, in this article Munk characterizes the figures in "An Idealist", saying that "none of this is abstraction or symbolic, it's living human beings of flesh and blood and fire and light" (Munk 1948, 26–29). And referring to a melting pot consisting of the philosophy of Nietzsche mixed up with the bloody chaos of the world war, he concludes: "My purpose has been no less than to create the drama of the new age and burn it into young receptive minds" (Munk 1948, 26–29).

Munk's play "Ordet" ("The Word") is another apt example of the transgressive and shocking in his theatre. It is staged in

a village environment on the far west coast of Denmark, just like the one where Munk himself served as a vicar. Far from urban life and minds in the capital, close to the dangers of the ocean, it is thus a setting for religious forces confronted by modern atheist attitudes, a reality of life and death.

One of the central figures in "Ordet" is the Jesus-like character Johannes, lingering between clarity and insanity, a consequence of his breakdown, which occurred when his fiancée was killed right in front of him in a traffic accident. Inger, his counterpart in the drama, dies in the maternity bed, and her unborn child is cut to pieces as the doctor tries to save her life. The shocking effect achieved by Munk is that he has her revive from death to life in an open coffin right in the middle of the stage, open and visible to the disbelieving audience. The Jesus-like Johannes is not directly the active force in this miraculous revival. It is a child who works the miracle through the single-minded strength of its belief in an appeal to Johannes/Jesus. It is an unbelievable and insane miracle in the theatre of the modern age. During a period of scepticism, or even in front of a majority of nonbelievers, this play has survived all of Munk's other dramas, and is staged and restaged right up until today, although the religious factions, Inner Mission<sup>62</sup> and the Grundtvig movement<sup>63</sup>, are now rather more a part of history than an actual and engaging reality in our society. "Ordet" is a bold and convincing scenic reality as it courageously confronts and meets the absurd, very much a successor to Søren Kierkegaard's concept of the existential and religious position of the absurd.

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62 Indre Mission, a pious Christian movement, officially founded in 1861, still exists as a faction of the Danish Church. Originally, it recruited mainly among West-Jutlandian fishermen and small farmers.

63 A movement based on the teachings of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), recruited broadly high and low in Danish society, and in a rural context above all among the more wealthy farmers. It was an optimistic, conciliatory version of Christianity. The popular Danish "schools for life" ("højskoler") have contributed to Grundtvig's position, even today, as a widely acclaimed reformer of politics, culture, and church in Denmark.

## Vitalism

The key word in the above-quoted preface to “An Idealist” is “life”, Munk’s calling for life, blood, action, and an outburst of real life. This is not just a key word for Munk, but also very much a key concept in art, literature, and outlooks on life during the post-war period. As a concept, it is in line with vitalism, often connected with expressionism. Nietzsche’s radical philosophy and the experiences from the battlefields, the trenches, and the revolutions during the period 1900–1920 are the main sources of the two often-interconnected currents: vitalism and expressionism. In Denmark, these currents can be traced back to Johannes V. Jensen’s (1873–1950)<sup>64</sup> early poems (1906), and further developed in some of the early works by writers such as Emil Bønnelycke (1893–1953) and Tom Kristensen (1893–1974),<sup>65</sup> in poetry and prose. Bønnelycke’s novel “Spartanerne” (“The Spartans”) (1919) and Tom Kristensen’s novel “Livets Arabesk” (“The Arabesque of Life”) (1921) are outstanding examples of the expressionist novel. Svend Borberg’s (1888–1947)<sup>66</sup> nihilist drama “Ingen” (“Nobody”) (1922), staged in Berlin, the centre of German expressionism, in 1924, takes expressionism to a new extreme. Both authors, Borberg and Munk, in “Ingen” and “En Idealist” dissolve the classical drama, divided into “acts”, and replace it with a sequence of loosely connected “pictures” or “phases”.

Among the Danish painters belonging to the abovementioned mixture of vitalism and expressionism present in Munk’s early works is J.F. Willumsen (1863–1958),<sup>67</sup> a unique painter of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Danish art, characteristic for his explosions of colour, light, and dramatic visionary composi-

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64 Johannes V. Jensen (1873–1950), a key figure in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century literature and debate. His most important collection of poems is *Digte/Poems* (1906). Jensen was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1944.

65 Emil Bønnelycke (1893–1953) introduced literary expressionism, Tom Kristensen (1893–1974) was a critic, novelist, and poet. In his early works, he was also affiliated with expressionism.

66 Svend Borberg (1888–1947) was a critic and playwright.

67 J.F. Willumsen (1863–1958), a leading figure in the early modern art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

tions; for example, "Bathing children at Skagen beach", "The Mountain Climber" and "After the Storm".

In Denmark, the cult of "life" inherent in literature and the arts between the two world wars was not limited to creative media, but was also a leading structure of thought in the works of the cultural philosopher, literary historian, linguist, and historian of religion Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948), who was a source of inspiration for the *Heretica* Circle (1948–1953)<sup>68</sup> during the 1940s. If we simultaneously take the ongoing inspiration from Nietzsche into consideration, we find names such as Ole Wivel (1921–2004), Thorkild Bjørnvig (1918–2004), and Karen Blixen (1885–1962)<sup>69</sup> worth mentioning. From the world of music, the composer Rued Langgaard (1893–1952) should also be mentioned a self-taught, deeply original composer, who received a lifelong ban from Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) and his disciples, who dominated Danish musical life for more than half a century. However, Langgaard has been rediscovered, and his work has increasingly been performed and recorded during the last 30–40 years, especially in the English-speaking world. This, of course, has no direct bearing on the subject of Kaj Munk. But there is a common denominator in the anti-intellectual, antirational focus on "life" and the belief in a renewal or rebirth of culture through inspiration, myth, symbolic presentation, and the flow of life.

"Life" is also a key word in the plays by another central figure in this period's theatre: Kjeld Abell (1901–1961). In contrast to Munk, Abell belonged to the political left, balancing between revue and cabaret, self-examination à la Ibsen, and, most of all, the visionary, lyrical, and expressive dramatic pictures as in "Silkeborg" (1946), "Vetsera" (1950), and "The Blue Pekingese" (1954). In his extremely suggestive and musical drama, "The Blue Pekingese", Abell presents one of his main motifs, the contrast between a fatal death drive and the con-

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68 A group of authors gathered around the literary journal *Heretica* (1948–1953).

69 Ole Wivel (1921–2004) and Thorkild Bjørnvig (1918–2004) were both influential poets. And both were connected to Karen Blixen (English author's name: Isak Dinesen (1885–1962)).

firmatory acceptance of the flow of life. Formally, this play is indebted to August Strindberg's "To Damascus" (1896–1904) and "A Dreamplay" (1902), which were key sources for expressionist-symbolist drama. The German director Max Reinhardt (1873–1943)<sup>70</sup> staged Strindberg's "Spöksonaten" ("The Ghost Sonata"), which made a deep impression on Kjeld Abell.

## Literary Position

In this overview, I have focused on tendencies in literature, theatre, the arts, and music from the period between the First and Second World Wars, all selected with the purpose of understanding Munk against a background of the profile of his time. This provides a description of Munk on the basis of his artistic scope, instead of the ongoing discussion of Munk within a political and national historical context, or as a martyr in his self-chosen position as a loud voice against the German occupation of Denmark.

Simultaneously, it should also be mentioned that the dominant tendencies in the 1930s are of a quite different kind: social realism and psychoanalysis, Marx and Freud, linked to names such as Hans Kirk, Poul Henningsen, Harald Hørdal, H.C. Branner, the young Martin A. Hansen, and many others. It is also worth mentioning the many authors who were addressing the rapidly vanishing rural culture, authors with many readers, but silenced by the official literary histories. Their works were published and read from approximately 1900 until 1950 – whereafter they were dead and gone.

Munk dealt with this rural reality in "Ordet" ("The Word") and for instance in "Kærlighed" ("Love"). It was a reality which he saw close at hand in his daily life as a vicar in Vedersø in West Jutland. This should also be kept in mind as a background for Munk and his works. He is both an outsider and a central figure at one and the same time.

Life and death are constantly at stake in and around Munk. He is his own drama, but he also personalized Denmark's drama up to and during the occupation. He was a believer and a

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70 Max Reinhardt (widely influential German / American director).

doubter, a fighter and a striver, a spokesman and a radical opponent. His death was to become a significant call for commitment and courage from the Danish population. He could quote Søren Kierkegaard's motto: "The purity of the heart is in the unity of the will" (Kierkegaard 1847).<sup>71</sup> And that was and is true, although Munk's own path to such unity and purity was stony and winding. His mindset was far from hesitant or cautious. In his soul, he was action and fire. As a playwright and a person, he was a living creature of flesh and blood and fire and light, the words he used in his self-explanation on the occasion of the staging of "An Idealist".

In both words and existence, Munk himself and his pen served LIFE, fully and totally. Perhaps that is why his works are still, in spite of a considerable distance in time and style, alive and provoke debate, are still staged in theatres, still shocking, and still prompting outrage.

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71 "Hjertets Reenhed er at ville Eet", a quote from Kierkegaard's *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand* (1847).





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# Power and Superiority in “Before Cannae” by Kaj Munk

*Nadezhda Mihaylova*

The focus of my chapter is the theme of power and superiority in Kaj Munk’s play “Før Cannae” (“Before Cannae”), written in 1943. It is a theme that dominated European literature in the period between the two world wars, and especially during the Second World War. This was a time of anxiety, disillusionment with the past, and no perspective on the future, filled with intense feelings of fear and uncertainty, of degraded values and beliefs. People felt lost and deserted in social, national, and religious terms. Anxiety, restlessness, and deterioration in personal and humanistic plans are some of the central themes in literature, and reflect the overall devaluation of morality and disorientation about the future of humanity. These predominant sentiments are a major theme in Danish literature too.

War raises the question of power and superiority because it is an intense contest for domination and stimulates the lowest passions and desires in people who are fighting for their lives, following political decisions and military strategies. It triggers the reassessment and degrading of values, which creates feelings of disorientation and hopelessness about the future. Thus, war changes the fate of whole nations. Questions about the meaning of human life and the price we have to pay for the establishment of peace are questions that emerge repeatedly in art, literature, and theatre.

The 1930s and 1940s in Scandinavian literature were a period of experimentation in forms of expression, visual means, and interpretation of the past and the present. Modernism and

social realism coexisted as literary trends in Danish literature during the 1930s, when Munk (1889–1944) made his breakthrough. He was then one of Denmark's promising young authors, who wrote poetry and prose, but became best known for his dramaturgy, as well as his highly critical publications as a journalist. Drama as a means of expression was also preferred by the Danish author Carl Erik Soya (1896–1983), whose brutal realism, as in "Parasitterne" ("The Parasites") (1929), psychological experience, as in "Hvem er jeg?" ("Who am I?") (1932), and ruthless satire as in "Umbabumba" (1935) (Rossel 1982, 208) are in accord with the spirit and striving for experimentation of this genre. The other two outstanding Danish dramaturgists of that period are Kjeld Abell (1901–1961) and Kaj Munk. During the Second World War, Abell's plays treated the topic of the evil forces against which humanity must fight, transforming the topic of the Danish occupation and resistance into a universal question, put into a philosophical and symbolic perspective of timelessness, where the boundaries between the brutal reality, the subconscious, imagination, and dreams are constantly being overcome.

