

kierkegaard

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kierkegaard

M. Jamie Ferreira



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Preface

In one sense, this book is my answer to all those people over the years who have asked me why I find reading Kierkegaard so fascinating. Although it is not a conventional introduction (and I appreciate the support of my editor, Nick Bellorini, for allowing me this freedom), it is intended to benefit the various kinds of audiences served by this series – namely, students reading Kierkegaard in classes, as well as scholars in other areas who want a brief but serious introduction to Kierkegaard. Perhaps even Kierkegaard scholars might find something of value in it, since we usually specialize in some, but not all, of his writings. But my fondest hope is that this book will be of interest to people who have always wanted to read something of Kierkegaard's but have felt daunted by the prospect, or people who have tried to read a particular work and given up. I want to help people to read these texts even if they do not intend to become Kierkegaard scholars, even if they are not particularly excited about keeping up with the latest debates in the secondary literature, even if they don't already know what the phrase "incommensurability with actuality" means.

My book is directly geared to helping readers who want to pick up a given book of Kierkegaard's. While it is no doubt true that overviews and analyses of themes drawn synthetically from all of Kierkegaard's writings are valuable, and that examinations of him as philosopher, or as religious thinker, or as humorist, etc., do a great service to readers by highlighting a particular dimension of his thought,¹ there is a sense in which they keep readers at a secondary remove from the primary texts. That is, on their own terms such introductions to Kierkegaard do not attempt to do justice to the particular, distinctive performance that goes on in each of Kierkegaard's texts. Readers may still need help approaching any given text; they may need a better sense of what to expect, and they may need extra help once they have started to read. At the same time, because it covers the entire length of Kierkegaard's authorship, this introduction reveals a development in the way certain themes are repeated with a difference, even while it highlights the consistency of Kierkegaard's general concerns. Moreover, it addresses the authorship in

its distinctive structure, as a kind of double helix in which the pseudonymous works and the upbuilding or religious discourses are examined in the light of each other.

An “introduction” is, I have discovered, the hardest thing to write, not only because one always wants to say something more by way of qualification, but also because it is a genre that depends in different ways on everything I have ever read about Kierkegaard, and the citations and bibliography would be endless. In lieu of that, I dedicate this book to all the professional scholars and students in my seminars with whom I have learned to read Kierkegaard. A special word of thanks is owed to the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen and the Kierkegaard Library at St Olaf College (Northfield, Minnesota) for generously offering a nurturing environment for writing parts of this book, and to George, Walter, and the two Emilys for making my life easier.

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note

- 1 For example: George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham [UK]: Acumen Publishing, 2005); David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (Basingstoke [UK]: Macmillan, 2000).

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Abbreviations

- C *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997)
- CA *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980)
- CD *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997)
- CI *The Concept of Irony*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989)
- CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments,"* vol. 1, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- EO1,2 *Either – Or*, 2 vols., trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987)
- EPW *Early Polemical Writings*, ed. and trans. Julia Watkin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990)
- EUD *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990)
- FPOSL "From the Papers of One Still Living," in *Early Polemical Writings*, ed. and trans. Julia Watkin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990)
- FSE *For Self-Examination*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990)
- FT *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- IKC International Kierkegaard Commentary Series, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984–)
- JC *Johannes Climacus*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985)
- JFY *Judge for Yourself!* trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990)

- JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 4 vols., ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978)
- KSY *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996–)
- LD *Letters and Documents*, trans. Hendrik Rosenmeier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978)
- OMWA “On My Work as an Author,” in *The Point of View*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998)
- PC *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991)
- PF *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985)
- PV *The Point of View For My Work as an Author*, in *The Point of View*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998)
- R *Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- SLW *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988)
- SUD *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980)
- TA *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978)
- TDIO *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993)
- TM “*The Moment*” and *Late Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998)
- UDVS *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993)
- WA *Without Authority*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997)
- WL *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Introduction: Reading Kierkegaard

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–1855) left behind a most unusual literary legacy. It is different from that of other great minds who left us intellectual projects that were in the traditional form of essays or treatises that could be straightforwardly mined for philosophical and theological insights and arguments. However difficult it might be to present the thought of people like Kant or Hegel, even acknowledging the scholarly differences of opinion that inevitably exist, the work of Kierkegaard is difficult to present for very different reasons. Given the remarkable variety of genres in which he writes, the counterpart to such traditional exposition and critique is the challenge of orienting and guiding readers in the activity of reading Kierkegaard's works.

