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# Voice and Fertility, (Self-)Impregnation and (Inter-)Dependence: The Pseudonyms and their (Narratives about) Wives

**Abstract:** By analyzing prefaces and other short excerpts written by different pseudonyms (Nicolaus Notabene, Hilarius Bookbinder, Frater Taciturnus, Judge William and, in contrast, Johannes the Seducer), this paper explores the pseudonymous authors' relation to their spouses. It assumes that recurring motifs in the prefaces, such as 'voice' and the metaphor of 'fertility,' reveal, often in ironic tones, general gender-related aspects of identity in Kierkegaard's works. The paper thus explores how the seemingly stereotyped and archaic conception of gender in the prefaces, such as the pseudonymous author's assertion of superiority of (male) reasoning through writing over the (female) immediacy represented in voice, reflect aspects of the individual's disposition before God.

## I Introduction

There are various well-known narratives about wives in Kierkegaard's authorship, e.g., Notabene's struggles with his wife, who appears jealous of his artistic productivity in the preface to the *Prefaces*, or Judge William's conversation with his wife, overheard by the aesthete in "In Vino Veritas." But there are also other, less familiar episodes and relationships, such as represented in the preface to *Stages on Life's Way* by Hilarius Bookbinder, who completely depends on the stereotyped convictions of his deceased wife's opinion. Doubtlessly, many of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are married, and it is a funny

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I am very obliged to David Possen, who not only helped me track down the English translations, but also commented very thoughtfully on them, trying to keep the translations as close to the Danish originals as possible. The references given in this paper refer to David Possen's suggestions based on the Hong translations. All quotes that differ from the Hong translations are marked with 'DP.'

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notion that the word wife (“kone”) appears almost exactly as often as governance (“styrelse”) in Kierkegaard’s writings (296 to 304).<sup>1</sup>

Focusing on the prefaces of some of the pseudonymous works, this paper will explore the use of images and motifs with respect to the pseudonymous authors’ relation to their spouses.<sup>2</sup> I will focus on two recurring metaphorical patterns: Firstly, the motif of ‘voice’ that resounds in almost all of these accounts;<sup>3</sup> and secondly, the metaphor of ‘fertility’ and ‘(self-)impregnation,’ images that in Kierkegaard’s works refer to both artistic as well as biological ‘fruits’ and often combine the assertion of autonomy with a (subtextual) manifestation of dependence.<sup>4</sup> In doing so I will try to answer the following questions: How does the pseudonyms’ relationship to their spouses reflect aspects of the individual’s disposition before God? In what way does the apparently stereotyped and archaic conception of gender in the prefaces express recurring categories of existence in Kierkegaard’s writings? I will suggest that patterns in the various pseudonyms’ relationships to their wives reflect, in ironic tones, general gender-related aspects of identity in Kierkegaard’s authorship—like, for example, the dichotomy of male reflection (as related to writing) and female immediacy (as related to voice). Moreover, the manifold close links between writing and the erotic in Kierkegaard’s works appear in a playful—but

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1 Taken into account published as well as unpublished works; cf. [www.sks.dk](http://www.sks.dk).

2 The preface as a genre in general will not be a focus of this paper. On Kierkegaard’s use of prefaces and paratexts cf. Lasse Horne Kjældgaard, “The Age of Miscellaneous Announcements: Paratextualism in Kierkegaard’s *Prefaces* and Contemporary Literary Culture,” in *Prefaces and Writing Sampler*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 2006 (*International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 9), pp. 7–28. On the linguistic-philosophical foundation of prefaces cf. Uwe Wirth, “Das Vorwort als performative, paratextuelle und parergonale Rahmung,” in *Rhetorik: Figuration und Performanz*, ed. by Jürgen Fohrmann, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler 2004, pp. 603–628. On prefaces and other paratexts cf. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997 (*Literature, Culture, Theory*, vol. 20).

3 This may appear as a rough simplification, since the motif of voice is highly heterogenous in Kierkegaard’s writings. In this paper, ‘voice’ simply refers to the medium of oral utterances. As such, it is opposed to writing as the oral resp. written side of language. In Kierkegaard’s works, the concept of voice is linked to concepts such as actuality, inwardness, and silence. On the topic of language and voice cf. Katrin Dieckow, *Gespräche zwischen Gott und Mensch: Studien zur Sprache bei Kierkegaard*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2009 (*Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie*, vol. 122). Cf. as well Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2001.

4 On this topic, especially related to Johannes the Seducer, cf. Henrike Fürstenberg, *Entweder ästhetisch—oder religiös? Søren Kierkegaard textanalytisch*, Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2017 (*Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series*, vol. 34), p. 162 and pp. 187–196.

nonetheless powerful—way in the prefaces to be discussed. We will have a look at the preface to *Prefaces*, written by Nicolaus Notabene; at the preface to *Stages on Life's Way* by Hilarius Bookbinder; and at the preface written by Frater Taciturnus to the last writing in the *Stages*, the diary entitled "'Guilty?'—'Not Guilty?'" In addition, I'll briefly discuss a passage in "The Balance [Equilibrium] between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality," the second letter written by Judge William in *Either/Or II*, where the motif of self-impregnation is carried to its extreme. Finally, the paper will turn to Johannes the Seducer, who—while obviously not married—will provide an *ex negativo*-scale for the questions discussed.

## II Nicolaus Notabene: Prefaces

Let us begin with the pseudonymously penned preface that gives the most space to the spouse of its author, Nicolaus Notabene.<sup>5</sup> In the preface to the eight prefaces Notabene publishes as a book, he explains to the reader how he came to write prefaces but not the books they introduce. Apart from being a polemic-satirical reply to J.L. Heiberg, *Prefaces*—"an insult that is wrapped in...ingenuity"<sup>6</sup>—it is a lucid example of the strategies of indirect communication. The work denies not only its author but even itself: It elevates the fragment, the reference, to a principle, even doing so in the form of an empty reference.<sup>7</sup> Not only is there no work at all (only prefaces) but the author's initials are also N. N., nomen nescio—an unknown, yet-to-be-filled-in name.

The preface to the prefaces is about someone who does not have his say. A few months after his wedding, Nicolaus "had become, step by step, rather well-

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5 On the figure Notabene in Kierkegaard's authorship cf. Nassim Bravo Jordán: "Nicolaus Notabene: Kierkegaard's Satirical Mask," in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*, ed. by Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart, London: Routledge 2015 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 17), pp. 193–204. Cf. as well Stephen Crites, "The Unfathomable Stupidity of Nicolaus Notabene," in *Prefaces and Writing Sampler*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 2006 (*International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 9), pp. 29–40.