By far the most significant of this generation of dramaturgists is Kaj Munk. He was born in Maribo on Lolland in Denmark in 1898 as an only child, and soon became an orphan. His childhood years formed his strong personality, his desire to survive and overcome the hardships of life, and he found firm foundations for that in his deep Christian belief. He studied Theology at the University of Copenhagen and became a pastor in Vedersø in Jutland. These biographical details, at first sight irrelevant to the topic of my chapter, are crucial for understanding the formation of Munk's life-views and firm Christian morals, which echo across his writings. He is one of those authors whose works are strongly related to his personality and biography.

The 1930s and 1940s were very productive for Munk, who soon became Denmark's leading playwright. His elaborate dramaturgy was widely staged in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. In 1931, "Cant", a historical play about Henry VIII, was staged at the Royal Danish Theatre and, after the perfor-

mance of "Ordet" ("The Word") at the Betty Nansen Theatre in Copenhagen in 1932, his place on the literary and theatrical scene was unquestionable (Dosenrode 2015, 22). Most of his works dealt with themes such as power, oppression, and the role of the individual in society.

Munk often clad the political issues and questions of his time in the image of historical figures, whom he subjected to a deep psychological analysis. The character of the strong ruler or dictator is at the centre of "Cant" (1931), "Fru Koltschak" ("Mrs. Koltschak" 1934), "Hamlet" (1934), "Sejren" ("The Ruler") (1936), "Diktatorinden" ("The Dictatores") (1937), and "Niels Ebbesen" (1942), in which the central theme is that of power and superiority (Dosenrode 2015, 23).

These plays could also be referred to as political dramas, deriving from the tradition of naturalism, the romantic, and classical drama, which he announced in a programmatic article in *Berlingske Tidende* as early as 1928, right after the premiere of his first play with biblical motifs "En Idealist" ("An Idealist"), in which the main character is Herod, whose prototype is Mussolini. This 1928 article is entitled "About the Premiere of 'An Idealist'", and in it he declared his intention to problematize the themes of power and its execution, the role of the strong ruler or dictator who was accepted as a messiah by the people but whose internal world is torn by doubt and uncertainty, and to promote these themes to the heights of classical drama, thus transforming them into universal ones.

"The Ruler" by Munk is yet another apologia for Mussolini's imperialist dreams, which found their practical realization in the annexation of Abyssinia. Despite his initial sympathies towards Nazi ideas, Munk never supported their movement in Denmark. At the end of the 1930s, he had to confess that these ideals had been crushed not by social, economic, or political oppression, or the overpowering militarism, but by racial discrimination and the Holocaust. In 1938, he wrote "Han sidder ved Smeltediglen" ("He Sits by the Melting Pot"), which is the turning point in his views about fascist ideology and dictators. It is an open attack against anti-semitism (Brøndsted and Kristensen 1975, 283).

Munk could not remain passive in the background of the political and historical events of his time. He witnessed Denmark's occupation by Germany on 9 April 1940, bravely objected to the censorship of the press and other publications, and was appalled by the atrocities of war. His Christian faith, his appreciation of every human life, and his belief in the principles of freedom did not allow him to keep quiet. In Norway and Denmark, the right to express political opinions was limited, publishing houses were under observation by the authorities and all literary production was controlled. Harald Grieg, the editor-in-chief of Denmark's largest most prestigious publishing house, Gyldendal, whose prestige remains until today, was arrested publicly at the National Theatre of Copenhagen in the summer of 1941 for opposition activities (Petersson and Schönström 2017, 331).

Munk's progressive and controversial ideas about the order in society, his rebellious spirit, and sharp tongue involved him in the current debates on cultural and political issues and eventually drove him to announce himself an ardent opponent of fascism in the press. He regularly wrote articles that were widely appreciated and discussed all over Scandinavia. The newspapers to which he contributed were *Jyllands-Posten*, where he was even employed as a permanent correspondent in 1931, *Nationaltidende*, and *Berlingske Tidene*. These were some of the most influential newspapers in Denmark (Dosenrode 2015, 21–22).

Munk's ideas about the political organization of society were obviously controversial. At the beginning of his career as a journalist and writer, he rejected democracy and advocated authoritarianism as the right way to organize political and social life. He strongly approved of Mussolini's policies and, in 1935, called him a genius and the saviour of Italy. In 1934, he wrote an essay entitled "Through Hitler's Germany", in which he expressed his enthusiasm for the Third Reich. Ideas about the superhero and Overman could be heard in some of his sermons in Vedersø, for which he was strongly criticized by democratic forces in Denmark. As a journalist, he travelled to Germany to report on Hitler's rise to power, expressing his excite-

ment about the new regime, and stating: “No Dane can honour Hitler’s deed more than I” (Petersen 2023, n.p.)

He was inspired by the strong personalities of his time, who had the power and determination to make difficult decisions and put them into practice; ideas originally deriving from Nietzsche and Freud. For Munk, these personalities were Mussolini and Hitler, whom he later rejected as figures to look up to, due to their inhumane attitude towards mankind.

Because of Munk’s contempt for the ruthless, but self-sacrificing despots, he was very respectful of the new dictatorial ideologies. It was his hope that Denmark too would find its strong leader and that he could awaken the nation through his writing. He clung fast to fanatical hero worship, although he revised his opinion of Hitler and Mussolini even before the war. (Rossel 1982, 209)

To many, Nazism was the third way between liberalism and communism, and it attracted many people with its ideas about a strong ruler and governmental power capable of uniting nations. With its authoritative and military structures, it probably seemed like the only solution to moral and political degradation. The young Kaj Munk was one of the people attracted to its ideas (Agger and Bondebjerg 2000, 360). With the distance of time, it is easier for us to reflect upon historical events. However, Munk experienced them from within. He was not only an observer, but also an active participant. He was emotionally and spiritually involved in them, and they provoked him to contemplate the themes of power and superiority.

Munk later had a new insight and found the strength to withdraw from his youthful ideas and the courage to admit his mistake. He went further, and put into action all his energy, all his literary and journalistic production to oppose the Nazis. He raised his voice against Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia in 1935–1936 and the Fascist persecution of the Jews. These events provoked him to write an open letter to Mussolini, published in *Jyllands-Posten* in November 1938:



Your Excellency, now YOU must act. You hate chaos, and you are healthy. You are just about the only healthy man in Europe who can act ... And tell your friend Hitler, that now it is enough ... in the name of mercy – solve this world problem, and we will kiss your hands. (Petersen 2023, n.p.)

Munk's initial ideals were shattered, and he re-evaluated his views of power and superiority as embodied in strong personalities. His play from 1936, "Sejren: et Skuespil om Verden Idag" ("The Victory: A Play on the World Today"), which was banned by the censors in Denmark and thus had its premiere in Oslo, is thematically connected with two of his other plays – the earlier "En Idealist" ("An Idealist") from 1923–1924 and "Diktatorinden" ("The Dictator") from 1937.

The occupation of Denmark by the Nazis was a turning point in Munk's career as a writer. As he became an ardent critic of the fascist regime, under the authoritarian tendencies and passivity of the Danish government, his publications in the press were banned, his books confiscated, and his plays no longer staged. The Nazis did everything possible to deprive him of the ability to speak out openly against injustice and the inhumane act of persecution on religious and ethical grounds. However, his voice continued to be widely heard. He had finally made his choice to act in the name of humanity. As a priest, he retained his strong faith in God, but as a man of action he was confident that God needed help so that harmony could be re-established in this world through practical actions.

He travelled around Denmark, delivering speeches and sermons, which inspired the Danes to oppose the oppression and the occupation, to stand up against it and defend their country by taking part in the resistance movement. The official authorities pursued him. He was arrested by Sonderkommando Dänemark and assassinated by the Nazis on the road to Silkeborg without a trial on 4 January 1944. His bible was found about twenty metres away from his body as though he had been holding onto it until the moment of his death and it was forcefully taken away from him. His killers put a note on

his body saying: “You, swine, have actually worked for Germany” (Dosenrode 2015, 33). This was an attempt to discredit Munk, and at the same time to shift the blame for his murder onto the resistance movement.

Thus, Kaj Munk became a martyr and a symbol of the resistance movement. He was conscious of the dangers but was convinced of the preciousness of life. After the end of the Second World War, his work as an activist was one of the reasons for Denmark being announced as an allied partner. Readers accepted him as a paragon of the patriot and anti-Nazi fighter, a hero whose life and works rehabilitated Denmark from the country’s passivity during the occupation. However, due to his preliminary respect for and interest in Mussolini and Hitler, Munk became “persona non grata” in the late 1950s, and his plays were neglected. It was as late as the 1990s before his dramatic works once again drew the public’s attention, when they were re-evaluated and approached analytically from a new perspective, at which time they were brought back to the stage.

“Before Cannae” is Kaj Munk’s last play, which was offered for publication in *Bogrevyen* in September 1943, although it took several months for the publishers to find the courage to print it. It was Munk’s last piece of dramaturgy to be published under his own name. This was a choice that he made consciously, but it was not a suicidal act of resistance. The play was staged posthumously in the Royal Theatre in Denmark on 25 October 1945, and met with huge success.

Although it is one of Kaj Munk’s shortest pieces of dramaturgy, this play is the focus of this chapter because it is special for several reasons. Munk uses the historical background to discuss issues pertinent to his own present – an approach he derived from colossal playwrights such as William Shakespeare, the Danish Adam Oehlenschläger, the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen, and the Swedish August Strindberg.

Historical facts and settings are a necessary tool to place the characters in a specific context, which is usually extraordinary or extreme in some way. Against this background, the playwright provides a deep psychological analysis of his central characters, raising fundamental universal questions about the

personal choices we make, the price we have to pay for them, the instinctive desire to dominate, and the meaning of power. This also raises the question of how history becomes a source for self-reflection and, furthermore, how this self-reflection could affect the historical consciousness of a nation.

“Before Cannae” is a one-act play, which takes about 25 minutes to perform. Munk was an innovator as a playwright, experimenting with this short form in which the key topic is explored and interpreted in a concentrated and highly dynamic manner. As is typical of one-act plays, the number of characters is limited, the story is focused on one event or problem, the action is quick, and the conflict is clear and transparent for the audience. It is an intensified way of delivering the central message in a brief and outspoken way. August Strindberg was a pioneer in experimenting with this type of play in Scandinavia; for example, in “The Bond”, “Facing Death”, “The Outlaw”, and “Simoon”, all written between 1871 and 1889. Another example of Munk’s new approach to this type of play is “Ewalds død” (“Ewald’s Death”), again from 1943.

“Before Cannae” is a dramatic work dealing with the themes of power in its different forms and the desire for superiority. It explores the corrupting influence of power and the devastating consequences it can have on individuals and society, and the death marks it can leave on whole cultures. The dialogue in the play is lively and highly spirited. Every word is precisely chosen, and its power is striking.

The action takes place in 216 BC during the Second Punic War, the night before the battle near Cannae, southeastern Italy, on 2 August between the Roman Republic and Carthage. The two central characters are Hannibal and Fabius. It is a historical fact that the Carthaginians, who were led by Hannibal, surrounded and annihilated the much larger Roman army. This battle is considered one of the worst ever defeats of the Roman army and is regarded as one of the greatest tactical achievements in military history. Hannibal was one of the cruellest and most insightful of military leaders, who had the ability to evaluate his opponents’ strengths and weaknesses and thus decide on the best tactics for battles. His well-planned strategies al-

lowed him to conquer much of southern Italy. His greatest opponent in the war was Fabius Maximus, known by the agnomen *Cunctator*, generally meaning “the delayer”. This name is related to the strategy that he adopted in his military actions against Hannibal, where he used defensive tactics and attempted to exhaust his opponent’s army rather than confront it directly. Fabius was a Roman statesman and general, at the time appointed as a dictator. He was also a strong religious believer and sought to please the gods by offering sacrifices. In his view, related later to Nietzsche’s too, strong personalities are required by the gods to act in the name of other people, to lead them and push forward historical events.

