

# The Fine Art of Writing Posthumous Papers

## On the Dubious Role of the Romantic Fragment in the First Part of *Either/Or*

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If you want to be and want to continue to be enthusiastic, then promptly pull the silk curtain of roguery (irony) and be enthusiastic in secret. Or put mirror glass in the windows that your enthusiasm be hidden, because curiosity and envy and partisan-sympathy see only their own mugs. There is no hiding place for inwardness which is safer than that behind mirror glass. And this can be done if in your association with any human being you deftly and agilely practice reflecting correctly, just as a mirror does, thus changing your phenomenal conduct in relation to his, so that no one manages to converse with you, but always only with himself – although he thinks that he is conversing with you.

*Søren Kierkegaard*<sup>1</sup>

In an essay on Kierkegaard's irony, Ernst Behler concludes: "that Hegel remained outside of romanticism and irony while Kierkegaard was among those native to it".<sup>2</sup> When one considers how Kierkegaard wrote – the masks and pseudonyms and the various other schemes and stratagems, he indulged in – one is very much willing to agree. Still, the statement is a slightly provocative one. Traditionally, Kierkegaard has not been held to be a romanticist. This, of course, is due to the fact that Kierkegaard was highly critical of the romantic movement, as is obvious from the harsh criticism of the romantic ironists in general – and Friedrich Schlegel in particular – rendered in *The Concept of Irony*.<sup>3</sup> Romanticism is more or less synonymous with the aesthetic, and as such is something to be overcome; this is the canonical idea of the Kierkegaardian

position. But, as indicated by Ernst Behler, there might be more to the picture than meets the eye. In order to elucidate what this ‘more’ could consist of, my intention in this essay is to discuss in which way the very romantic genre of the fragment is employed in the first part of *Either/Or*.

There, the fragment is alluded to in several instances. The subtitle of the work is “A Fragment of Life”. This, of course, means that what we are reading is presented as unfinished, posthumous papers, those of A and B, which, however, does not necessarily imply that we are dealing with fragments in the romantic sense of the genre. Friedrich Schlegel, who did more than anyone else to develop the romantic idea of the fragment, made the following distinction in his *Athenäum* fragment 22: “The feeling for projects – which one might call fragments of the future – is distinguishable from the feeling for fragments of the past only by its direction: progressive in the former, regressive in the latter” (p. 21).<sup>4</sup> The ‘regressive’ fragment is the fragment of the past, the philological fragment. It is a work that has either been left unfinished by its author or for whatever reasons no longer exists in its totality. As Schlegel says in *Athenäum* fragment 24: “Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written” (p. 21). The latter are ‘progressive’ fragments, remnants of a totality which has not yet come into existence – postcards from the future, if you like.

If we return to the first part of *Either/Or*, one of the essays therein, ‘The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama’, carries the following subtitle: “A Venture in Fragmentary Endeavor”. And this is a crucial one. By applying the word “venture”, the author, A or Victor Eremita,<sup>5</sup> signals that this is going to be an essay in the paradigmatic sense of the term: an adventure in the realm of thought. Here, one should bear in mind that the essays of, for example, Montaigne were important models for the romantic fragment. Furthermore, any “fragmentary endeavor” must be a progressive one; the Danish word used by Kierkegaard is *Stræben*, which literally means “striving”. That our “fragmentary endeavor” will prove to be a romantic one is therefore not to be doubted. By means of the two subtitles Kierkegaard has thus already staged a conflict or drama between the philological and the romantic idea of the fragment.

Still, neither *Either/Or* as a whole, nor the essay on tragic drama, resembles the fragments of Friedrich Schlegel or the other Jena romanti-

cists.<sup>6</sup> Their fragments were much more condensed texts, more reminiscent of genres like the maxim or the aphorism, than of any philological fragments handed down by antiquity. There are, however, instances in the first part of *Either/Or* where it is much more obvious that something akin to the fragmentary endeavors of the Jena romanticists is being *practised*. I am, of course, thinking of the “Diapsalmata” and quite a few of the entries in “The Seducer’s Diary”. But the puzzling thing is that these texts are *not* explicitly stated to be in any way fragmentary. So it is of great importance that one try to determine what is going on here, which is exactly what I am going to do. The essay on tragic drama will be my privileged text because, as I have argued, it is there that the progressive aspects of the fragment are thematised. First of all, however, I will have to situate the romantic fragment in its wider philosophical context. Then I shall have a closer look at the romantic category ‘the interesting’, *das Interessante*: an important aspect of the subject matter of the essay, which in fact relates the biographical to the fragmentary. Subsequently, I shall examine this somewhat surprising element of the text in order to determine what part the fragment is really intended to play in *Either/Or*.