6 Kjældgaard, "The Age of Miscellaneous Announcements," p. 28.

7 As Hugh S. Pyper puts it: "*Prefaces* is an odd work even by Kierkegaard's standards" ("Promising Nothing: Kierkegaard and Stanislaw Lem on Prefacing the Unwritten," in *Prefaces and Writing Sampler*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 2006 (*International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 9), pp. 67–85. Drawing an analogy between a book consisting of prefaces as an empty promise and an engagement, while in incarnation "the unwritten takes form," Pyper understands *Prefaces* as a metonym for Kierkegaard's authorship, belonging to the realm of introduction—a preface to Christ.

versed in the method of married life, then a desire reawakened in [him]—one that [he] had always cultivated, and to which [he] believed, in all credulousness, that [he] ought to devote [him]self—” namely, to work as an author.<sup>8</sup> But the jealous wife, who thinks that “[t]o be an author when one is a married man...is the worst form of unfaithfulness,”<sup>9</sup> confiscates everything, Notabene writes—going so far as to use the writings as curlers, or simply setting fire to them. Reasoning doesn’t help, for she simply dismisses any statement she doesn’t like as “teasing.”<sup>10</sup> When the argument has got so far that he fears to be “an *encliticon* to nothing,” she gives him an ultimatum: Either be a good husband, “or else - - - - well, the rest makes no difference.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, he promises to stop writing, but reserves the right to write prefaces. Thus, with a clear conscience—albeit still in exile on a country stay—he finally writes a book consisting solely of prefaces.

It becomes clear that the persistence of the conflict hinges on the different kinds of language the two of them use. As he puts it, Notabene’s wife’s contributions to the conversation are illogical and uncooperative; her arguments are “ignorant” but descend “from the heart”; they “move and touch”<sup>12</sup> Notabene. One might say that she simply negates his “methods,” his attempts to approach love logically, such as when Notabene describes their struggles using words of rhetorical and juridical import (“sections,” “syllogism,” “dialectics”)—a highly logically organized way of writing. Not surprisingly, he appears as the male representative of mind and reason, while she represents irrationality and emotion. But Notabene knows this kind of feeling too. It is striking that inclination, fidelity and commitment in Notabene’s words are related to *writing*: in a kind of chiasm, love is turned into an intellectual operation (“method”), while writing is a matter of sensuality. “My pen was, so to speak, dipped,”<sup>13</sup> Notabene writes—a few months after his wedding—about his intention to write a book. Without commenting any further on that, one can though hardly avoid to think of the correspondence between the pen and the phallus here.

What does that mean? For Notabene talking to his wife doesn’t involve passion, he reserves passionate discourse for his writing. A twisted analogy arises, as she, on the other hand, completely ignores the validity of his principle, since it is only “teasing” to her. In short, Notabene uses the wrong register (in the linguistic sense): In the struggle between her conception of marriage and

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8 SKS 4, 470 / P, 6; DP.

9 SKS 4, 474 / P, 10; DP.

10 SKS 4, 472 / P, 7.

11 SKS 4, 475f. / P, 11; DP.

12 SKS 4, 474 / P, 10.

13 SKS 4, 471 / P, 7.

his desire to write, he doesn't participate in his wife's passionate discourse, but insists on the superiority of the rational language he uses. As partners, they do not share the same mode of expression at all, so misunderstanding and actual distance—his stay in the country—follow logically from that.

The funny thing is that, regardless of his arguments, she seems to be perfectly right—but only if we consider the sensual metaphors Notabene uses about writing. Then, indeed, his acts of writing are a sort of unfaithfulness. After being married for a few months, he seeks passion in writing, while the marriage itself seems characterized by distraction, misunderstanding, argument, and, finally, by distance and secrets. Seen in this ironic manner, Notabene uses writing as a substitute for a passion we might expect his wife to inspire—even if only writing prefaces: substitutes! And apparently, even the poor substitute (of writing prefaces instead of books) seems to work. In the first sections of his preface, Notabene praises “the desire to write a preface, the desire for these *leves sub noctem susurri* [low whispers, when night falls]”<sup>14</sup> in a large number of anaphorically arranged images, images that testify that he truly lives out this desire. Though the passage is too long to be quoted, it can be said that it is very lyrical, with a rhythm that starts paratactically and increases with phrases that continually grow longer and more entangled; a climax that involves a variety of parallelisms, chiasmi, polysyndeton, tonal structures, metaphors and brilliant images.

It is not very inventive to claim that, in Kierkegaard's works, the dialectic of male and female is linked to the dichotomy of reason/rationality and immediacy/commitment. With Notabene, the man who by his wife is forbidden to write and who still thinks “that according to all divine and human laws the husband is the one who rules,”<sup>15</sup> the claim of superiority of male reason becomes an ironic statement. Firstly, this clearly contradicts the stereotyped gender ideas presented in the preface. What's more, even though Notabene caricatures the difference between being married and being an author (no minor distinction for Kierkegaard himself), the preface ironically illuminates the inability to unite two dialectically opposite points of view, resulting in a stalemate for the two partners. For Notabene, love and passion are shifted to writing, which is thus paired with the ‘female’ side of the argument. This means—following the categories the text provides—that his identity both as a partner and as an author remains incomplete, or: substitutional.

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14 Cf. *SKS* 4, 469 / *P*, 5; *DP*.

15 *SKS* 4, 474 / *P*, 10; *DP*.

From the wife as an opponent to writing, let's turn to the wife as an authority—still bearing in mind the theme of 'writing,' which now will be complemented by the motif of 'voice.' We turn to Hilarius Bookbinder, who signs the preface to *Stages on Life's Way*.