Robert Frost once wrote that "a poetic philosopher or philosophical poet" was his "favorite kind of both,"¹ and Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested that "Philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition*."² It is interesting, therefore, to note that Kierkegaard presented himself not as a traditional philosopher or religious thinker, but as a kind of "poet" and as someone who was "in love" with his pen.³ This is not incompatible with offering sound philosophical, religious, or psychological insights, but it does mean that we will have to be prepared to read his works a little differently. Kierkegaard's own description of the genres of his works is a sign that this is the case. We find, for example, a "Dialectical Lyric," "A Venture in Experimenting Psychology," "A Fragment of Philosophy," "A Mimical-Pathetical-Dialectical Compilation, an Existential Contribution," as well as *Works of Love* and "Discourses for Communion." Readers need to be alerted to certain facts about the writing, as well as to certain assumptions and strategies that inform the writing. I hope to present introductory accounts of the texts that will provide both encouragement for readers to turn to the originals and guidance for them when they do. I do not intend my brief introductions to spare readers the need of reading the texts.

In what follows I want to introduce Kierkegaard's thought, not by telling what he thought, but rather by showing *how* he thought. I want to consider how his texts are provocative performances or performative provocations. Although it might be said that every text is a performance of sorts, this is especially important in Kierkegaard's case since his work covers a variety of genres. A fruitful reading of these texts requires that we are sensitive to the "how" of the performance. I want to introduce readers to what I love about reading Kierkegaard by providing examples of the sorts of activities he engages in, and by providing enough of his own inimitable language and style to tempt readers to read (or re-read) the originals carefully.

Let me suggest the following reasons for picking up Kierkegaard's writings, knowing that the reader will have to judge for herself as the book proceeds. I read Kierkegaard for his *passionate* performances, as well as for the passionate ways he puts passion in question. That is, I read him for the ways in which he embodies a resistance to one-sidedness and to closure (he calls this his "dialectical" aspect). He does this by using literary strategies and techniques to unsettle us, to perplex us, to cause us to rethink things; he is always asking provocative questions and using unexpected inversions and comparisons, to make us uncomfortable in our security, to defamiliarize us with something we think we are familiar with already, to make problematical the totality, the system, the closed, the finished, the completed, and the finalized. He uses pictures that provoke the reader to do some work. He will paint a picture – then ask what is wrong with the picture. He will repeatedly ask us to imagine strange situations, saying what if someone who wanted to achieve X were to do Y, what would you think? He constantly invites the reader to do the work of making judgments or coming up with alternatives. His writings encourage us to appreciate the tension-filled nature of life.

Kierkegaard's works are full of challenges, posed through satire, sarcasm, and humor; there are passionate polemics. But there is always a complementary or underlying *compassion*. I think all his books could have the subtitle he gave to one of them, "For Upbuilding and Awakening." They are designed to build up or encourage, as well as awaken or provoke. In other words, they are designed to be appropriated by the reader. But that is precisely what makes it difficult for me to introduce them. Most of the time, I feel I am in a difficulty similar to that noted by one of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, Johannes Climacus, who considers the task of trying to paint a mythological figure in the armor that makes him invisible – as he says, "the point is the invisibility" (CUP, 174). How do you suggest that something is invisible? What features of its surroundings or background will need to be brought out in order to evoke the invisibility? One cannot simply paint the armor, and one cannot refuse to paint at all, leaving a blank space. All of Kierkegaard's

writings illustrate to some degree the problem of indirection he points to. And while Kierkegaard is usually quite artful in his indirection, it is difficult for me not to reduce it as I present it.

Every scholar who has ever worked on Kierkegaard's writings probably has felt pangs of conscience at the thought that he/she may be doing exactly the kind of analysis that Kierkegaard ridiculed or condemned. The only way to keep on going is to remind oneself that Kierkegaard appreciated the Socratic art of maieutics and it is possible to see what we scholars do as maieutic work – as being an occasion for others in the way that Kierkegaard is himself an occasion for us all. There is a kind of authority that is impossible to claim with respect to the study of these works.

I hope to provide enough analysis and commentary to indicate the fruitful perplexity that readers should expect to encounter, and to suggest why this can be a good thing rather than a frustrating thing. As will become increasingly apparent, we are faced with an authorship in which there is much ambiguity, many unresolved questions, no pat answers, no "results" we can easily summarize – a bit like life, actually. We should ask what these texts *do*. That is, we should shift the question from "What did the author want to do?" to "What did the author do?" or "What do these texts do?" Only then can we ask ourselves what we think of what they do.

