Reading the Epigraph to *Philosophical Fragments*

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Better well hanged than ill wed.
Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms use, but say little of, epigraphs over the course of the Kierkegaardian authorship. Aside from a passing comment in *From the Papers of One Still Living* and an exegetical backward glance in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard leaves (and has the pseudonyms and the anonym leave) the epigraphs to the works he writes unexplained in terms of their relation to those works, in and before which the epigraphs appear. It is the contention of the present study that this absence of explanation does not signal the insignificance of the epigraph for the Kierkegaardian authors – and, in fact, that in the case of one of the Kierkegaardian works in particular, Johannes Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments*, an extended inquiry into the character of the epigraph can serve as the occasion for considerable insight into authorship and the role and nature of the author in *Fragments*. The present work, then, can be understood as an attempt to engage in both an inquiry into epigraphy and the epigraph to *Philosophical Fragments*, and a consideration of the ramifications of that vision of the epigraph for the authorship of *Fragments*. It is in this sense, perhaps, a meta-reflection on Kierkegaard's authorship, in light of authorship as performed by Kierkegaard and Johannes Climacus.

The study is divided into two major sections. In the first section, I will attempt to elucidate the relation of considerations of Johannes Climacus as author and what I take to be a misattribution of the epigraph to Shakespeare. In this section, we will see that the problem of Johannes Climacus' authorship is analogous to the metaphysical and theological problems of the simultaneity of unity and multiplicity within individuality. This plays out most clearly and significantly in the joint roles of Kierkegaard and Johannes Climacus as authors of the work. In the second major section, the

manipulation of authorial responsibility in the relation of Climacus to Kierkegaard will be further illuminated by reference to Climacus' discussion of the paradox. Of particular import will be the ways in which paradox plays into Climacus' conceptions of the incarnation of the god and the identity of the faithful. Kierkegaard's authorial strategy of pseudonymity will be seen to reflect and rely upon the paradox of faith as put forward by Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*, a strategy that appears already in a highly condensed form in the epigraph to that work.

'Shakespeare', Johannes Climacus, and Authorial Responsibility

The epigraph to Johannes Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments* is a line from Shakespeare, a quotation from a scene in the comedy, *Twelfth Night*: »Better well hanged than ill wed« (*PF* 3; *SKS* 4, 214).[1] Climacus writes the epigraph; Climacus notes for his reader that Shakespeare is the author of the words of the epigraph. In writing, »Better well hanged than ill wed,« Climacus makes an assertion original to Shakespeare. He constructs a bridge backward from *Philosophical Fragments, or, A Fragment of Philosophy* toward *Twelfth Night: Or, What You Will.* He binds himself to the author of the words of the epigraph.

Kierkegaard will elsewhere maintain that he is the author of Johannes Climacus, but not of the works of which Climacus is the author (*CUP* 625-630; *SKS* 7, 569-573). Kierkegaard's relation to the *Fragments* is, according to Kierkegaard, a matter of indifference. This is a claim worthy of further consideration; we can say now, however, that if true, Kierkegaard's claim must cause us to doubt Climacus' claim regarding the authorship of the words of the epigraph to the *Fragments*: if we can agree with Kierkegaard that Climacus is capable of authorship, then we must question the ascription of the epigraph before Climacus' work to Shakespeare. Shakespeare is the author of *Twelfth Night*; he uses no pseudonym. Yet, unlike the pseudonym Climacus, who makes claims throughout his work, Shakespeare makes no claims. Shakespeare is a playwright. To be a playwright is not to be the author of any claims, but to be the author of characters who make claims. One such character, authored by Shakespeare, is the clown, Feste. Feste tells Maria that, »Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage.«[2] Shakespeare tells us nothing. Climacus should have been aware of this; and, if not Climacus, Kierkegaard. Yet the epigraph's ascription is to Shakespeare, not to Feste. The question of Climacus' epigraph thus not only requires an aware-

ness of Shakespeare's play – the text from which Climacus chose his epigraph – but also an inquiry into Climacus as pseudonym of Søren Kierkegaard and into the possibility of fragmentary philosophy he sets forth in the title of his work. The misattribution of the epigraph to Shakespeare highlights the relation of Shakespeare to Feste – and, thus, the pseudonymous relation of Kierkegaard to Johannes Climacus.