### III Hilarius Bookbinder: Preface to *Stages on Life's Way*

Hilarius' foreword is relatively short and unspectacular. It has attracted little attention.<sup>16</sup> In it, the 'Cheerful Bookbinder' gives an account of the book's origins, and of his status as its editor, since, after all, he's only a bookbinder. In fact, Hilarius' foreword is a defense against anticipated objections.<sup>17</sup> Funnily, this defense is, to an almost grotesque extent, embedded in others' speech. For example, three voices have their say before Hilarius dares to report the death of the actual author whose his writings lay, unbound, in Hilarius' bookbindery: "And just as things go as the German says: Heute roth morgen todt [Today red, tomorrow dead], and just as the preacher says: Death recognizes no status and no age, and just as my late wife declares: We all must take this road...So in the meantime the literatus died."<sup>18</sup> In the following, all of Hilarius' assumptions and attitudes toward the published work are credited to his wife, to a philosopher friend of his, and to other 'reliable' people, but not without their reliability being undermined several times in ironic fashion.<sup>19</sup>

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**16** Although its autobiographical elements have been highlighted. Cf. Elisabete M. de Sousa, "Hilarius Bookbinder: The Realm of Truth and the World of Books," in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*, ed. by Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart, London: Routledge 2015 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 17), pp. 97–105 and p. 97.

**17** "...since no distinguished professor or man of high standing should resent it if a bookbinder, instead of minding his own business, mingles unauthorized with the literati, a shameless boldness that could also prompt severe judgment on the book and possibly have the result that many, scandalized by the bookbinder, would not read the book at all—there follows hereupon the truthful history of the book" (*SKS* 6, 11 / *SLW*, 3).

**18** *SKS* 6, 11 / *SLW*, 3. When de Sousa speaks to "three modalities of wisdom" here, she seems to miss the irony embedded in this chain of quotations. Cf. de Sousa, "Hilarius Bookbinder: The Realm of Truth and the World of Books," p. 100.

**19** E. g. when the philosopher claims his payment: "I was deeply moved and became even more so when he raised his voice and continued in a raised voice: As far as I am concerned, I ask nothing or as good as nothing; in consideration of the anticipated large profits, all I ask is ten rix-dollars right now and a half pint of wine for dinner on Sundays and holidays" (*SKS* 6, 14 /

Hilarius' wife appears five times in his foreword, always with the epithet "my late [blessed] wife." She is thus a kind of 'empty phrase,' herself quoting phrases and idioms. Even though she is dead, she's the one who empowers Hilarius to dare to act, or to speak. Exactly the inverse of Notabene's wife, Hilarius' wife gives rise to his productivity. Hilarius (also inversely) does not want to be an author; indeed, he hardly dares to be an editor. As with Notabene, this preface is really about writing, in this case as opposed to voice. Voice, the sensual part of expression, is, in Kierkegaard's works, often linked with a female, immediate approach to existence. This approach involves devotion and passion as conditions for opening up to grace and redemption. Katrin Dieckow highlights the importance of voice in favor of an authentic relation to actuality, especially with regard to religious existence: "The bodily side of language, namely the voice, guarantees that the words are in connection with the believer's life."<sup>20</sup> According to Victor Eremita, voice is "the disclosure of inwardness incommensurable with the exterior."<sup>21</sup> In this light it is very notable that Hilarius deals with *absent* voices; in his preface, his wife is merely a quotation. So, again, an ironic relationship arises. Even though she represents 'voice,' her words are only remembered and quoted—and, in addition, so vague and stereotyped as to not even really be 'hers.'

Hilarius' wife, as well as his relation to her, thus reflects two things. Firstly, borrowed authority justifies Hilarius' own actions. This means he is pure convention, the one who symbolizes the purchasable truth available from the author-authority of written words, not the "truth for you,"<sup>22</sup> as we read at the very end of *Either/Or*. Thus, a punchline of indirect communication arises from this caricature of direct communication. It is exactly Hilarius' belief in authority that ironically points out the absence of any 'author' of the text he prefaces (the *Stages*). But secondly, Hilarius' wife also illuminates an ironic relationship: The absent, the dead, the written formulas—or: the general—appear as guarantors that something enters into existence and receives relevance.

For more clarity on this point, it helps to look at how 'writing' and 'voice' relate to each other as this relation unfolds in the text. In the first sentence of the preface, truth and writing, even the institutionalized form of writing, are tied together: "Inasmuch as there ought to be rectitude in all things, especially

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SLW, 5f.). For comparison: A maid received, in addition to board and lodging, a maximum of 30 Rbt. per year; cf. SKS K 6, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Dieckow, *Gespräche zwischen Gott und Mensch*, p. 124; translation HF.

<sup>21</sup> SKS 2, 11 / EO1, 3.

<sup>22</sup> SKS 3, 332 / EO2, 354.

in the realm of truth and the world of books ... “<sup>23</sup> There is a humorous shift in this: What Hilarius presents, is indeed a caricature of appropriation (German: “Aneignung”; Danish: “tilegnelse”), when he naively parrots his wife’s and others’ opinions. But the subtext in this preface does not at all favor ‘truth’; rather, it favors an outward, appealing form of utterances. Actually, there is a fairly high prioritization of orality in the preface. It is implicit, rather than explicit; we find at least three examples in the short preface: (1) Hilarius is more enthusiastic about the philosopher’s “splendid voice” in the pulpit than his rhetoric; (2) a demand made in a raised voice—“when he raised his voice and continued in a raised voice”<sup>24</sup>—moves Hilarius despite its outrageousness; and (3) he does not understand the content of the writings and instead lets his children copy “the beautiful letters and flourishes”<sup>25</sup> in order to practice their handwriting. In a kind of climax, they also read their work out loud. Thus, the outward form of the utterances makes up for a lack of—or for contradictory—content. So, perhaps, Hilarius’ role in the book isn’t limited to having “compiled” it, “forwarded” it “to the press,” and “published” it, as the front page to the *Stages* states.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, one can now turn from ape to apostle by claiming that his real point is that one should not be deceived by the various appealing voices in the *Stages*, no matter how beautiful or moving they might sound.<sup>27</sup> This jives well with the principle to which Hilarius’ whole preface is obliged, both in terms of content and form: authority. The distinguished professor’s, the philosopher’s, his wife’s caricatured authority!

In this context it is striking that all the voices in the *Stages* feign presence and simultaneity. We find genres committed to the situational (speeches, diary, Williams’ answer to “objections”), but all of them also ironize their setting. For example, the symposium, which must simulate spontaneity artificially for the participants, with all kinds of precautions in order for it to take place at all (otherwise, the aesthetes who are committed to contingency would not

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<sup>23</sup> SKS 6, 11 / SLW, 3; DP. Elisabete de Sousa argues that Hilarius distinguishes between the “realm of truth”—“being true in what you do”—and the exclusive “world of books” (de Sousa, “Hilarius Bookbinder: The Realm of Truth and the World of Books,” p. 100). I don’t see any evidence for a “necessary division” and even opposition between the two kinds in his account, while de Sousa’s highlighting of his prioritization of acting in a true manner goes well with his prioritization of the oral, as we shall see.