### The Romantic Fragment

As already mentioned, it is especially Friedrich Schlegel who is responsible for the theoretical development of the romantic fragment. But he did not accomplish this by means of traditional philosophical expositions or anything of the sort. He developed the genre as well as its theory by practising it. Thus an exegesis is required in order to elucidate his ideas about the fragment. Athenäum fragment 206, which is a ‘definition’ of the romantic fragment, is a paradigmatic example of this: “A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine <Igel>” (p. 45). Hardly the most self-evident of analogies! Fortunately, I do not have to perform the exegesis of this fragment from scratch. Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have in fact done the job for me.<sup>7</sup> They point out that what Schlegel thematises in this fragment is the complex status of the romantic fragment *an sich*. *As fragment*, it must necessarily relate itself to a totality of which it is merely a part. But *as an independent work of art*, it must also introduce itself as a unified whole.

Thus, the status of the fragment is ambiguous. At the same time as it isolates itself from its surroundings as a unified, organic whole, it is forced to point towards the totality it represents. Like a porcupine, or a hedgehog, the fragment protects itself by pointing away from itself. In this way, the Schlegelian fragment resembles the aphorism, which coils up in a similar fashion while it at the same time attempts to say it all. In fact, Maurice Blanchot argues that Schlegel often fails in his endeavors to write genuine fragments, but merely succeeds in writing aphorisms.<sup>8</sup> But is this really a failure? At least Nietzsche's ideas about the aphorism, as he puts them forward in the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*,<sup>9</sup> are deeply indebted to Schlegel's ideas about the fragment.

But what kind of absent, still non-existent totality, is the romantic fragment a 'part' of? It is first and foremost the 'grand' romantic novel, the work of art which, as Schlegel states in his Athenäum fragment 116, can become "a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age" (p. 32). The great model here is Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The Jena romanticists wanted to create a work of art which could do for their own age what Cervantes' novel did for his. Only, they, sensitive to the complexities of dawning modernity as they were, did not really think that this would be possible for them. Such a work of art they rather thought of as a kind of utopia, something which could only be approximated, never fully accomplished. Hence the progressive nature of romantic poetry. Why they thought in this way, we can understand even better if we look at the philosophical aspects of their striving. The work of art which can become an image of the age must of course comprehend this totality as a system of interrelated parts or connections. In this way it resembles the "System" of contemporary idealistic philosophy. Like Hegel, the Jena romanticists aspired to comprehend the totality as a System. But they did not believe that this could be done speculatively. The objectifying pathos of Hegel's philosophy was alien to them. In the wake of Fichte, they saw the individual consciousness as the subject constitutive of thinking. To them, philosophy was a *subjective* activity. The System they subsequently held to be representable only in a *negative*, ironic fashion. The ironist breaks the System down into components or parts – fragments. The reader of the fragment might thus catch a glimpse of the System, But it will be a sudden, impermanent one. Schlegel often used the image of a bolt of lightning, *Blitz*, to convey this idea.

The romantic fragment is thus not a text which is either literary, critical or philosophical. It is all this at once. Romantic irony is a mix-

ing, *Mischung*, of the genres of the classicist canon; a mixing which is to catalyse the alchemy of fragmentary writing. Such a *synthesis*, of course, differs markedly from the one of speculative dialectics. But does fragmentary writing then solely consist in the act of writing fragments which are as condensed – and thus as potentially explosive – as possible? Not necessarily. Schlegel in fact says of Lessing’s prose that it is “absolutely fragmentary” (p. 79, my trans.).<sup>10</sup> Hamann is another writer whose mode of writing has been seminal to the development of the poetics of the Jena romanticists. So longer prose texts which communicate indirectly and ironically can also be deemed fragmentary. And I will have to point to the fact that Johannes Climacus seems to be in perfect agreement with Schlegel on this issue. About Lessing he says the following: “But now to his result! Wonderful Lessing! He has none, none at all; there is not the slightest trace of any result. Truly, no father confessor who received a secret to be kept, no maiden who had pledged herself and her love to silence and became immortal by keeping her pledge, no one who took every piece of information with him into the grave – no one could act more carefully than Lessing in the more difficult task: also to speak” (pp. 65–66).<sup>11</sup> Climacus, of course, relates Lessing’s way of writing to the latter’s humbling himself under the divine, which is not a very Schlegelian gesture. At any rate, it should be obvious that Kierkegaard’s own project in decisive respects is far more reminiscent of Schlegel’s than of Hegel’s. So his harsh and seemingly very Hegelian critique of Schlegel in *The Concept of Irony* is indeed enigmatic. But I will leave that aside for the moment. The quotation from Climacus, however, is interesting for another reason too. In fact, it announces quite a few of the themes which are of importance in the essay on tragic drama. I therefore feel very tempted to commence my reading of that text without further ado. But, as already mentioned, I will have to deal a little with the romantic category of ‘the interesting’ before I feel prepared to embark on this venture.

