

# How to Face a Preface<sup>1</sup>

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*Writing a preface is like spitting out of the window.*

In this article I would like to concentrate on Kierkegaard's prefaces. I will attempt to show that prefaces are an important point of departure for understanding Kierkegaard as an author and for clarifying the issues of writing and authority. Although an author 'without authority,' Kierkegaard tends to be an authoritative reader in his prefaces. At the same time it becomes apparent to what degree he envisaged his text as collaboration between author and reader. In order to show this I analyse Kierkegaard's book *Prefaces* and then various prefaces of both pseudonymous and signed works.

I then suggest that Kierkegaard's prefaces also reveal that what has been taken to be a 'problem of pseudonymity' has to be referred to a broader question of what it is to be an author. While Kierkegaard's own descriptions suggest a very complex and subtle understanding of the issue, most Kierkegaard scholars have unfortunately failed to move beyond a Schleiermacherian conception of author transparent in his text.

Lastly I look at the definition of reader in an attempt to show that it mirrors that of an author. This is an essential feature of indirect communication which enables appropriation of the text; it also allows Kierkegaard legitimately to conceive of himself as the reader of his authorship.

The preface has traditionally been a place where the drama of an author's anxiety and expectations is played out in the most explicit terms. As the first encounter between author and reader (except the title and motto), the first step in the transition from private to public discourse, it usually involves attempts to clarify possible misunderstandings and avoid misrepresentations. The preface in general has two main functions: 1) to ensure that a text is read; 2) to ensure that the text is read in the right way.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the latter depends on the belief in 'true sense.' But most

importantly, the preface includes deliberations on the matter of authority. Self-authorisation can take two, often interrelated, forms: claiming to have an authority and claiming not to have an authority.

While today we discover an author's self-effacement as a thoroughly modern phenomenon of an age where writing writes itself, the ancients looked upon it as a pragmatic (even if complex) trick of rhetoric whereby the subjectivity of writer is as it were subordinated to 'actual facts'<sup>3</sup> in the book.

But what about the preface itself?<sup>4</sup> Is the author in it visible or invisible? Contrary to Aristotle who thought that the preface was a form of evasion which had nothing to do with the author and even less with the subject,<sup>5</sup> Foucault and many others claimed that it is »the self that speaks in the preface.«<sup>6</sup> Viewed as such, the preface must surely be immensely valuable, particularly for those interested in that one self, *the* self of an author.

Kierkegaard tells us that a preface is a place where an author whispers to his readers secret words of intimacy: »a preface is a secret whisper to a reader« (*JP* 5387; *Pap.* II A 432). And yet, despite the fact that Kierkegaard even wrote a book of prefaces – *Preface(s)* – his prefaces remain somewhat neglected.

Apart from being a place where an author addresses his reader, the preface is the place where an author becomes a reader. And quite often one can observe a double movement in the preface: it performs *captatio benevolentiae* as regards the book, but simultaneously carries out an act of straightforward self-authorisation as regards the preface; that is, the author claims not to have an authority and yet claims to be an authoritative reader.

### *Preface(s)*

Before speaking about other prefaces in Kierkegaard's authorship and demonstrating that his works are not only conceived of as shared possibilities but are also accompanied by definitions of their own meaning and content – it is instructive to look at this project of a book consisting only of prefaces.<sup>7</sup> I think this curious fact shows that Kierkegaard considered the preface to be an important part of a book and explored its peculiar status.

In the corpus of Kierkegaard's writings one finds a book without *corpus* in quite a literal sense: a book of prefaces which is like a promise

which does not promise anything. They are prefaces to unwritten books and books most probably never meant to be written,<sup>8</sup> and as such they are not *for* anything.<sup>9</sup>

The question is how long can a preface which has no »face« sustain itself in its status without blending into any other genre? Kierkegaard-Nicolaus Notabene was well aware of this question and devoted his entire preface to the discussion of the nature of the preface.

In this preface – which is a preface in the regular sense since it leads to something: a preface to a book of other prefaces – he tells how it came about that his »writing is always suffocated at birth« (*P* 7; *SKS* 4, 471).<sup>10</sup> The story is that of a happy marriage which is disturbed by an unusual form of adultery – by the husband's desire to indulge in literary activity. There is no worse kind of unfaithfulness than for a husband to be an author since an author is always absent. The author is absent not only for his wife, but also for his readers. Trying to escape the absence of the author, Nicolaus Notabene sets out to confirm his presence in two ways: 1) for his wife, since by writing only prefaces he shows that he is not a real author after all, and 2) for his readers because in the preface, the author is present and explains that he will be absent later (in his case he is never absent, instead he makes the text absent).