Kierkegaard does not write pseudonymously from the perspective of Climacus in order to conceal himself as the origin of the *Fragments*. He denies this in his admission, »A First and Last Explanation.« The denial reveals Kierkegaard's indifference to pseudonymity as concealment, however much Climacus conceals. Kierkegaard is adamant: »My pseudonymity or polyonymity has not had an *accidental* basis in my person ... but an *essential* basis in the production itself« (*CUP* 625; *SKS* 7, 569). Kierkegaard's understanding of the pseudonyms as authors and himself merely as their secretary (*CUP* 627; *SKS* 7, 571) necessitates an essential relation of Johannes Climacus to the *Fragments*. Kierkegaard is not the author of a written work to which he appended another name. Climacus is the author of the *Fragments*.

Kierkegaard as pseudonymist is in this respect something like Shakespeare as playwright. The Kierkegaardian pseudonymist, like the playwright, creates personae which themselves become significantly the sources of views and claims. While Shakespeare writes the words spoken by the clown and those spoken by the priest, Shakespeare is neither the clown nor the priest, and cannot be understood to express Shakespearean views through the voices of either the clown or the priest. Shakespeare is the author of *Twelfth Night*, and the author of the clown, Feste, but he is not responsible in any but a legal or literary sense for the claims made by Feste. Although Feste's words are original to Shakespeare, it is inappropriate to ascribe Feste's views to Shakespeare. No character in a play serves as the mouthpiece for the playwright. Similarly, no pseudonym can be understood as the mouthpiece for Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard requests that, »if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine« (*CUP* 627; *SKS* 7, 571). The views expressed in the *Fragments*, although original to Kierkegaard, can be ascribed as little to Kierkegaard as Feste's lines can be ascribed to Shakespeare. As playwright, Shakespeare is the origin of the words of the line, but he does not speak the line. The line can only be ascribed legitimately to Feste. Climacus is familiar with Shakespeare's

Twelfth Night. As reader of the play, he makes an excision from the fifth scene of the first act; as author of the *Fragments*, he inscribes the excision before his own written work as epigraph. Such structural details are the work of the author of a written work, not that author's author.

We must not forget that Kierkegaard is the author of Climacus, and thus is in one way responsible for the *Fragments*. As he claims in »A First and Last Explanation,« Kierkegaard lives in »the world of actuality«; Climacus is »poetically actual« (*CUP* 627; *SKS* 7, 570). The bounds between these two realms in and around the *Fragments* must not be confused. Climacus lacks actuality as such, but Kierkegaard lacks poetical actuality. The two authors are not actual in the same way, and this will certainly bear on their relationship to one another. This again mirrors Shakespeare's relation to his comedy. In the same manner in which we must ascribe *Twelfth Night*'s shipwreck to the sea – and thus understand it as the work of nature, instead of merely as an authorial contrivance – so must we ascribe authorship of the epigraph to Johannes Climacus, not to Kierkegaard.

Climacus is accountable, then, for the misattribution of Feste's line to Shakespeare. The reason for the misattribution is not clear. The fact of the misattribution, however, directs the reader of the epigraph to remember Shakespeare as playwright. »Just as Saft always ends up in the pantry,« the imaginary interlocutor informs Climacus, »you always mix in some little phrase that is not your own, and that disturbs because of the recollection it prompts« (*PF* 105; *SKS* 4, 301). The misattribution serves as an occasion for the reader to remember the polyphony of Shakespeare. As playwright, Shakespeare speaks in multiple voices simultaneously but says nothing in his own voice. Shakespeare's many voices leave him without one voice by which to be heard. Having read *Twelfth Night* with care, the reader recollects both the polyphony of Shakespeare and Feste's poetical existence as one Shakespearean voice. Having written the epigraph, Climacus serves as the occasion for the careful reader's recollection. Climacus himself, however, has a similarly ambiguous relationship to Kierkegaard, and the careful reader will find the recollection of Shakespeare an occasion for the recollection of Climacus as Kierkegaardian pseudonym. The misattributed epigraph thus appears as one element that brings harmony to the polyphony of the authorship of *Fragments*. Kierkegaard maintains Johannes Climacus as the author, and further maintains his relationship to the written work as a matter of indifference.