This project is torn, however, between two impulses. On the one hand, I want the reader to discover these works for herself – to confront them (the title, the author and/or editor, the introductory guidance, and the text itself) as if for the first time. I want to show the reader how themes emerge in the writings themselves, *as they emerge*, rather than impose at the outset a list of the themes to be explored. And I want to treat each work as a particular. The problem with simply doing all that, however, is that the reader needs a little orientation up front about why she should bother to read Kierkegaard at all, and that involves suggesting how the reading may prove valuable. The reader also needs some preliminary sense of how the particulars fit into the whole, and what are the already existing practices of, and debates about, reading Kierkegaard. So there is a tension between what I need to say up front and what I try to save for the reader to discover for herself. What we have are texts that can be edifying, or entertaining, or shocking – and in some cases all three. The most I can do is prepare, orient, and guide the reader.

I The Visual Introduction

The first, and in one sense the most important, piece of guidance that can be given to a reader concerns the most unusual feature of Kierkegaard's

writing – namely, the variety of forms it takes. The best short “introduction to Kierkegaard” is found in the visual picture of his writings provided by a listing of all the works he authored, along with their dates (see the appendix at the end of this chapter). The titles and dates and “signatures” by themselves already reveal a great deal about why his writings have always had passionate readers – whether uncritical devotees, critical students, or intrigued analysts. It is a unique body of writings. Apart from the obviously intriguing names to which the books are attributed (Constantin Constantius, Johannes de Silentio, Johannes Climacus, Vigilius Haufniensis, Nicolaus Notabene, Anti-Climacus, H. H., Inter et Inter, and S. Kierkegaard) or with which they are associated (Victor Eremita, Hilarius Bookbinder, and S. Kierkegaard), there are provocative titles, like *Either – Or* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

Moreover, Kierkegaard’s works can be sorted out into two columns ordered by date of publication. It is apparent from this that he wrote from beginning to end of his career two parallel sets of quite different kinds of writings, publishing them alongside each other. That is, one set of texts was written under a variety of ingenious pseudonyms, and a second set, predominantly “discourses” (“upbuilding”⁴ or “Christian”) was written in his own name (S. Kierkegaard), so that at any given point he would be writing/publishing one of the pseudonymous texts at about the same time as he was writing/publishing one of the upbuilding or Christian writings under his own signature. Often the corresponding sets would come out within weeks or months of each other, and once it happened on the very same day. If we look at the parallel lines of signed and pseudonymous works, we see a body of writings that appears to have been written and published very self-consciously. The arrangement does not look accidental; it looks like an authorship that, if not deliberately crafted according to a plan from the outset, at least was deliberately arranged in certain ways as it went along. The parallel lines of authorship are a reconstruction, to be sure, but that they can be so reconstructed shows that the resulting writings were not produced arbitrarily. By working with both sets of texts at the same time I hope to introduce readers to Kierkegaard’s writings in a way that ensures that they never forget this distinctive feature of his authorship.

Many people, especially those interested in his philosophical and religious thought, have studied Kierkegaard under the aspect of one of his famous pseudonyms, for example, Johannes Climacus. Others have been less aware of the pseudonymous aspect of his writing and have concentrated on one of his famous books, like *Fear and Trembling* or *The Sickness unto Death*, uncritically attributing to “Kierkegaard” responses to questions about the relation between ethics and religion or

about the existential transformation of the self. And so, there has been a huge literature on “Kierkegaardian” themes like subjectivity, the “leap” to faith, anxiety, the teleological suspension of the ethical in the name of religion, and the relations between esthetic, ethical, and religious ways of living. Others, fewer but the numbers are growing, have studied the “upbuilding discourses” and the “Christian discourses” written in his own name. To readers who are only familiar with the pseudonymous works these discourses will be a revelation. The “upbuilding” discourses, in particular, have been accorded a special importance recently: it has been argued that “upbuilding, or edification, is the central theme of Kierkegaard’s authorship”⁵ and that the upbuilding discourses provide a “privileged viewpoint on the authorship as a whole.”⁶ To my knowledge no one has published a book-length study of the entire parallel track of writings in their relation to one another,⁷ and yet this product with two different kinds of writing in tandem over a career makes Kierkegaard absolutely unique in the history of thought.