The author tells us that, »to write a preface is essentially different from writing a book« (*P* 4; *SKS* 4, 468). Even more specific must be the writing of a preface »that is not a preface to any book« (*P* 4; *SKS* 4, 468), which is both the purest confirmation and negation of what it is to be a preface. What makes writing a preface different is its insignificance. »In relation to a book preface is a triviality« (*P* 3; *SKS* 4, 467). However, in the very opening of the preface, Notabene tells us how important the unimportant can be. »It is a frequently corroborated experience that a triviality, a little thing, a careless utterance, an unguarded exclamation, a casual glance, an involuntary gesture have provided the opportunity to slip into a person and discover something that escaped more careful observation« (*P* 3; *SKS* 4, 467). By saying this he inverts all the remarks which follow concerning the insignificant since the insignificant is endowed with the capacity to have even more value than the significant. Not only are prefaces insignificant in relation to a book, but insignificance abounds also in its internal structure: »Prefaces are characterized by the accidental, like dialects, idioms, colloquialisms« (*P* 3; *SKS* 4, 467) and they are said to be whimsical and unstable: »they change like clothing« (*P* 3; *SKS* 4, 467), »now bold, now shy« (*P* 3; *SKS* 4, 467). That is,

prefaces do not have a fixed structure, but rather are in a constant movement. It should be remarked that this is quite an existential emphasis on the insignificant and accidental (and also the way it is related to the movement). It is a part of Kierkegaard's fascination with the margin – of text, of society, etc. A preface to a book is analogous to an individual's relation to society, or the poor and the lepers in relation to Christianity. The accidental – or we should rather say 'so-called' accidental – can be a way of approaching the essential, and this is particularly relevant in the framework of indirect communication in the sense of Socratic 'occasion', (as we will see later, 'occasion' plays an important role in prefaces).

The insignificance of 'ordinary' prefaces is intensified in the prefaces which have revolted against 'being elbowed aside' and liberated themselves. The other prefaces of *Preface(s)* have become independent and rejected their primary function as preceding something – *pre-face*. The attempt to acquire independent value has resulted in a situation in which the insignificance of the 'prefaces as such' has become nothing. »The preface as such, the liberated preface, must then have no subject to treat but must deal with nothing, and insofar as it seems to discuss something and deal with something, this must nevertheless be an illusion and a fictitious motion« (*P* 5; *SKS* 4, 469). This is certainly true about the prefaces in *Preface(s)* – they are about nothing.

But irony aside, nothing, both in liberated and unliberated prefaces, need not be so negative. 'Nothing' has often played a positive role in Kierkegaard's thinking. And, in the context of prefaces, one can think about nothing, as in relation to *Angest*, as 'not object,' as the indefinite and perhaps infinite. »A preface is a mood (*Stemning*)« (*P* 5; *SKS* 4, 469) – it has no object, is not an object, it is the 'relation' (which is shivering and not stable) which serves as background music and light. At the same time, one can say that because they are not bound to an object and are neither necessary, nor important, prefaces are a sheer festivity. They are a celebration of writing;<sup>11</sup> a disinterested writing which does not have to come to fulfilment, to 'a point,' enjoyment with no obligations, not obliged to end, or even to begin. This is confirmed by what Notabene writes about writing a preface: »Writing a preface is like sharpening a scythe, like tuning a guitar, like talking with a child, like spitting out of the window. One does not how it comes about; the desire comes upon one« (*P* 5; *SKS* 4, 469). Or as Kierkegaard writes in his journals: »Whether this preface is going to be long or short, I simply do not know at this moment. My soul is filled with but one thought, a longing,

a thirsting, really to run wild in the lyrical underbrush of the preface, really to rumble about in it (...) for the preface always ought to be conceived in twilight» (JP 5387; *Pap.* II A 432). It might seem then that writing a preface is pure immediacy to which one surrenders. However, fresh inspiration and euphoric intoxication are at the same time counteracted by the consciousness which is observing its own dizziness and 'slipping away': »writing a preface is like *being aware* that one is beginning to fall in love – the soul sweetly restless, the riddle abandoned, every event an intimation of the transfiguration« (P 6; SKS 4, 470). I will now turn to the less emancipated prefaces in Kierkegaard's authorship.

## Prefaces

Kierkegaard's prefaces are so important<sup>12</sup> in their insignificance (as are other small texts, such as the motto) that one could say that reading his prefaces alone would give an idea of his hermeneutics *in nuce* (author, authority, reader). In fact, one could make an alternative book to his *Preface(s)*, made only of his prefaces. It is here, as he himself says, that Kierkegaard whispers sweet love words to his reader. Whether the preface can escape the fate of all writing (that is, being subjected to the doubt and question: who is speaking?) and address us directly,<sup>13</sup> will be left out of the scope of the present essay. In what follows I want merely to draw attention to several issues which are of importance in understanding what Kierkegaard thinks/writes about writing and reading. For example, in spite of the open structure of his works, in the prefaces Kierkegaard gives directions *how* to read and also describes clearly the real subject-matter. In my opinion, this affects the way we should understand his works as 'possibilities.'