In »A First and Last Explanation,« however, Kierkegaard admits to his responsibility for the work:

> In a legal and a literary sense, the responsibility is mine, but, easily understood dialectically, it is I who have *occasioned* the audibility of the production in the world of actuality, which of course cannot become involved with poetically actual authors and therefore altogether consistently and with absolute legal and literary right looks to me. Legal and literary because all poetic creation would *eo ipso* be made impossible or meaningless and intolerable if the lines were supposed to be the producer's own words (literally understood) (*CUP* 627; *SKS* 7, 570-571).

And in a footnote from the asterisk above:

> For this reason my name as editor was first placed on the title page of *Fragments* (1844), because the absolute significance of the subject required in actuality the expression of dutiful attention, that there was a named person responsible for taking upon himself what actuality might offer (*CUP* 627 n.; *SKS* 7, 570 n.1).

Kierkegaard affirms a connection between himself and Climacus' work, a connection by which he means to take responsibility in »the world of actuality.« He does not wish to take authorial responsibility from Climacus; rather, as Climacus is but poetically actual, »S. Kierkegaard« is offered as »a named person,« able to take actual responsibility for what may come as a result of the written work.

Kierkegaard is not the author of the *Fragments*, however, and as such, he is not the author of the title page of the *Fragments* on which the ascription of editorship appears. Climacus is the author. As there is no Shakespeare as author of *Twelfth Night* for Feste, there is likewise no Kierkegaard as author of Climacus for Climacus. To take Kierkegaard's claim to an indifferent relation to the *Fragments* seriously, we must acknowledge the inadequacy of any explanation Kierkegaard is able to give for the appearance of the name, »S. Kierkegaard,« on the title page. Johannes Climacus is author of the line: »Edited by S. Kierkegaard« (*PF* 1; *SKS* 4, 213). Only an explanation comprehensible to Climacus will suffice.

Climacus does not attempt to explain the editorship of the *Fragments*, yet any possible explanation would necessarily refer to the Kierkegaard named as editor. This Kierkegaard is related to Climacus as editor (or publisher) to author. Kierkegaard, the man in »the world of actuality,« cannot be the Kierkegaard to whom Climacus ascribes editorship. He is, among other things, the author of Climacus. If Climacus the pseudonym is to be

taken as a pseudonym of Kierkegaard, however, and is to be granted (as Kierkegaard grants him) authorial independence, the perspective of Climacus must be an independent perspective. Only in this way can Climacus constitute a Kierkegaardian persona, a true alter ego. A person aware of him- or herself as pseudonym is a contradiction: awareness of oneself as pseudonym entails denial of the possibility of the awareness it presupposes. A contradiction of this sort cannot inform a feasibly independent perspective. Thus, Climacus must be understood to remain ignorant of Kierkegaard the man: that is, Kierkegaard the author of Climacus. Climacus nevertheless ascribes editorship to some Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard the editor of the *Fragments*, then, must be someone other than Kierkegaard the man.

The editor has no obvious voice within the written work. The editor [*Udgiveren*] gives the text out – both by preparing it for publication (editing, in the ordinary English-language sense) and by publishing it. In this regard, the editor does not speak. Yet the editor is invested with the power to alter the expressions of the author, as well as to make those expressions public in the author's name. The editor stands between the author and the reader, giving the work over from one to the other. This is no slight power. To perform his or her editorial task, the editor must determine the author's purpose. In so doing, the editor must not only come to an interpretation of the author's manuscript, but must apply the force of that interpretation to the manuscript. However strongly or weakly the editor edits, the careful reader remains constantly aware in his or her reading of the indeterminable possibility of editorial intrusion on authorial production or intention. The editorial voice is thus always quite possibly present within the written work, although indistinguishable from the authorial voice. An edited work, then, must be read as at least potentially polyphonic, although the polyphony remains tacit. In cases wherein the author of the written work ascribes editorship to an individual, and particularly when this ascription appears with the ascription of authorship on the title page, the reader has been given audible evidence as to the possibility of an inaudible polyphony in the written work.

