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Beyond Foreword: Reading Kierkegaard's *A Literary Review*

“If they asked me, I could write a book; about the way you walk and whisper and look. I could write a preface on how we met; so the world would never forget. And the simple secret of the plot; it’s just to tell you I love you a lot. Then the world discovers as my book ends; how to make true lovers of friends.”

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, *I Could Write a Book*

As Rodgers and Hart suggest, writing prefaces has something to do with ending books. Kierkegaard, too, knew that the world does not forget prefaces, though it quickly puts a book out of sight and out of mind. His navigation of complex movements of pseudonymity and publicity marks Kierkegaard as a stylist and literary trickster par excellence. Whether in reaction to the religious establishment or the literary tastes of his day, his critical ploys seldom fail to fascinate his readers. Nevertheless, academic work on Kierkegaard tends to focus on the elusive nature of the task, preferring to systematize rather than to read how Kierkegaard’s theatrics of writing resist the categories of criticism and interpretation. Reviewing Kierkegaard is a difficult job indeed, for to read his singular texts today is to engage and reengage the writing, its translation and reception. The exploration to follow seeks to address how one of Kierkegaard’s prefaces problematizes the act of writing and reviewing by interrogating the genre of the literary review, asserting the bold proposition to speak to a particular reader. The site for this excur-

sion is the preface to Kierkegaard's *En literair Anmeldelse/A Literary Review*.¹

A Literary Review was published on March 30, 1846, shortly after the appearance of Kierkegaard's final philosophical work, *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig efterskrift/ Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. As the title *En literair Anmeldelse/A Literary Review* suggests, this text has a literary work as its subject, the Danish novel *To Tidsaldre /Two Ages*, written by the anonymous author of an earlier, extremely popular novel called *En Hverdags-Historie/A Story of Everyday Life*.² In his review, Kierkegaard refers to the then anonymous Thomasine Gyllembourg-Ehrensward as "Forfatteren til en 'Hverdags-Historie,'" "the author of *A Story of Everyday Life*." Kierkegaard's response to Mrs. Gyllembourg's novel takes its form in *Two Ages*, as the English translation in the Princeton edition entitles the review, but it is not the first time that Kierkegaard has relied upon the anonymous author to motivate his criticism. The text on *To Tidsaldre/Two Ages* is Kierkegaard's second and last review. Framing his entire production and playing partner to his first work of literary criticism, a polemic on Hans Christian Andersen's *Kun en Spillemand/Only a Fiddler* published in *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer/From the Papers of One Still Living*, *A Literary Review* has more than a coincidental relation to the first effort, serving to close and enclose the authorship within a perpetuating, resuscitative, framework that will defy the interpretive shackles of a certain kind of reader, undermining a categorization by reception.

Kierkegaard's first literary review from September 1838 critiques

¹ References to the Danish text are from Søren Kierkegaard, *Samlede Værker*, vol. 14 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962). The English translation is from the Princeton University series of *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 14, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978). The German translation is from Sören Kierkegaard, *Eine literarische Anzeige, Gesammelte Werke*, 17. Abteilung, trans. Emanuel Hirsch (Düsseldorf: Diederichs Verlag, 1954). Hereinafter citations will appear in the text "Princeton," "Danish," and "German," followed by the page number.

² Edited by J.L. Heiberg, Gyllembourg's son, *En Hverdags-Historie* was published in October 1845.

H.C. Andersen's novel *Only a Fiddler* as representing the opposite of the ideals of the anonymous Gyllembourg's writing, referring there also to the *The Story of Everyday Life* as a model.³ Kierkegaard considers Andersen's text stylistically feeble, fickle, essentially everything that Gyllembourg's novel is not; Andersen's method describes through oppositions and extraneous functions, lacking a consistent life-view, reacting merely to outer phenomena.⁴ The issue in this first review, as will be the case in *A Literary Review*, is the value of comparisons, of relationships, of repetitions, of the possibility of endings that Kierkegaard describes in the introduction to his treatment of Gyllembourg's *Two Ages*. In the introduction to *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard admits to his reader just how apprehensive he is about the act of reviewing, with the anonymous "author of *The Story of Everyday Life*" looking on:

Now, after seven years, I want a second and last try at it [reviewing], again using *A Story of Everyday Life*. I hazard the conjecture, as decorum permits in connection with an anonymous author, that the honored unknown author read my little piece in the past - if he will again do me the honor of reading these lines, I trust he will find me unchanged or, if possible, changed in the repetition, a little more clarity in the presentation, a little more lightness in a flowing style, a little more consideration in recognition of the difficulty of the task, a little more inwardness in discernment: consequently changed in the repetition. (Princeton 23)

Efter 7 Aars Forløb er det da mit Ønske anden Gang, afsluttende, at gjøre Forsøget og atter med en Hverdags-Historie. Jeg har, hvad dog

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer, Samlede Værker*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962) 27.