Without any historical background, Kaj Munk decided to create an imaginary meeting between these two central characters, thus bringing these two strong personalities, with their different views of war and its meaning, into confrontation.

The play reveals a unity of time, place, and action. The exposition consists of a dialogue between two guards, which provides the necessary background information as the first stage of the dramatic plot. The background for the action is the military camp of Hannibal’s army, where the soldiers are keeping guard and preparing for the important battle on the following day. The dialogue creates an image of Hannibal, who is obsessed with the idea of conquering Rome, expressed in the following words: “One of his generals asked him once if he ever slept. His answer was – ‘When I’ve taken Rome, I’ll sleep’” (Keigwin 1953, 263). The two guards discuss the fact that the Roman army outnumbers theirs by 30,000 soldiers, but as long as Hannibal is their leader, they are confident in their future victory.

In the middle of their conversation, Fabius arrives to meet Hannibal personally. Fabius and Hannibal are the two protagonists of the play and initially stand in opposition, despite their equal background and position in their respective armies.

Fabius Maximus pays a visit to Hannibal in his tent at the battlefield camp. Fabius has sent a message inviting Hannibal to a parley with safe-conduct to the Roman camp, to which Hannibal replied that Fabius might have safe-conduct to his camp, “then, if the safe-conduct were broken, it would be of no

great consequence” (Keigwin 1953, 263). Fabius accepted the invitation, which is a sign that he had overcome his reaction to this arrogant comment and his dignity as a great warrior. He is depicted as an old man who is used to living at a time of political conflict and is himself a representative of the military. His sight and hearing are bad and he is in a period of re-evaluation of his own achievements as a general and a dictator. He has the wisdom to look back on the past and value the present. Hannibal, on the other hand, is as self-assured as a young military commander should be. He is determined to win his victory and challenges his opponent in every way he can. He is cold-blooded, and sober in his evaluations. In the dialogue, he explicitly mentions that he does not drink anything except milk and water, meaning that he is always ready to act clear-headedly. The two military leaders decide to speak in private with no other witnesses to their conversation, which frees them from the obligation to act as generals and makes it possible for them to express their own thoughts and personal beliefs. This intimacy is a prerequisite for openness and eliminates the expectations of other people for their behaviour and decision-making.

At the beginning of the play, yet another obstacle to a frank, man-to-man conversation is cleared away. These are the reasons and political intentions that may stand behind such a meeting. Hannibal asks: “Who has sent you here, Fabius Maximus?” and Fabius answers:

Sent? Sent? Was I sent? I only wish I knew the answer. Shall I say – God? Or – instinct? Was it – I don’t know what to say. I haven’t come from Varro – nor from Paulus. [...] No, I sent myself here. I am getting on in years. I may die before I’ve realized many more of my wishes. One of them has long been – to see the face of the man who has caused us Romans all this trouble. (Keigwin 1953, 265–266)

Hannibal points out that he is not responsible for that and accuses Fabius of fleeing from him and avoiding meeting him on

the battlefield. He even makes direct accusations and mocks Fabius for his agnomen. The dialogue is dynamic and the discussion between the two main characters about the meaning of war and the role of the commander in battle is agitated. Fabius sticks to the right tone and presents logical reasons while trying to convince Hannibal to give up the war and keep the peace, ideas to which Hannibal responds with accusations of frailty and incapacity on Fabius' side. Fabius is full of self-esteem and confidence, but seemingly admits his subordinacy to Hannibal. However, he is the wiser and more experienced of the two, due to his advanced age. He realizes that every victory is also a defeat if war is driven by personal ambitions.

Nietzsche's ideas about the Overman are detectable in both characters, who act out of their own instincts, their personal desires, and intentions. They are both strong personalities and men of action, setting their own rules and forms of conduct.

The conversation between the two protagonists is a constant game of prevailing dominance. This domination takes the form of proving and outnumbering each other's army, the territories each of them has conquered, and the respect and admiration of each general's subordinates. The only difference is their age, which outdistances them in their evaluation of the present. Fabius says:

You take me for an old fool. You're right; that's just what I am. Back in Rome they think exactly the same. And that's why they trust me. But you, Hannibal, you're a genius; we all recognise that, and we thank Jupiter that you weren't born a Roman. The worst fate that can overtake a people is to be inflicted by a genius. A genius is bitten by the fixed idea that he can get the better of fools like us. But he never can. That's why he's doomed to failure. (Keigwin 1953, 266–267)

Fabius feels disappointed by his own people in the Senate, who in many instances have disregarded and misused him and have rejected his decisions, only to eventually fulfil them

themselves, realizing that they are the only possible course of action. This means that he is not a man to be feared, while Hannibal is a man who is both feared and never opposed. Fabius intentionally gives way to the younger Hannibal, whom he admires but also pities. The loneliness of an Overman is a feeling with which they both have to live. However, it is Fabius who intentionally dominates in terms of emotional intelligence, humanistic values, and social position.

Fabius mentions that he has five children and 13 grandchildren, and that he wants to see them play. Children play in the same way in Carthage and Rome, but Hannibal is not moved by this argument, because he has no children and feels no empathy.

Fabius: If you haven't children, you can get them.  
And anyhow I suppose you were a child yourself  
once and used to play.

Hannibal: I may have. (Keigwin 1953, 267)

Hannibal has obviously lost any feeling of compassion and cannot relate to his childhood memories. It seems that the two characters are a reflection of the two sides of Kaj Munk himself. Fabius is deeply religious, just as the pastor and resistance movement activist Munk was. As the historical facts prove, he believes that the fate of the Romans and of himself is in the hands and at the mercy of the Roman gods, to whom he makes sacrifices. Munk kept his faith until the end of his life, but in times of turbulence he believed that humility and resignation should be replaced with revolt and action.

Fabius asks Hannibal to keep the peace and return to the other side of the sea, at which Hannibal turns to him with the question: "How long will that peace last?" Fabius replies: "No peace lasts for ever, but every day peace lasts is a blessing won" (Keigwin 1953, 268).

At that, Hannibal bursts out and accuses Fabius of senility. Hannibal's tone changes and he shouts that Rome has formed him as the person he is now with the death of his own father and of his people and that Fabius is not in a position to ask for



peace. He was raised as a soldier, and war has made him the man he is:

My father took me from my mother's breast away with him on active service. I was only 9 when I knelt among smoking ruins and tried with my little hand to stanch the blood from the mortal wound in my father's left side which you had inflicted. That's how I played as a child. Now you want peace. (Keigwin 1953, 268)

These scenes of war, and the death of those closest to us provoke anger and the desire for revenge, which is carried on to the next generations and functions as a vicious circle leading only to destruction, not only in terms of material losses, but also at an emotional level.

Fabius responds nonchalantly to Hannibal's reaction with the following words:

I am sorry, but I didn't quite catch what you said. Would you mind saying it again? [...] There we have an old superstition that the one with the loudest voice has the least in his head; while truth can always get a hearing. But those are just our prejudices in the Senate. And anyhow, of course, we're an old, old people. (Keigwin 1953, 268–269)

This is the climax of the conversation, when the two protagonists realize that the conversation is leading nowhere and that neither of them will be convinced by the other's arguments. They each derive from different cultures and cannot overcome their feelings of superiority. Fabius knows that conflicts can be resolved with dialogue and compromise on both sides, otherwise there is only one way – to demonstrate power and leave death and devastation behind.

Hannibal suggests that this conversation should be brought to an end and Fabius agrees, expressing his regret that he has taken Hannibal's time and his own. On the other hand, it has



not been entirely a waste of time because it has raised many questions and he has come to a conclusion.

Fabius: [...] Please forgive me for coming; I've been wasting my time. That's no matter, I have plenty of it. But I've been wasting yours; that's more serious. Still, my visit hasn't been altogether wasted. It has given me an insight – my country is right; there's only one way of convincing people like you – and a nation that fosters people like you – namely, to kill you. Which must duly be done. (Keigwin 1953, 269)

Hannibal is enraged by these words and boasts of all his victories and achievements on the battlefield in an attempt to prove his military skill and his superiority.

Fabius provokes him with the question: "And what then?" (Keigwin 1953, 269). He assures him that it is not only about winning a territory but appreciating its culture, its people, and its past and contributing to its future. He talks about the Romans and the people they have conquered, and adds:

They don't like us, perhaps. But they hate you. For you are a wolf, as we were once. We have changed, but you will never be anything but a wolf. We conquered the world – call it a crime if you like. But, after that, we have showed that we could govern it [...] *You* are spurred on by hatred, vengeance and a craving for self-assertion. You aim high, you fight well, history will name you with admiration and respect. You're far superior to me and mine, I am well aware of that. *But I like to see small children play* [...] (Keigwin 1953, 270)

At the end of the play, Fabius puts out his hand saying: "Shall we give the world our answer?" (Keigwin 1953, 271).

To which Hannibal only answers: "Faugh!" (Keigwin 1953, 271).

In the exodos, Fabius replies: "Very well. My condolences on your victory tomorrow" (Keigwin 1953, 272). Once again, Fabius was right. According to the historical facts, Hannibal won the battle and lost only 6000 men, compared to the Roman loss of 60 000 men, but this was not the end of the destruction of human lives. In 146 BC, the Romans finally won the war and annihilated Carthage.

These final words provide an open end to the play, leaving the audience with the following questions: Is there a winner in any war? What is the price of every victory, and what is it about to lead to? What is the point of domination, if it is only aimed at proving one person's own superiority and power, if it leads to nothing creative or constructive, but destruction and hatred, that will escalate and grow in the minds of the people generation after generation?

Literary criticism often compares Fabius to Churchill and Hannibal to Hitler as an allegory to the fight against dictatorship (Kaj Munk Forskningscentret, 2023). Nowadays, faced with the absurdity of war and its effects on humanity overall, we ourselves could easily make the same comparisons. Strong historical personalities, such as Fabius and Hannibal, were obsessed with the desire for superiority and it devalued their personalities. Thus, they became the victims of their own power. Power leads to the loss of personality, disillusionment, and disappointment. The obsessive desire for superiority is always followed by degradation and devastation. Hard decisions can only be taken by strong personalities, and it requires great will to confess one's own mistakes, as Fabius did in his conversation with his key opponent, Hannibal. Munk conducted a deep psychological dissection of both central characters merely through their conversation.

"Before Cannae" is stripped of any asides or monologues and soliloquys, which is a technique that Munk used to intensify the dialogue and concentrate on the inner meaning of each phrase. The number of scenes is limited, and the rounded characters add to the exactness of their position in the dialogue. The end is open, but the final words raise fundamental questions about the meaning and burden of power and superiority,

of war and opposition. Munk is torn between his personal belief in the uselessness of war and the need to confront destructive forces. Only strong personalities can realize the absurdity of war and the need to preserve humanity and harmony by taking an active role. I sincerely believe that, guided by his Christian faith, Munk remained a pacifist in his soul, but also realized that all attempts to overcome the inner desire for domination and superiority with reason and empathy are futile. The huge question is whether humanity is still doomed to suffer at the hands of such personalities.