### 1. The Status and Nature of the Book

In a preface the author often describes the nature and status of the book, states the overall aim or the main questions, sometimes explains the structure of the book. Kierkegaard too, for example, in the preface to *Sickness unto Death*, informs us that the form of the book is by no means accidental, but, on the contrary, carefully considered. These declarations often include a definition of a work formulated in such a way that there is no doubt that in the author's opinion an awareness of the nature of the

work is essential in order to avoid misunderstandings. For example, consider the preface to *Philosophical Fragments*: »What is offered here is only a pamphlet, *proprio Marte, propriis auspiciis, proprio stipendio*, without any claim to being part of the scientific-scholarly endeavour in which one acquires legitimacy as a thoroughfare or transition as concluding, introducing, or participating (...)« (PF 5; SKS 4, 215). The definition of the nature and contents of the book often involves crucial distinctions as in the preface to *Works of Love*: »They are Christian deliberations, therefore not about *love*, but about *works of love*.« (WL 3; SV3 12, 9).

All this is surely very helpful for the reader, but it sits oddly with one popular theory<sup>14</sup> in Kierkegaard's scholarship, namely that Kierkegaard's writings, and in particular pseudonymous writings, are incredibly open, that they are mere possibilities and that Kierkegaard always lets his reader choose how to read. Of course, in one sense no author can intervene in such a way that he could *make* a reader read in this particular way and no other, and Kierkegaard is always acutely aware of this. In the preface to *From the Papers of One Still Living*, for example, he writes »You know very well, said he, that I consider writing books to be the most ridiculous thing a person can do. One surrenders oneself entirely to the power of fate and circumstance (...)« (EPW 57; SKS 1, 11) or in the preface to *Three Upbuilding Discourses*: »The speaker nevertheless does not forget that to be able to speak the truth is an ambiguous art, and even to be able to speak the truth is a very dubious perfection. In this consciousness, the book goes out into the world; inclosed in itself [*indesluttet i sig selv*], it pays no heed to the weather (...)« (EUD 231; SKS 5, 183). But in so far as it is possible for an author to *suggest*, Kierkegaard takes full advantage of it in his prefaces, both pseudonymous and veronymous. This often happens under the cover of the 'unnecessary,' 'insignificant' and 'redundant.' For example, in the preface to *Sickness unto Death* we read, »just one more comment, no doubt *unnecessary*, but nevertheless I will make it: once and for all, may I *point out* that in the whole book, as the title indeed declares, despair is interpreted as a sickness, not as a cure« (SUD 6, SV3 15, 65). Is this not a direction how to interpret, or – as the less charitable critic could say – an 'imposed interpretation'? Or to take a less radical example, consider the preface to *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*: »Two (II and III) of these discourses, which still lack something essential to be, and therefore are not called, sermons, were delivered in Frue Church. *Even if he is not told*, the knowledgeable reader *will no doubt himself recognize* in the form and the treatment, that these

two are ‘delivered discourses,’ written to be delivered, or written as they were delivered.» (CD 249; SV3 13, 238). I do not wish to portray Kierkegaard as a tyrannous author who decides how we should read him, but to suggest that the theory about readers ‘absolute choice’ (which is often invoked as an argument to support the thesis that pseudonyms merely represent possibilities) is not true, and that Kierkegaard has a tendency to become an authoritative reader in his prefaces.

On the other hand, it is true that Kierkegaard’s indirect communication takes the form of possibilities. However, this has to do not so much with a reader’s random choice of interpretation but with the fact that, according to Kierkegaard, ethically there is no direct relation between subjects. Thus every actuality outside myself I can grasp only in thinking, and in thinking I turn it into a possibility, and accordingly an author has to convey it as a possibility. Far from being a perspective employed only by pseudonymous authors, the creation of ‘possibility’ is an essential feature of Kierkegaard’s writing, pseudonymous or signed by his name.

## 2. Author and authority. Or Kierkegaard & Tutti Frutti<sup>15</sup>

In the prefaces to the upbuilding discourses, Kierkegaard tells us that he is ‘without authority.’<sup>16</sup> In the pseudonymous writings – it is assumed – there is no even need to say this since speaking with authority is rendered impossible by the very fact that works are signed by pseudonyms. And from this, scholars have drawn many far-reaching conclusions, not all of which can be sustained. In what follows I wish to show that by *reading* prefaces and by paying attention to tiny (insignificant?) segments of text in general (such as the comment on the title page of *From the Papers of One Still Living*, »Published, Against his Will, by S. Kierkegaard«) one may avoid the confusion<sup>17</sup> which seems to prevail in the contemporary scholarship when it comes to understanding Kierkegaard as an author, particularly as regards his pseudonyms.