The character of the uniqueness that I am claiming for Kierkegaard should be clarified. In assessing this dual or parallel collection of works, I acknowledge that Kierkegaard was not writing in a literary vacuum – his writings show a mastery of Danish literature and an extensive knowledge of contemporary German literature. Pseudonymity and satire, for example, are found in the Danish and German contexts familiar to Kierkegaard, but his use of it was a pervasive and continuing dimension of his writings throughout his life as an author. Although he builds on the earlier examples of certain genres and approaches, he outdistances each of these individual authors in his variety and consistent use of certain literary techniques.⁸ For this reason, the peculiar duality of his authorship has no rival.

This is not to claim that what he did is more important than what other thinkers have done, and it is certainly not to claim that he was equally successful in all he did – it is simply to be unapologetically astonished by what he did. Even in Nietzsche’s case, where the departures from traditional form and style are evident – provocative and flamboyant aphorisms as well as vitriolic diatribes – the elements of his authorship are at least presented in his own name (including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which has lots of clever deconstruction going on that puts in question any easy identification of Zarathustra with Nietzsche). Something a little more similar to the case of Kierkegaard may be found in David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which has generated a lot of literature about which of the three dialogue partners (Philo, Cleanthes, or Demea) stands for Hume. In this case, it is pretty clear that they are all Hume in some sense, and all not Hume in another sense – each of the characters created by Hume voices views that Hume

can be otherwise documented as holding or rejecting. That is, in the case of both Hume and Nietzsche we can assess correspondences between the views of their creations and their own straightforwardly presented views, but it is not clear that there is ever a comparable straightforwardly presented Kierkegaard.

What else do we learn from the visual representation in the appendix to this chapter? First, each set is distinctive: there is the explicit pseudonymity of one set of writings whereas the other set in the parallel listing is signed S. Kierkegaard. The bulk of this latter set consists of what Kierkegaard generically titled "discourses." If we unpack these volumes of "discourses," we will find about 87 religious discourses – either "upbuilding" or "Christian." This signed track of writing shows clearly that Kierkegaard did not become interested in religion at some late stage of writing. The "discourse" differs markedly as a genre from the pseudonymous writings. Although it might be possible to raid these discourses for irony and satire and parody, it seems implausible to think that they are repositories of these literary strategies in the same way as the pseudonymous writings are. Most of them explicitly address New Testament passages, and some begin with a prayer; indeed, they look so much like traditional sermons that Kierkegaard almost invariably insists in their prefaces that they are not sermons, since he lacks the authority for that. Moreover, of the 87 discourses, Kierkegaard delivered four of them in church services. Seven are subtitled "Christian Discourses," and 28 others are explicitly assembled under the rubric "Christian Discourses." One volume of 15 "deliberations, in the form of discourses" addresses the divine commandment to love the neighbor. The visual representation in the appendix shows that there are writings *about religion* from the beginning, and more importantly that there was *religious writing* from the beginning. Even if the author S. Kierkegaard were to be distinguishable from the man Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, these writings are in a different class from the pseudonyms, even the most Christian of the pseudonyms.

It is worth noting that under the rubric of writings signed by S. Kierkegaard, we find not only such religious discourses but also quite a different genre of writing that has attracted attention to Kierkegaard. These are the writings that have generally been associated with what has been called Kierkegaard's "attack on Christendom."⁹ The challenge Kierkegaard issued in 1851 (*For Self-Examination*) was eventually followed by his assault in the more public media. During the last years of his life (1854–5), he produced 21 newspaper articles and then 10 more volumes of his own pamphlet series supported by public subscription. These late writings express a very polemical (at times vitriolic) response to the established (state) church in Denmark, but their content is not new. As we shall see, the outrage expressed in these writings is of a

piece with Kierkegaard's earlier frustration with what he took to be a dangerous misunderstanding of Christianity.

I do not call attention to the different kinds of writing to separate them, as if they are parallel tracks that never touch or influence each other. It is not as if a university professor adopts a pen name and writes detective novels that have no relation to the academic research she publishes; even in such a case, if both strands began at the same time and continued over a career, it would be hard to imagine that the writings did not mutually influence each other in some way. In the case of Kierkegaard, the pseudonymous and signed writings interweave through each other in interesting ways: a given theme initially explored in a pseudonymous work may then be developed in the discourses or sometimes the other way round.