### From Genius to Psychopath; the Interesting Romantic Artist

The pre-romantic conception of the poetical genius was that his voice could express what was universally true, good and beautiful. The romantic conception is much more centered around the singularity and

peculiarity of the literary genius. In the romantic era the literary audience therefore begins to become interested in the biography of the author behind a given literary work. The author becomes an *interesting* character. And the category of 'the interesting' is indissolubly linked to this development. As a poetological category in a narrower sense, it has to do with the creation of characters, in novels or plays, which are proper individuals and not just types or incarnations of given ideas. But as a more 'popular' category it designates what is singular, peculiar – or even *piquant* – about a person or a situation. When Kierkegaard in his *Journals and Papers* says of his contemporaries that they have "been carried away by the interesting" (Vol. 6, p. 153) he is referring to this more popular notion of the category. In his thesis from 1795-96, *Ueber das Studium der Griechischen Poesie*, Friedrich Schlegel expresses himself along the same lines. According to Schlegel the ancients interested themselves in what was objectively true and beautiful, whereas the modern age interest itself in what is "new, piquant and striking" (p. 228, my trans.).<sup>12</sup>

The logical outcome of such a development is that the interest in the individual personality of the artist completely overshadows any interest taken in his actual work. Adorno has identified the starting point for this development in Schiller: "Schiller was potentially the first Kantian to have been openly inimical to works of art, for he considers the human being behind them more essential than the works themselves. In Schiller's concept of genius, modelled as it is on the person of Goethe, idealistic hubris transfers the idea of creation from the transcendental to the empirical subject, i.e., the productive artist. This is in harmony with vulgar bourgeois consciousness for two reasons: one, it glorifies pure creation by the human being without regard to purpose and thus feeds into the bourgeois work ethic; and two, it relieves the viewer from of the task of understanding the artistic object before him, giving him instead a surrogate – the personality of the artist or, worse, trashy biographies of him" (p. 215).<sup>13</sup> And towards the end of the 19th century its culmination might be found in Lombroso, who held the genius to belong to a species of the genus madmen. The Lombrosian genius is not only an empirical subject but a diseased one; he has been honored with his own psychopathology!

Things had not gone that awry in Kierkegaard's time. One was not hailed as being mad just because one was inclined to think of oneself as suffering the fate of being a genius in a smaller town. But Kierkegaard was obviously acutely aware of certain 'biographistic' tendencies

amongst his contemporaries. I quote from *The Concept of Irony*: “Similar mystifications are sometimes also necessary in literature, where one is surrounded on all sides by a crowd of alert literati who discover authors the way Mrs. Matchmaker arranges matches. The less it is an external reason (family reasons, timidity, regard for promotion, etc) that makes someone decide to play the game of secrecy, the more it is a kind of inner infinity that desires to emancipate its creation from every finite relation to itself, wants to see itself freed from the condolences of fellow sufferers and from all the congratulations of the tender, loving brotherhood of authors – the more pronounced is the irony”(p. 252).<sup>14</sup> What is described here is a literary audience consisting of inquisitive and meddling “literati”. But the ironist, Kierkegaard promises, will know how to deal with such a crowd. And, if we are to believe him, Kierkegaard might well have found it necessary to play the part of such an ironist himself. In his *Journals and Papers* he in fact states that he knows himself to be “in eminent possession of the interesting” and that, had he wanted to, he could therefore have become “the hero and idol of the moment (Vol. 6, p. 153). Kierkegaard was thus in a tricky position where his biography might interfere with the reception of his work; something which would certainly have been anathema to him, privileging his reader’s free and independent reception of his work as he did. But properly handled, the situation might be turned around to his own benefit. By means of irony, he might be able to use and abuse the desires of his interested audience without giving one iota of his own game away. How he actually did just that by toying around with the romantic fragment in the essay on tragic drama is what I will now, at long last, turn my attention to.

### The Fragmentary and the Biographical in the Essay on Tragic Drama

As is obvious from its full title, ‘The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic of Modern Drama’, the text deals with the dialectical relationship between ancient and modern tragic drama. But its genre is not so easy to determine. I have been calling it an essay. But within the fictions of authorship that prevail in *Either/Or* we must read it as the written notes for a lecture given by A to a society of aestheticians that he addresses with the Greek term *sympanenekromenoi*, which means something

like ‘fellow dead’. The members of this society, however, are hardly genuine Christians who are dead to the world. Do they take pride in being ‘dead’ because they are jaded and fastidious aestheticians, then? Maybe. But the term *symparanekromenoi* might have additional connotations in this context.