Due mainly to the lack of contextualising the problem of pseudonym (both in a historical and in a theoretical perspective),<sup>18</sup> the rather vague discussion about pseudonyms and their role in Kierkegaard’s authorship has led to many approximations and misunderstandings, like for example, a term ‘genuine pseudonym.’<sup>19</sup> This might be a sign that we must readdress the issue of pseudonyms radically. That is, as Kierkegaard would say, we must first of all begin with the beginning (and also with a preface). We should ask ourselves ‘what a pseudonym is’ from a point of

view of history and theory of literature, and only then approach this question in Kierkegaard. I do not, of course, exclude the possibility that Kierkegaard understood and employed it in a idiosyncratic way, but in order to appreciate this we must know the context, whereas now it seems to me that scholars have not at all thought about the nature and function of the 'pseudonym' as such. On the other hand, it is not an easy task and, in the end, perhaps 'pseudonym' is not a definable concept at all, since pseudonyms themselves are as elusive as prefaces, the superfluous, the *esprit* of writing.

Without in any way saying that there is no such question as the question of pseudonyms, I want nonetheless to suggest that there is some vicious circularity in the present arguments and little in the way of theoretical foundation. Scholars have been so puzzled by the question 'why Kierkegaard wrote under pseudonyms?' that they have ignored not only the European but also the most immediate context: most Danish Golden Age authors wrote with pseudonyms at some point or another. Mynster, for example, wrote exclusively under a pseudonym until 1805. Has bishop Mynster also been playing with possibilities and hiding behind masks?

In Kierkegaard's prefaces we find many instructive descriptions which suggest that the case of pseudonymity is far more complicated (although, at the same time more simple) than the well known theory, that pseudonyms are 'masks,' a way of distancing oneself from the text, etc. Reading prefaces, one sees clearly that pseudonyms are by no means the only way of creating distance between the author and the text in Kierkegaard's authorship. They enter into a chain of self-distancing techniques. For example in *Either/Or* we read: »For the sake of order, it is probably best to tell first how I happened to come into possession of these papers« (EO1 4; SKS 2, 12), and then we are told about the discovery of the writing desk with manuscripts. Moreover, the various authors of these papers are described. The writer (who is a pseudo-writer) records that he has been experiencing the pangs of conscience: »The question occurred to me whether I might not become guilty of an indiscretion towards the unknown authors« (EO1 12; SKS 2, 19).

If we take *Stages on Life's Way* as an another example, in *Lectori Benevolo!* (which serves as a preface) we are told that the book was left to be bound, that Mr. Literatus died (the death of an author?!). Some time later a small package of hand-written papers was found and the publisher took the responsibility to publish it. As if that was not complicated enough, in a separate preface to *Guilty?/Not Guilty?*, in the section



which serves as a preface called *Notice: Owner Sought* (with a title which asks the question about author in no ambiguous terms), Frater Taciturnus tells us that he found the manuscript in Søborg lake in 'a box of palisander wood.' The manuscript was written quite a long time ago by a certain person, whom he calls Quidam. Who is the author? And what difference would it make if instead of 'Bookbinder' at the beginning of the chain, we saw the name of Kierkegaard while all the rest remained the same?

The examples from *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way* are the most elaborate and explicit examples of an 'unknown author,' but does not the same authorial self-effacement happen in *Fear and Trembling* or *Philosophical Fragments*? In the preface to the latter one reads: »But what is my opinion? (...) Do not ask me about that« (PF 7; SKS 4, 217). Perhaps it takes place here on a smaller, less visible scale just because these works have less literary structural qualities but not because the function of 'author' is different.

Thus it is clear that pseudonyms also insist on detachment and disinterestedness (for example, Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) and draw different perspectives within themselves. In fact, pseudonyms make a special effort to tell us that they are not the authors.<sup>20</sup>

The second problematic feature related to the pseudonyms is the view held by many scholars that pseudonyms represent different world-views. This position is best expressed by Mark C. Taylor when he says: »Each pseudonym represents a particular shape of consciousness, form of life, or type of selfhood.«<sup>21</sup> However, this position is hardly ever based on a concrete analysis of text and the only argument advanced in favour of this thesis is that they are pseudonyms. From the sheer fact that there several pseudonyms it does not follow that pseudonyms *represent* different perspectives. Roger Poole is one of the few researchers who has tried to support the view of 'different perspectives' by telling us how pseudonyms differ from one another. He has attempted to show the differences between pseudonyms<sup>22</sup> by tracing different meanings of the concept 'ethical' in *Fear and Trembling* and in *Either/Or*, then 'sin' in *The Concept of Anxiety*, *The Sickness unto Death*, and *Philosophical Fragments*, as well as despair in *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death*. However, one notices that the difference in terms is derived from unargued foreknowledge that the worlds of the pseudonyms are radically different. Roger Poole formulates his principle as follows: »The pseudonymous authors inhabit thought-worlds which are radically different, and thus concepts in the