This visual picture of the writing also provides a different vantage-point on Kierkegaard's religious discourses – for example, the current presentation of the first 18 upbuilding discourses in a single volume allows one to compare the discourses with each other, but it fails to give the reader any sense of their original publication by Kierkegaard in separate small groups of two, three, or four discourses, and obscures the relation between the individual sets of discourses and the other works Kierkegaard was writing at about the same time. The visual picture gives a better sense of the chronological relation between the sets of discourses and the pseudonymous works.

Finally, another important benefit of presenting these contemporaneous strands together is that it introduces the reader to the vexing question of the pseudonymous authorship which scholars wrestle with, but does so in a way that shows that it is not simply an eccentric technical issue but rather affects the very heart of one's understanding of Kierkegaard's thought. Kierkegaard left us a very mixed bag of writings, with an intriguing array of signatures. Kierkegaard wrote a book and signed it "S. Kierkegaard." Kierkegaard wrote another book and signed it "Johannes de Silentio." Kierkegaard wrote yet another book and signed it "Anti-Climacus, edited by S. Kierkegaard." If we clearly distinguish the pseudonymous presentations of ethics from the religious presentations of ethics, this will prevent even a beginner from making certain mistakes – e.g., conflating "Kierkegaard's ethic" not only with the ethic proposed by Judge William in *Either – Or*, but also with the ethic proposed in *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes de Silentio.

The question whether there is a unity to all of Kierkegaard's writings interests many readers, but the visual picture leaves open the question of whether (as he claimed in his retrospective account of his activity as an author) all his writings, including the pseudonymous ones, were "in the service of Christianity."¹⁰ That question cannot be decided on the basis of the visual representation.

II The Contemporary Discussion – Kierkegaard the Writer

Although I want to avoid prejudging these texts for the reader, it is probably helpful to preface the examination of the texts with a brief acknowledgement of the contemporary situation in which Kierkegaard scholarship finds itself. An introduction to Kierkegaard's writings done today can avail itself of a marked renaissance in Kierkegaard scholarship during the last few decades. The new directions in Kierkegaard research have benefited from three relatively recent developments. The first was the completion in 2000 of a critical edition begun in 1978 of all the major works in English, which made the writings accessible to a larger audience.¹¹ The second development was the concentrated attention to the original Danish manuscripts themselves. Much painstaking research into the Danish Royal Library's collection of Kierkegaard's manuscripts – research into the sketches, drafts, printer's copies, and proofs – began in 1994 and continues in a new Danish edition of Kierkegaard's writings, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, spearheaded in Copenhagen by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center.¹² While English non-scholars will not be going to this Danish edition, several general benefits to Kierkegaard scholarship have accrued from this research.

The explanatory notes to the Danish edition document the complex dialogue that Kierkegaard had with other authors, theological, philosophical, and literary, as well as with the current events of his day – they reveal the entire intellectual and political background to his writing. For example, it has become clearer that the occasions for much of Kierkegaard's philosophical diatribes were Danish Hegelians, rather than the German philosopher Hegel as such. That is, although Kierkegaard did read some Hegel, he is best understood as responding to people who were inspired by Hegel.¹³ Moreover, the researchers for the new *Skrifter* edition have uncovered much detail that is relevant to the dating and composition of the various writings; this shows us that Kierkegaard was often working on several texts at once, going back and forth between them.¹⁴ For those who are interested in the person of Kierkegaard the writer, this research also tells a fascinating story of the quirkiness of Kierkegaard's own writing: his remorseless revisions, his last-minute changes, his micro-management of typographical printing details. Over the years then we have been getting a clearer picture of Kierkegaard the writer – often finicky, sometimes vain, and always passionate.

One important implication of this research has to do with the crafting of the texts of the authorship. Attention to the various versions of the Danish originals shows that Kierkegaard often changed his mind about how to sign his works. He sometimes began a work under his own name, changing it to a pseudonym only at the last minute before it went to

