

THE SINGLE INDIVIDUAL AS READER-SPECTATOR¹

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Abstract

The present article proposes to name the reader of *Either-Or* as 'reader-spectator'. My claim is based on a structural analysis of the work in which theatre and theatricality are considered as key elements for the unity of the work. On the one hand, I underscore the compositional factors which give body to the theatricality, in particular at the level of the organization of the chapters and at the level of the internal structure of some of them. This allows the reader, on the other hand, to overcome the continual flow of the reading, which, due to its immediacy, would prevent reflection. This effect is achieved by creating and inserting descriptions of a clear theatrical nature, thus arising in the reader-spectator the capability to simultaneously visualize and conceptualize what is being presented and represented in the text.

Key words

Reader-spectator, theatricality, *Either-Or*, *Bildungsroman*.

Resumen

En este artículo se propone la designación 'lector-espectador' para el lector de *O lo uno o lo otro*. Esta propuesta se basa en un análisis estructural de la obra, en la que el teatro y la teatralidad se toman como elementos fundamentales para su unidad. Por un lado, se subrayan los elementos de composición que constituyen la teatralidad, en particular en el nivel de la organización de capítulos y en el nivel de la estructura interna de algunos de ellos. Esto permite al lector, por otro lado, superar el flujo continuo de la lectura que, debido a su inmediatez, impediría la reflexión. Este efecto se consigue creando e insertando descripciones de naturaleza claramente teatral, para producir en el lector-espectador la capacidad de visualizar y conceptualizar simultáneamente lo que se presenta y representa en el texto.

Palabras clave

Lector-espectador, teatralidad, *O lo uno lo otro*, *Bildungsroman*.

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Introduction

Long as it is, the complete title of *Either-Or* is often neglected, and hardly ever uttered in its full form just as it happens with nearly all of the enticing and provocative titles chosen by Kierkegaard for his various works. Most of them compel the reader to overcome some surprise, even a certain shock; before diving into the book, the reader needs to compose herself, and get rid of any preconceived notion, be it aesthetic, or ethical, or religious – or philosophical, or theological, or literary. This experience is the first step in the formation of a response by the reader, and the very first interplay between reader and author. Despite being more concise than extraordinary titles like *The Concept of Anxiety. A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, or *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments. A Mimical-Pathetical-Dialectical Compilation. An Existential Contribution*, nonetheless these show a closer relation to the themes and topics addressed, whereas *Either-Or. A Fragment of Life* raises some questions concerning the second half of the title, all the more so since it is a work in two parts bearing exactly the same title, simply followed by the indication of which part it is.

Taking into account the palette of scenes, episodes, pieces of criticism, and biographical accounts of one kind or another contained in the first part, and the inexhaustible justifications and exemplifications provided by B to support his arguments, as well as the fruitful title of the sermon in ‘Ultimatum’², one might expect to read the plural and not the singular, i.e. ‘fragments of life’ instead of ‘a fragment of life.’ That the content is about choice has always unanimously been acknowledged, and ‘either-or’ will eventually become a leitmotif in Kierkegaard’s writings, in particular in the *Journals and Notebooks*, with the disjunction gaining both a metonymical and metaphorical sense. To take the title as a mere ostensible literary artifact used more to tease the reader than to engage her attention is too naïve, and to believe that more than eight hundred pages, supposedly portraying two clearly distinct life views are ‘a fragment of life,’ once compared to the everlasting effect of the proposals contained in the two upbuilding discourses³ published three months later seems equally naïve. Neither Kierkegaard’s contemporary reader, nor a modern one, who can now

² “The upbuilding that lies in the thought that in the eyes of God you are always in the wrong.”

³ “The expectancy of faith” and “Every good and every perfect gift comes from above.”

choose to start with any one of his works, would ever manage to carry out a simultaneous comparative reading of *Either-Or* and the *1843 Upbuilding Discourses* which might let them draw a sound conclusion concerning the issue of ‘a fragment’ versus ‘fragments.’ My initial point of departure is then a dual question: Why ‘a fragment of life’? And if this ‘either-or’ is a fragment of life of a singular individual, who does it apply to or who is more entitled to appropriate it?

We tend to forget about ‘a fragment of life’ due to the dramaturgical skills of Victor Eremita who covertly sets before the reader the task of guessing the reasons behind the chosen title. What we actually retain from the “Preface” is the criteria adopted to divide the papers – A’s “esthetic essays” versus B’s “studies (...) all with ethical content.”⁴ However, the inculcation of this idea in the reader’s mind obeys a strict stage direction, carefully chosen props, and beautiful scenarios. Instead of a mere description of the content, or a presentation of the work, the reader has to represent in her imagination the vividness of Victor Eremita’s comings and goings around town until his passion makes him succumb to the secretary, and realize that Victor becomes a synonym of victory when he finally unlocks the secrecy of his private rooms to his beloved but secretive piece of furniture. Then, the reader beholds with surprise and some horror the violence Eremita uses to violate its secrets, and by the time the papers are substituted for two dueling pistols, intrigue, drama and suspense take hold of the reader. This is immediately confirmed since the time Eremita consumes in the idyllic forest secretly studying the documents is taken by the innkeeper as time spent at shooting practice⁵. The nature of the ethos of A and B as authors, supposedly reflected in the papers, is thus depicted with detail and accuracy to show them as offended antagonists, as if one of them was willing to kill or severely injure the other. This also implies that if witnesses of this putative duel (and it would obviously have to be us, the readers) should step in between the two to reconcile them, they might get injured in the crossfire. In my view, this acts as a first warning for the reader to take her distance. These impressions are so vividly described that when Eremita presents his elaborations on who these authors are and the genre of their writings, with the differences between A and B gaining the contours and colors of a friendlier relation, and a few pages later admits that the papers “might take

⁴ SKS 2, 14-15 / *EOI*, 7.