pseudonyms ought to be distinguished from each other, even when they are verbally identical» (162). Moreover, the fact that concepts differ from book to book does not prove that the pseudonyms have different, coherent worlds. The meaning of terms and concepts is often context-dependent. Thus 'sin' can have different connotations in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death* even if they were written by the same pseudonym or even the same 'Kierkegaard.' In his famous 'A First and Last Explanation' at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard says: »I am just as far from being Johannes de silentio in *Fear and Trembling* as I am from being the knight of faith he depicts« (CUP 626; SV3 10, 286). This can be interpreted as supporting the view that should draw a very sharp distinction between Kierkegaard's views and the views held by Johannes *de silentio*, but I think it is important to pay attention to the symmetry of the 'as far as.' This alone should be sufficient grounds for not assuming independent world-views for pseudonyms; they are first of all authors and the usual problems of authors are not solved by simply saying that the author is a pseudonym. Johannes *de silentio* has a no more distinct worldview than the merman.

The third highly complex issue in relation to the pseudonyms is the question of fiction and biography. One of the most interesting confusions that arose from reading 'A first and last explanation' (which is often used to support the interpretation that there is a gulf in Kierkegaard's authorship between his pseudonymous and veronymous works) has to do with the role of Kierkegaard's life in his authorship. The confusion enables the same researchers to emphasise Kierkegaard's words: »in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me (...)« (CUP 626; SV3 10, 286), but to ignore what Kierkegaard says just a few lines down: »what and how I am is absolutely irrelevant to this production« (CUP 626; SV3 10, 286). For example, M. Holmes Hartshorne quotes the line, »in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me (...)« on the first page of his work<sup>23</sup> but later pursues a biographical line of interpretation, and thus after having just quoted from the first *diapsalmata* of the pseudonymous *Either/Or* he says: »that Kierkegaard was speaking of his own life is obvious« (76). Likewise, Roger Poole, in spite of his constant reminder to keep the pseudonyms apart and not to attribute their works to Kierkegaard, nevertheless talks about the relation between Kierkegaard's biography and his pseudonymous works. For example, »Kierkegaard wrote book after book under a series of easily distorted pseudonyms, which referred to, while occluding or distorting significant

information, upon the broken engagement to Regine and the ever-renewed puzzle of his relationship to his father.«<sup>24</sup>

This 'selective' reading of 'A First and Last Declaration' lead to a centaur-like view that in pseudonymous works there is not a single word by Kierkegaard, while at the same time claiming that his entire life is inscribed in them.

As has been mentioned, one of the most important texts with respect to the role of pseudonyms in Kierkegaard's authorship is 'A First and Last Declaration'. Talking about the fact that in a legal and literary sense the responsibility is his, Kierkegaard says: »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; *SV3* 10, 287). This statement gives us a clear idea of how subtle and complex, and surprisingly modern, Kierkegaard's understanding of an author is; in order to appreciate the role of pseudonyms one should first of all examine Kierkegaard's notion of an author.

I have been trying to show that Kierkegaard's prefaces entail an implicit critique of many current interpretations of the 'pseudonym problem.' The mistakenness of these interpretations is perhaps most obvious when one reads a preface to *From the Papers of One Still Living*, a book published in Kierkegaard's name. In his work, Kierkegaard tries to tell us about his interesting relationship to the 'real author' of the treatise, a complicated relationship in which the parties rarely agree with each other and are engaged in a constant fight, but yet are »inseparable in the strictest sense« (*EPW* 55; *SKS* 1, 9), and elaborates: »as if two souls lived in one body« (*EPW* 55; *SKS* 1, 9). Is this not very much the same as what happens in the pseudonyms and with the pseudonyms, and should we not therefore redefine our notion of author? Perhaps the question of pseudonyms is so confused because many scholars adhere to a stale, archaeological conception of what it is to be an author, and what it is to write – (strangely enough, this is often true even of the so called deconstructive interpretations). This conception involves the author's intentions, a straightforward correspondence between author's views and his text – the archaeological hermeneutics attributed to Schleiermacher (although to be fair to Schleiermacher one should note that his ideas have often been oversimplified). Perhaps it is time to have a more elaborate understanding of 'author' and thus also of Kierkegaard. I think this initial problem with the concept of 'author' might explain how it has come about that it is now taken for granted that pseudonyms are meant to ex-

press that which the author does not mean,<sup>25</sup> as if no questions should be asked as to what we mean when we say ‘what the author means.’

### 3. Reader

In this part I want to concentrate on the definition of reader, which plays a significant role in Kierkegaard’s understanding of himself as author. This will also involve the instructions Kierkegaard gives, not as regards the interpretation, but as regards the actual reading, and later his vision of the encounter between author and reader which takes us back to the issue of the authority of the author.