These themes remain up-to-date even today. Unfortunately, we obviously have not learnt our historical lessons. We are constantly fighting with our inner passion for power and superiority. We still find it difficult to suppress our egos in the name of the well-being of others, we still feel helpless and unprepared to oppose aggression in all its forms and expressions. However, the civilized and democratic world is making progress in this respect, and there is still hope for the future.

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# The Plays “Herod the King” and “He Sits by the Melting Pot” by Kaj Munk in the Context of Bulgarian Biblical Interwar Drama

*Elizaria Ruskova*

There is no phenomenon like the Danish dramatist Kaj Munk (1898–1944) in the Bulgarian dramaturgy of the period between the two world wars. A theologian by education, he worked as a pastor in Vedersø (Jutland) and in his dramaturgical works he clothed individual elements related to the Bible in secular plots, accessible language, and modern imagery. These motifs are developed as characters, for example, the three wise men, the Virgin Mary, and the baby Jesus are visions in the mind of the agonizing King Herod. But the biblical theme is also implicitly present as subtext in the play “He Sits by the Melting Pot” (1938), with its quotation from the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, whose idea it is that the power of Christ is fully manifested in weakness. This is an allusion to Germany, which lost the correct direction of development during the decade before the outbreak of the Second World War. These observations prompt us to attempt a comparison of the above-mentioned plays by Munk with one thread in the development of Bulgarian drama in interwar dramaturgy, namely biblical drama.

Biblical drama in Bulgaria has not been the subject of systematic scientific research due to ideological reasons that held sway until 1989, the year when the Berlin Wall fell. Then, the turbulent political developments directed the literary search towards the time of rejected and suppressed Modernism, with the study of its philosophical basis and codification of its poetics. This led to a gradual rethinking of the development trends

in native literature. Admittedly, biblical drama is not plentiful in terms of works, which is one reason why it does not occupy a central place in modern scholarship. Nevertheless, its study testifies to the rejection of 50 years of ideological atheistic hold over Bulgaria.

When we talk about modern biblical drama, we mean dramatic narratives that borrow – in whole or in part – stories from the Old and New Testaments in an explicit way. We do not include implicit biblical drama here, where a dramatic story follows the pattern of a famous biblical narrative, such as the parable of the prodigal son, in different times and with different characters. The interest in biblical drama is even more significant due to the fact that, according to the canons of Orthodoxy, the depiction of biblical persons or saints is not allowed and, in our country, there is no mediaeval tradition of the kind of church theatre, characteristic of Catholic Europe, with its semi-liturgical dramas, miracles, and mysteries, or of the imposing theatrical performances through which they are staged. A few more general contextual observations follow.

The total number of biblical plays in Bulgaria written during the period between the two world wars consists of only five texts. Their authors are Bulgarian intellectuals and writers with careers other than a theological one. Emanuil Popdimitrov (1885–1943), the author of “Jephthah’s Daughter” (1924) and “Job” (1942), was a poet, writer, playwright, and university lecturer in comparative literature. Grigor Cheshmedjiev (1879–1945), the author of “Moses” (1939), was a politician, journalist, lawyer, and writer. Konstantin Sagaev (1889–1963), the author of “The Beggar Yonatan” (1942), was a lawyer by education, but known as a translator from German, with interests in the theatre, who for two years became the director of the National Theatre in Sofia, and as the author of many plays for children and adults. Ivan Grozev (1872–1957), the author of “Judgement Day”, written at the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940, but published in 1945, graduated in Slavic philology, was a theosophist, freemason, religiously obsessed creator, idealist thinker, and mystic, and – as we will see later – among Bulgarian authors it is he who stands closest to Kaj Munk. A general over-

view of these authors shows that they were highly educated, some of them at European university centres such as Toulouse, Bern, or Vienna, and that their dramatic work fits into a broad interest in literature, theatre, and society.

A second feature of the listed playwrights, apart from Grigor Cheshmedzhiev who uses the realistic method of depiction, is that the remaining three are clearly distinguished modernist writers who worked as expressionists (Sagaev) and symbolists (Popdimitrov and Grozev), the latter participating during the 1920s in the publication of the review *Hyperion*, which is a peculiar phenomenon of late Symbolism in Europe in general. Thus, biblical themes are conveyed through the modernist worldview as a metaphysical conversation between this world and the hereafter, as an attempt to unravel the mystery of life.

The third feature concerns the field of the topics treated. In the early 1920s, Bulgarian authors focused on the Old Testament. "Jephthah's Daughter" by Popdimitrov and the first version of "Job" appeared in 1924 and 1923 respectively, immediately after the end of the First World War, when Bulgaria was on the side of the losers. It suffered casualties numbering about 115,000, and Bulgarian ethnic territory was divided up between all its neighbours. As a result of Bulgaria's participation in three wars – the Balkan War, the Inter-Allied War, and the First World War – the national ideal, and the attempts for national unification within ethnic Bulgarian borders, came to an end. The choice of the subject of Job, who loses God's mercy but perseveres in suffering without a blasphemous word towards God, is an allusion to the trials that the Bulgarian people had to endure while retaining the strength of their faith.

Tsveta Minkov, a contemporary critic of the author, gives the following description of the play – "In 'Job' a national worldview is promoted – stoicism in suffering" (1936, 144). "Jephthah's Daughter" conveys a similar motif, the father, a military leader, gives away his daughter in a kind of sacrifice for the sake of the victory of his people, and the preservation of their strength and integrity.

As a hidden background to the selected plots, we perceive an analogy with the idea of national destiny, the veiled politi-



cal in the socio-historical context, and an echo of the complex and stormy events of the first five years of the decade. After a long gap of 16 years, as late as 1939, the remaining three dramas were either written or published – “Moses” by Cheshmedzhiev, an Old Testament motif that chose as its plot the escape of the Jews from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and the return to their homeland, seen as the divine paradise. Two New Testament biblical dramas follow. The first is called “The Beggar Yonatan”, with the theme of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, his betrayal by Judas, the condemnation of Jesus, and his crucifixion, as seen through the eyes and participation of the fictional character Yonatan. Author Konstantin Sagaev turns to the biblical narrative to emphasize the theme of betrayal, the division between good and evil, and the clear position each person must take. The last play, from author Ivan Grozev, is entitled “Judgement Day” and is based on the idea of the day of the Second Coming, when good and evil will be repaid. Thus, in Bulgarian biblical dramas from the interwar period, we find a dependence on the historical-political context of the time and a search for trust in the eternal values of Christianity.

As we have already stated, there is no figure with a profile close to that of Kaj Munk in Bulgarian dramaturgy, but it still seems to us that we can find the greatest similarity with the playwright Ivan Grozev. Grozev’s religious and mystical passions are mostly related to theosophy, and what is more, from 1930 to 1934 he was the chairman of the Theosophical Society in Bulgaria. The main ideas of theosophy as a teaching are related to three principles: the universal brotherhood of mankind, nature is divine and is consciousness achieved through a complex process, and each person is the creator of his own life (Azmanova 2018, 82). Grozev’s play “Job” remains very close to its biblical prototype. The author emphasizes the temptations of Evil, human ambition, and weakness, as does the epigraph of Munk’s play “King Herod”. Grozev introduces the character of Satan as the instigator, narrator, and interpreter of all events in the play. Unlike Job from the Old Testament, the Bulgarian Job does not seek an answer from God for the misfortunes that have befallen him; instead, he becomes a symbol

of patience and providence for the salvation of man. He brings up to date the New Testament parables of self-sacrificing behaviour characteristic of the son of God. It is not by chance that God's messenger Elihu exclaims about Job: "This is the man". The play's antagonists consist of two characters. One is Satan, manipulative, arrogant, haughty, and full of contempt and hatred for mankind. The biblical Job is the questioning man who demands an answer and an explanation from God for the sufferings that have befallen him. In contrast, the Bulgarian Job is constructed as an enlightened hero who has seen the omnipotence of God and therefore addresses no questions or objections to him. The function of questioning, doubt, and discontent in the play is transferred to the second antagonist, Job's wife, Lilith, an entirely fictional character absent from the biblical narrative. She wants earthly happiness and does not understand the abstract faith of her husband.

The stage language of the play is unusually rich. The first two acts are dominated by the forces of darkness, allegorical figures such as the daughters of the underworld, drowning men, shepherds, and camel riders who are apparitions in the subjective vision of the suffering Job, depicted with vivid visual effects. The code colour of red, whose bearer is Satan, dominates. The transformation of people by the spiritual power of Job is achieved through catastrophic pictures, such as apocalyptic biblical scenes. Key signs in the final vision become burning, fire, and melting, a sign of the destruction of the earthly body and the rebirth of Job, an expressionistic finale in the spirit of prophetic-eschatological visions.

Translated into English as "Herod the Great", Munk's play was originally entitled "An Idealist". Grozev's "Job" is related to it by the principle of contrast. The word "ideal" is mentioned once in the play, when Herod addresses Mark Antony as "my beautiful ideal". In fact, the idealist Herod is fixated on one goal, possession of the crown, the power, and its preservation at any cost by murder, fraud, or any sacrifices, even killing his beloved wife. The pathological obsession with power and provoking and challenging God is an ironic response to Søren Kierkegaard's epigraph to the play: "Purity of heart lies in will-

ing but one thing". Herod the Great reflects absolute evil, without repentance, subservient to only one goal, which becomes his calling: not to be a slave, but to be a mighty king, and his true path is woven from blood and murder. He can be defined as Nietzsche's Overman, standing beyond good and evil. The real antagonist to Herod is not another contemporary ruler such as Cleopatra, Antony, or Octavian, but God, the old god Yahweh and the newborn baby Jesus.

Like "Job", Munk's play ends with successive episodes of visions of the dying king, conveyed with Shakespearean flair, in which he acknowledges his loss to the will of God, which is the will of history. In this regard, we can consider the playwright Munk as continuing the tradition of Henrik Ibsen, developed in his historical plays and especially in "Emperor and Galilean" (1873), a landmark that preceded the birth of Modernism in his work. In a certain sense, we can talk about continuity in the development of Scandinavian drama, which seeks out examples that are not part of the historical existence of nations, but a turn to global examples that can give universality to the messages that dramatic texts convey. In the Bulgarian case, it is the choice of a biblical theme that transforms the playwright's ideas into universal messages.

The next two plays to be compared are "He Sits by the Melting Pot" by Kaj Munk and "Judgement Day" by Ivan Grozev. Both titles are borrowed from the Bible, the first from the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, while the second connotes the day when individuals will be judged by God based on what they do on Judgement Day, and the unrighteous will be destroyed forever (Isaiah 65:20). The Bulgarian author was not a pacifist, as some critics believe (Popiliev 2008, 121). As a protagonist of the play, Grozev used the Wandering Jew Ahaspherus, a mythical immortal man. The legend about him began to spread across Europe during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In the original legend, he was a Jew who mocked Jesus on the way to the crucifixion, then was cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming and bear witness to Christ. The plot moves from the crucifixion of Jesus, through Nero and the torture of the Christians, through scenes of the mediaeval Inquisition, up

to scenes of the Second World War. Although the play contains only one explicit biblical scene, by means of biblical motifs the text builds an allegory of modernity and is labelled by its author as a “world drama”. The forces of evil which the mythical Ahaspherus opposes in modern times are clearly distinguishable. The character of the military man is named after the highest military rank in the Third Reich, field marshal, and the cardinal is designated as a papal legate. It is not difficult to find here national representatives from the Tripartite Pact, Germany and Italy, and precisely these figures are antagonists to Ahaspherus. It is no coincidence that the plot of the play begins with a scene of the city besieged during the war. Going back to the fable reveals the dividing forces between the Christian belief in good and the forces of evil. The Bulgarian play retains its mysterious character. The vision of Jesus Christ appears in pink flames, accompanied by the scent of roses and the funeral march of the Eroica by Beethoven. The multi-layered pathos of the play is directed against the initiators of the war, similarly to the Danish play, despite being written in 1938.