⁵ SKS 2, 12-14 / *EOI*, 4-6.

a new aspect if they were regarded as belonging to one person,”⁶ the reader hardly pays any attention to this possibility, and readily accepts Eremita’s suggestion that “during his reading he may very well forget the title”⁷. In conformity, the reader tacitly accepts the differences, in content and in expectation of pathos, suggested by the curious advice that Eremita makes A and B enunciate to the reader.

Eremita’s separation of the two parts as two distinct views of life was momentous for a holistic understanding of the work in the contemporary reception of the work as well as in future reception. His awareness of this is evident in his answer to J. L. Heiberg’s review, when he accuses Heiberg of pronouncing himself over the two parts, but clearly detracting the first while praising the second⁸. In fact, Kierkegaard repeatedly urged for *Either-Or* to be taken in its unity, and, possibly, when he claimed having written the work in eleven months, he wished the reader had believed that it all had flowed continually from his mind to the pen, and hence, the chapters and parts had been conceived and written according to a natural sequence⁹. Yet, taking into account Henning Fenger’s comprehensive and stunning analysis of the formative years of Kierkegaard as writer, most probably, these eleven months were the time he took to rewrite and complete the previous material, be it drafts or unfinished projects, or to add extra material that he found necessary to allow for the holistic reading he expected the work to receive. Like Fenger points out after saying that to take Kierkegaard’s claim as true is a “a matter of taste,” what should be retained is that “*Either-Or* is a résumé of ten years of contemplations, thoughts, ideas, drafts, sketches, and attempts at writing. It is precisely for this reason that it provides a gateway into the central aesthetic-philosophical oeuvre of 1843-46, the era of the great works”¹⁰. But not even eleven months could be considered as a fragment of the life of Kierkegaard as an author, months that we also know

⁶ *SKS* 2, 20 / *EOI*, 13.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ “Taksigelse to Hr. Professor Heiberg”/“A word of thanks to Professor Heiberg” (05.03.1843), in *SKS* 14, 55-57; here, p. 55 / *COR*, 17-21; here, p. 17.

⁹ *JJ*: 500, *SKS* 18, 306 / *KJN*, 2, 282.

¹⁰ Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard, The Myths and their Origins. Studies in the Kierkegaardian papers and letters*, trans. by George C. Schoolfield, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976; here, p. 14. First published as *Kierkegaard-Myter og Kierkegaard-Kilder. 9 kildekritiske studier i de Kierkegaardske papirer, breve og aktstykker*, Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1976.

he spent coming and going between Copenhagen and Berlin, publicly doing more than writing or rewriting parts of *Either-Or*¹¹.

More things are left unsaid than said with this title. *Aut-aut*, be it for A, for B, for Johannes, the Seducer, for the reader, for anyone in general, can hardly be described as ‘a fragment of life’. In fiction and in real life we are faced with choices on a daily basis, some of them minor, others terribly challenging. Taking ‘a fragment of life’ as an attribute to be applied only to the four authors (A, B, Johannes the Seducer, and the pastor from Jylland), or to any of the three editors (Victor Eremita, A as editor of “Diary of the Seducer,” and B as editor of “Ultimatum”) is not sensible, since it is obvious that the presentation of each of their contributions, and what it is represented in these contributions, falls into the category of a life view, which points to a protracted time. On the other side, focusing now solely on the work, as we read through both parts of *Either-Or*, we are faced with an immense gallery of characters from books, plays or operas, mythological and historical creatures, occasional passers-by, narrators, editors, and addressees; and they all make more than one choice, or decide not to make it or decide to postpone it, or experiment before making a choice. Take the most emblematic romantic pairs – e.g. Johannes/Cordelia; Don Juan/Elvira; Faust/Margarete. Even if we circumscribe their choice to a single moment of their existence, what is at stake in having fallen for each other are the everlasting effects of their choice in their lives. Even B and his wife fit into this category, since the Judge takes as a model the typical bourgeois, or member of the gentry, or of the upper class, a character we constantly come across ever since the emergence of the novel as genre. Hence, we can hardly say that their choice constitutes a fragment of their lives, all the more so because once it was printed in the book, a perennial mark was stamped on their character. Furthermore, the literary treatment the characters are subjected to in *Either-Or*, in their narrative or dramatic role, necessarily re-dimensions the original profile that their great masters had originally created, in order to enable these characters to present and represent, sometimes more visually than verbally, as we shall see, an episode, or an emotion, or a disposition, or a strictly defined line of thought or intention in the new context they are living in. In *Either-Or*, however, this procedure is basically put at the service of the theatricality that presides over the structure of the work, which, in turn, shapes the reader’s response. The reader responds

¹¹ He attended Schelling’s lectures, and possibly much more. I give an account of his first stay in Berlin in “Kierkegaard’s Musical Recollections.” See note 27 below.

as reader-spectator, and, as more volumes come along by different authors addressing the reader, and re-shaping or adding new features to her profile, this reader-spectator becomes the foundation stone of the single individual.