In his prefaces, one can find startling addresses to the reader as, for example, in *The Book on Adler*: »I must directly ask ‘my reader’ to read this book« (BA 6, Pap. VII 2 B 235). One also finds pleas for patience and good will: »I will not, however, hesitate to ask the reader outright not to let himself be disturbed by the appearance of the first impression« (BA 3; Pap. VII 2 B 235). We should begin with the definition of ‘reader.’ The reader is, as well known, ‘that single individual,’ or as he says in some discourses: »the bird I call *my* reader suddenly notices it, flies down to it, picks it, and takes it home,« the reader is »a little flower under the cover of the great forest.« The description of a suitable reader is often accompanied by the notion of ‘favourable hour.’ The value of the book is presented as conditional;<sup>26</sup> if the act of reading is to be as fruitful as possible, the right ‘occasion’ is needed. Of course, there is another side to it, a more inward one – the individual must be ready to receive, must be open: »that single individual who is favorably enough disposed to allow himself to be found, favorably enough disposed to receive it« (EUD 5; SKS 5,13). Sometimes one finds a more specific description of the qualifications of the reader. For example in the general preface to *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* we read: »These two essays probably will essentially be able to interest only theologians (...)« (WA 53; SV3 15, 16). Judging by many internal references,<sup>27</sup> ‘my reader’ is also envisaged as an omnipresent, all-reading reader. For example, Kierkegaard plays a strange game of interrelation of prefaces, creating as if it were a global network of prefaces, where the same conditions apply. In the preface to *The Lilies of the Field*, we are referred to a book published five years earlier: »My reader will be reminded of this by the circumstances and in turn, I hope, will be reminded, as I am reminded, of the preface to the two upbuilding discourses of 1844: ‘It is offered with the right hand’ – in contrast to

the pseudonyms, which were held out and are held out with the left hand.' May 5, 1849 SK.« Or instead of writing a preface to an upbuilding discourse published in December, Kierkegaard tells us: »See the preface to *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, 1843.« Or in *Training in Christianity* in place of prefaces to the second and third parts, we find this in both cases: 'See Preface No. 1.' The author does not re-write his prefaces, but the reader re-reads them and re-connects texts.

With regard to the mode of reading, many have noted that the author asks the reader to read slowly and to read aloud. For example, he writes: »These Christian deliberations, which are the fruit of much deliberation, will be understood slowly but then also easily, whereas they will surely become very difficult if someone by hasty and curious reading makes them very difficult for himself (...)« (*WL* 3; *SV* 3 12, 9). The reader is asked to read slowly not only because reading slowly is more likely to lead to appropriation, but also, curiously enough, because the reader's work should mirror that of the author's (see, for example, the description of writing process in *Point of View*). The fruit of much deliberation should be consumed with much deliberation if the reader is to take over the author's place. The reason we should read aloud is given in the preface to *For Self-Examination*: »My dear reader, read aloud if possible! (...) By reading aloud you will gain the strongest impression that you have only yourself to consider, not me, who, after all, is 'without authority,' no others, which would be a distraction« (*FSE* 3; *SV* 3 17, 52). That is, by reading aloud the reader collaborates with the author in his attempt of self-effacement.<sup>28</sup>

While in the prefaces to the pseudonymous writings Kierkegaard focuses mainly on the problem of the author, in his signed works he concentrates on the reader. It is, however, important to note that the reader is seen as somebody who accomplishes the work begun by the author, and not only the work of the creation of a text but also the work of the author's self-effacement. In a preface to *Eighteen Discourses*, the meeting between author and reader is described in this way: »the joy of him who sends it, who continually comes to his reader only to bid him farewell, and now bids him farewell for the last time« (*EUD* 295; *SKS* 5, 289). This is the wish and position of author, but it is the reader who »(...) transforms the discourse into a conversation, the honest confidentiality of which is not disturbed by any recollection of the one who continually desires only to be forgotten (...)« (*EUD* 231; *SKS* 5, 231) and thus helps the author to be forgotten.

But in order to successfully appropriate and benefit from the author's self-effacement, the reader must surrender as well. The most desirable fate for the book is the melting of the author's and the reader's wills into a new synthesis: »The meaning lies in the appropriation. Hence the book's joyous giving of itself. Here there are no worldly 'mine' and 'thine' that separate and prohibit appropriating what is the neighbour's.« A couple of lines down, the author speaks about the reader giving of himself as well (*TDIO* 5; *SKS* 5, 389). The creation and existence of a text arise from a mutual need, as noted in the preface to *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*: »I saw and see that the little book is received by that single individual, who it seeks and who seeks it« (*WA* 113; *SV3* 14, 169).

I hope I have succeeded in showing that several hermeneutical issues, even the very complex ones like the infamous 'problem of pseudonymity,' can be illuminated by – and some prejudices eliminated by – reading Kierkegaard's prefaces. It is in prefaces that Kierkegaard gives both the invitation and conditions for the communion of author and reader in the creation of a text. The reader has to mirror the author's work and help him efface himself. Preface is effacement, the place where Kierkegaard retreats to become his own reader, and yet his presence lingers over the text until *the* reader takes it over and makes it his own.