The first text published by Kierkegaard under his own name is his review of the novel *Just a Fiddler* by H.C. Andersen, *From the Papers of One Still Living*. In this review Kierkegaard argues that Andersen is a mediocre author because he cannot keep his own personality apart from his works. About Andersen’s novels in general Kierkegaard writes that they “stand in so physical a relation to him that their genesis is to be regarded more as an amputation than as a production from himself” (p. 84).<sup>15</sup> According to Kierkegaard, not being ‘dead’ is a mortal sin on an author’s part; it is only the “dead and transfigured personality that ought to and is able to produce, not the many-angled, worldly, palpable one” (ibid., p. 82). Such a personality must indeed be fit to lecture to a society of *symparanekromenoi*. So the way our lecturer addresses his audience might very well allude to this poetological ideal. We shall have to wait and see whether this is indeed the case.

Strangely enough, the text does *not* start off like a lecture intended to be given to an audience. It rather commences in the manner of an academic essay. Those speech acts that one would think would appear in a lecture, those one uses when one addresses an audience, are entirely absent from the text. What it deals with in this first part – it can be divided up into three distinct parts – is the difference between ancient tragic drama and modern tragic drama. What is being thematised, however, is also what characterises modernity as compared to antiquity. The individual character in ancient tragic drama was enmeshed in what the lecturer, following Hegel, calls “substantiality”. It experienced itself and was experienced by the audience as being part of a series of hierarchically organised totalities: the family, the state, and the universal play that the gods, at least to a certain extent, were the directors of. The individual character in modern tragic drama, on the other hand, is alone on his own inner stage no matter how many fellow actors he is surrounded by. So where the individual in ancient tragic drama was not the only being responsible for its tragic outcome, the burden of the guilt falls solely upon the modern individual. The interesting refinements that modernity allows for are thus paid for with a heavy price by the modern individual, as well as by tragedy, as it ceases to be tragic.<sup>16</sup> But the opposites



in the dichotomy between modern and ancient tragic drama can in fact not be kept rigorously apart. According to the lecturer, "The unity of absolute guiltlessness and absolute guilt is not an esthetic category but a metaphysical one" (p. 150).<sup>17</sup> In human existence neither innocence nor guilt can be identified as pure states; one will always have to confront a certain ambiguity. Thus, the 'reflex' between ancient and modern tragic drama goes both ways. Only when one is aware of one of these two opposites will one be aware of the other one. And it is not possible to synthesize them aesthetically or dissolve the opposition between them by means of a speculative *Aufhebung*. So the lecturer in fact leaves the modern individual, who, as we saw, was the only one left to negotiate the guilt, with only one option if he is to successfully get out of his predicament: faith.<sup>18</sup> He might not, after all, be as far removed from his creator, Søren Kierkegaard, as we might like to think. To Kierkegaard, as well as his various pseudonyms, apart from Judge Wilhelm perhaps, the intervention of Christianity in human history is not a mediation, but a caesura.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the lecturer now effects his own caesura in his lecture, whereby he suddenly makes it seem much more like a proper lecture. He breaks off the academic exposition and in fact begins addressing his audience directly. The effect is very much reminiscent of the breaking of the illusion, the parabasis, of romantic irony. In an early fragment, belonging to his posthumous papers, Schlegel laconically writes: "Irony is a permanent parabasis" (p. 85, my trans.).<sup>19</sup> Originally, this rhetorical figure designated the intervention of the chorus in ancient tragic drama. The lecturer's effecting a parabasis in his exposition on tragic drama is thus wonderfully *a propos*. All the more so, because this caesura marks that he enters into a meta-discourse which constitutes the second part of the text. And it is, indeed, a reflection upon fragmentary discourse, which is the one preferred by the society he belongs to and addresses. As I have mentioned, the text is much longer than a romantic fragment of the Schlegelian type usually is. The lecturer apologises for this sad state of affairs, which, as he puts it, "almost must be regarded as a serious attack on the ejaculatory style in which the idea breaks forth without achieving a breakthrough, to which officiality is attached in our society" (ibid., p. 152). He consoles his audience, though, by pointing to the fact, that "the bond that holds this periodic sentence together is so loose that the parenthetical clauses therein strut about aphoristically and willfully enough" (ibid.) – 'do not panic, gentlemen, this is still fragmentary writing'! He then spells out in