My claim is that, on a first level, ‘a fragment of life’ is a fragment of the life of the reader, which incidentally fits into the advice given by A and B in the final paragraph of the “Preface”¹². On a second level, this fragment of life becomes associated with a choice again on the part of the reader. Despite the grandeur of the seduction and of the persuasion transpiring in the two parts, more than making the reader assume a passive or submissive role, as a result of having succumbed to the more seductive tone and content of part one, or to the more convincing and reassuring tone and content of part two, this choice empowers the reader to become the agent who can give unity to the work. The reader is in fact the cement that seals together all the heterogeneous chapters in both parts. Taking into consideration that this has hardly ever been the case ever since the book came out, what kind of reader is this one? Definitely not the reader who reads only selected parts of *Either-Or*, or the one who has failed to realize how manipulating Eremita’s description of A and B, and of their writings, actually is. It has to be a reader who sees in what is presented in the sequence of scenarios of both parts, which may be conflicting or contradictory, the representation of the aesthetic and ethical philosophical categories that play dissimilar roles and seem antagonistic, because their basis and subsequent implications derive from different sources. In fact, A and B are not antagonists because an esthetic life view has necessarily to be the opposite of an ethical life view, but because they both present and represent esthetic and ethical life views, based on different philosophical roots¹³.

The presentation and representation of the life views contained in both parts are shown in a way which gradually takes the reader to realize that it is up to her to learn to detect how what is mimetically presented actually represents what is conceptually developed. The ‘reader-spectator’ is then the single individual as reader in the process of developing her skills which allow her to gain introspection and self-awareness, by means of contemplating how introspection and self-awareness is gained in the myriad of examples

¹² SKS 2, 21-22 / EOI, 14-15.

¹³ The full development of the argument outlined here would lead us to demonstrate the fundamental differences between the aesthetic and ethical assumptions of A and B, and to develop its theoretical background, whose main sources are found in Friedrich Schiller and G. E. Lessing’s writings on theater theory and theatrical effects, and the relation of these writings to the state of the art of aesthetics and the discussion of morals in relation to art.

provided by the authors, as narrators or editors, and concomitantly, realizes that any choice is intrinsically linked to a life view. By learning to cope with this game of simultaneity of presentation and representation the characters operate (and quite often by A and B, since they are participant narrators), the reader gains the required distance to become a critical beholder, and learns how to develop her reflexivity in the immediacy of her own reading, just like a member of the audience does when she sits in a theater. On this occasion, I shall only focus on the complementarity between this reader-spectator in formation and *Either-Or* as a narrative, which despite the heterogeneity of its chapters, is theatrically structured so that ‘either-or’ as ‘a fragment of life’ can be recurrently staged along the work. This will be done in three steps. First, I will demonstrate how this aim is articulated with the idea of unity of matter and idea as defended by A in the essay on the musical-erotic in relation to Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. Then, I will refer to Kierkegaard as a theatergoer and give a very brief account of the historical context of the role of reading and theater in Kierkegaard’s time, drawing attention to how this becomes manifest in the central idea of *Dannelse*, not in order to open a discussion of the appropriation of the German ideal of *Bildung* by the Danish philosopher, but strictly to enhance how aesthetic *Dannelse* was essential in the process of self-formation in Kierkegaard’s era and is also taken by him as decisive in the process of self-formation. Finally, I will show how the diegesis of *Either-Or. A Fragment of Life* is structured in order to allow space for the emergence of this reader-spectator and for her development as single individual. This will be done by means of selected examples which illustrate the theatrical infrastructure of the chapters and parts of *Either-Or*, thus permitting at the same time that the reader takes *Either-Or* as a novel of formation, an original adaptation, or deconstructed version, of the *Bildungsroman*.

I

If the title of the chapter “*Diapsalmata*” is understood in the primordial use of the word, i.e. musical interludes or choral refrains, possibly indicating a change of tune, then the reader, as she turns over the last page of the “Preface,” listens to, and reads about, what a poet can do with words to express a wide range of dispositions, which bear in common the mark of observation and contemplation, be it inter-subjective, or interacting with a contextual surrounding or environment. The majority of the *diapsalmata*

are quite melancholic or nostalgic, but others are quite humorous, or self-ironical, or more philosophically prone, or show a more matter-of-fact attitude towards life. In general, they all include a plethora of references to literary works, from Antiquity to the German and Danish classic authors, or alternatively to recent public facts or customary individual routines or social habits. Hence, the contexts range from scenes of an inner life, often depicted in dreams or thoughts, but they can include home environments or street scenes, or the reproduction of scenes taken from mythological episodes. Using different combinations of these elements, a significant number of the *diapsalmata* announce with varying degrees of emphasis what topics and themes will be discussed along the two parts of *Either-Or*. The disposition of the last *diapsalma* is the exact opposite of the first one, with the suffering, tortured, and isolated poet giving place to a poet favored by the gods, who was granted the gift of having laughter on his side. The theater is mentioned in two of the *diapsalmata* – the first time, on the occasion of the public’s tragic misunderstanding of the clown’s warning that the theater was on fire; and the second, the theater is the key to assess the author’s self-reassuring and contented confession for having given up a job as a professor in order to join a travelling theater company. Hence, these four *diapsalmata* describe roles of the poet/writer (*digter*, the one who ‘says’ the word) as actor, in the sense that the focus is on his public role, i.e. what others see in him, or expect to see him doing, whether it is the case of a tyrant, or someone as ignorant as a peasant, or a theatergoer incapable of distinguishing the truth when it is spoken from the mouth of a clown, or the gods.