In Munk’s play, the protagonist is an archaeologist, which bears similarity with Grozev being a representative of the technical intelligentsia who becomes intoxicated by the possibility of new technological discoveries, and his antagonist is the poet who thinks about the preservation of human life. The biblical motif employed by Munk is an artefact of the time of Christ, a portrait of Jesus as depicted by his contemporaries, but around it unfolds a brilliant political play, ridiculing some of the ideological foundations of the Third Reich such as anti-semitism, the theory of the pure Aryan race, of Teutonic blood, and of Nietzsche’s Overman, which are shared by the common people of the country, the dominance of the racial aspect. The methods of the Inquisition are indicated by the character of Bishop Beugel, in reference to the Jewish scholar Dr Helm. The play is a satire of pseudoscientists such as the archaeologist Dorn, who distorts basic scientific facts and strays from the truth, a key concept separating the two opposing camps in the play. Munk extremely skilfully selects the configuration of characters in his play so that each one of them corresponds to a given stratum in

society and personifies its attitude to the political problem being discussed. The protagonist of the play, however, bears the universal name Mensch, or "man" in German, and is the only one who undergoes development and takes a humane position against the background of the prevailing Nazi ideology.

Continuing the general comparisons between the plays of Kaj Munk and the Bulgarian biblical dramas of the interwar period, we must also emphasize the difference in terms of the stage language used by the authors. As we indicated above, one of the peculiarities of the Bulgarian authors of biblical dramas is their prolonged dwelling within the artistic movement of Symbolism, which in this respect is characterized by Wagner's concept of the synthesis of the arts. A reflection of this principle can be traced in almost all of the Bulgarian plays, with the presence of musical accompaniment and short dance études. In this respect, Sagaev's play "The Beggar Yonatan" is remarkable because its plot reproduces the miracle experienced by the beggar Yonatan, who by nature is deprived of sight, hearing, and speech, but regains his senses on the Saturday of Lazarus when Jesus passes by him. This leads him to testify in favour of Christ during the trial before Pontius Pilate. Aware of the fact that the miracle of the meeting with the Godman must surpass the usual representation of life, the Bulgarian author includes four musical themes. These are musical motifs from the Western European Baroque heritage, expressed through music from George Frideric Handel's oratorios, namely "Messiah" and "Saul", as well as Orthodox religious music through the funeral unison litany and wordless choral song "Christ is Risen". On stage, these musical motifs are included to add more stagecraft and spectacle to several climactic moments within individual scenes, as well as within the plot as a whole. This is an attempt by the author to add more mysticism, aiming to bring viewers closer to the mystical experience of meeting the Godman. The plays "Jephthah's Daughter" (1924) and "Moses" (1939) which borrow motifs from the Old Testament, rely on visual and dance elements. In both texts, there is an oneiric theatrical space. In the case of Jephthah's daughter, before being sacrificed, she spends her time dancing

in the paradise-like nature of the mountains. Similarly, Moses' sister dances in anticipation of the Promised Land, describing it in vivid colours.

The combination of visual and sound effects is also characteristic of the end of the play "Job" by Ivan Grozev, during the victory over Satan and the rebirth of the new man. These scenes are closer to the spirit of expressionist poetics, and this is one of the reasons to highlight a greater proximity between the spiritual world of Grozev and that of Munk, whose finale to the play "Herod the King" is saturated with expressionist dreams of the king parting with his life. Thus, sound, vision, and dance are effective theatrical means that convey the mysterious, and the inexplicable in human life, because even though the plays are labelled with different genre nominations, such as tragedies or dramas, in every Bulgarian biblical drama there is a belief in mystery, in the mystical, an echo of Orthodoxy, which is the leading religion in our country.

"He Sits by the Melting Pot" could also be designated a political play. A similar political play in the Bulgarian dramaturgy of the 1930s and early 1940s does not exist. Such a thing could hardly have been written. Bulgaria's history during the Second World War includes an initial period of neutrality until 1 March 1941, a period of alliance with the Axis Powers until 9 September 1944, and then a period of joining the Allies until the end of the war. Nevertheless, Bulgarian society managed to save the Jews in Bulgaria by preventing their deportation from within the pre-war borders of Bulgaria to Nazi concentration camps. The deportations were stopped after a strong public reaction, in which the main actors were the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, members of Parliament, and trade union leaders, and as well as ordinary citizens. A similar humanitarian act also occurred in Danish society regarding the Jews in Denmark. But it is precisely the comparison between the play "Judgement Day" and the drama "He sits by the Melting Pot" that gives us the opportunity to take a new look at the Bulgarian biblical plays written between the two world wars. New functions stand out in them; namely, resistance to war, distancing from inhumane reality, and finding support in the

eternal biblical narrative of the vivid opposition between good and evil. It turns out that religious plays can and do carry a political charge when placed in the context of historical conflicts. They even become a political protest precisely because of the universal truths they contain. Biblical motives do not enter the secular and do not suppress it; on the contrary, they catalyse the processes of ordinary everyday life through the opposition between truth and untruth, good and evil, faith and lack of faith. This unsuspected dimension of dramas with religious motifs becomes particularly apparent in times of historical upheaval, such as the eve of the Second World War. In the decade before it, the attempts of Bulgarian dramatists were concentrated on making sense of the lasting, the eternal, in the historical life of the nation and humanity – it is not by chance that “Judgement Day” has been labelled a part of the world drama genre. The story told is universal and could be set in any city of war-torn Europe. The musical motif, from Beethoven’s “Eroica” symphony, which precedes the play, symbolizes the struggle of Europe against Nazism and fascism, providing a universality that extends beyond the Bulgarian dimensions of the conflict.

Munk is a representative of religious drama. In Bulgaria, due to the novelty of the problem, we talk about biblical drama, and it is difficult to get into the broader concept of religious drama. Therefore, here, we would like to advocate another idea related to a more global understanding of the religious motifs in the work of the Danish playwright and his Bulgarian counterparts. It concerns the motif of the miracle. It is well known that, in Bulgaria, as an Orthodox country, great emphasis is laid on the Easter holiday, which includes the resurrection of Jesus, and in general, it is with greater joy that this second of the two holidays related to the birth and death of Jesus is celebrated. A common motif in the work of the Danish Munk and his Bulgarian colleagues is that of the resurrection, although in Munk’s work this represents an implicit theme. It is evident in the drama “Ordet” (“The Word”) from 1932, which talks about the miracle in the genre defined as a miracle play, set among Jutland peasants. The Bulgarian play corresponding to the Danish original is called “The Beggar Yonatan” by Sagaev. It displays two mira-



cles performed by Jesus Christ, the healing of the blind, deaf, and mute Yonatan, who regains his senses, along with many other sick people, who are present at the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The second miracle is the very resurrection of Jesus. In the Danish play, we see the resurrection of the young woman Inger, who died giving birth to her third child, a plot that brings the play into a Scandinavian tradition previously shaped by the Norwegian playwright Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in his influential play "Over Even" ("Beyond our Power") part one, a mystical and symbolic play from 1883.

Both the Danish and the Bulgarian plays, ask the fundamental question of how miracles overcome natural laws or nature. Neither play sees the miracle as a supernatural phenomenon, but as a manifestation of the transcendent in human life. It is a sign and an indication to the common man of the existence of God, in the sense of a revelation that is disclosed to the common man by God's decision. He alone can be the doer of the miracle, and it exists as a gift to the person who, for one reason or another, has deserved it. In this Christian sense, both Kaj Munk and Konstantin Sagaev, divide their characters into those who believe in God, for whom miracles have a place in this world and who live without doubts, and those who do not truly believe in God.

This division is basic among the Bulgarian authors of biblical plays. In the majority of the plays considered here, it is implicit, distributed among different characters, bearers of good and evil. Only in Ivan Grozev's play is the mentioned opposition visualized through the figure of Satan, who in the play "Job" promises the miracle of eternal youth and sexuality to Job's wife, the fictional character Lilith. Here, Grozev is asserting the difference between divine revelation and false imitation. He finds the interrelationship between miracle and revelation mutually conditioning, but generally more important is the fact that the miracle confirms pre-existing faith. Therefore, the relationship between Job and God remains steadfast and unchanging, despite the sufferings that are inflicted upon the man, and the "miracle" intended for Lilith does not work because it is the deceptive miracle of Satan.



Both Munk and Grozev focus on not only a theological, but also a philosophical question, and its extensive analysis in the plays should help the modern audience to direct the relationship between the particular and the general, between the eternal and the ephemeral. A specific individual is saved, but the order remains unchanged. The great similarity between the two authors' protagonists is that their belief in miracles is devoid of any selfish purpose. Faith gives them both life and light in the life they live with God every day. Despite the sufferings of the Bulgarian Job, his faith, like that of Munk's protagonist Borgen, is cheerful because it discovers trust in God every single day of his life, enhances his spirituality, and makes him happy.

Posing such serious questions as the meaning of faith, the meaning of miracles, how to distinguish between faith and unbelief, and their skilful discussion through full-blooded characters gives these plays by Kaj Munk and Ivan Grozev the quality of intellectual debates, which was especially important during the interwar period with the emergence of new ideologies. The return to faith and its affirmation was one of the ways to resist the evil that hung over Europe in the form of totalitarianism and Nazism. The universality of the issues and of critical rational thinking lends these writers a significance that transcends local national boundaries. Munk's plays are performed not only in his homeland, but also in other Scandinavian countries and Great Britain, with great success. Among the Bulgarian authors of biblical drama, Grozev gained the greatest fame, with three of his plays, among them "Job", being translated into French, and in 1928 he was proposed by a Bulgarian committee as a candidate for the Nobel Prize, taking into account the comprehensiveness of the questions he raised in his work. In conclusion, we can note that the plays with religious motifs discussed here have still not lost their relevance, and each new generation can make a new reading of the universal truths presented in them.

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# Nordahl Grieg and Kaj Munk: A Comparative Analysis

*Antonia Gospodinova*

The subject of this chapter may seem a little strange: comparing the work of the Danish theologian and pastor Kaj Munk with that of the staunch Norwegian communist Nordahl Grieg does not at first sight presuppose finding many similarities. However, I find interesting parallels between the two, both biographically and in terms of their creative works.

They were contemporaries, with Munk born in 1898 and Grieg in 1902. They started their literary careers very early, while still at school, and worked as both journalists and writers, predominantly of drama, but also of poetry and prose. Their backgrounds and family environments, however, were very different. While Munk lost his parents at a young age and was raised by another family on a farm in the Danish countryside, Grieg came from a prominent Bergen family. His great-great-grandfather was the poet Johan Nordahl Brun (after whom he was named), one of the most prominent representatives of “Norske Selskab” – the Norwegian literary society in Copenhagen at the end of the 18th century – and the author of Norway’s first unofficial anthem (called by Henrik Wergeland “The Norwegian Marseillaise”). A distant relative of the family was the composer Edvard Grieg.

Nordahl Grieg’s father was a lecturer and had a strong interest in literature. There was a large library in their home, and conversations on literary topics were often held. The children in the family grew up with literature. Therefore, it is not surprising that Nordahl made his first attempts as a writer while

still a student at Bergen Cathedral School, and his older brother Harald became the most famous and influential publisher in Norway.