more detail what kind of textual ideal the society attaches itself to: “Let us, then, designate our tendency <Tendents> as ventures in the fragmentary endeavor or in the art of writing posthumous <efterladte> papers. A completely finished work is disproportionate to the poetizing individual; because of the disjointed and desultory character of posthumous papers, one feels a need to poetize the personality along with them <at digte Personligheden med>. Posthumous papers are like a ruin, and what place of resort could be more natural for the buried <Begravne>” (ibid., trans. modified). In his Athenäum fragment 216 Schlegel heralds “The French Revolution, Fichte’s philosophy and Goethe’s *Meister*” as “the greatest *tendencies* of the age” (p. 46, my italics). By calling a “fragmentary endeavor” a “tendency”, the lecturer no doubt alludes to this fragment.<sup>20</sup> But immediately afterwards he institutes a decisive break with the poetology of the Jena romanticists. He makes it clear that the fruits of the endeavors of his own society are nothing more than fake philological fragments, texts which, because they are or seem to be unfinished, leave a vacuum behind that any reader can fill out with whatever fancies he harbours about their author. What started out as a homage to the “ejaculatory” style, which let the idea burst forth – like a flash of lightning, presumably<sup>21</sup> – but did not allow it to break through properly, did not permit it to embody itself substantially, has suddenly turned into a trap for the reader interested in reading biographically. The ‘dead’ author can construct his productions in such a way that they, bearing the review of Andersen in mind, lend themselves to be read as amputations. This is “the art of writing posthumous papers”. From the progressive romantic fragment we have regressed indeed! And furthermore quite a warning sign has been flashed at anyone, at you and me and the rest of us, who study Kierkegaard’s works and his journals and papers. “The silk curtain of roguery (irony)” has been pulled (cf. my motto); if an inquisitive and/or voyeuristic ‘literatus’ looks into such papers, he will certainly not discover any apostle staring back at him!<sup>22</sup> But what might be even worse in our present context: the aforementioned conflict or drama between the philological fragment and the romantic one which is staged in the first part of *Either/Or* seems to have wound up in a knot which is not easily disentangled. I am afraid I will have to start the exegesis from scratch this time.

When confronted with this kind of playing hide and seek with the curious reader, one can of course not help thinking of Kierkegaard’s famous entry on “the secret note” in his *Journals and papers*: “After my

death no one will find in my papers the slightest information (this is my consolation) about what really has filled my life, no one will find the inscription in my innermost being that interprets everything and that often turns into events of prodigious importance to me that which the world would call bagatelles and which I regard as insignificant if I remove the secret note that interprets them” (Vol. 5, p. 226). As Joakim Garff has argued, the real secret might well be that there was not any.<sup>23</sup> Still, it must be granted that Kierkegaard several times removed such notes from his papers, when, at points where some great disclosure seemed to be announcing itself, he tore pages out of them. But that this was part of some deceptive *mise en scène* is quite possible.

And the essay on tragic drama gets ever more deceptive; in the third part of the lecture, the lecturer narrates a story which has *a crisis in an engagement* as its explicit theme. It is, however, a female figure who is the stricken party. What we are presented with is in fact a modernised version of the story of Antigone. Within the economy of the lecture its role is to exemplify the difference between ancient and modern tragic drama. Before again adopting his more ‘academic’ discursive style, the lecturer assures his audience that this modern Antigone of his will prove to be an interesting acquaintance: “She is my creation, her thoughts are my thoughts <sic!> and yet it is as if in a night of love I had rested with her, as if she in my embrace had confided her deep secret to me (...)” (ibid., p. 153, trans. slightly modified). So let us hear what he has to say about her.

The ancient Antigone had no secret. Wanting to bury her dead brother, she was placed in a tragic conflict between societal law and familial piety. The ‘modern’ Antigone of the lecturer, however, is a reflected individual, who keeps secret her innermost being. She is the only one who knows about the crime of her father, Oedipus; she does not even know whether he is aware of it himself. Oedipus is a good king who is respected and loved by his subjects. Antigone guards her secret with a certain pride, because she knows that she is responsible for maintaining this happy status quo. Naturally, she harbours a certain sorrow, but she guards it as if it were a treasure. Now, Oedipus dies. And Antigone has to keep her secret even more carefully in order that his memory shall not be stained. Then her relative peace is violently disturbed: she falls in love with a young man who loves her, too. But such a relationship is far too dangerous; she knows she cannot help confiding in this young man if she lets herself go. The lover senses her strange re-

sistance and begs her to love him like she loved her dead father. Everything gets worse and worse, and Antigone reflects more and more upon her situation. Her sorrow is gradually transformed into pain. Only on her deathbed can she confess her love to her lover – “recollection kills her” (ibid., p. 164, trans. modified), are the famous last words of the lecturer. Kierkegaard’s problematic relationship to his father and to Regine obviously seem to lurk behind this narrative. Any reader who is just a little familiar with Kierkegaard’s biography can therefore not help thinking about all that he has written about his melancholy moods. In other words, the art of writing posthumous papers, which was defined in the second part of the lecture, has been practised in the third. One must admit that the economy of the text is pretty neat.<sup>24</sup>

But what are we then to think of *Repetition*, where a crisis in an engagement again occupies the center of the stage? Or what about Quidam’s diary in the second part of *Stages on Life’s Way*, a text dealing with the difficulties of negotiating the guilt resulting from a break with a fiancée? In the latter text are even inserted six fragments, six small prickly hedgehogs, that isolate themselves from the main text, but which at the same time echo certain myths about Kierkegaard’s life; myths that he has himself been highly responsible for putting in circulation.<sup>25</sup> Two of these fragments, *Solomon’s Dream* and *The Reading Lesson* are even stories about sons who have to face up to the fact that their fathers have committed horrible crimes. In the case of Solomon the result is melancholia and – it is more than implied – impotence. Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms certainly know how to arouse the reader’s interest!