<sup>24</sup> SKS 6, 14 / SLW, 5.

<sup>25</sup> SKS 6, 12 / SLW, 4.

<sup>26</sup> SKS 6, 7 / SLW, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the well-known epigraph to the *Stages*: “Solche Werke sind Spiegel; wenn ein Affe hinein guckt, kann kein Apostel heraus sehen. [Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out]” (SKS 6, 16 / SLW, 8).

appear);<sup>28</sup> or the diary, that confronts an uneventful present—which in itself is a construct—with the report about a love story that happened a year ago, with the cool reflections of those entries written “in the morning” (i.e., in the present) contrasting almost boldly with the uncontrolled, diffuse world of emotions “at midnight” (from the past). In *Stages*, we hear voices instead of authorities. So what we can say about Hilarius is that he sets an example of how *not* to deal with the text the reader is about to read—otherwise, as is the case with him, the readers’ own voice will never be able to speak, or to find “truth for you.”<sup>29</sup> His wife is thus an ironic example of the kind of (authorial) voice one should be wary of. Again, there is a humorous exchange in which (Hilarius’ wife’s) voice (as pure quotation) is assigned to the sphere of bookish “truth,” remote from real life, whereas text (the voices in the *Stages*) guarantees the reality of individual existence.

So actually, both Notabene and Hilarius ironically spin the ostensible suggestions in their texts about writing (male) versus passion/voice (female) the other way: Writing is not logical reasoning, but passion; not authoritative truth, but voice. The *Stages* provide another example of equating a text with the female—namely, the book’s other preface. This preface brings us to the motif of fertility.

## IV Frater Taciturnus: Preface to “‘Guilty?’—‘Not Guilty?’”

The longest text in the *Stages*, young Quidam’s diary “‘Guilty?’—‘Not Guilty?’,” begins with an elaborate explanation by the editor, Frater Taciturnus, of how he came to possess the text. Frater Taciturnus, the Silent Brother,<sup>30</sup> is not only known for this “Notice: The Owner Sought” [*Fremlysning*], but also for his much longer conclusive “Letter to the Reader” at the end of the *Stages*. Apart from that, he appears as the author of newsletter articles. The personality of

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *SKS* 6, 27–33 / *SLW*, 21–28.

<sup>29</sup> *SKS* 3, 332 / *EO2*, 354.

<sup>30</sup> A highly readable account of Taciturnus’ figure in Kierkegaard’s universe is presented in Gene Fendt, “The Wit Against Religious Drama: Frater Taciturnus vs. Søren Kierkegaard,” in *Kierkegaard Revisited*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997 (*Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series*, vol. 1), pp. 48–74.

this “highly complicated figure”<sup>31</sup> will, however, not be discussed here, only his prolog as it is related to the other prefaces discussed in this paper. In his writings in *Stages* he makes use of a specific “rhetoric of silence,”<sup>32</sup> as Wojciech Kaftański and Gabriel G. Rossatti put it; through it, the motif of ‘voice’ will gain new facets here.

The “Notice” tells us in colorful words that Taciturnus, while he accompanied his “friend the naturalist,” hauled the diary up from the depths of a lake surrounded by a belt of reeds that had been difficult to penetrate.<sup>33</sup> The text was placed in a box made from palisander wood, which was covered by an oilcloth provided with several seals, and, apart from the diary, contained jewels and things of personal value. There is no wife in this preface. But what we do find is a poorly concealed image, or a symbol, of the female.

These strategies of authentication (about the book’s origins) are conspicuous in at least two respects: The physical barrier that the reed-bordered lake constitutes against the removal of the box reveals the text as a secret<sup>34</sup> on the one hand, and, at least implicitly, the border that connects it to the female at the other hand. There is good evidence to read this account of the capturing of the text as an allegory of exegesis, and there is also good reason to state that it is not a diary, but an artifact—Taciturnus’ artifact.<sup>35</sup> That the author of the diary,

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**31** Wojciech Kaftański and Gabriel G. Rossatti, “Frater Taciturnus: The Two Lives of the Silent Brother,” in *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonyms*, ed. by Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart, London: Routledge 2015 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 17), p. 67.

**32** *Ibid.*, p. 68.

**33** Thus referring to Victor Eremita’s fictions about how he (resp. A) came to detect the texts they publish. Cf. de Sousa, “Hilarius Bookbinder: The Realm of Truth and the World of Books,” pp. 98f.

**34** On the importance and semantics of the secret in Kierkegaard’s writings cf. Ettore Rocca, “Ästhetisches und religiöses Geheimnis. Kierkegaards heteronome Kunst,” in *Kunst und Religion. Ein kontroverses Verhältnis*, ed. by Markus Kleinert, Mainz: Chorus Verlag, pp. 57–77; with regard to the relationship between secrecy and disclosure in *Either/Or*, cf. Ettore Rocca, *Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2016, pp. 105–140.

**35** Taciturnus assumes, that “a poor...psychologist...has made an attempt to invite sympathy by giving it the aspect of a novel [ved at give det et novellistisk Anstrøg]” (SKS 6, 178f. / SLW, 190f.). This reminds us of Victor Eremita, who in his preface to *Either/Or* suspects A of using an “old literary device [gammelt Novellist-Knebt]” (SKS 2, 16 / EOI, 9) stating he is not the author of the “Diary of a Seducer,” but who in turn wonders, how Johannes’ diary got such a “poetic tinge [digterisk Anstrøg]” (SKS 2, 295 / EOI, 305). These strategies of destabilization of any author-figure can, of course, be read as attempts to deliberate the reader’s opinion.