the printers. Sometimes he went through several variations whose scratching out we can still see in the originals. As a result, we need to acknowledge that the presence of pseudonyms should nuance any appreciation of the authorship, but we also need to be careful not to take the pseudonyms flatfootedly either. For example, if one knows nothing of the pseudonymous nature of the authorship, one will likely take *Philosophical Fragments* to present “Kierkegaard’s” position on the issues discussed. When one becomes aware that the author, Johannes Climacus, is one of Kierkegaard’s many pseudonymous creations, it is tempting to conclude that now we should read it differently and that we know exactly how to do that. For example, since Johannes Climacus tells us (in his *Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*) that he is not a Christian, we should be very wary of thinking that Johannes Climacus gets the portrayal of Christianity (indirect as it may be) right. That is, one will be suspicious about how to take Climacus’s claims. Then, lo and behold, one sees a physical copy of the *Philosophical Fragments* signed by S. Kierkegaard; researchers have discovered the draft from the day before it went to the printers, at which time it still had Kierkegaard’s name as author. One seems to come full circle by learning that only at the last minute before sending it to the publisher did Kierkegaard change it to be authored by Johannes Climacus. It is not clear why he made the change, but the shift in signature does suggest that he did not begin by first creating the pseudonymous author and then writing the book in that distinctive (non-Christian) voice. And this is true of other works.¹⁵

However, this does not at all mean that whether he used a pseudonym was unimportant to him. Pseudonymity signals to the reader that the text is a calculated pedagogical project, with authorial distance, so pseudonymity is crucial to the ways in which Kierkegaard oriented his readers. Moreover, we should not give up our hermeneutics of suspicion when reading the *Fragments* – there are still numerous literary devices and twists going on in the text that need to be appreciated, regardless of the signature. There are levels and levels of appreciation of the strategy of pseudonymity. In this same vein, we know that Kierkegaard expressed regret that he had published under a pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, a text that he later wished he could put under his own name (as he had originally had it in the final draft). Finally, we have evidence that Kierkegaard toyed with the idea of many pseudonyms that he never actually used – he seems to have just liked the sound of some of the names. My discussion will show the dangers of any naïve failure to pay attention to the pseudonyms, but at the same time it will challenge simplistic assumptions about the pseudonyms, as well as qualify post-modern interpretations in which even “S. Kierkegaard” is taken to be a pseudonym. All of this research may seem irrelevant to people who care

only about “the ideas” in the books and don’t care whose name is signed to them, but pseudonymity is a literary strategy, and if we cease to care about the literary strategies in the texts, we will fail to understand the ideas in the text.

Although I have been concentrating on highlighting the dual strands of Kierkegaard’s authorship – the signed and the pseudonymous – it is important to note that his writing includes not only these works, but also a large amount of journal and notebook material, as well as some correspondence. The new Danish edition of Kierkegaard’s writings explicitly intended to treat the writing as a unity, to include them all in a single edition, in acknowledgement of the fact that this “extra” material found in the manuscripts was not of a unique private status. Kierkegaard fully expected that some day some of that too would be available to the public – he was, in a sense, always writing for others. This does not mean that all the writings are leveled to a single common denominator – it is still important to make distinctions between the kinds of writing – but it does suggest that there is no special cache of writings that give privileged authoritative access to Kierkegaard’s private intentions and motives. There is no doubt that these writings are valuable for research if used rightly; there is much in them that is fascinating and curious, as well as informative and provocative, and I recommend them highly to interested readers.¹⁶ I will not, however, be relying on them; even when the “extra” material is written with others in mind, I think it best not to unduly complicate things by trying to integrate this material into an introduction.

This leads us to the third development in Kierkegaard studies. We currently have a climate in which work on Kierkegaard has benefited from a couple of decades of literary attention. That is, the study of Kierkegaard’s texts has been enriched by the attention given them by people who have not only philosophical and religious interests, but also (sometimes especially) literary interests. Recent analyses have demonstrated the pervasive use of literary strategies like irony, humor, and indirect communication, as well as a deeper appreciation of the strategy of pseudonymity.

One of the strengths of the literary approaches to Kierkegaard’s writings is that they have shifted the ground away from naïve readings. The attempt to read Kierkegaard’s mind (to determine authorial intention through appeal to biography or to journal entries) should be rightly set aside. The practice of reading pseudonymous works without sensitivity to the presence of satire, parody, irony, and humor, should also be guarded against. But there is a danger that focusing attention on literary strategies can draw us out of our literary innocence in such a way that we substitute literary suspicion for literary sensitivity, and thereby limit our reading options. For example, sometimes the literary approach leads

people to ask whether Kierkegaard's writings were all put on for show – of cleverness, or wit, or one-upmanship, or revenge. It leads people to posit an illegitimate dichotomy, asking whether a work is “really” about his broken engagement (his shame about his father, the need to justify himself), or whether it is “really” about religion. The question then would be what to make of the writings that have given so much edification to people, changed their lives, awakened them, so to speak, to the importance of paradox, passion, despair, and the infinite. But acknowledging Kierkegaard's literary concerns does not preclude taking his works seriously. One danger of a hermeneutic of suspicion is that it can obscure the ways in which a writer's various experiences, interests, and concerns can coincide in the space of his artistry.