And that being said, one question simply has to be asked: *why* employ such mystifications that rather than prevent *will provoke* the kind of biographical readings which are detestable to a ‘dead’ author like Kierkegaard? I shall venture to answer this question as well as I can.

## A Hall of Mirrors

I will start off by quoting more extensively from Schlegel’s Athenäum fragment 116. There he writes with respect to romantic poetry: “It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also – more than any other form – hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and

can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors” (*op.cit.*). According to Schlegel romantic poetry is to hover on the wings of poetic reflection between the work and the personality of the artist. In the essay on tragic drama we met with quite another kind of poetic dynamics. Modern readers, it was implied, are not at all interested in following the hovering flight of the work. Rather, they immediately start digging for the empirical subject of the author. And as we have seen, Kierkegaard is more than willing to furnish his readers with the shovels and spades needed for such sordid work. But only to a certain extent. If you read texts like the story of the modern Antigone in the essay on tragic drama, *Repetition*, or Quidam’s diary in order to verify any of the myths that permeate and unsettle what we know about Kierkegaard’s biography you are fighting a losing battle. Those myths will never be verified because they are – myths. The ‘real’ Kierkegaard that such a reading will pursue will again and again be reclaimed by the silence of the grave. A hovering reflection between the fictions and their author will anyhow be at work. And the more one tries to master the situation the more the reflections will multiply. Once “the art of writing posthumous papers” has been thematised in a work we must ultimately identify as written by the author S. Kierkegaard, the conditions for an endless series of specular exchanges have already been established. But all of this does not answer my simple question: why?

Perhaps the answer is as simple as the question. Perhaps Kierkegaard, aware as he was that the reading public’s interest in the interesting would by no means decrease,<sup>26</sup> opened up for biographical readings of his work in this ambiguous fashion because he knew they would be carried out anyhow. Such readings could moreover be inevitable for even more fundamental reasons. Paul de Man seems to be describing such an inevitability when he, in his essay ‘Autobiography as De-face-ment’ writes the following: Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. (...) This specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding, but this merely makes explicit the wider claim to author-ship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be *by* someone and assumed to be understandable to the extent

that this is the case. Which amounts to saying that any book with a readable title page is, to some extent, autobiographical” (p. 70).<sup>27</sup> Does reading imply such a specular structure that makes any text by an identifiable author to some degree autobiographical?<sup>28</sup> It appears that Kierkegaard believed so and that he did his utmost to make this state of affairs benefit his own ends. At least he let his work and the myths concerning his life mirror each other in such a way that any reader wanting to read Kierkegaard’s works biographically is invited into a hall of mirrors where he will have to confront an infinite redoubling of reflections and thus find those works to be unreadable in this very sense. If biographical reading is indeed characterised by de Man’s “mutual reflexive substitution”, the reader will also be read by the works that he is reading – and be shown to be unreadable in the same sense, too. Kierkegaard’s perhaps vain hope must have been that the reader would in this fashion catch a glimpse of his own (lack of) face in the mirror. A reader trapped like that would be in the same position as the dizzyingly reflected individual that the story of the modern Antigone in the essay on tragic drama portrays. He would therefore be as prepared for (and in as dire a need of) performing the leap of faith as one can be. So there might after all be a sort of maieutics implicated in the biographical trap defined and demonstrated in that same essay. But what part was really played by Schlegel and the romantic fragment in this drama?

### Exeunt

As we have seen, Kierkegaard’s text like Schlegel’s romantic poetry is hovering at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer. But a strange inversion has occurred. The progressive aspects of the art of fragmentary writing have been replaced by the fine art of writing fake ‘regressive’ philological fragments: posthumous papers. Read in this light, the essay on tragic drama constitutes a highly ambiguous gesture towards Schlegel. That Kierkegaard does not pursue the same literary and philosophical ends as Schlegel cannot sufficiently explain why such a gesture is being made. Another disturbing factor is the fact that the first part of *Either/Or*, even though it in several instances and in various ways alludes to Schlegel’s fragmentary endeavors, does not mention him at all. Add to this Kierkegaard’s crude dismissal of Schlegel in *The Concept of Irony*, and the picture gets even more blurred.