In 1920, Nordahl Grieg entered the University of Oslo, where he studied philology, but for a while he interrupted his studies and became a sailor. On board the cargo ship *Henrik Ibsen* he travelled to Africa and Australia and, influenced by his experiences on this trip, he published his first collection of poems, "Around the Cape of Good Hope", in 1922.

After graduating from university, Grieg worked as a journalist and wrote reports of various trips. In 1927, he was sent as a newspaper correspondent to China where, at that time, there was a civil war. Grieg published his reports as a book entitled "Chinese Days". In the same year, he wrote his first plays – "A Young Man's Love" and "Barrabas". The first of these two plays has a modern theme and describes the complicated relationships of the main character with three women. The writer himself considered the play not particularly good and years later insisted that it should not be included in his collected works.

Much more original is the second play – "Barrabas", written during Grieg's stay in China and directly inspired by the events he witnessed there. The basis of the play is the biblical story of Barrabas, who, according to the New Testament, was a prisoner who was chosen over Jesus by the crowd in Jerusalem to be pardoned and released by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate at the Passover feast.

The same biblical plot is the basis of Kaj Munk's first significant play, "Pilatus" ("Pilate"), written in 1917. It is interesting that the two playwrights looked at the same plot under the conditions of a brutal and cruel war – Munk during the First World War and Grieg during the Chinese Civil War. However, the approaches of the two writers are very different.

The main conflict in Grieg's play is the relationship between ends and means. Do the ends really justify the means? Can good prevail without the use of violence? In the play, Barrabas is a violent rebel supported by the population, who suffers under the harsh Roman rule. The play begins with stories of the

suffering people, recounting the misfortunes that have befallen them – disease, famine, flood, death – with the implication that the source of all these evils is foreign oppressors. Some claim that Barrabas wants to rise up and lead the people and that this is the path to their salvation. But others say that the saviour is Jesus, and he should be followed.

The central conflict in the play is between Barrabas' violent rebellion and Jesus' nonviolent message. The Pharisees do not believe in the pacifist message of Jesus. They conspire against him and the play ends with the people demanding that Pontius Pilate release Barrabas. The struggle between good and evil and the inevitable loss of good is the basic theme of Grieg's creative works, and this is very clearly demonstrated in "Barrabas".

In his play, Munk looks at this biblical story from a different perspective. In his rendition, the focus falls not on Barrabas or Jesus, but on Pilate – a man with great power – and his difficult dilemma between responsibility and duty. In Munk's interpretation, he is trying by every means possible to avoid doing his duty as it has been orchestrated by the manipulation and scheming of a Jewish priest (Caiaphas). After listening to the crowd's demands that Barrabas be pardoned and Jesus crucified, Pilate tries to justify his decision to his own conscience, but deep down he realizes what a terrible mistake he is making. Sometimes he regrets pardoning a child murderer, while at other times he justifies his actions by regarding them as duties that arise from the high position he holds. Hence, Munk divides the responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion between Pilate and the crowd. The play ends with a conversation between Pilate and his wife Julia. She initially accuses him of allowing Jesus to be crucified and cannot forgive him, declaring: "Now Life is killed. And Love crushed and Truth paralyzed." At that point, John the Baptist appears, saying that Jesus has conquered death and his work is now finished. At these words, the sun appears again and floods everything with light. After all this, Pilate now perceives his role in another way – not as a murderer, but as the executor of part of a higher plan.

While Grieg's play ends with the release of Barrabas, in Munk's play Pilate's personal drama begins at that moment. Grieg views the conflict from a social and political perspective, while Munk views it from a psychological and moral aspect.

Although the two plays are very different, what they have in common is the question of personal responsibility in all its dimensions. One perspective explores the personal responsibility of each individual for his (or her) actions, guided by universal moral principles, without hiding behind collective and anonymous guilt. The other focuses on the responsibility of people in power, those who have the power to rule the crowd and, in some cases, manipulate it.

These plays are also prophetic to some extent. Grieg's play "Barrabas" begins with the words: "The action may take place in China today. In India tomorrow. In Palestine two thousand years ago." Written in response to the First World War and the Chinese Civil War respectively, both Munk and Grieg seemed to anticipate the new threat looming over Europe and the world – the rise of Nazism by means of the manipulation and zombification of vast masses of people, culminating in the outbreak of the Second World War.

Although they took different ideological positions, both Nordahl Grieg and Kaj Munk fell victims to this war – Grieg died as a war correspondent aboard a warplane over Berlin on 2 December 1943, and Munk was killed by the Gestapo a month later, on 4 January 1944.

Today, when Europe is again at war, when we are witnessing the violation of all the norms of humanity, I would like to end with an excerpt from Nordahl Grieg's poem "Til Ungdommen" ("To the Youth") (Sinclair 2023; Nordahl 1947):

War is contempt for life,  
Peace is creation  
Death's march is halted  
By determination

(Krig er forakt for liv.  
Fred er å skape.  
Kast dine krefter inn:  
døden skal tape!)





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# Interfaces to the Digital Kaj Munk Archive as Research Tools

*Peter Øhrstrøm*

Scholars and students with some knowledge of Danish language and with an interest in the study of the works of Kaj Munk may benefit from the use of the digital research tools provided by the Kaj Munk Research Centre at Aalborg University (AAU). The aim of this chapter is to give a brief presentation of these interactive tools.

Since its inception in 2005, the Kaj Munk Research Centre has worked on the digitization of the large Kaj Munk collection that has been placed at AAU, making it available online to the public in Denmark and elsewhere. The digital Kaj Munk Archive will eventually include annotated versions of everything Munk published during his life, and everything published after his death: his sermons, his speeches, and everything else he wrote, including unfinished works that he might have considered for publication at a later date. The digital archive should ideally also include the letters he wrote, as well as those he received. Furthermore, it should include Munk's personal notes and documents, diaries, preliminary drafts, photos, etc. Finally, the ambition is to include as much as possible of what has been written and broadcast about the life and works of Kaj Munk.

Obviously, the Aalborg collection, started as it was in 2005, is not sufficient to provide everything necessary to establish a digital archive as described above. Material from many other sources must be added. For this reason, the members of staff at the Kaj Munk Research Centre have constantly been trying to

locate relevant material included in other collections around the country. This means that both the physical collection at AAU and the digital archive at the Centre have grown significantly over the years. Many texts have been transcribed, and dates, publication venues, and other metadata about the texts have been meticulously researched and added. Furthermore, explanatory notes and editorial introductions have been created for a large number of the texts. In this way, it has been made possible to search broadly and view texts online from the Aalborg collection, as well as items from other collections.

The number of items in the digital archive is currently 4511 (accessed 1 August 2023). An item can be anything from a picture, a letter, or a poem of just a few lines, to a manuscript of several hundred pages.

The aim has been not only to make the texts of the Kaj Munk collection available in digital form to the public, but also to provide tools that support research into Munk's texts and thought. A small selection of the research that has been made possible by the Kaj Munk Archive is cited in the Bibliography section (2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2014, 2021).

## Two user interfaces

Since 2005, a number of user interfaces to the digital archive have been discussed, explored, and implemented at the Kaj Munk Research Centre (2023a, 2023b, 2010). Over the years, the Centre has constantly tried to make access to the online collection as user friendly as possible. Two user interfaces are offered on [www.kajmunk.aau.dk](http://www.kajmunk.aau.dk), *The Digital Archive* and the *Timeline*. The choice between the two interfaces will obviously depend upon the task that the user has in mind and its context.

## The Digital Archive

This approach makes it possible to search the digital archive in a straightforward and traditional manner, referring to basic properties of the items in the database, including a categorization that has been added and is currently under further development. Sometimes more than one category has been added to an item in the archive. An illustration of the use of the Digital

Archive is shown in Fig. 1. A video explaining the options available when using this approach is available on the website.

Fig. 1. The User Interface to the Kaj Munk Digital Archive. The illustration shows a search attempting to locate Kaj Munk's most famous poem, "Den blaa anemone" ("The blue anemone").

## The Timeline

The most recent user interface offered by the Kaj Munk Research Centre is the so-called Timeline. It is based on the dates added to texts in the Archive, and it offers a quick overview of items found in the Archive that fulfil a number of selected criteria. For example, Fig. 2 (Next page) shows the result of a search in the archive for texts in which Kaj Munk uses the word "evighed" ("eternity"). It is assumed that, for some reason, the user wants to limit the search to texts written in the date range from 9 June 1935 to 9 June 1945.

Clearly, the Timeline Interface can be very useful when we want to find texts in which Munk refers to a certain topic (here: "eternity"). The various colours represent categories of texts: books (pink), newspaper articles (blue), dramas (yellow), sermons (orange), or articles about Munk (purple). In this way, the user may gain a first indication regarding the categories in which the word "eternity" is mentioned, i.e., where to look for sources relevant to a discussion of Munk's ideas. In fact, the timeline gives direct access to Munk's texts themselves. The



With this information, it becomes easy to count the occurrences, and to group them into periods of, e.g., five years each:

Period	Number of texts by Kaj Munk including the word “mirakel” or one of its declinations
1920–1924	2
1925–1929	16
1930–1934	18
1935–1939	16
1940–1944	22

Obviously, not a great deal can be deduced from an overview of this kind. On the other hand, it does suggest that Munk focused on the notion of miracles, and that he frequently mentioned it in his writings from 1925 onwards, which was also the year in which he wrote his most famous play, “Ordet” (“The Word”), which is often understood as a treatment of the very idea of miracles and its role in Danish culture and faith. It should be noted that, in Fig. 3, this important play has been hidden in a group of seven texts. However, in Fig. 4, below, the search has been limited to the Drama category, and thus the famous play is explicitly displayed. Some of the plays occur in

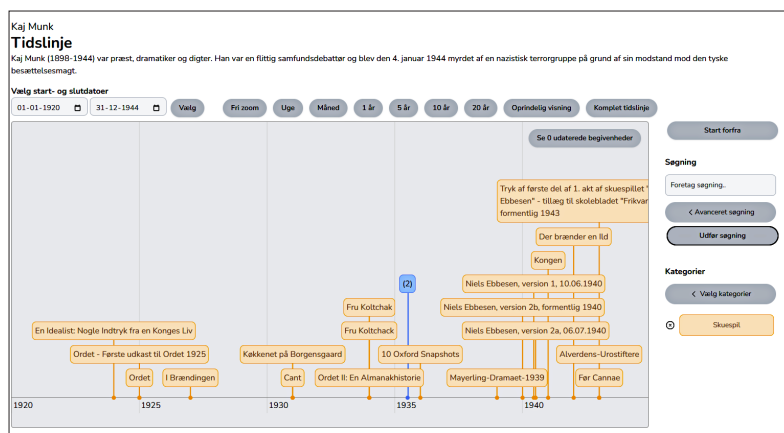


Fig. 4. The search in Fig. 3 limited to the Drama category.



several versions, each of which gives rise to a “hit”. This obviously increases the occurrence count. However, it is evident from the overview presented in the figure that Munk made references to miracles in several of his plays.

In the same way, we may also choose to limit the search to Munk’s articles. It might be noted that none of them are dated before 1930. This is probably due to the fact that Munk became an employee at *Jyllands-Posten* in 1930. Having Munk’s newspaper articles displayed, one might click through to the texts and read them, in order to obtain a more detailed account of his view on miracles.