⁴ See Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 1993) 33-34, for this description of the review. For more on Kierkegaard's views on H.C. Andersen, see Søren Gorm Hansen, *H.C. Andersen og Søren Kierkegaard i dannelseskulturen* (Copenhagen: Medusa, 1976). For more on Kierkegaard and Romanticism see Gerhard vom Hofe, *Die Romantikeritik Sören Kierkegaards* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972).

Sømmeligheden tillader i Forhold til en Anonym, en gjettende Formodning om Muligheden af, at den ærede ubekjendte Forfatter i sin Tid læste den lille Piece; dersom han da nu igjen vil gjøre mig den Ære at læse disse Linier: jeg haaber han skal finde mig uforandret eller om muligen forandret i Gjentagelsen: lidt mere Klarhed i Fremstilling, lidt mere Lethed i en flydende Stil, lidt mere Langsomhed i Kjendskab til Opgaven, lidt mere Inderlighed i Skjønsmheden: altsaa forandret i Gjentagelsen. (Danish 25)

Conveniently, conjecture must be allowed here, since the respected author is anonymous. Nevertheless, decorum, the incommensurable law of taste and tact, cannot be ignored, for a revered author is looking on, even if she does not allow herself to be easily identified. This time, a different, improved Kierkegaard attempts the repetition, but it occurs in a favorable climate, since both Kierkegaard and the anonymous author have been reading all these seven years. The anonymous author/reader, “he,” Kierkegaard hopes, is now ready for the second attempt at the task of reading, writing and reviewing.⁵ Kierkegaard, as writer and reviewer, assigns tasks to both himself and his reader.

The task of this criticism as repetition, “Opgaven,” Kierkegaard writes at the end of the introduction, “erfares af Titelbladet” (Danish 24).⁶ The task is experienced, delegated and transmitted at the title page.

⁵ Kierkegaard sets up reading number two in a favorable manner, for he presumes that the anonymous author can read in a certain way. In this context, we might ask what Friedrich Nietzsche means for his future readers when he notes in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Vorrede 8: “Wenn diese Schrift irgend jemandem unverständlich ist und schlecht zu Ohren geht, so liegt die Schuld, wie mich dünkt, nicht notwendig an mir. Sie ist deutlich genug, vorausgesetzt, was ich voraussetze, daß man zuerst meine früheren Schriften gelesen und einige Mühe dabei nicht gespart hat: diese sind in der That nicht leicht zugänglich.” Nietzsche’s expectations, his requirements for reading, follow those of Kierkegaard, for he expects his reader to have read his earlier texts and he admits to their difficulty. His writing, then, like Kierkegaard’s, is motivated by past and future readings and by a relationship to reading that demands a certain rigor.

⁶ The complete passage from the introduction is as follows: “Der gives Indvendinger, som rette sig mod en Bog, og dog egentligen aldrig ere komne videre end til Bindet og Titelbladet, og som derfor bedst besvares eller rettere affærdiges udenfor. Opga-

Aptly, Kierkegaard's title page overflows with tasks fulfilled and to be fulfilled. It not only bears the weight of an extensive title, but also immediately situates the review within a web of investments and obligations that goes beyond the initial obligation to the anonymous author. On this single page something is dedicated (to the anonymous author of *En Hverdags-Historie*), something edited (by J.L. Heiberg), something published (by Reitzel in Copenhagen), and finally, something is written and reviewed (by S. Kierkegaard). A veritable menu of the business of literature, a tableau of obligations and a play of demands and requests, this title page presents the reader with more than a single task. Complicating matters for the contemporary reader, the English translation of the passage provides a sudden twist in this intricate site of reading. There, the title page "poses the problem" (Princeton 22-23). No longer a place where experiences are to be had, the English text uncannily offers clues to the obligations with which the reader of *En litterair Anmeldelse* must contend, proffering the question: If the title page is the problem, then where and how do we attempt to read Kierkegaard's literary review?

To begin at the title page, a logical site for opening a book, is thus to be confronted straight away with the problem of reading and reviewing. Indeed, the title page presents a, if not the problem, for do we call this text *En litterair Anmeldelse*, *Eine literarische Anzeige*, *Two Ages*, or perhaps even *A Literary Review*? Setting the translators' name game aside, though, let us seek the task of reading in an obligation located only one page away, in the strange appendage that is Kierkegaard's preface to *En litterair Anmeldelse*. Opening Kierkegaard's book, his review, by exploring the gap between its form and its content will mean to peel away editorial and aleatory trappings in order to initiate an excavation of the text's compulsions and interests. With this proposition to begin reading almost at the beginning, at the preface, the foreword, Kierkegaard's

ven erfares af Titelbladet; i en Fart omskrives Opgavens Vanskelighed til en Indvending mod Bogen, og som Jøderne ved Hjælp af Obligationer trak Penge ud af Landet, saaledes trækker Overfladiskheden Fynd og Betydning ud af Literaturen ved saadanne vrængende Conversioner." (Danish 24)

“Forord,” and resigning ourselves to the “problem” of title pages, we will discover why this preface deserves considerable critical attention and why it is so crucial to the work it precedes.