»One last remark, no doubt unnecessary.« At the very end of the preface to *From the Papers of One Still Living*, after the fight with the other author, Kierkegaard says: '*hvad jeg skrev, det skrev jeg.*' [What I have written I have written] (*SKS* 1, 12; *EPW*, 58).

## Notes

1. This essay has no pretension to exhaust the issue, it rather hopes to serve as a preface to further inquiries in the subject.
2. Gerard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1987, p. 183.
3. »The commonplaces of classical rhetoric as a whole therefore marginalize, from a modern perspective, the subjectivity of the writer, or more accurately, subordinate it to the 'actual facts.' The modesty topos is perhaps the most important of these commonplaces. (...) As Quintilian sees the more effective speaker's self-abnegation, the more seriously the listener will take his words on a subject, since he has made his own motivation invisible« (my italics), Kevin Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority. The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance preface*, Stanford, Calif., 1994, p. 6-7.
4. It is interesting to observe that both in Danish and in English, one may find unexpected senses of 'preface.' Thus in the *Ordbog over det danske sprog* we read: 1) mundtlig ell. skriftlig udtalelse, som gaar forud for noget andet. 1.1) tilkendegivelse af, hvad der er ens vilje ell. ønske m.h.t. noget fremtidigt, hvad man agter at foretage sig, hvilke betingelser man stiller olgn. 'med forord' – sige noget med forord: i forvejen erklære noget for kun at gælde under en vis forudsætning, paa visse betingelser... 1.2) indledende bemærkninger, især (kortere) meddelelse fra en forfatter, udgiver olgn. 2) have forordet – have det afgørende ord. 3) udtalelse til bedste for en anden, anbefaling. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989): 1. In the *Liturgies of Christian Churches*: the introduction or prelude to the central part of Eucharistic service (the consecration, etc.), comprising an exhortation to thanksgiving and an offering of praise and glory to God, ending with the Sanctus. 2. The introduction to a literary work, usually containing some explanation of its subject, purpose, and scope, and of the method of treatment (my italics).
5. Thus in his *Rhetoric* (commenting on Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris*) he says: »Why all this preface? Introductions are popular with those whose case is weak; it pays them to dwell on anything rather than the actual facts of it. That is why slaves, instead of answering the questions put to them, make indirect replies with long preambles.« Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, ed. Richard McKeon, New York, Random House, 1941, 3, 14.10.
6. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post Structuralist Criticism*, ed. J. Harari, New York, Cornell University Press, 1979, p. 152.
7. I am proposing a thought experiment insofar as I am suggesting that we distance ourselves from the well known line of interpretation, 'it is a parody of Hegel,' which often is so convincing, that within the framework of this stream of interpretation there are no greater problems than to decide whether it is really a parody, or perhaps a satire. I do not wish to say that there is no trace of Hegel or Danish Hegelians in this book at all, but it seems to be hypochondria to make claims like those of McDonald in the introduction to his own translation: »Prefaces satirizes the Hegelians' aspirations for systematic totality of knowledge. By its very form, as a collection of prefaces that do not precede any book, this text mocks the pretension to attain any complete and self-contained universe of meaning within a human artefact. That is, it challenges the totality of the book« (4). While I fully agree that it does challenge the totality of a book, I cannot see how that mocks or why that is a satire on Hegel – after all it is not Hegel who invented a 'totality of book' in a sense that it has a beginning and an end, head, body, and a tail.