Kierkegaard's relationship to Hegel is also a problematic one. But at least Kierkegaard has dealt explicitly and at times extensively with him. About Schlegel, however, Kierkegaard's journals and papers maintain a silence which is almost complete; the few remarks that can be found are of absolutely no significance. But as any ironologist will know, what is not mentioned directly is not necessarily of no importance. After the blunt criticism launched at Schlegel in *The Concept of Irony*, the indirect and twisted allusions to him in *Either/Or* perhaps add up to a tribute of sorts. It is of course easy to dismiss the lecturer on tragic drama as 'only an aesthete'. But as we saw, his philosophical position was not as far removed from what we take to be that of his author as one might initially have believed. And as I have already argued, Schlegel's position is in many respects much closer to Kierkegaard's than that of Hegel. In the 155th of his *Ideas* Schlegel writes: "I have expressed a few ideas pointing towards the heart of things, and have greeted the dawn in my own way, from my own point of view, from my standpoint. Let anyone who knows the road do likewise in his own way, from his own point of view, from his standpoint" (p. 109). In its overt perspectivism, this "dawn" is evidently Nietzschean. In its insistence on the subjective position of the thinker as the basic condition for the thinking being done, it is, however, not much less Kierkegaardian. Moreover, one of Kierkegaard's (as well as Nietzsche's) fundamental objections to speculative dialectics is that it cannot conceptualise becoming, in Danish: *Vorden*, adequately. Kierkegaard claims that the progression of the System of speculative dialectics is illusory. Only by means of a leap or via an approximation is it possible to progress in Kierkegaardian terms. Kierkegaardian progression thus has a whole lot more in common with the Schlegelian than with the Hegelian position. Still, the discrepancies between Kierkegaard's existential and religious progression, which is always coming to unexpected halts, and Schlegel's predominantly aesthetic and hovering one cannot be disregarded. That Kierkegaard could never identify completely with a Schlegelian position, however shifty it must be said to be, goes without saying. And not even the lecturer on tragic drama identified fully with a position like that. It should rather be noted that the dialectical exposition on the dialectical relationship between antiquity and modernity also has some affinities with Hegelian dialectics of history but without identifying fully with that either. The lecturer, in other words, performs his own hovering at the midpoint between the positions being discussed here. He has got his

own wings of poetical reflection to carry him along. On the other hand, he reserves the endless succession of mirrors for the reader who wants to read the texts of Kierkegaard biographically. The inevitable conclusion must therefore be that he is quite indebted to Schlegel. And he might not be the only one being just that.

When we read Kierkegaard's pseudonyms we are always presented with posthumous papers: the more or less unfinished or even aborted literary experiments of idiosyncratic, ex-centric and subjective thinkers. But we also read pieces of fragmentary writing, writings that greet the dawn from their perspective, their point of view, their standpoint, writings that continually approximate the truth they want to communicate, and repeatedly attempt the leap even though they have no point of departure but the textual and rhetorical quicksand of which they consist. So the importance of Schlegelian poetics to Kierkegaard might be another note that he has succeeded in keeping secret. The lecturer on tragic drama might be a character who, while at the same moment subverting future biographical readings of the works by Søren Kierkegaard, indirectly (ironically) gives this secret away. What a rogue!

## Notes

1. Quoted from *Journals and Papers* (trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Indiana UP, 1970), vol. 2, p. 269 – I have slightly modified the translation. All further quotations from Kierkegaard's journals and papers will be from this source.
2. Quoted from *Kierkegaard Revisited*, Walter de Gruyter, 1997, p.33.
3. Schlegel is simply dismissed as a paradigmatic example of how the desire of the romantic ironist to negate all of existing reality results in nothing but unwarranted willfulness and indecency.
4. I am quoting from Peter Firchow's translation of all of Schlegel's published fragments in *Friedrich Schlegel Philosophical Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991). All further quotations from Schlegel will, unless otherwise indicated, be from this edition.
5. Aage Henriksen, in *Kierkegaards Romaner* (Gyldendal, 1969) and Joakim Garff, in "Den Søvnløse". *Kierkegaard læst æstetisk/biografisk* (C.A. Reitzel, 1995) have both more than convincingly argued that the elaborate structure of fictions within fictions in *Either/Or* is the cunning work of a certain Victor Eremita, who, at the fundamental level of fiction, is the real author of the entire piece. Henriksen's study, unfortunately, is of too limited a scope, as it is chiefly a reading of *The Diary of the Seducer*. But Garff very much completes the work initiated by Henriksen when he shows how Eremita, disguised as the implicit narrator, in the second part of *Either/Or* undermines the authority of the voice of B, Judge Wilhelm (cf. pp. 104–12).
6. Friedrich Schlegel was the head of a small circle of literary companions situated in the



city of Jena around the turn of the 18th century who published the journals *Lyceum* and *Athenäum* in which the romantic fragments appeared. Other members of the group were Friedrich's brother, A.W. Schlegel, and Novalis. Schleiermacher and Schelling were also at times affiliated with the movement, which has received its name, Jena romanticism, from its geographical location. In Germany the movement is also designated *Frühromantik*.