There are, indeed, two kinds of writings – pseudonymous and signed – but both are done by a master literary craftsman. It is not possible to separate Kierkegaard's literary works from his religious/philosophical works – he was literary “all the way down,” even in his religious and philosophical writings. Therefore, I want to explore the ways in which his literary sensibilities go hand in hand with all the dimensions of his life and issue in a complex overdetermination of his writing. By overdetermination I mean simply that there is not necessarily one single thing going on at any given time, not one single motivation informing a given text. We are embodied, contextualized human beings who cannot neatly compartmentalize the various dimensions of our life, so it is not surprising that more than a single motivation or a single concern would inform a given piece of writing.

Let me use a suggestion made by Kierkegaard himself to illustrate what this “overdetermination” might mean. The general idea that one's various life concerns can be expressed in one's literary pursuits is found in the first work Kierkegaard ever published – *From the Papers of One Still Living* (1838), a review of Hans Christian Andersen's novel, *Only a Fiddler*. That review clearly raises the question of the relation between the quality of an author's life and the quality of an author's writing. It asks: What is true poetry, the poetically true? What is good writing? What is genius? What is art? Kierkegaard makes a striking contrast between two ways of writing, two different uses of one's life experiences: in “the poetically true,” one's experiences (living to the “first power”) are “transubstantiated” (living to the “second power”); he contrasts this with the case where one's experiences are “undigested,” “unappropriated,” “unfiltered” (FPOSL, 84). The view that life is appropriated experience contests both the rationalism and the romanticism of Kierkegaard's day: in order to be appropriated, there must be both immediacy and reflection, and whereas rationalism lacks the indispensable immediacy, romanticism lacks the equally indispensable reflection on immediacy.

Kierkegaard's critique of Andersen's esthetic failures reveals his view of the inseparability of the esthetic and the authentic – the true esthetic is not vain or self-centered. Kierkegaard's accusations are revealing. He suggests that "instead of carrying through his reflection, he [Andersen] on the contrary encloses himself in a very small space of it," a space which prevents development because it cyclically repeats itself (FPOSL, 74). True artistry, on the contrary, is suffering life through to the second power. In short, Kierkegaard's view of the demands of literary art and its relation to life seems to be one way of making sense of the concept of "esthetic earnestness" that he uses in a letter to his friend Emil Boesen: "I have far too much sense of and reverence for what stirs in a human being not to guard it with just as much esthetic as ethical earnestness."¹⁷

If we take seriously the notion of "transubstantiation" of lived experience in literature, we will find it difficult to continue simplistically raising the question of "either/or" too often addressed to Kierkegaard's writings. The question whether Kierkegaard was exercising his literary craft *rather than* exploring a religious or philosophical or personal concern does not make sense. The fact that Kierkegaard was a self-conscious author, a literarily minded author, is not incompatible with his being an author who had religious or philosophical or psychological aims. We need to do justice to Kierkegaard's wide variety of concerns and interests: I propose that we call them religious/theological, philosophical, psychological, literary, and personal. It should be clear that I am using the word "literary" to point to two different things – on the one hand, to point to a literary approach, and on the other hand, to point to literary interests. Kierkegaard had literary ambitions – he wanted to be accepted in Danish literary circles; he was disgruntled about not being part of the reigning literary alliances. He wanted to be known as a great writer. But at a different level, at the level of his approach to his writing, even this interest in literary reputation was "transubstantiated" into literature. The category of "personal" here covers things like his relation to his family, and to his fiancée – his private life. Although one could say that things like cultivating a literary reputation and reacting to the goings-on in the competing literary circles of his day were also personal, still these are different from the most important personal relationships he had. But even if we can distinguish these categories conceptually, they are not separate in practice – all his concerns had a bearing on each other in some sense. And ultimately, all his experiences coincided within the space of his artistry; his life was inflected in literary art.

Let me suggest the following heuristic device for thinking about the overdetermination or multivalence in the texts – namely, concentric circles. Immanuel Kant used the image of concentric circles in his book, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, to explain the relation