Accordingly, Kaftański and Rossatti suggest a reading where the whole text (the diary) is Taciturnus’ own production; following this reading he simply never would have opened the box. Actually, it seems reasonable to ask, how he actually opened it, “if it was closed and

William Afham, “does not exist outside my imaginary construction in thought,”<sup>36</sup> as Taciturnus concedes in his conclusive “Letter to the Reader,” clarifies that the genesis of the text as stated in the “Fremlysning” is pure fiction—pure allegory. Actually, it unfolds as the antagonism of two powers at play on several levels. This becomes obvious right at the beginning, when two different traditions of textuality/orality are implicitly addressed: “Every child knows that Søbørg Castle is a ruin...Although the castle has long since been destroyed, it still survives in folk memory and will survive inasmuch as it has a rich historical and historically poetic past to draw upon.”<sup>37</sup> An oral narrative tradition—the poetical and romantic dimensions of which are highlighted in the chiasmus “rich historical and historically poetic”—refers to the lake, which is affective (the mainland “squeezes it together” [*ængster [den] sammen*]), and whose extent is emphatically imprecise. This romantic-mythological narrative tradition is then contrasted by a scientific view, when Taciturnus’ “friend the naturalist” appears. It is no coincidence that place and time are no longer diffuse, but rather precisely given: “It was in Helsingør last summer that I met an elderly friend, a naturalist.”<sup>38</sup>

From here on, the antagonism between romanticism and science becomes the antagonism between female and male. Taciturnus’ account is decidedly one of seduction—or even violation: The lake (the female) and “the solid land” (which embodies the male principle) fight day and night, namely a fight over “limits,” more specifically over the question of who is allowed to cross the other and how far. No background in psychoanalysis is necessary to understand what this is about: “What gives the lake an even more inclosed [*indesluttet*] look is that the quagmire is overgrown with the most luxuriant bed of reeds...Only in one place has a little waterway been opened up; here there is a flat-bottomed boat, in which we...poled [*stagede (!)*] ourselves out.”<sup>39</sup> To make the semantics even clearer, the consequences of crossing over are tied to fertility: “There is something melancholy about this struggle; yet it is

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the key was inside?” (Kaftański and Rossatti: “Frater Taciturnus: The Two Lives of the Silent Brother,” p. 71) Again, it seems obvious to draw an analogy to A’s preface to the “Diary of a Seducer,” consisting of several hundred pages which A has copied “only in the greatest haste” (*SKS* 2, 293 / *EOI*, 303) while Johannes had left his home—an act that, physically, seems even more impossible than Taciturnus, who “forced [the box] open” (*SKS* 6, 177 / *SLW*, 189), as he states.

**36** *SKS* 6, 374 / *SLW*, 403.

**37** *SKS* 6, 175 / *SLW*, 187.

**38** *Ibid.*

**39** *SKS* 6, 176 / *SLW*, 187f.; DP.

not marked by any traces of devastation, for what the earth step by step wins from the lake is transformed into a smiling and exceedingly fertile meadow.”<sup>40</sup>

Now, the third antagonism—the one of voice and silence—emerges. A mythical realm opens up, a realm “as if eternally lost to the world,” where Taciturnus feels “almost anxious.”<sup>41</sup> This is a reference to the realm of the demonic where the ego finds itself radically lonely: “[T]o be so infinitely far from people, to be in a nutshell out on an ocean!” In this realm, voice and silence interfere with one another: “Everything was so still; silence rested over the lake”; and yet the call of a bittern can be heard; “and then the silence descended again [*gjorde sig atter gjeldende*] nearly to the point of anxiousness, when all of a sudden the sound was interrupted and the ear grasped in vain for some support in the infinite.”<sup>42</sup> This passage clearly appeals to the ear. Through the motif of silence, on the other hand, the lake not only represents the feminine but also the secret, as the lake “is more reliable than the most solemn vow-absolute silence is promise.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, it belongs to the mythological rather than the scientific world: the bittern is called a “strange” bird, who “wail[s] and lament[s],”<sup>44</sup> its threefold yell is incomprehensible. As we remember, it is only with great resistance that the lake lets Taciturnus wrest from it the sealed box that can itself only be opened by force, the key being inside the box: “...inclosing reserve [*Indesluttethed*] is always turned inward in that way,” the text says.<sup>45</sup>

What does that mean? Only the “ape”<sup>46</sup> will believe in the ‘cheap’ fiction that the text has been written in 1751 in purely personal interest, as Taciturnus states. It is rather a highly artificial writing—and such a secret the reader himself is to reveal. Indeed, the text is truly about an exegetical process. It starts by

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**40** Ibid.; DP. Moreover, Taciturnus imagines himself “in the lush fecundity in India [*Indiens yppige Frugtbarhed*]” (SKS 6, 176 / SLW, 188).

**41** Ibid.

**42** Ibid.; DP.

**43** SKS 6, 177 / SLW, 189.

**44** SKS 6, 176 / SLW, 188.

**45** SKS 6, 177 / SLW, 189. The semantics of the secret are distinctly tied to the semantics of voice and incomprehensible inclosing reserve. When the text says about the bittern: “Strange bird, why do you wail and lament [*sukker og klager*] this way-after all, you indeed wish only to remain in solitude!” (SKS 6, 176; SLW, 188), the word “sigh” brings it together with the sigh of the lake, which can be seen as the inclosed soul: “a sigh [*suk*] *de profundis* [out of the depths], a sigh over the fact that I wrested away from the lake what had been deposited there, a sigh from the inclosed lake, a sigh from the inclosed soul whose secret I had wrested away” (SKS 6, 177 / SLW, 188–189; DP). The wooden box can be read as a treasure chest with the diary as the interior life, which the psychological experimenter pulls into the light of day.

**46** Cf. footnote 27.

presenting two different kinds of approaches (romantic vs. scientific) from which it seems obvious to understand the lake, allegorically, as the prefaced text that the reader now is about to read. He/she then turns into the seducer of the text in order to gain from it the secret of inwardness.<sup>47</sup> First of all, he has to fight his/her way to a silence where inwardness makes itself heard—it is a diary we are about to read. Moreover, Taciturnus describes the lake as surrounded by peasant dwellings on the one side and priestly property on the other side. The mystical lake, which is slowly shrinking down by the activities—unmistakable a romantic image—is tied together with the mystical and the female, containing the secret of inwardness. So, again, it is convention and civilization—everything taught by education, reflection and reason—that one must leave behind in order to discover a fruitful secret and hear what cannot be understood (the bitterns' mystical yell); and, finally, to hear silence. In Kierkegaard's work, silence is a necessary condition for receiving what we cannot draw from ourselves.<sup>48</sup> It is therefore clearly linked to the religious and, on the other hand, to the demonic dimension of "inclosing reserve." For Taciturnus, the Silent Brother, silence is "the way of communication" he exercises; it communicates "the concealed, which...will not be revealed."<sup>49</sup> It also emphasizes the romantic-poetic nature of the writings as well as the limits of poetry.<sup>50</sup>