Although he remains significantly silent, Kierkegaard the editor – insofar as he is editor – has a voice within Climacus' *Fragments*. This Kierkegaard, distinct from Kierkegaard the man, is like Johannes Climacus authored by Kierkegaard the man. That he shares Kierkegaard's name does not identify him with Kierkegaard. Insofar as Kierkegaard's name is Kierkegaard's, and not that of the altogether poetically actual (and thus factually nonexistent) editor of the *Fragments*, the editor's name is a false name.

Within the *Fragments* we thus find two voices: the audible voice of Climacus, and the inaudible voice of Kierkegaard the editor. Both operate within the written work. Both are actual only poetically. Climacus is the author, but both Climacus and Kierkegaard the editor bear some authorial responsibility: that is, each is responsible in some way (if only legally and literarily) for what is written in the written work. Authorial responsibility is not limited to the pseudonyms, however. Kierkegaard the man, as author of the pseudonyms, remains responsible in some way for what is written in the *Fragments*. Having granted authorial responsibility to both Climacus and Kierkegaard the editor, we must likewise grant some such responsibility to Kierkegaard the man.

There are thus three distinct personae responsible for Climacus' *Fragments*. These three personae are personae of one person, Søren Kierkegaard. The identity of the author cannot be thought simply. To do so is to relegate Kierkegaard to a banal form of pseudonymity. Kierkegaard produces poetically actual alter egos, with whom he shares authorial responsibility. To say that the author of the *Fragments* is Kierkegaard is to misspeak: the author is Johannes Climacus. To speak of Climacus as author of the *Fragments* without reference to Kierkegaard, however, is likewise to misspeak. The distinction between Kierkegaard the man, Kierkegaard the editor and Climacus must be maintained, lest our understanding of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity become unfaithful to Kierkegaard. To remain faithful is to affirm both the unity and the multiplicity of the author. Ascription of authorship of the *Fragments* to Kierkegaard is false, but it is not wholly false, and in the incompleteness of the falsity of that ascription lies the paradox: Johannes Climacus is one (Climacus), but Johannes Climacus is three (Climacus, Kierkegaard the editor, Kierkegaard the man).[3] The ways in which the paradox of Climacus' authorship relates to what Climacus writes of paradox in *Philosophical Fragments* will therefore become the focus of the remainder of the present work.

Philosophical Fragments (or A Fragment of Philosophy) and the Paradox

The simultaneity of multiplicity and unity that occurs within individuality – such as is ascribed by Climacus to the Socrates of *Phaedrus* 229e – does not seem able to be understood. Socrates was »still not quite clear about himself«; he was uncertain whether he »was a more curious monster than Typhon or a friendlier and simpler being, by nature sharing

something divine.« Of this, Climacus writes that it »seems to be a paradox« (*PF* 37; *SKS* 4, 242). This paradox, however, shares its foundation with the paradox of the incarnate god. Both present the indivisible by nature as divided, the innumerable as numbered. Kierkegaard as single individual fragments within his singularity in the authorship of the *Fragments*. (Shakespeare as author of *Twelfth Night*, although pseudonymous and polyphonic, does not fragment, because the authorship of the play remains ascribable to him. Shakespeare as author of the lines spoken by Feste is a mistaken fragmentation of Shakespeare, and of Feste, from the perspective of Climacus). Awareness of this fragmentation is occasioned by the recollection of pseudonymity occasioned by the misattribution of Climacus' epigraph. Climacus cannot maintain himself as pseudonym. Kierkegaard, writing from the perspective of Climacus, however, can remind us of the multiplicity characteristic of the author of the *Fragments*, and as the occasion for our recollection Kierkegaard writing as Climacus is something like Socrates. In the fragmentation of his singularity, Climacus gives substance to Socrates' fear. Johannes Climacus as single individual is multiple. This is the paradox.

> But one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow . . . This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think. This passion of thought is fundamentally present everywhere in thought, also in the single individual's thought insofar as he, thinking, is not merely himself (*PF* 37; *SKS* 4, 242-243).