7. In their excellent study of Jena romanticism, *The Literary Absolute* (trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, State University of New York Press, 1988), see especially p. 43-44.
8. See his essay 'The Atheneum', p. 359, in *The Infinite Conversation* (Trans. Susan Hanson, University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
9. Nietzsche writes: An aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been "deciphered" when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its *exegesis*, for which is required an art of exegesis" (trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1989, p. 23).
10. *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* (hereafter referred to as KFSa), vol. III (Munich, 1975).
11. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton UP, 1992).
12. KFSa, vol.I (Paderborn, 1979).
13. Quoted from *Aesthetic Theory* (trans. C. Lenhardt, Routledge, 1984).
14. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton UP, 1989.
15. Quoted from *Early Polemical Writings* (trans. Julia Watkin, Princeton UP, 1990).
16. In his work on Nietzsche, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Athlone Press, 1983), Gilles Deleuze writes: "Nietzsche had already pointed out an essential thesis in the *Birth of Tragedy*: Tragedy dies at the same time as drama becomes an inward conflict and suffering is internalised" (p. 130). There are thus essential affinities between Nietzsche and our lecturer. Both might very well be indebted to Schlegel's *Ueber das Studium der Griechischen Poesie*.
17. Quoted from part one of *Either/Or* (trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton UP, 1987).
18. Apart from its many other accomplishments, the text also paves the way for *The Concept of Anxiety*. The discussion of guiltlessness and absolute guilt does not touch upon the concept of original sin. This creates a kind of hollow or vacuum which Vigilius Haufniensis will know how to fill out.
19. KFSa, vol. XVIII (Munich, 1963).
20. I should point out here that Kierkegaard had the collected works of Schlegel in his library. The edition he was in possession of, however, did not contain any of Schlegel's fragments. Neither did it contain *Lucinde*, though, which it is obvious from *The Concept of Irony* that Kierkegaard knew well. It is thus difficult to determine exactly how much of Schlegel Kierkegaard did actually read. I hope this article will convincingly argue that Kierkegaard was familiar with Schlegel's fragmentary endeavors.
21. The following statement from no. 131 of Schlegel's *Ideas* is wonderfully *a propos* in our present context: "Only in the midst of death does the lightning bolt <Blitz> of eternal life explode" (p. 106).
22. In *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* (trans. Walter Lowrie, Harper and Row, 1962), Kierkegaard, by quoting again an excerpt from an aphorism of Lichtenberg's he had used as a motto for *Stages on Life's Way*, expresses his anger at the fact that the controversial critic P. L. Møller had hailed *The Seducer's Diary* as his masterpiece: "Such works are mirrors: when an ape peers into them, no Apostle can be seen looking out" (p. 95).
23. Cf. "*Den Søvnløse*", p. 230.

24. In his chapter 'Kierkegaard as a Falsifier of History' (in *Kierkegaard The Myths and their Origins*, Yale UP, 1980), in which he comments upon the genesis of *Either/Or*, Henning Fenger writes the following: Many of the pages in "The Antique Tragic's Reflection in the Modern Tragic" bear conceptual and stylistic traces of older sketches and projects" (p. 14). That is probably true. But his conclusion: "What is new in *Either/Or*, before all else, is the personal element, the many recastings of the relationship to his father and to Regine" (ibid.), clearly reveals the limitations of his approach. He does not see what Kierkegaard is actually doing with those recastings in the essay on tragic drama. And he does not acknowledge that the manner in which Kierkegaard patches his older sketches and projects together in this essay is one of the finest examples of how truly great a writer he is.
25. A thorough investigation of how these six fragments relate themselves to the myths surrounding Kierkegaard's life can be found in the chapter 'Stages on life's way' in Roger Poole's *The Indirect Communication* (University of Virginia Press, 1993), pp. 108-39.
26. Kierkegaard does not refer much to the category of 'the interesting' in *A Literary Review*, but he certainly describes a community which has let itself be carried away by it.
27. Quoted from *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (Columbia UP, 1984).
28. In his essay, 'Fictions of Authority' (in his anthology of essays, *The Deconstructive Turn*, Methuen, 1984), Christopher Norris reads Kierkegaard's *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* as an autobiography in a manner which is heavily inspired by de Man. But he lets himself be guided by de Man's reading of Rousseau's *Confessions*, and that is a pity because Kierkegaard's *Point of View* is by no means autobiographical in the same sense as this text by Rousseau. Kierkegaard in fact several times stresses that he has got a more personal interpretation of his work which he is not going to tell us – 'the secret note' is still kept secret. Norris' ignoring this fact makes his study quite reductionistic; he very much turns Regine into *the* note which explains why Kierkegaard feels obliged to 'excuse' his inverse writerly ways. Had Norris let himself be guided by an essay like 'Autobiography as De-facement' his study would probably have been more interesting.