This initial chapter, in its fragmentary structure, strongly contrasts with the first thesis introduced in the chapter “The Immediate Erotic-Stages or the Musical-Erotic”. I refer to the famous definition of the perfect work of art, the masterpiece that entitles its creator to be remembered for all eternity. This definition is not exactly a mere case of a union of form and content. If this were so, it would mean that a perfect correspondence of matter and idea could eventually be found. But this was Hegel’s pursuit, not Kierkegaard’s. In the chapter of the musical-erotic, the Danish philosopher followed a more elaborated proposal, at the time propagated by the German composer Robert Schumann, then at the peak of his career as musical critic. In one of his most famous critical pieces, precisely on Hector Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, where incidentally the novelty is an *idée fixe* whose variations present and represent the hero in the different movements of the symphony, Schumann stated that “form is the continent of the spirit”

and enunciated the steps a musical critic should follow in order to analyze a musical work critically: “the four points of view, according to which a musical piece should be considered, i.e. according to form (of the whole, the individual parts, the periods, the phrases), also according to the musical composition (harmony, melody, phrasing, work, style), according to the particular idea that the artist wanted to present, and according to the spirit, which rules over the form, the matter and the idea”¹⁴. Due to Kierkegaard’s obvious ignorance concerning the technicalities of music, A did not execute all the steps, but he did appropriate the idea that a spirit rules over form, matter and idea, as he actually admits¹⁵. Hence, A praises the *felicitas* of the creator whose geniality consists in finding the right matter for the right medium thus permitting that his spirit insufflates the form and the matter and vice-versa. In the artist and in the artwork, form and matter are as interpenetrated as geniality and creativity are, and this is what allows the beholder (or the listener, or the spectator) to recognize the work as a masterpiece, its immortality, and also the geniality and immortality of its creator. In other words, the awe of the beholder certifies the immortal and perfect artwork, and her unconditional admiration is a sign that, in her aesthetic contemplation, the beholder could not tell matter from idea, but could acknowledge in their unity the geniality of the creator.

A, nonetheless, proves in the same chapter that it is possible to understand, and in part to describe, how a masterpiece comes about. He offers a detailed analysis of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, thus showing how a cultivated beholder is capable of finding out the organization principle that presided over the design of the structure and framework of Mozart’s opera. Interestingly, A’s analysis of Mozart’s overture, as well as of the actual dramaturgy of the opera itself, in comparison to J. L. Heiberg’s version of Molière’s *Don Juan*, focuses on how successfully their respective authors constructed the theatricality required for an effective recreation of the mythical character of Don Juan. The reader feels now capable of understanding A’s confession in the postlude of the same chapter, when he confesses that together with the fortune of having recollected Mozart, he

¹⁴ Vd. Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Leipzig: 1854; Reprint Ausgabe, Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1985, vol. I, p. 118: “[...] nach den vier Gesichtspunkten, unter denen man ein Musikwerk betrachten kann, d.i. nach der *Form* (des Ganzen, der einzelnen Teile, der Periode, der Phrase), je nach der musikalischen *Komposition* (Harmonie, Melodie, Satz, Arbeit, Stil), nach der besonderen *Idee*, die der Künstler darstellen wollte, und nach dem Geiste, der über *Form, Stoff, Idee* waltet.”

¹⁵ *SKS 2*, 78 / *EOI*, 71-72.

also had the fortune of having written that recollection and of making both fortunes available to be read and shared by the contemporary reader, by all admirers of Mozart, and by generations of readers and admirers to come¹⁶.

The unity of matter and idea demands from the reader a surplus of reflection and distance, setting her on a formative path, so that she does not end up like the tyrant, or as ignorant as a peasant, or incapable of distinguishing the truth spoken from the mouth of a clown, or as condescending as the gods. In order to perceive the cohesiveness and coherence in *Either-Or*, the reader becomes a reader-spectator capable of recognizing the total unity of matter and form in each one of the chapters. She is then capable of grasping what each part and each chapter presents and how it is represented, be it the idea, or the concept, or the character, or the argument, or the feeling, or the passion. The first part of *Either-Or* is decisive in this process, since it is the central group of chapters which addresses the different ways, and degrees, of the unity of idea and matter, versus the different manners of contemplation, observation, and knowledge of the stage, demanded from the reader. These skills, as we shall see in the next section were indeed part of the life of the individual, possibly in a larger scale than one may imagine today, and had been linked with the idea of *Bildung*, ever since the consecration of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, whose hero leaves home to return in the end, after having learned his ways in the world by assuming different functions (manager, stage director, actor, writer) in a travelling theater company.

II

When we think of Kierkegaard's day as the Golden Age of Denmark, we feel inclined to picture a time of prosperity when the arts bloomed and society in general prospered. In terms of literacy and reading habits, in Copenhagen, just like in many European capitals in the wake of the second wave of the Industrial Revolution, this was a world divided in two fairly distinct groups. The larger part of the adult population in the 1830's who could read and write still had little formal education, either received at home or in institutions. The elite combined self-educated representatives of different branches of society, a few already with formal education; the wealthier had their salons and were already following the English and the

¹⁶ SKS 2, 136 / EOI, 135.