As author, Climacus begins the project of his pamphlet with the attributions of authorship and editorship; he begins to write the *Fragments* in writing the epigraph. The words of the epigraph, original to Shakespeare, succeed the title page in the authorship of Climacus and precede the rest of his work as prologue to the text. The words of the epigraph tell of marriage. In Shakespeare's play, they are spoken in jest. Maria threatens Feste with possible expulsion: »Yet you will be hanged for being so long absent; or to be turned away – is not that as good as a hanging to you?« Feste responds: »Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage: and for turning away, let summer bear it out.«[4] Feste, »turned away,« is destitute. This destitution is tantamount to death: if he is not paid for his jests, Feste will starve. Yet the clown objects on two points: not only will the sum-

mer make poverty bearable, but death is not the worst that can befall a man.

Climacus, like Feste, is poor. His poverty, although not the absence of material wealth, likewise threatens death. Climacus claims to lack learning, and is thus unable to offer anything but his life to thought. Unlike Socrates, however, Climacus does not sacrifice his life for thought. He is no martyr. Climacus dances with the thought of death: »All I have is my life, which I promptly stake every time a difficulty appears« (*PF* 8; *SKS* 4, 217). Yet Climacus does not risk his life for philosophy. He is no dialectician.

> Next to the question of whether or not I have an opinion, nothing can be of less interest to someone else than what my opinion is. To have an opinion is to me both too much and too little; it presupposes a security and well-being in existence akin to having a wife and children in this mortal life, something not granted to a person who has to be up and about night and day and yet has no fixed income (*PF* 7; *SKS* 4, 217).

The poverty of Climacus stays him from »domestic bliss and civic esteem« (*PF* 7; *SKS* 4, 217), and thus his poverty stays him from the expression of an opinion. The *Fragments* are not the setting forth of the opinion of Climacus, whatever they might be.

To express one's opinion is to open oneself to the system, »by a hapless marriage to be brought into systematic in-law relationship with the whole world« (*CUP* 5; *SKS* 7, 9). Yet the *Fragments* remain but a pamphlet, »without any claim to being a part of the scientific-scholarly endeavor in which one acquires legitimacy as a thoroughfare or transition,« a pamphlet which »will not become anything more« and to which »of course it is impossible for anyone to dream of attributing world-historical importance« (*PF* 5-6; *SKS* 4, 215-216). Climacus warns us from the beginning: the *Fragments* do not serve the system, they are not a moment in the system (of »thoroughfare or transition«), and they lack the significance to become incorporated within the system as world-historical. They cannot oppose the system, for such opposition is but provision for the synthesis of the system (thesis) and the *Fragments* (antithesis). Climacus refuses to engage the system. Unable to proffer either a systematic or antisystematic opinion, Climacus dances lightly in the service of thought. This dancing constitutes the *Fragments*, and in the *Fragments* Johannes Climacus dances with the thought of death. Rather than be ill wed to the system, Climacus risks death by hanging:

> I do not, like that noble Roman, refrain from serving the system *merito magis quam ignavia*, but I am a loafer out of indolence *ex animi sententia* and for good reasons. Yet I do not want to be guilty of ἀπραγμοσυνη, which is a political offense in any age, but especially in a time of ferment, during which, in ancient times, it was punishable even by death (*PF* 5; *SKS* 4, 215).

This is, however, the risk Climacus takes in refusing to engage the system.

Defiant of systematic philosophy, Climacus offers the reader philosophical fragments. Fragments do not constitute a system: a fragment (or a scrap, or a crumb, *en Smule*) is a part disassociated from the whole of which it once was associated part; systems are themselves whole. Should the fragment itself come to constitute a new whole, it does so at the expense of itself as fragment.[5] A fragmented text is thus itself an expression of the paradox, asserting both its multiplicity (as fragmented) and its unity (as text). Fragmentary texts of which the fragmentation is overlooked, and out of which philosophical systems and moments in world history are constructed, are no longer paradoxical. The system is antithetical to the paradox: to lose the paradox is to be a mediocre lover, ill wed.