8. One observes that at least one of them was intended for *Begrebet Angest*, but was never realised as such.
9. One might here recall the curious fact that in 1872 Nietzsche, as a Christmas present for Cosima Wagner, dedicated *Five Prefaces for Five Books which were not Written* and, in the accompanying letter, adds that they were »not meant to be written.«
10. In this article, Kierkegaard's works are referenced to the English edition of *Kierkegaard's Writings*, edited and translated by H. and E. Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978–1998, and to *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (JP)*, edited and translated by H. and E. Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967–75. References to the Danish text are to either the third edition of the *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker (SV3)*, 3rd edition, edited by A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg and H.O. Lange, revised by P.P. Rohde, vol. 1–20, Copenhagen, Gyldendals Forlag, 1962–1964, or *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter (SKS)*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, Alastair McKinnon and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, Copenhagen, Gads Forlag, 1997–2002. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. by P.A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torsting, vol. 1–11, Copenhagen 1909–1948; 2. ed., ed. by N. Thulstrup, vol. 1–16, 1968–78; index by N.J. Cappelørn, vol. 14–16, Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1968–78. The following abbreviations are used for the English Titles: *P: Prefaces*; *SUD: The Sickness unto Death*; *WL: Works of Love*; *CUP: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*; *EUD: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*; *CD: Christian Discourse*; *BA: The Book on Adler*; *EO1: Either/Or vol. 1*; *PF: Philosophical Fragments*; *EPW: Early Polemical Writings*; *FSE: For Self-Examination*; *TDIO: Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*; *WA: Without Authority*.
11. Prefaces also have something erotic about them. In his article about *Preface(s)* Henriksen (*Kierkegaardiana* 20) has drawn our attention to the displacement of desire. He went so far in this interpretation that he reads 'spitting out of the window' (which is how Kierkegaard describes the process of writing a preface) as 'a metaphor for male masturbation' (21). It seems to me that there is also another source of the eroticism, namely its very status. Its status is analogous to that of an engagement. In Kierkegaard scholarship their analogy acquires an extra meaning: just as so few scholars seem to have considered what a 'preface' is, so too, almost no one has considered the nature of 'engagement' (namely, that the possibility of being broken forms part of the very nature of an engagement). Kierkegaard's engagement could be likened to an emancipated preface.
12. The meaning of '*have forord*' – '*have et afgørende ord*' might be of interest.
13. We should bear in mind a question similar to the one concerning the status of *Point of View*: does this preface for a book of prefaces transcend what in itself is said about other prefaces or prefaces as such? And on the other hand, the same question applies to any preface insofar as it has an ambition to be a different kind of communication between author and reader than the rest of the text.
14. It is inspired by Mackey and Taylor, but now predominant among English speaking researchers.
15. Tutti Frutti was a pseudonym of Fürst von Pückler-Muskau. Under this pseudonym in 1834 he published *Aus den Papiren des Verstorbenen*, which is quoted by Kierkegaard in *Pap. I A 41*; *JP* 5071, and the title of which is most likely to have influenced Kierkegaard's *From the Papers of One Still Living*.
16. In *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* we find the formula-like definition repeated: »Although this little book (which is called 'discourses,' not sermons, because its author



- does not have authority to *preach*, 'upbuilding' discourses, not discourses for upbuilding, because the speaker by no means claims to be a *teacher*)» (EUD, 53; SKS 5, 13).
17. No doubt, partly initiated by Kierkegaard himself.
  18. One of the rare attempts to contextualize the question of pseudonyms can be found in F.J. Billeskov Jansen, »Pseudonymiteten for Kierkegaard. Bag masker,« *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymitet*, Copenhagen, C.A. Reitzel, 1993. However, it is only a list of other more or less contemporary pseudonyms. I am grateful to this article for the discovery of Tutti Frutti.
  19. I first encountered this in S. Evans book *Passionate Reason. Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*: »In this book I follow the policy of Roberts and Nielsen and the precedent of my own Kierkegaard's *Fragments* and *Postscript*, by taking the Johannes Climacus pseudonym as a genuine pseudonym« (6). Evans might have borrowed the term from Niels Thulstrup. Of course, Kierkegaard himself in the *Point of View* has introduced the difference between lower pseudonymity (all except Anti-Climacus) and higher pseudonymity (Anti-Climacus), but this does not at all imply that some of them are less genuine than others.
  20. At this point, one should ask oneself how reasonable it is that some scholars insist on referring to the pseudonym of the book and never to Kierkegaard. What is gained by this is dubious since, within pseudonyms, there are other authors. Saying that a certain proposition is a position held by, for example, Climacus is, in fact, as complicated as saying that it is held by Kierkegaard.
  21. Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood. Kierkegaard and Hegel*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p. 92.
  22. Roger Poole, »'My wish, my prayer': Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart. Preliminary Considerations,« *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1997, p. 156ff.
  23. M. Holmes Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard. Godly Deceiver: The Nature and Meaning of his Pseudonymous Writings*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990.
  24. Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1993, p. 4.
  25. See for example Kierkegaard's comments in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* pp. 551–552 where he says that there is not a single word by him in the pseudonymous writings. I would like to suggest that another possible sense in which one can understand these sayings may be overlooked: perhaps these sayings were addressed to reviewers precisely because most of Kierkegaard's contemporaries did not grasp Kierkegaard's subtle and complicated understanding of authorship, what it is to write, what happens in the process of reading, etc. The reviewers would most likely have had a rather crude conception of authorship, assuming a direct link between author's work and his life. Kierkegaard's position in respect to the reviewers is well known, and suggested in *Either/Or*: 'As far as the reviewers are concerned, I would like that my request be understood simply and altogether literally as my honest intention and that the result might be according to the petition of my request: that the book would not be subjected to any critical mention, be it in the form of acknowledgement or approval or disapproval' (E/O 191). Furthermore, the idea that when writing under a pseudonym, an author says what he does not 'mean' is at least historically not true; in fact, often the case was quite the opposite.
  26. And here we could remember the meaning of '*sige noget med forord*' – *i forvejen erklære noget for kun at gælde under en vis forudsætning, paa visse betingelser* (...).

27. These references are scattered all over the authorship, perhaps most notably in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, where he reviews other works.
28. See a very helpful article by George Pattison, 'Who is the Discourse,' in *Kierkegaardiana* 16, pp. 28-46.