Germans in their formative tours across the continent, mainly heading south. Nonetheless, as prosperity rose, the former group began to have time and money to spend on educational entertainment, and the dark days of bankruptcy in the late eighteenth century gave place to an era that welcomed the Romantic idea of *Bildung*, and theater, entertainment, and contact with nature, even if in artificially created parks, played major roles. Even if we take into consideration Kierkegaard's criticism of the idea of progress, his thoughts on the crowd and the numerical, or his harsh criticism against the Church and its representatives (and thus realize that despite the economic boom, the transition from absolute Monarchy to the constitutional Regime was not properly smooth due to the political, social, and educational changes involved), we should keep in mind that Kierkegaard was very much aware of the impact of economic progress and of the importance and consequences of being financially independent in all aspects of life. This awareness is patent in the way he managed his personal life and his authorial production financially, which he made evident on a number of occasions, in particular in the words of his editors he created for his works.

That Kierkegaard was a theatergoer and a theater lover we have no doubt whatsoever. Yet, irrespective of the uncountable references he made to so many plays and playwrights, the quotations he repeats several times in works of quite a different nature, and the apparently intrusive appearance of dramatic characters, it is important to understand that many of these allusions and references were exactly of the kind his contemporaries would instantly decode. Not that his reading public might be cosmopolitan or immensely cultivated, but in comparison to them, we have to dig into the universes of these intruding allusions, references, or characters, unless we want to miss the full meaning of the context they visit. Many shared Kierkegaard's passion for the theater, and theatrical allusions or references were as easily recognized as biblical ones. Hence, Kierkegaard was writing at a time when the intellectual and cultural elite lived side by side with layers of the population who could read and write and, indeed, already used these skills in everyday life, in their professions, at church, in reading circles, or to read with their families, or simply for making contact and communicating on a daily basis, or to write diaries, or to keep a kind of family logbook. There was quite a large variety of texts available for reading material – novels, poems, librettos, plays, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, the Bible, *den*

salme bog, leaflets.¹⁷ This is the time when people subscribed newspapers and various types of publications, when books became a commodity, the theater became an industry, and the artist had to fight for her rights. It is the time when The Royal Theater flourished, when people went to the theater for more than pleasure¹⁸, when the nation's writers and poets received their deserved honors and saw their complete works published¹⁹. In Copenhagen, the emergence of the author, of the independent artist, of the glorification of acting, was au courant with other European capitals. And Kierkegaard's production mirrors this situation, as we know, in quite a good number of works. Reading and going to the theater, or to the opera, had become a fragment of the life of the educated citizen who felt he was fulfilling his duty as a citizen. Literature and the stage provided entertainment and were taken as formative activities as well.

One of the points that Kierkegaard stresses is exactly the fact that reading or going to the theater or the opera require reflection in order to realize the full dimension of the representation before your eyes, and that failing to do so, is a sign of lack of aesthetic *Dannelse*, as in these excerpts from different periods of his production. The first one is taken from his article "*Who is the Author of Either-Or?*" (1843) and pinpoints the effects of biased readings:

Some pay more attention to the externalities in style, and being more sensitive observers, they take special notice of the minute details, since they are sharp enough to see that the author has tried to conceal his identity. A theologian, for example, thinks he has detected that the book betrays too much philological education [*Dannelse*] to be a theologian. A philologist thinks he has detected that the philological training [*Dannelse*] is just what can be expected from a theologian, for a philologist would accent the Greek more accurately²⁰.

¹⁷ The Corsair Affair is a good example of this type of society. Kierkegaard's works had not obviously been read by the people who cursed him on the streets – but a significant number did read or have access to the periodical, to the texts and the caricatures.

¹⁸ The inscription above the stage of the Royal Theater in Copenhagen still is "*Ej blot til Lyst*," i.e. not only for pleasure.

¹⁹ This is clearly recorded in the Auction Catalogue in the number of translations of Complete Works, or Complete Works of Danish and German authors, which Kierkegaard acquired.

²⁰ *SKS* 14, 50-51 / *COR*, 16.

In the next two, taken from *The Crisis and The Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (1848), lack of aesthetic culture or education is firstly seen as a consequence of not having formed oneself as a spectator. Once again we can see how the interpenetration of matter and idea and the presence of geniality in the process are stressed. In the second excerpt, after mentioning how in a lyrical poet the gain of maturity with age is widely accepted, the lack of aesthetic culture is used to explain a gender-centered bias on the part of the public, who fails to see that an actress also gains maturity in her art as she grows old:

Those who have a sense only for the fortunate accidentals of that first youthfulness lack esthetic culture [*Dannelse*] and therefore do not discover that this good fortune is the accidental and the perishable, whereas the genius and the relation to the idea are the eternal and the essential²¹.

But why, now this inhumanity that causes so much unfairness, yes, cruelty, to women dedicated to the service of art, why, if it is not that esthetic culture [*Dannelse*] is so rare among people? When it comes to the feminine, most people's art criticism has categories and thought-patterns essentially in common with every butcher's assistant national guardsman, and store clerk, who talk enthusiastically about a damned pretty and devilish pert wench of eighteen years²².

III

Theatricality in the works of Kierkegaard is a multilayered construction which goes beyond the mere production of effects aimed at producing recreations of the narrative genre, or the potentiating of a 'theater of the selves'²³. This view has recently been receiving more and more attention. Carl S. Hughes, in his highly commendable work *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire*, takes theater and theatrical performance in Kierkegaard's

²¹ SKS 14, 105 / KK, 320.

²² SKS 14, 94 / KK, 305.