Philosophical Fragments asserts itself as paradox on the title page: *Philosophical Fragments, or, A Fragment of Philosophy*. Climacus maintains the written work as both singular (*A Fragment*) and multiple (*Fragments*). This ambiguity stresses the paradox of the fragmentary text: although the text itself may remain paradoxically something which is neither singular nor multiple exclusively, the reader cannot understand the text as anything but either singular or multiple exclusively. Even the careful reader, aware of the paradox, can see only the unity or the multiplicity at any particular time. The reader's care will keep the reader aware of the presence of the unseen other, but that other remains unseen. The reader of the *Fragments*, then, understands the text alternatively as a single fragment and as multiple fragments. At any time, the reader can assert the paradox, yet that assertion is not understanding. The paradox as paradox cannot be understood. Unable to be understood, the paradox cannot be explained – neither at first, nor at last.

> When the understanding wants to have pity upon the paradox and assist it to an explanation, the paradox does not put up with that but considers it appropriate for the understanding to do that, for is that not what philosophers are for – to make supernatural things ordinary and banal?

> When the understanding cannot get the paradox into its head, this did not have its origin in the understanding but in the paradox itself, which was paradoxical enough to have the effrontery to call the understanding a clod and a dunce who at best can say »yes« and »no« to the same thing, which is not good theology (*PF* 53; *SKS* 4, 256).

To say 'yes' (it is fragmentary, it is multiple, it is a man) and 'no' (it is textual, it is unified, it is the god) to the same thing is not to understand the paradox. It is but to assert the paradox that cannot be understood. If the *Fragments* is the paradox, no final interpretation is possible. The *Fragments* cannot be fixed. Climacus maintains the *Fragments* as pamphlet, and denies any claim to an opinion on his part, and in so doing does not betray the paradox. Yet the thought of death with which Climacus dances does not arise at the sight of the *Fragments* transformed into an opinion on the system. To the contrary, Climacus only risks a hanging in the maintenance of fragmentation.

Climacus as author does not hang if careless readers mistake him for some systematic Salomon Goldkalb of Copenhagen. So long as he has authorial independence, Climacus remains an author, albeit a misunderstood one. Climacus exists as author, but only as author. Were there no text of which Johannes Climacus were the author, there would necessarily be no Johannes Climacus: for the poetically actual, there must be some text grounding poetical actuality. Without poetical actuality, Climacus is but Kierkegaard: Climacus as independent author and paradox is lost, and Kierkegaard as anything but banal pseudonymist and mediocre poet is lost. If the *Fragments* fragment and are forbidden coherence, then the *Fragments* as text does not exist. Asserting the *Fragments* as fragments at the expense of the *Fragments* as coherent text dissolves the *Fragments* into simple fragmentation and denies the *Fragments* as paradox. Simple fragments, such as the remains of lost texts or notes recorded in notebooks and not as texts, are incomplete. They imply an absent whole. Texts are those completed wholes. If Climacus possesses the authorial independence granted him by Kierkegaard, then a text must cohere of which Climacus, as paradox, is author. If such a text does not cohere, then Climacus collapses into Kierkegaard and Climacus is less a pseudonym than he is a misnomer. To lose the entirety of one's identity, and to have the possibility of the existence of such identity denied such that one could never have been in the first place, this would truly be to be well hanged.

The possibility of risking such a hanging depends entirely upon the

actuality of fragmentation within the written work. If the *Fragments* are not fragments, then Climacus may preserve himself as author but he does so only through service to the system. A non-fragmentary text – that is, a systematic or antisystematic text – bears no relation to the paradox. Such texts express authorial opinion. Opinion is understood, and the paradox defies understanding. Climacus claims to express no opinion within the *Fragments*. Climacus also misattributes the epigraph to Shakespeare, however, and we are careful not to take Climacus always at his word. Yet the *Fragments* is hypothesis: if the moment is to be significant, then the teacher must provide the condition.[6] Upon affirmation of the antecedent, the hypothesis denies the Socratic. If we affirm the antecedent, however, then we must be in possession of the condition for such affirmation. This condition requires knowledge of the moment and knowledge of the teacher. The moment is the paradox; if the teacher is the god, the teacher is likewise the paradox. Affirmation of the antecedent requires knowledge of the paradox, yet the paradox cannot be known. If we admit the actuality of the paradox, then we must admit that the antecedent cannot be affirmed. To make this admission, however, is to affirm the antecedent: the moment is significant in the actuality of the paradox. This is, again, the paradox.