Kierkegaard was a fan of prefaces and mottoes. He even devoted an entire book to them.⁷ Nevertheless, the preface to *A Literary Review* marks an unusual site of obligation, for why would the apparently straightforward genre of a book review require prefacing, a word before?⁸ This prelude would seem to complicate matters and expectations. Underscoring the blunt, utilitarian character of the review as genre, however, the critical literature on *A Literary Review* emphasizes not the confusions produced by this elusive text, but rather an implied stability in the work, categorizing the review as a statement of Kierkegaardian politics, a social critique. In this vein, one scholar has concluded: “*A Literary Review* is a political book which is subtle and dialectical, and it can only be understood by preserving the tension between the ‘present’ and the ‘Revolutionary’ ages.”⁹ If the meaning of *A Literary Review* lies in the tension between the two ages under investigation in Gyllembourg’s novel, then it is even more striking that such a transparent text would require the intervention of a preface.¹⁰ Why would a literary re-

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Forord. Morskabslæsning for enkelte Stænder efter Tid og Leilighed, Samlede Værker*, vol. 5 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1963) 195-254.

⁸ The preface as form, as Gérard Genette convincingly demonstrates, is never obligatory, unlike the title and the name of the author. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 163.

⁹ Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) 267.

¹⁰ In the United States, the rigid categorization of the text is certainly the result of the influence exerted by Alexander Dru’s 1940 translation of the third section of *En litterair Anmeldelse* under the title *The Present Age*. There, Kierkegaard’s work becomes simply its third section. Dru’s slim volume is still the text used in many American university classrooms. While this disfigurement of the original is striking enough, the Princeton translation’s adoption of the title *Two Ages* would seem an even more startling extension of the confusion in the complex history of this text’s publication. Aptly, the continuing saga of the translation and reception of the text, at least in the United States, underscores the issues of reading, reviewing and reception that I will address, albeit briefly, in this article. On the subject of the text’s interpretation as a

view, a work with such blatant affiliations and investments of form and content, such obvious tasks to fulfill, require the explanatory trappings of a prefatory note? Perhaps this particular preface performs a textual undermining and even a textual violence on the book to come, and so the book itself is doomed, always already, to follow in the footsteps of a single paragraph. What the “world discovers,” as Rodgers and Hart muse, is something other than the book, for this preface seeks to assure that the world will never forget. But what should a reader remember about *A Literary Review*?

As a constant reminder, Kierkegaard’s preface, signed “S.K.” and claiming its own page, might just stand all alone anyway, for it dismantles the expectations that accompany the book that follows. In fact, the preface might be the book itself, for Kierkegaard’s preface to *A Literary Review* is all about reviewing and certain readers of reviews. It is, then, the book; it tells the book’s story before the story is told, before the review itself is written or read by certain readers.¹¹ Playing a serious game, Kierkegaard’s prefacing subverts expectations and conceptions of texts that would follow authoritarian rules and regulations of form and content. Unraveling the strictures of the review as a marketable genre, and the informational demands of a review’s presumed public, the preface confounds the marketplace. Though excessively defined, the foreword remains elusive, for readers presumably know where to find prefaces, but their purposes must be read. Demarcated within the framework of another book, on whose existence it would seem to depend, the preface appears as an unmappable space of unknowing where disciples, readers, are asked to read in what Jacques Derrida has delineated as becoming, “not in the presence (parousia) but in the absence (apousia) of the mas-

work of political criticism, I refer here to Kirmmse’s informative study *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, and to the Mercer University Press volume of commentary on *Two Ages*, *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 14, to name but two of many examples of secondary works which categorize this text as a work of political and social criticism.