One important article to select would be Kaj Munk’s reply to the senior leader in the Student Organization, Professor Brøndsted, who had recently asked the religious students in the organization to be religiously tolerant in their discussions – apparently in the sense that they should not refer too often to religious ideas in their discussions with their non-religious fellow students on matters such as courage (see Fig. 5). The topic of courage was clearly on the agenda among students during the German occupation of Denmark. However, in a rather polemical manner, Munk argued that, if the purpose of the discussion was to create new courage in someone who had none, then there is an obvious need for a miracle – apparently

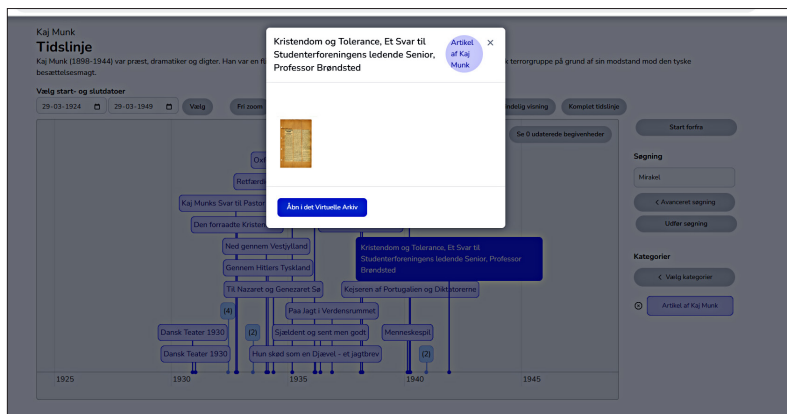


Fig. 5. One article is selected from the display. The text itself can be accessed by clicking through to the Virtual Archive.

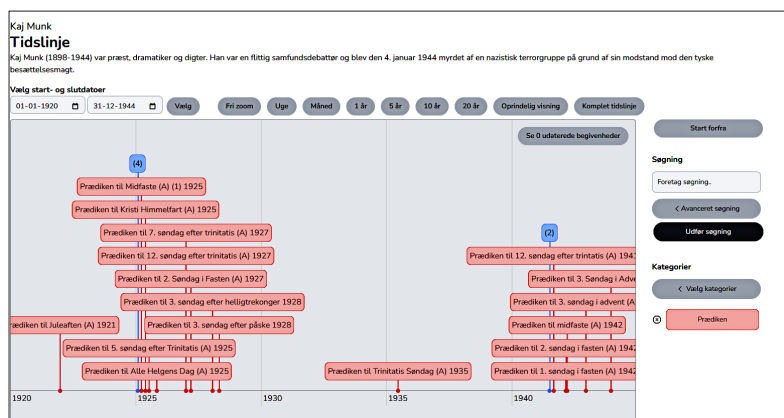


Fig. 6. A search in the digital archive for sermons by Kaj Munk that contain references to miracles.

because the courage in this case would have to be created from nothing. And in the article, Munk pointed out that, if we need miracles, then we cannot make do with anything less than a God who can make them happen. (In Danish: “Skal vi til at have Mirakler, kan vi ikke klare os med mindre end en Gud til at gøre dem.”)

It is obvious that if we want to explore Kaj Munk’s understanding of miracles, there is a lot of information to be found in his sermons. The diagram in Fig. 6 shows the result of a search in the digital archive for sermons in which there are references to miracles. At first, it may look as though Munk mainly referred to miracles during the 1920s and the 1940s. However, we must be careful here. For it is also clear that the total number of sermons dated to the 1930s in the digital archive is significantly lower than the total number of sermons stored in the archive dating from the 1920s, and it is also much lower than the number of sermons from the 1940s stored in the archive. It is likely that many of Munk’s sermons during the 1930s are unknown because he simply preached without a manuscript and felt experienced enough to do so. However, during the German occupation of Denmark, he had to have his sermons in a written form, because he knew that many of them were going to be published – in many cases as an important expression of his resistance against the German occupation.

## Using the Timeline Interface to Solve Riddles

As we have seen above, the Timeline Interface of the Kaj Munk Digital Archive can offer a quick overview of the texts we want to study, and it can also provide easy access to the texts. In addition, this interface can sometimes assist us in solving particular problems or riddles that we face when working with Munk's writings. To illustrate how the Archive can be used in this context, we consider the following famous letter to "The Hunting Master"; see (Harfeld et al. 2021):

Below, we provide a translation of the text in the letter shown in Fig. 7:

"Vedersø Pastor's Home 9/4–1935

Dear Hunting Master,

Never, never, never ask  
whether it will avail anything,  
only,  
whether it is true.

Kind regards,  
Your affectionate  
Kaj Munk."

However, it is not stated in the letter who the "Hunting Master" is. Although the letter is very well known and often quoted, its context is almost never mentioned. This obviously gives rise to an interesting historical riddle that needs to be solved based on the sources. In fact, the answer follows from information stored in the Digital Kaj Munk Archive.

In this case, the Timeline Interface turns out to be very useful. Fig. 7 shows the result of a search in the Digital Archive for letters and articles written during the period immediately prior to 9 April 1935:

As shown in Fig. 8 (Next page), the writer Gunnar Nislev (1895–1978) wrote a letter to Munk on 7 April 1935. It is obvious that this is the letter to which Munk is replying a few days

Vedersø Byd 9/4 1935-

Kære Jørgen,

aldrig, aldrig, aldrig spørg,  
om det nytter,

bare,

om det er sandt.

Verdy' Højen.

Der's hængene

Kaj Munk.

Fig. 7. Letter from Kaj Munk dated 9 April 1935.

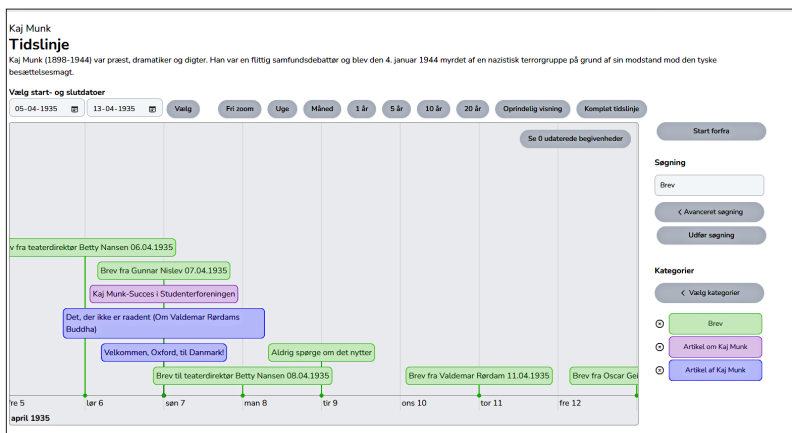


Fig. 8: The result of a search in the Digital Archive for letters and articles written during the period immediately prior to 9 April 1935.

later. This is evident from the signature used by Nislev in the letter, “Jægermester Plov” (trans: “Hunting Master Plov”), as shown in Fig. 9, below.

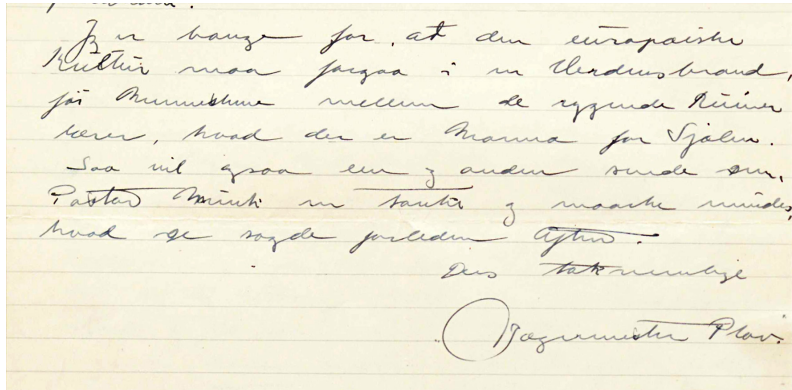


Fig. 9: Last part of the letter from Gunnar Nislev to Kaj Munk, dated 7 April 1935.

In his letter, Nislev wants to thank Munk for his recent talk to the Student Organization, which was reported in the newspapers. However, Nislev points out that he is uncertain whether Munk’s (and Nislev’s own) significant and serious messages about the importance of the soul and culture will be of any avail after all. Munk’s reply is a clear encouragement to continue sharing the truth with the public.

## A Need for Further Development of the Digital Archive

The Digital Kaj Munk Archive is obviously a useful research tool as it is right now. As we have seen, it may help the researcher both to obtain a quick overview of any relevant Munk-related sources, and to gain access to the texts themselves. In some cases, the Archive may even assist the researcher in solving important research riddles.

On the other hand, it is also obvious that the tool could become even stronger in a number of ways. For example, more sources can and should be added to the Archive. Furthermore, the information related to each post could in some cases be expanded or made more precise. It is also very important that the organization of the digital archive is as user-relevant as possible. In particular, the system of categories should be carefully thought through and discussed with individuals with editor-level authority, as well as other key users.

### Acknowledgements

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# The Art of Translation: “Ordet” by Kaj Munk

*Ana Maria Martins da Costa Santos Langkilde*

## The Beginning

Our introduction to the problem of translation was related to studies about Hans Christian Andersen’s work, specifically, “The Ugly Duckling”. After reading the English, French, and Spanish translations – and of course the Portuguese ones – those readings did not provide answers to several questions. We tried to discuss and share our doubts with colleagues at the university, but no one, at that time, was interested in *both* Andersen *and* problems relating to translation. In Brazil, before students finish their theses, they meet with a committee made up of professors from the university and experts in the theme to be evaluated. Among the many questions and suggestions they gave at that moment, one set called for deep attention. They were a sort of warning:

“Have you ever been to Denmark? Have you ever had any kind of contact with the country, culture, society, or traditions in that country? Have you read the story or tried to understand the story in Danish while considering the peculiarities of the country? Do you read Danish?”

Unfortunately, the answers were NO to all these questions. The advisor’s suggestion was to apply for a scholarship and travel to Denmark; otherwise it would be very difficult to analyse the story, especially when you do not have any sort of information about Andersen’s homeland.

Spending six months at the Hans Christian Andersen Centre under Johan de Mylius’ guidance helped, but did not solve the

problem. That experience was very important for gaining an understanding of the context in which Andersen lived. Part of the translation problem was solved, but part of it remained. There was still work in front of me, to translate "The Ugly Duckling" but from a new viewpoint, with new eyes after some months in Denmark. The purpose was not to analyse the translation, but to better understand the story in the original Danish, not in other languages. At that point, the theory of translation, as an art, was also one of the main issues. Trying to decide which was the best way to overcome the problems of the translation led to a huge bibliography about translation. How and where should we start?

The discussions about translation theory started some centuries ago. There is a fresco in All Saints Church in Florence (1480) which reminded us or illustrated the problem of translation in an artistic way. It is a very strong example of it. On the fresco we can see a man sitting alone at a table, reading and writing something. Who is he? He is Saint Jerome, who was invited "to revise the existing Latin translation of the Old Testament using the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Septuagint as basis" for Pope Damasus. Why should the Pope order this kind of work? Because he noticed differences, discrepancies among the versions. He, indeed, would like a new version, to avoid this kind of problem. So, why is the fresco so important?

We can see a solitary man, working alone, trying to find an answer to the problem he has in front of him. That was a challenge, and the results of his work would help Christian people and others to understand the Bible without mistakes or misunderstandings. Where can we get the main point that emerges as soon as you set eyes on this piece of art? If you look at the fresco, the solitary man gives us an idea about what kind of work he used to do, but the main idea behind it is this: we are alone when we are translating a controversial text or, indeed, any kind of text, alone with our thoughts and knowledge.