The *Fragments* are not simple fragments, yet they remain a fragment of a thought that in the context of the *Fragments* cannot be thought because it is the paradox. The hypothetical nature of the written work implies the work as fragment. Fragments do not cohere as texts. If the written work is a fragment, then, it does not cohere as a text – yet the incoherent fragment is composed of parts, and if these parts do not form a coherent whole, these parts are themselves legitimately named fragments. Given affirmation of the paradox, which occurs only within the paradox, the *Fragments* coheres as text. Given the impossibility of that affirmation, the *Fragments* fragments. Climacus as author of the *Fragments* takes both as given. This taking of the given is itself paradoxical.

The reader cannot understand the paradox. The careful reader, then, must alternate between affirmation in the awareness of the possible impossibility of affirmation, and denial in the awareness of the possible possibility of affirmation. The reader can resolve the reading into neither affirmation nor denial. When the reader affirms the significance of the moment, the text coheres paradoxically as fragments. Johannes Climacus as author of the fragmentary text is himself paradoxically fragmented (Johannes Climacus as Climacus; Johannes Climacus as Climacus, as Kierkegaard the editor, as Kierkegaard the man), for it is only in the coherence of the

philosophical fragments that Climacus retains independence as author of the text. The reader lacks reasons for affirmation of the paradox, however, as any reason would provide an explanation for that which cannot be explained.

> How, then, does the learner come to an understanding with this paradox, for we do not say that he is supposed to understand the paradox but is only to understand that this is the paradox. We have already shown how this occurs. It occurs when the understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something, the something in which this occurs . . . is that happy passion to which we shall now give a name, although for us it is not a matter of the name. We shall call it *faith* (*PF* 59; *SKS* 4, 261).

The careful reader who affirms Climacus' hypothesis is, insofar as care cannot ground the paradox in understanding but only in faith, faithful. Climacus hangs if the reader lacks faith. The unfaithful reader denies the paradox. In this denial, the paradoxical coherence of the *Fragments* is denied – an entirely legitimate philosophical maneuver, explained and understood – and with the fragmentary text, Climacus' authorial independence is lost.

The hanging of Climacus rests upon the reader of the written work. To grant with Kierkegaard authorial independence to Climacus, the reader must experience the moment »when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself« (*PF* 59; *SKS* 4, 261). Climacus cannot give the reader the moment, for Climacus cannot give the reader the condition and the reader requires the condition for the moment. If the reader denies the paradox, and the reader quite possibly does, *Philosophical Fragments* is incoherent. This is the risk Climacus takes by way of the *Fragments*, the risk which stays him from marriage into the system but leaves open the possibility of execution. Taking the risk means relying dearly upon the reader, as the reader becomes constitutive of the *Fragments* as text, not the author. When, in faith, the paradox is affirmed: Climacus is author of the *Fragments*. When the paradox is denied: Climacus is hanged. Insofar as Climacus is only as author, and Climacus' authorship is constituted by the reader, the reader of the read work creates Climacus. Kierkegaard maintains, »I have no opinion about [the pseudonyms] except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them« (*CUP* 626; *SKS* 7, 570). That Kierkegaard appears as the author of Johannes

Climacus, yet claims to relate to Climacus solely as reader, is only superficially a contradiction.[7]

Thus Climacus remains aware of the reader as creator of Climacus as author, although Climacus must remain unaware of Kierkegaard as author of Climacus. Fragmentary philosophy affirms the significance of the moment against the Socratic and the system. The fragmentation of the text necessitates the reader as constitutive of the read work, and thus the fragmentation of the written work. The reader as reader is thereby given creative powers by the author of the written work, and the gift affirms the significance of the reader as constitutive of the philosophical work – and not merely a moment in the process revealed by the work. Set forth as opinion this view is antisystematic, and thus engages the system. To engage the system is to make oneself comprehensible within the system – and thus the antisystematic is in the service of the system (which seeks to comprehend all), and is itself systematic thereby. Climacus sets forth no opinions.