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**47** Inwardness is pointed out by Taciturnus in a very figurative way. He writes: "Now that I think about it, now that I know everything, now I understand it: I understand that it was a sigh emanating from below, a sigh *de profundis* [out of the depths], a sigh over the fact that I wrested away from the lake what had been deposited there, a sigh from the inclosed lake, a sigh from the inclosed soul whose secret I had wrested away ["Naar jeg nu tænker derover, nu da jeg veed Alt, da forstaaer jeg det, jeg forstaaer det var et Suk dernede fra, et Suk de profundis, et Suk, at jeg fravristede Havet sit Depositum, et Suk fra den indesluttede Sø, et Suk fra den indesluttede Sjel, som jeg fravristede hans Hemmelighed]" (SKS 6, 177 / SLW, 188–189; DP). In the chiasmus "fravristede"—"indesluttede"—"indesluttede"—"fravristede" the inclosed becomes actually 'inclosed' between the successful attempts to wrest the secret from it. The five-time repetition of the "sigh (Suk)" again exposes the importance of hearing in this passage.

**48** This is, certainly, a rough simplification of the different layers of meaning which are at play when Kierkegaard addresses silence in his works. Ettore Rocca has written a short but outstanding article on "Søren Kierkegaard and Silence" (in *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. by Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino and Sven Hakon Rossel, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2000, pp. 77–83) where he points out that both the demonic and the divine participate in Kierkegaard's understanding of silence. Demonic silence, so he argues, corresponds to reticence, a remaining inside the own enclosed self, whereas the religious form of silence corresponds to a becoming nothing in light of the divine by which it evokes openness and constitutes the basis for communication at all.

**49** Kaftanski and Rossatti: "Frater Taciturnus: The Two Lives of the Silent Brother," p. 71.

**50** Ibid.

The topic of silence is beyond the scope of this paper (we could, e.g., turn to the lilies and the birds to find a religious image of silence in nature that can teach silence as a receptive form of being).<sup>51</sup> But what I would like to suggest is that Taciturnus' "Notice," apart from being an allegory on textual exegesis and disclosing inwardness, draws an analogy between encountering a text and encountering a fabulous woman. Silence seems to be the condition for such an encounter. So surprisingly enough, *again*, textuality is associated with the *female* side of existence; the text is a sphere where not only voice (as vivid reality) but even silence resounds. In all the texts we've looked at, writing/textuality has been linked to the female, to voice, and even to silence, contradicting the male claim of having control/superiority. It's this claim we will now look closer at. Furthermore, with Taciturnus, 'seduction'—the lifting of the secret—is framed as *two* forces at play. In an image Judge William uses in the second of his long letters in *Either/Or*, seduction only involves *one* partner. This will lead us, in a roundabout way, to Johannes the Seducer and back to the motif of 'voice.'

## V Self-Impregnation: Judge William

Even though Judge William, the most famous husband in Kierkegaard's works, is not a focus of this paper, his accounts help to shed light on the sort of (ironic) interdependence the discussed prefaces expose. It is not my concern to say anything general about the relation between William and his wife here. Instead, I will only trace the semantic outlines of the image of 'fertility' as developed in "The Balance [Equilibrium] between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality." Carrying the image to (again: ironic) extremes, in this passage William metaphorically asserts that getting pregnant and giving birth to his own self is something he can do without (his wife's) assistance.<sup>52</sup>

William uses an—in his own words—"clever" allegorical image. It is exclusively in this passage of "Equilibrium" that William uses the formula "either—or" in *Either/Or*. In fact, he uses it there 24 times. Choice, allusively, appears as an auto-erotic operation:

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51 Cf. George Pattison, "The Joy of Birdsong or Lyrical Dialectics," in *Without Authority*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 2007 (*International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 18), pp. 111–125.

52 Cf. *SKS* 3, 246 / *EO2*, 258f.

When the individual knows himself, he is not finished; but this knowing is very productive, and from this knowing emerges the authentic individual. If I wanted to be witty, I could say that the individual knows himself in a way similar to the way Adam knew Eve, as it says in the Old Testament. Through the individual's intercourse with himself the individual is made pregnant by himself and gives birth to himself.

[Idet da Individet kjender sig selv, er han ikke færdig, tvertimod er dette Kjendskab i høj Grad frugtbar, og af dette Kjendskab fremgaaer det sande Individ. Dersom jeg vilde være aandrig, kunde jeg her sige, at Individet paa en lignende Maade kjendte sig selv, som naar det i det Gamle Testamente hedder, at Adam kjendte Eva. Ved Individets Omgang med sig selv besvangres Individet med sig selv og føder sig selv.]<sup>53</sup>

The image, we learn, is based on a (nowadays mostly historical) ambiguity between “kennen” (to know) and “erkennen” (to recognize). ‘Erkennen’ (“to know” in the Biblical sense), among other significations, also means to have sexual intercourse. The self-knowledge of the individual thus is “fruitful” and spawns the “true” individual. But the fertility is paradoxical, because even if not being “finished,” knowing oneself suggests a chronology—that “knowledge” is, to a certain extent, coextensive with the consequences of its offspring (fertility): the birth of the “true individual” that is one’s “self.” This “self” is not only erotically involved with itself—it even gives birth to itself!

Moreover, the two participants in this act—the “actual” and the “ideal” self—turn out to be one and the same: “The self that the individual knows is the actual self and, at the same time, the ideal self that the individual holds outside himself as the image in whose likeness he is to form himself, and which he nonetheless also holds within himself, since that is what he is.”<sup>54</sup> In this quotation, transcendence and immanence merge in a Fichte-esque act of self-empowerment, and notably this happens *through* the individual’s attention to himself, which is an erotically connotated sort of attention.

It is not by chance that William—as he does with Adam and Eve (quotation given above)—revisits the creation story by quoting the “image in whose equality” the self is formed. But this moment is not, as one could suppose, about the human being immediately after the fall. Instead, it’s about the divine intention at the *beginning* of creation. It can hardly be any clearer: By creating itself, Wilhelm’s “self” not only goes back *before* the fall of man (and paradoxically into innocence), but makes itself the creator, actually a reproach that William otherwise directs at his aesthetic friend A. It is not only easy to recognize the identity of subject and object here, but also the act of creation itself

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53 SKS 3, 246 / EO2, 258 f.; DP.