The idea also calls to our attention the fact that translating a piece of any kind of art makes you an artist. The artist is a sort of artisan. His material, books, and papers are his tools. Nowa-

days it is a little easier because we have the help of computer programs, but in any case it remains a kind of art and a solitary creation. Everything was different in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although the problem was not:

- 1 We cannot translate word-for-word, but sense-for-sense.
- 2 Syntax must be overcome, the grammar is not the same, neither is the syntax.
- 3 We should consider the context of the text.
- 4 Metalanguage gives weight to theory

According to Saint Jerome:

There are two translation strategies available, one focused on the (form of the) word and the other on recreating sense. For most translation, the sense-focused strategy is the default, but the word-focused strategy is more appropriate for sensitive, high-status religious texts. (Cambridge Handbook of Translation 2022, 13–33)

To translate “Den grimme ælling” (“The ugly duckling”) and “Ordet” (The Word”), we chose to recreate the sense.

What does the term translation mean?

According to Christensen (2002, 2) the theory of translation is an explanation of a phenomenon arrived at through examination and contemplation of the relevant facts; a statement of one or more laws or principles that are generally held as describing an essential property of something centres on the visual observation leading to the identification of works like an artist or artisan, surrounded by the tools of their trade, books and papers, manipulating a quill/ pen and, more recently, a computer/ computer-assisted translation (CAT) tool. Later, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) created a translation taxonomy of procedures: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation, at three levels: lexicon, syntax, and message. Translators might think about all of them and their level. The procedures will change from text to text, always

considering the context in which the text was written, as well as the author's background.

"Ordet" ("The Word") is an example of how many procedures and levels need to be combined to access the meaning of the text and the message of the author. From the earlier theories until now, we have seen a huge number of theorists, each with a different focus about which is the best way to translate a text, and perhaps we should not talk about the best, but rather the least harmful, method of understanding the changing of the text from the original to a second language. Among these are the ones who discuss metalanguage as a systematic system. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) from Canada are very much representative of this group; Nilda and Taber (1969) emphasized the effect of the translation on the receiver; in 1988, Holmes introduced six steps to prevent a general statement; in 2012, Toury created two laws of translation; in 2021 came Fedorov from Russia; nowadays we have the so-called technological and digital revolution, explored by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), Bateman (2008), Pym (2014), and Saldanha and O'Brien (2014) (The Cambridge Handbook of Translation 2022, 13–33).

Choosing a theory to give direction to a translation is not an easy task. Among the authors mentioned above, we decided to choose Erwin Theodor (1976) because his theory gives us the support we need. Back in Brazil, our studies were improved by focusing on theories of translation. Among the authors we read was Erwin Theodor (1976), who introduced a 17<sup>th</sup>-century discussion by Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancour (1606–1664). Nicolas' main idea was free translation. Following these ideas, Gilles Ménage (1613–1692) created the expression "le belle infidèles". Both scholars defended the thought that, in order to retain the beauty and literary aspects of a text, some changes must be made to the literal meaning. This was the point: firstly to analyse the texts, and secondly to work on the translation afterwards. Otherwise, any problems with the language would not be resolved. They would still be there.

According to Erwin Theodor (1976, 88), we have three possibilities for changing a text from its mother tongue to a second or third language:

- Translation: literal translation, which we call *ipses litteris*, during which the literary aspects disappear.
- Version: when the artistic and semantic aspects of the original text are retained, along with the context.
- Recreation: here we can find the path to what we call free translation. The translator will keep the story, the characters, place, and time. Where are the changes? Normally these consist of neologisms, metaphors, and cultural, historical expressions.

When our focus is literature, which involves – among other things – aesthetic aspects, we use versions and recreation more often than literal translation. After reading almost all of the translations of Hans Christian Andersen’s works into Portuguese, we realized that they were and are more recreation than translation. In general, the translators had profoundly modified the stories. That is, they kept some similar aspects, such as the themes, but in many ways the plot development of the stories is not the same. Despite different problems related to translation, linguistic aspects remain among the most difficult to resolve.

Looking back on our work, it is easy to notice how many mistakes we may find there related to translation – most of them because our understanding of the Danish language was so poor. Nowadays, context is another aspect. We are living in Denmark now, and trying to understand the surroundings, the society, the culture, and the art much better than before. No less important, Niels Langkilde is supporting us with all the small but extremely important details – such as expressions, humour, the irony between the lines, the special sentence structure, the linguistic aspects, and so many other things.

### The Translation of “Ordet” (“The Word”) into Portuguese. Why?

Brazil is a Christian country. We have a culture related to miracles; we believe deeply in them. Important churches in Brazil have special rooms dedicated to miracles. In these rooms, we can see pictures, sculptures, pieces of a car, a motorcycle,

wheelchairs, and many others. Under each piece there is a name and what kind of accident the person had. They come with them to give thanks to the Virgin Mary and to God.

It was thus completely acceptable to introduce an author who had a strong relationship with his faith and his Church. But the cultures of Denmark and Brazil are not the same, and the differences required us to recreate many passages of the text to bring “Ordet” to Portuguese-speaking people. Kaj Munk wrote “Ordet” in six days in 1925. It is part of the Canon of Danish literature listed by a former Minister of Culture (Kulturministeriet 2006), demonstrating that it is important to Danish culture. To know Denmark is also to know Kaj Munk and “Ordet”. It was first staged on 2 September 1932, at the Betty Nansen Theatre in Copenhagen, under the title “In the Beginning was the Word” (from the Gospel according to John 1.1 and Genesis 1). We can also read this beginning as a calling about the text because the text is the Word itself. The play’s enormous success helped the theatre to avoid going bankrupt. It also became popular among touring theatres and amateurs. Its first performance at Det Kongelige Teater was on 9 September 1948, and it was first broadcast on Statsradiofonien (now Danmarks Radio, DR) on 20 June 1941. “Ordet” was also adapted for the cinema, originally as a Swedish film produced by the Svensk Filmindustri in 1943, based on a manuscript written by Rune Lindström. Later, it was made into a Danish film directed by the famous director, Carl Th. Dreyer, in 1955. In 2023, a British newspaper published a list of the best winners of *Il Leone d’Oro* (The Golden Lion) presented at the Venice Film Festival. The best film ever on this list is “Ordet” – the Danish version from 1955 directed by Carl Th. Dreyer. The same film was also awarded the Golden Globe in the USA and three Bodils – which is a Danish film award.

The story consists of a play in four acts, about a family and events in that family, and the community where they live. Some years ago, a new Brazilian film was inspired by, and used parts of, Carl Th. Dreyer’s well known Danish version of the film “Ordet”. Many of the Danish actors involved considered that work to be their best moments in the art of drama

and film. The movie script remained very close to the original play. Again and again this drama is staged in Danish theatres. And they change a lot – including the ending. We decided to stay as close as possible to the original version, that is Kaj Munk's text.

The play came about when Hans Brix invited Munk to write a play for the theatre. It should be serious but with aspects of reality and idealism, something very much connected with daily life in the countryside, because we do not often see plays that take farmers seriously. It is important to mention that the main theme of the play is the in-fighting between two wings of the Lutheran Church: *Indre Mission* and *Grundtvigianere*. Here the first problem with translation emerged: explaining the differences between these two wings. Footnotes helped to make a completely new universe clear to readers – we explained and named them as liberal and conservative. The conservatives accepted miracles, but the liberals did not. Kaj Munk himself believed in miracles. According to Møller (2020), Munk knew about the German military police, he knew that they were waiting for the right time to kill him, but he refused to run away. Perhaps he was expecting a miracle that could enable him to avoid martyrdom. However, we know how it turned out.

No less important are the names that Munk chose to give the characters in his play. They have strong and special meanings. For example, "Borgen" means "the castle". This name tells the audience that this man is the king of the Grundtvigianerne. In his area, he is strong and powerful. In the first act, there is an intense dialogue between him and his daughter-in-law Inger, containing important reflections, and values about life. There is also "Johannes" – this is Saint John. His name came from the gospel. He is a person with the gospel in his heart and on his lips. "Pastor Bandbul" is a more ironic name. "Bandbul" means somebody who is banished from the Church. It is a punishment. But this priest was a weak person, without power; otherwise, he would like to show off his power. He did not believe in miracles, and the first time he met Johannes was a complete disaster for him. This kind of irony is difficult to translate – and to understand in the Danish language. The first



time that Pastor Bandbul meets Johannes is one of the richest parts of the text. The audience was touched by powerful statements from Johannes and the totally unprepared answers and questions from the Pastor. They were speaking different languages and discussing different concepts. Johannes was the most powerful of the two.

Let us give an example:

When Pastor Bandbul comes to the farm to introduce himself because he has recently moved to that Parish, Johannes says:

Johannes: Peace be with you!

Pastor: I can't understand what you're saying!

Johannes: God be with you!

Pastor: Thank you, the same to you.

From that point they started a dialogue that became more and more difficult for Pastor Bandbul to understand. Suddenly, he asked Johannes' name and he answered:

Johannes: Jesus Christ!

You can imagine how upset and confused Bandbul became. So, he said:

Pastor: It's impossible to talk with you, you're a crazy man.

At this time Mikkel, Johannes's brother, enters. Johannes disappears and Mikkel notices that something wrong has happened. He knows that Johannes must have said something that sounded extremely strange to Bandbul. It is necessary to tell him Johannes's history. So, he does.

"Amtslægen Houen" is the doctor who helped Inger deliver her baby. When he left the house, he said he had done his best and nobody could have done better. But, some hours later, Inger died. His name describes an arrogant person with great precision! We decided to keep the names as they were originally written. Perhaps this was not the best decision, but it was certainly a reasonable one. Would you change the English

name “Hamlet” to “Lille Gris” in Danish? Of course not. There are some names that must be retained. This is what we have done in “Ordet”.

## Text From the Bible

The third item that we want to discuss here concerns the sentences from the Bible that appear in “Ordet”. In Denmark, translations of the Bible must have authorization from the head of the church, the King or, nowadays, the Queen. In Brazil, however, we follow the rules of the Roman Catholic Church; there is a special committee that is responsible for analysing each new translation that might be published. Munk is so rich and so precise in his language that there will be problems when we do not have similar words in Portuguese or must use more words than in Danish. This is a classic problem that every translator must always face.

But still, one should remember that, sometimes, the publishing house also has rules. In this specific translation, they asked us to change all the passages that mentioned characters smoking together to drinking a cup of coffee, for example. So, the characters were never smoking, they were drinking coffee, or tea. Thus, translators must face not only problems related to the language, but also those that do not follow the social rulers at the time of translation, such as, nowadays, smoking, privately or in public.



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The inter-bellum and the Second World War was an extreme era in terms of politics and culture. Culture broadly understood was marked by the horrors of the First World War, and by the political instability in Central Europe that followed it, including constant attacks on democracy as a form of government. The Danish priest, playwright, author, debater, and resistance icon Kaj Munk (1899–1944) lived and was in his prime during this period, specifically during the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s. Munk was controversial both during his life and after his death, killed by a German SS Group in January 1944.

Kaj Munk was multifaceted; he encapsulated values that today we consider right (the fight against oppression and anti-semitism) as well as wrong (his embracing of fascism and never becoming a democrat), and he tended to divide people sharply into admirers and opponents then.

Munk was one of several important cultural personalities in Europe of that time, and is well known within the Nordic countries, but less so elsewhere, mainly because he wrote in Danish. With this anthology, we aim to introduce him to a broader international audience.

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