Climacus returns to the epigraph to *Philosophical Fragments* in the preface to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. He writes, »Undisturbed and in accordance with the motto ('Better well hanged than ill wed'), the hanged, indeed, the well-hanged author has remained hanging. No one – not even in sport or jest – has asked him for whom he did hang« (*CUP* 5; *SKS* 7, 9). Conflating here the senses of execution and suspension implicit in the image of hanging, Climacus depicts himself as author of *Fragments* to the reader of *Postscript* as one suspended in the moment immediately prior to his own death. Climacus hangs – and continues to hang – on the possibility of the dissolution of his identity as author. The reader cannot put an end to Climacus' hanging, but he or she can prevent the suspension from becoming an execution. In this manner, we might understand Johannes Climacus to hang for the readers of *Fragments*, to whom he cedes power over the integrity of his authorship.

Reading the epigraph to *Philosophical Fragments*, then, and reading the epigraph alongside the *Fragments*, the careful reader brings him- or herself into relation with the relation that holds (in the reading of a text) between poetically actual, authorial personae and the authors of such authors. The relation between readers and authors is thus both central to a reading of the *Fragments* (as *Fragments* is a text to be read), and indirectly centralized by Johannes Climacus in the authorship of *Fragments* by way, in part, of the misattribution of the epigraph to Shakespeare. Reading the epigraph, the reader becomes an essential element in the authorship of Climacus. Climacus gives up some authorial power to us, his readers, and in the giving

accentuates the paradoxical nature of his own identity. He indirectly treats *this* paradox in his treatment of the paradox of faith in *Philosophical Fragments*. Johannes Climacus ostensibly writes of faith, but he likewise offers his reader the opportunity – the occasion – to make an ostensible act of faith in the preservation of the coherence of Climacus' identity as author of the work being read. By way of such a reading, Johannes Climacus himself becomes an occasion for the reader to search more extensively for the self-knowledge requisite for entrance into the life of faith outlined within *Philosophical Fragments*, the Christian life.

Notes

1. All references to the works written by Søren Kierkegaard will be abbreviated as follows: *CUP, Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. H. & E. Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, (including, »A First and Last Explanation«); *PF, Philosophical Fragments*, trans. H. & E. Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985; *SKS, Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, ed. N.J. Cappelørn, J. Garff, J. Knudsen, J. Kondrup & A. McKinnon, Copenhagen, Gads Forlag 1997-2004.
2. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds., J.M. Lothian & T.W. Craik, Surrey, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1997, act I, scene v, line 19.
3. This is analogous to the divine in a trinitarian theology, the three persons of the one author. For a brief discussion of the relation of pseudonymity to incarnation in Kierkegaard, see p. 113 ff. in Richard Kearney, »Kierkegaard's Concept of God-Man,« *Kierkegaardiana* 13, Søren Kierkegaard Selskabet, 1984, pp. 105-121. Compare also *CUP* 243; *SKS* 7, 221: »No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can. He is in the creation, everywhere in the creation, but he is not there directly . . .« Merold Westphal also notes the analogy of God and the author, with particular reference to the cases of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida. See Westphal, »Kierkegaard and the Anxiety of Authorship,« *International Philosophical Quarterly* 34:1, 1994, pp. 5-22. The reference here is to page 15.
4. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, I, v, 16-20.
5. For a similar discussion of the nature of the Romantic fragment, and its relation to the first volume of *Either/Or*, see Jacob Bøggild, »The Fine Art of Writing Posthumous Papers: On the Dubious Role of the Romantic Fragment in the First Part of *Either/Or*,« *Kierkegaardiana* 19, Søren Kierkegaard Selskabet, 1998, pp. 95-112. On pp. 97-98, Bøggild writes, »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.« As set forth by Bøggild, the fragment is not unlike the epigraph as understood in the present work.
6. See *PF* 109; *SKS* 4, 305.
7. For an interesting account of the reasons for, and consequences of, reading Kierkegaard as reader of Kierkegaard, see Joakim Garff, »The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author,« trans. J. Chamberlain & B.I. Rasmussen, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, eds., J. Rée & J. Chamberlain, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1998, pp. 75-102.