54 SKS 3, 246 f. / EO2, 259; DP.

becoming a matter for the ethical individual who does not choose anything other than himself. This is not mere self-confidence. William's "ingenious" image, surprisingly enough, points back not only to his aesthetic friend A, who is "as reflected within myself as any *pronomem reflexivum* [reflexive pronoun],"<sup>55</sup> but even to Johannes the Seducer. In a wrathful speech, Johannes describes coincidence as the one "in whose image I form [*skaber!*] myself."<sup>56</sup> William's act of self-impregnation is as paradoxical (albeit conversely) as A's talk of "empty...labor pains" of his "sterile [*ufrugtbar*]...soul and...mind" is in the "Diapsalmata,"<sup>57</sup> and as Johannes' ode to coincidence, "barren mother of all things, the only remnant remaining from that time when necessity gave birth to freedom, when freedom let itself be tricked back into the womb again."<sup>58</sup> It is precisely this 'omnipotent' male "self" who—aesthetically—wants to shape existence on his own terms (just as A gives birth to his artworks, or Johannes to Cordelia as the incarnate ideal femininity) or—ethically—draws everything from himself. The paradoxical quality of William's image thus clearly reveals what his ethics suffers from: setting the absolute from the point of view of the relative, and thereby circulating in its own immanence, self-referentially. A woman or wife, obviously, is missing from this image (which is a funny notion in light of William's general theme, marriage). The (male) individual alone seems responsible: for his values, for his self, for his redemption? The image of self-impregnation shows, playfully and ironically, the paradox of such assumptions in view of Christian grace and the character of redemption as something that happens to us. As William in this—figurative—statement is not too far from Johannes the Seducer, we turn to him in conclusion.

## VI From Johannes the Seducer to the Semantics of 'Voice'

In Johannes' minutely detailed diary about his becoming acquainted with young Cordelia, and about their engagement, separation and the ellipse of their final encounter, art appears as a substitute of existence. Indeed, his highly metaphorical account can be read as one account about his transformation of young Cordelia into a perfect piece of art—exactly the reverse of Pygmalion, to

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55 SKS 2, 30 / EOI, 22; DP.

56 SKS 2, 316 / EOI, 327.

57 SKS 2, 32 / EOI, 24.

58 SKS 2, 316 / EOI, 326f.; DP.

whom Johannes refers and who went from statue to creature of flesh and blood.<sup>59</sup> The diary is more about writing than about the erotic, thus reflecting that control, distance, overview, and moderation are the fundamental conditions for his seduction. It is impossible to give even a short overview of the layers of meaning and possible readings of the “Diary of a Seducer” here. What I will try to show, is how the image of (in)fertility depicts this transformation into *ideal* instead of *real* woman, a transformation Johannes is *forced* to complete—for otherwise, Cordelia’s immediate presence would force him to get in touch with actuality, something he as the extreme representation of aesthetic existence fears more than anything. Despite of or even because of this fact, he stylizes himself as a master of reason, thus controlling not only her, but also his own feelings in order to never engage with reality at all. In the course of this, Johannes uses the image of infertility several times. In fact, his metaphors turn from paradoxical infertility—as in the example quoted above<sup>60</sup>—to a consciousness about woman’s (Cordelia’s) fertility. First metaphorically seen as a “Madonna”<sup>61</sup> or the maiden “Joan of Arc,”<sup>62</sup> Cordelia turns to “Gretchen in *Faust*,”<sup>63</sup> before Johannes devotes himself to his famous reflections on woman as being-for-other, where he celebrates the “moment” but pretends not to “understand” the “consequences”—such as having children.<sup>64</sup> Finally, he praises the image of a mother lost in the contemplation of her child in her arms and admits: “but if I were to see such a picture in actuality, I would be disarmed.”<sup>65</sup>

In another context I have claimed that it is precisely the contingent, uncontrollable immediacy of women (among other things, their ability to give birth) that limits Johannes’ claim of absolute (male) control.<sup>66</sup> In his text, fertility

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59 Cf. SKS 2, 425 / EO1, 438. Cf. Fürstenberg, *Entweder ästhetisch—oder religiös?*, pp. 165–169.

60 “...barren mother of all things, the only remnant remaining from that time when necessity gave birth to freedom, when freedom let itself be tricked back into the womb again” (SKS 2, 316 / EO1, 326–327; DP).

61 SKS 2, 306 / EO1, 316.

62 SKS 2, 334 / EO1, 345.

63 SKS 2, 428 / EO1, 441.

64 SKS 2, 419f. / EO1, 433.

65 SKS 2, 422 / EO1, 435. To Carlota Salvador Megias I owe the brilliant observation that Johannes’ account is kind of opposite to William’s image where the (male) self gives birth to himself alone: Johannes’ approach to motherhood makes it seem as if the mother had given birth to her child by herself (unlike William to *another* human being, not to herself). For a more detailed discussion of Johannes’ view on motherhood cf. Fürstenberg, *Entweder ästhetisch—oder religiös?*, pp. 187–196.

66 For a deeper understanding of this chapter, cf. Fürstenberg, *Entweder ästhetisch—oder religiös?*, pp. 134–204.

becomes increasingly visible—the moment he realizes what lies at the end of seduction, control is no longer a claim but something he needs in order to remain a shadow, both for himself and others. Johannes, terrified to be(come) himself, is especially unable to relate to the love between mother and child. Again, a shift takes place: it is only by Johannes' metaphorical enactment and the fixing in written form that the male spirit's superiority emerges, not that writing bears witness to this superiority. It is namely beyond question that concrete liveliness simply eludes the fixations of the male spirit, which is revealed in the text in terms of various metaphorical complexes of motifs, including female childbearing ability and sexuality. When infertility turns to the image of a child being baptized, an implicit refutation takes place of Johannes poetically varied basic assertion that he is the sovereign ruler of both women and 'history.'

Put in another way, one could say he's pure writing, whereas Cordelia is pure voice. His medium is distance, lack of commitment, and reflection, while she symbolizes devotion, commitment to love, life, and, surely, to God. The controllability of writing thus is the opposite of opening up to something that happens to a single individual (in the sense of "widerfahren").