²³ This is the title and theme of the postdoctoral project in progress since 2011 by Dr. Bartholomew Ryan at the Institute for the Philosophy of Language (IFILNOVA) at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. His work is centered on the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa and Søren Kierkegaard. He has recently headed another project entitled "The Plurality of the Subject in Nietzsche and Pessoa." See more at: <http://www.ifl.pt/pages/bartholomew-ryan#sthash.xvckWxEf.dpuf>.

writings to be core elements in Kierkegaard's project as a Christian writer, arguing that "his writings function as 'stagings' of infinite, ever-increasing desire"²⁴, analyzing in particular how these stagings work in the Eucharistic discourses. A two-day conference entitled *Kierkegaard und das Theater*, which took place during the bicentennial year under the auspices of the University of Zürich²⁵, was an exceptional occasion to assess the input and output of theater and theatrical performance in Kierkegaard's thought in all its complexity. The lectures covered several topics among them theater theories – Kierkegaard's, the ones he got inspiration from, and the ones he inspired –, his criticism of theatricality in church services, or the role of virtuosity in his writings, or the impact of his Hamlet-variations, as well as different approaches to his drama aesthetics, seen from a historical perspective, but also in its historical context. My research on the role of the music virtuoso and musical virtuosity in Kierkegaard's era increased at this time²⁶ and together with my conclusions concerning the influence of music, in particular of musical performance in Kierkegaard²⁷, the Zürich conference fostered further research on the possibility of an aesthetic of the arts in Kierkegaard. His aesthetics, more than being orientated towards a hierarchy of the arts or even at coming to sound conclusions concerning a comparison of the arts, is aimed at proving that an art can only reach its

²⁴ Hughes, p. 7.

²⁵ *Kierkegaard und das Theater, Internationale Tagung an der Universität Zürich*, organized by Klaus Müller-Wille and Sophie Wennerscheid, from September 11th to 14th, 2013. A revised version of the papers delivered is expected to be published in 2015: *Kierkegaard und das Theater*, Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie, Vol. 56, Tübingen: Francke.

²⁶ Two articles resulted from the original lecture delivered in this conference, namely "The idea of Virtuosity in Kierkegaard's Thought," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scholastica*, no. 3-4 (2013), pp. 987-1000, and a follow up bearing the same title of the original lecture, "Kierkegaard: a Virtuoso on many Strings," due in 2015. See also, "Virtuosity and Incarnation," in *Metamorphosen des Heiligen. Vergemeinschaftung durch Sakralisierung der Kunst* (Reihe: Religion und Aufklärung), hrsg. von Hermann Deuser, Markus Kleinert und Magnus Schlette. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming this Spring; and "Wollstonecraft e Kierkegaard: as virtudes da mulher e a virtude de ser mulher," in *A Paixão da Razão. Homenagem a M. Luísa Ribeiro Ferreira*, ed. by António Pedro Mesquita, et al., Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, 2014, pp. 675-684.

²⁷ "Kierkegaard's Musical Recollections," in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2008*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al., Berlin, New York: Walter De Gruyter, pp. 85-108. I developed Liszt's influence as performer on Constantius's work *Repetition* in "Repetition in Constant Reference to Liszt," in *Kierkegaard and the Challenges of Infinity. Philosophy and Literature in Dialogue*, ed. by José Miranda Justo et al., Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, 2013, pp. 39-49.

peak once it consents to a performative simultaneity of presentation and representation. This is a point that I have already stressed in the present article since it is one of the essential features of theatricality in Kierkegaard's creative process, present in his writings, in the way he creates multiple authors, and also in the methodology adopted for the publication of his works.

But my quest today is the reader-spectator, and how she manages to retain the intended wholeness of *Either-Or* despite the diverse and heterogeneous topics and themes there discussed, and the specific nature of each part and chapter. My aim is not to deal with these topics and themes, even less the dialectical discussion that many of them are subjected to within the work, but to attempt to demonstrate that there are other possibilities for sustaining the reading of the work, besides the ones that are created by the discussion of topics or themes which in some chapters are controversially debated. Indeed, the dialectical discussion is most often confined to restricted passages, or sections, where the same topics or themes re-appear. As a result, this circumstance, supported by the fragmentary structure of the chapters and their autonomous content, compromises the relation of those topics or themes to other topics or themes dealt with in the book. A fragmentary reading of this type may fall under the criticism of A as 'arbitrary reading':

Arbitrariness is the whole secret. It is popularly believed that there is no art to being arbitrary, and yet it takes profound study to be arbitrary in such a way that a person does not himself run wild in it but himself has pleasure from it. One does not enjoy the immediate object but something else that one arbitrarily introduces. One sees the middle of a play; one reads the third section of a book. One thereby has enjoyment quite different from what the author so kindly intended. One enjoys something totally accidental; one considers the whole of existence from this standpoint; one lets its reality run aground on this²⁸.

For the sake of concision, I will usually use the term 'theatricality' to refer to the theater, theatrical illusions and effects, and staging. I will focus on examples of theatricality which operate externally in the first part of *Either-Or*, and on examples of theatricality, which operate internally. *Either-Or. A Fragment of Life* is structured in order to allow space for the emergence

²⁸ SKS 2, 288 / EOI, 299.