It is precisely here that the texts discussed above meet. The pseudonym's wives are always absent: in Hilarius' case, dead; in Notabene's case, spatially and emotionally distant; in Taciturnus' case, turned into a complex symbol of femininity and fertility; in Judge Williams' case, forgotten in the midst of the image; and in Johannes' case, surely, left behind after the first and only sexual interaction—which moreover goes un-commented. Moreover, all the female figures belong to the realm of voice, while the men claim the realm of writing, logical reasoning and reflection for themselves. Johannes does this to an extreme degree which needs to be called merely an experiment of thought. But we also found a shift in some cases, for while the men are unable to interact emotionally with or commit to the women, they do preserve passion, commitment, dedication, and, ultimately, interaction, through writing. So we wind up in a paradox: Kierkegaard's own, which playfully and ironically turns around the ideas of gender at the surface of the texts.

## VII Conclusion

A very short exposition of the motif of voice in this context will, finally, help to show the importance of this motif as it is related to the questions discussed here.

Actually, in some accounts of voice in *Either/Or*<sup>67</sup> the metaphors at the heart of this paper meet. Conspicuously, when A uses the image of infertility quoted above, it is metaphorically linked to the semantics of ‘voice’, while again, an image from the realm of motherhood is chosen: he complains that his soul and thought are “sterile [*ufrugtbar*]” and yet martyred by “empty...labor pains.”<sup>68</sup> Complaining that his voice is “just hoarse” and “dying,” he claims that he needs a virtuoso voice rich in modulation, a voice he could yell with—but then, one surely exits the allegory and enters a birthing process: precisely that process which for Johannes expresses actuality and ideal commitment, the commitment between mother and child, the kind of reality that threatens Johannes the most. It is voice that transforms aesthetic possibility in vivid actuality and thus symbolizes reduplication, the repetition of gained convictions in existence.<sup>69</sup>

In Wilhelm’s appeal to A, too, ‘voice’ precedes (written) language right at the beginning of his second and most important letter. This happens in a formulation that updates and increases the presence of the voice: what I “have said so often” to A “I say once again,” or, rather, “I shout it to you: either—or; aut—aut.”<sup>70</sup> Last but not least, William highlights the “stentorian voice”<sup>71</sup> (a voice of hyperbolically powerful vocal power) of the pastor quoted in the sermon at the end of *Either/Or*. This pastor imagines himself on the heath of Jutland, “where my voice rises to its full power in order to drown out the storm.”<sup>72</sup> This highlighting of voice as an impactful medium, a matter of agency, can be understood as an answer to A’s lack of voice. His lamentation

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**67** The motif of voice does not appear out of the blue in *Either/Or*. Victor Eremita, the pseudonymous editor of the two-volume work, promotes in the very beginning of his preface the sensual side of language, the musical side as it were, which, in contrast to writing, is tied to the body of an individual: voice—as quoted above—appears as “disclosure of inwardness incommensurable with the exterior” (*SKS* 2, 11 / *EOI*, 3), the ear as the instrument to apprehend the inwardness, the hearing as the sense through which it is “appropriated” and therefore the dearest of all senses to him (*ibid.*). Eremita, who in analogy to Johannes the Seducer may be called the seducer of the reader, thus is not a reflected tamer of writing, but rather a Don Juan. The complex attempts in *Either/Or*, penned by Victor Eremita to mystify and fictionalize the authorship of the text, have been read as written practices of seduction. Cf. Joakim Garff, “*Den Søvnløse*”. *Kierkegaard læst æstetisk/biografisk*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1995, pp. 68–112; Philipp Schwab, *Der Rückstoss der Methode. Kierkegaard und die indirekte Mitteilung*, Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2012 (*Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series*, vol. 25), pp. 502–506.

**68** *SKS* 2, 32 / *EOI*, 24.

**69** Cf. *SKS* 12, 138 / *PC*, 134.

**70** *SKS* 3, 155 / *EO2*, 157; HF.

**71** *SKS* 3, 317 / *EO2*, 338.

**72** *SKS* 3, 318 / *EO2*, 338

about his voice that is “only hoarse” and “moribund like the blessing on the lips of the mute,”<sup>73</sup> such can be understood together with his lack of any real engagement in reality. It is certainly surprising that A and Johannes use the word ‘voice’ five times as much as William does, and that they do so in the context of passion and authenticity—of actuality instead of possibility, in rare cases to mark their absence.<sup>74</sup> It is the aesthetic sense for passion, the (albeit hidden) longing for authenticity, that carries along this meaning of ‘voice’ in Kierkegaard’s universe.

From this point, it is not far to the thought that appropriation (“tilegnelse”; “Aneignung”) is only imaginable as a practice in reality and not in theoretical writing, something almost all of the pseudonyms are committed to. In the light of William’s letters it becomes clear: just like Johannes, A is forced to continue written language production, partly because of his lack of voice, partly because—as his first aphorism shows—communication only means misunderstanding to him, especially since he is not in dialog with anyone. Seen in this more general light, the relations of the pseudonymous authors to their spouses not only humorously point to the consequences of misread dialectics as in Williams’ image of self-impregnation or in Notabene’s unbalanced relation to his wife—dialectics at its worst, one could say. They even playfully reflect central aspects of the individual’s disposition before God: the necessity of opening up for ‘the other,’ of passion, commitment and surrendering in the right place. Even though presented in an ironic (Hilarius and Notabene) or in a kind of conceited way (William), the images and motifs involved in these explanations hint at some of the main topics in Kierkegaard’s authorship: turning usual attributions to their opposites, and thus challenging our views on the dichotomy of reflection and immediacy. Moreover, they do show that motifs and metaphorical images pervade Kierkegaard’s works despite all limitations of different spheres of existence—thus not only pointing out the weakness of any

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73 SKS 2, 32 / E01, 25.

74 Cf. the famous “Ridderborgs-aforism” in the “Diapsalmata” (SKS 2, 51 / E01, 42). The very short depiction given in this paper surely simplifies A’s accounts of voice. In marked contrast to Eremita’s foreword, in “The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic” A states that “[in] language, the sensuous as medium is reduced to a mere instrument and is continually negated”; the ear is “the most spiritually qualified sense” (SKS 2, 72–74 / E01, 67f.). Even though this is in the context of an art theory that is not free of contradictions, it is made clear that A considers it a quality of language not to be able to express immediacy by virtue of its reflection. This view can be traced back to the surplus meaning modern languages possess in contrast to the ancient Greeks who have not yet been subject to reflexion (cf. SKS 2, 157 / E01, 159). However, if one leaves A’s theoretical treatises of art in favor of existential ones as the one quoted above, a different picture emerges.

such boundaries, but inspiring the inclination to follow metaphorical patterns like these throughout his works.