of a reader-spectator, that is, a reader that can desirably visualize each part as a constitutive element of a whole, and for this purpose, she has to build bridges between the different chapters and parts. This step is essential for the reader to understand how the staging of the 'either-or' is present throughout the work. *Either-Or*, as a multi-layered narrative, relies on the juxtaposition and interchangeability of a fairly large number of structural planes. As I see them, they could never resemble a set of Chinese boxes, unless they were translucent, or could hold interchangeable positions inside the major box, which obviously does not reproduce the illusion intended with a set of Chinese boxes. These structural planes are indeed not designed according to dimension, so that one could fit inside the other. On the contrary, they are supposed to be able to complement each other. As we shall see, the juxtaposition and interchangeability of these structural planes allows the reader to never be left with a sensation of discontinuity as she progresses from chapter to chapter, from part to part, which is again essential to create the theatrical illusion required to hold the attention of the reader while at the same time allowing her to keep the necessary distance for reflexivity. For those familiar with baroque theater stages, the effect produced by these structural planes may be compared to the one produced by the mechanism that coordinated the painted flat surfaces used in such theaters to create the illusion of a landscape or scenario in perspective, but which were also used to provide the adequate environment for each scene. These stages consisted of a floor, on whose sides stood rows of painted flat surfaces, which could roll along the stage. In their first and initial position, these panels created a single perspective, but new perspectives could pop up by moving the initial position of those painted surfaces, sometimes by just hiding a number of them. Because they could be moved, once they were rolled along the stage (the so-called 'wings'), or descended from above (the 'boarders'), or interchanged at the back of the stage (the 'backdrops'), a variety of environments would become visible to the public. Hence, the wings, the boarders, and the backdrops, depicted elements which, by means of different combinations with one another, managed to produce the illusion of different times of the day, of interiors or exteriors, and so on, thus providing the adequate background for each scene²⁹.

²⁹ Baroque theaters still existed in Kierkegaard's day, and still exist today. The ones that he might have possibly known were the Hoftheater in Christianborg Palace, in Copenhagen, which is now a museum; the Helsingør theater which was dismantled in 1961 and

One of the planes in *Either-Or* conceived to bridge the physical separation of the work in two volumes consists in placing two chapters as introduction to the work – the “Preface” –, and a conclusion to the work – a sermon, the “Ultimatum,” which are radically different in genre and content, in themselves, and compared to the rest, but, by virtue of their nature, address the reader more directly than all the others, where different types of mediation are used. Moreover, their authors, not being A or B, do not have to commit themselves to the content of the whole work or to any of its parts. In my view, this is the only plane that might evoke the enveloping case in the set of Chinese boxes. Another plane unites the first two chapters, “Diapsalmata” and “The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical Erotic.” As mentioned before, they provide a theoretical, and practical, guideline for the reader so that she may recognize what makes the unity of a perfect artwork and how to proceed in order to analyze how such a unity is created, in what concerns the structure of the work, as well as the form assumed by the ideas presented therein. In addition, these chapters provide thematic orientation; “*Diapsalmata*,” in the terms I have described in the opening paragraph of section one, and in the case of the chapter of the musical-erotic, by focusing on the presentation and representation of ideas, or concepts, primordial or non-primordial, while at the same time giving the central place to drama and dramatic action. Furthermore, this same chapter provides the master key to assess the different types of seducers and seduced, from Don Juan, the seducer as deceiver, and Johannes, the psychological seducer, to Elvira and Cordelia, Faust and Margarete, Emmeline and Charles and Rinville, but also the Judge and his wife, thus placing the theme of relational love as a permanent subtext in the whole work.

Still in the first part of *Either-Or*, a good example of the interchangeability of planes is provided by the four chapters which develop their own topic(s), on the one side, along the discussion of dramatic genres – opera, vaudeville, ancient tragedy versus modern tragedy, and comedy – I refer to “The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical Erotic,” “The Tragic in Ancient Drama reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama,” “Silhouettes,” and “The First Love.” On the other side, by being introduced as speeches or perorations before a Fellowship of the Dead, “The Tragic in Ancient Drama reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama” and “Silhouettes” form another level of complementarity with “the Unhappiest One.” In

re-assembled in Århus, and is still in operation; and the Hoftheater at the Sanssouci Park in the Royal Palace in Potsdam.

addition, all these chapters share a common narrative pattern consisting of a bipartite or tripartite division, as in the chapter on the musical-erotic and in “Silhouettes.” Usually after a brief address to the reader or to members of the fellowship of the dead, there is an introductory section where a category and/or some theoretical discussion, usually concerning art-related issues, is presented, and then the second part may be called an exercise in practical criticism, and is carried out in multifarious ways. I will just illustrate this with two of the most diverse cases: “The First Love” and “The Unhappiest One”. In “The First Love,” A begins by presenting and elaborating on the category of occasion, and demonstrates its effectiveness in his process of becoming a critic, but also its effectiveness in his conclusions regarding what a first love might be, according to his own experience; the second part is a scene-by-scene commentary of Scribe’s play that ends with the praise of four major Danish actors and glorifies the Danish stage. “The Unhappiest One,” brief as it is, introduces the theme in the first paragraph, and before the final parade of candidates for the title, the idea is discussed from a philosophical point of view, starting with Hegel’s idea of an unhappy conscience and followed by a detailed explanation of the reciprocal effects of the interaction between recollection and hope. A theatrical framework is also introduced in “The Rotation of Crops,” which features one of the longest and most curious epigraphs in Kierkegaard’s writings – a page-long sequence of lines from Aristophanes’s *Plutos*, in the original Greek, and in a German translation.

These theatrical links and bridges sustain the continuity of the narrative, without effacing the multifarious environments that emerge in each chapter which are determinant for the thorough discussion of the equally multifarious themes or topics addressed therein. To use Hughes’s terms,³⁰ the chapters stage themes and ideas, or characters as representatives of experimentation in thought, against what we may call a contextual background which best highlights the issue in question, a background which, in turn, may be composed of interchangeable and mobile planes. All this is accompanied by narrative strategies which operate internally, inside each chapter, and normally involve modifications in the genre blueprint of the chapters and parts, as I illustrated above. The aim is always to slow down the continuing flow of time induced by the reading process itself, thus

³⁰ Hughes, p. 6, in particular: “The verbs “stage” and “staging” can be used in English to refer to an action that anticipates or is preparatory to a second, greater action after or beyond it.”

creating the necessary distance between what is being thematized in each chapter, so that the reader is allowed to reflect on what she is reading and on what she is mentally visualizing. These modifications in the narrative can be much more complex and deeper than the interchangeability of the planes that I described above. This is the case of “The Seducer’s Diary” but also of the two letters of B, “The Esthetic Validity of Marriage” and “The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality,” which can be analyzed as recreations of the epistolary novel, a genre which Kierkegaard will continue to re-invent with Constantin Constantius and *Repetition*, but also in *Stages in Life’s Way*. Due to the degree of complexity that such modifications imply, I will single out here what may turn out to be the point of departure for a more comprehensive and founded analysis. In the first place, concerning the letters of the Judge, when B re-instates the idea that his writings are letters to A, he is not just following Eremita’s suggestion in the “Preface,” or merely justifying the label he chose. In fact, this permits a dialogical reading of the two parts, and sustains the illusion of correspondence between two friends who, despite their differences, share the capability of exchanging points of view. This illusion is actually created with the help of theatrical effects, since the discursive argumentation of the judge is constantly interrupted, or prompted, by various kinds of descriptions which, in their detail and dramatic settings, deliberately appeal to the reader to be visually represented in her imagination. I refer to the inclusion of a great number of episodes in A’s life, and those of his entourage, domestic episodes in B’s life, recollections of mutual meetings and visits, and private recollections of events in the life of B, which also lend an intimate tone to B’s letters similar to journal writing. It is curious to notice that once we look at the elements that the fragmentary structure of “The Seducer’s Diary” is composed of, we also find episodic encounters, scenes in domestic environments, private recollections, philosophical digressions, confessional notes, and also letters, which obviously are used for a radically different purpose than in the Judge’s letters. Such elements, in the case of the Judge, concur with a dialogical reading of the two parts of *Either-Or* and generate a stabilizing effect in his writings, which otherwise would end up looking like lifeless soliloquies on marriage and love, lacking an intuition of life, in particular, because the Judge’s letters follow a narrative whose main character, from beginning to end, is completely determined to fulfill his own life view.

In the case of “The Seducer’s Diary,” the fragmentary structure builds a bridge to “*Diapsalmata*,” but its greatest feat is certainly managing to produce a journal-like narrative, which takes inspiration from former epistolary novels as unlike as Goethe’s *Werther* and Laclos’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, and simultaneously confronts Schlegel’s *Lucinde* and Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* head-on. “The Seducer’s Diary” would soon outdo their popularity and almost two hundred years later it still stands as one of the greatest novels on seduction, possibly the greatest, written in modernity.

The reader-spectator sees her strategy confirmed within A’s words in his preface to “The Seducer’s Diary,” when, as editor, he expresses the following advice which, curiously enough, is also useful when it comes to reading the Judge’s letters. What really matters here is the operational role of the luminosity of a theater, and not the reminiscence of the obscurity of Plato’s cave:

Behind the world in which we live, far in the background, lies another world, and the two have about the same relation to each other as do the stage proper and the stage one sometimes sees behind it in the theater. Through a hanging of fine gauze, one sees, as it were, a world of gauze, lighter, more ethereal, with a quality different from that of the actual world. Many people who appear physically in the actual world are not at home in it but are at home in that other world³¹.

When I associate the reader-spectator with *Either-Or* as a deconstructed *Bildungsroman*, I presuppose the conflation of the theatrical effects I described and illustrated in this article. Taken together, they let us see how this heterogeneous work can also be read, on the one hand, in its intended sequence, and on the other hand, how it empowers the reader-spectator with the leading role in the process. The reader, indeed, becomes the hero of the *Bildungsroman* and the pages of *Either-Or* provide the scenarios for her wanderings. The usual voyage of a hero in the *Bildungsroman* involves leaving home behind, finding one’s self homeless or at least with no definite abode, and then on the return home, one realizes that we have changed hopefully for the better, having learned about the world during this voyage, about one’s relation with one’s self and others, and obviously having experienced love. In *Either-Or*, the reader evidently does not have to leave her home physically, but the truth is that right from the “*Diapsalmata*” until

³¹ SKS 2, 295-296 / EOI, 306.

the end of the “Ultimatum” she embarks on a journey during which her mind, all her faculties of reason and judgment, her senses and her sensibility, get involved in the typical experiences of the hero of the *Bildungsroman*, by means of having been the spectator of all the theatricality therein. In the end of the second part she will have a better chance of understanding the very last lines of the work, which come from the loud and thunderous voice of the pastor practicing his sermon in the Jylland heath:

Do not interrupt the flight of your soul; do not distress what is best in you; do not enfeeble your spirit with half wishes and half thoughts. Ask yourself and keep on asking until you find the answer, for one may have known something many times, acknowledged it; one may have willed something many times, attempted it—and yet, only the deep inner motion, only the heart’s indescribable emotion, only that will convince you that what you have acknowledged belongs to you, that no power can take it from you—for only the truth that builds up is truth for you³².

Victor Eremita will not be the only one to have felt a sense of victory with A and B’s papers in his hands. In the inevitable solitude of her reading, the reader-spectator will feel as victorious as he did.

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³² SKS 3, 332 / EOII, 354.

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