¹¹ See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago IL: Chicago University Press, 1981), in particular the chapter entitled “Outwork, prefacing,” 3-59.

ter: without either seeing or knowing, without hearing the law or the reasons for the law” of form and content.¹² Here in the foreword, Magister, master Kierkegaard gives a gift to his readers by simultaneously entering and withdrawing from the text in its textual excess, leaving us with the task, the responsibility and the obligation of reading. Ending his book, as it were, by addressing just that obligation, Kierkegaard offers some closing advice on the final page of his review of *Two Ages*. There, he asks the reader not to remember this book, but rather to read another, and then to read it again:

It is not up to me to direct attention to the novel [Gyllembourg’s *Two Ages*]; in my own opinion that would be unseemingly [sic] presumptive. But if anyone asks me for my advice, I would advise him to read it, and if he has read it, to read it [yet] again. (Princeton 112, translation modified)

At henlede Nogens Opmærksomhed paa Novellen er ikke min Sag, vilde forekomme mig selv som en usømmelig Vigtighed; spurgte derimod Nogen mig om mit Raad, da vilde jeg raade ham at læse den, og har han læst den, at læse den om igjen. (Danish 102)

Insisting on repeated readings, this reviewer has no intention of guiding one’s attention to the novel, of answering the demands of a public, of those readers of reviews who seek easy access to the text. Considering a request, though, Kierkegaard responds to a possibility by offering a piece of advice. That advice articulates a demand for reading that aims

¹² See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 56-57. On the preface as genre, see Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*; Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, *The Social Dimensions of Fiction. On the Rhetoric and Function of Prefacing Novels in the Nineteenth Century Canadas* (Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1993); Claus Träger, *Studien zur Realismustheorie und Methodologie der Literaturwissenschaft* (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1972) and Sven-Aage Jørgensen, “Warum und zu welchem Ende schreibt man eine Vorrede? Randbemerkungen zur Leserlenkung, besonders bei Wieland,” *Text und Kontext*, 4.3, Copenhagen, 1976, 3-20.

to return us to the anonymous *Two Ages*, but that also projects the reader to the beginning, to the review's title and preface, where the reader begins to read again. Making true lovers, true readers and disciples, of friends requires a reading of repetition, a reading suspended outside the demands of an informational culture that seeks merely to finish reading or to avoid reading at all.

If we follow Kierkegaard's closing advice, then, and crack the binding once more, the preface tells us that this "little" review, dedicated to the anonymous author of *The Story of Everyday Life*, was originally intended for the journal *Nordisk Literaturtidende*, the 'Nordic Literary Times':

This review was, before it was even begun with, meant for the *Nordisk Literaturtidende*. Its dis-proportionality in relation with that paper's limited range, since after all, half of its contents encompass Swedish and Norwegian literature, soon became obvious to me, as did also my unsuitability/incompetence for writing in journals/newspapers/magazines. (translation modified)¹³

Denne Anmeldelse var, førend den paabegyndtes, bestemt for nordisk Literaturtidende. Dens Uforholdsmæssighed i Forhold til hiint Blads ringe Omfang, da endog dets halve Deel omfatter svensk og norsk Literatur, blev mig snart indlysende, *item* min Uduelighed til at skrive i Blade. (Danish 9)

More important than the mention of a literary magazine, the preface states that this particular review was meant for something else, was designated to appear in public in another context, but under the same name, much like the English translation that renders it as *Two Ages*, ironically titling the review as the object of the review's attentions. The

¹³ The Princeton translation of the opening lines of the preface is as follows: "This review originally was intended for the *Nordisk Literaturtidende*. I soon realized that it was too long for the limited space of that journal, since as much as half of it is devoted to Swedish and Norwegian literature, and also that I am unqualified to write for journals." (Princeton 5).

naming of the originally intended journal, like the non-naming of the notable “Author of *The Story of Everyday Life*,” and the naming of two historical ages that appear to be defined, stresses an important dislocation. Something has not gone according to plan, was forced to be somewhere else, was omitted. In tracing this displacement from a review to a review that is more of a book, the question arises as to whether *A Literary Review* will actually review anything at all or whether it is merely an ‘Entstehungsgeschichte’, the history of the review’s coming into being, how it reviewed itself into existence, repeated itself into a book by availing itself of a book’s proportions.

The preface tells the story of that displacement. Helping itself to a marker for which it cannot apply, *A Literary Review* cannot function as a review, but rather must exist as an unintended book, since objects, like ages, are defined by their size and proportion. As the preface states, the times will not allow this book to exist as a review. These proportional categories mark not an essential nature, but a random series of outward characteristics. The preface, then, cannot be the book, but only its repetition, creating a difference in the process that opens a critical gap between the formal definitions of books and reviews and what Jacques Derrida has described as an “empiricist or formalistic lag” of a preface that would be a book.¹⁴ To follow the Derridian lag is to recognize that the existence of this book and its preface owes itself to the question of proportions, or rather a lack thereof, a confusion as to how things must be sized and sized up at a certain time. Thus, the preface to Kierkegaard’s review responds to both a lag in time and a lack of suitability, for it guides us to the time before the book, not to the future book and a reading that may begin just a few pages ahead.

Having been in disproportion to something else, *A Literary Review* must become a book. Resisting the traditional delineations of the review genre, this text must somehow ‘mean’ differently, producing an excess that cannot be eliminated, that appears beforehand, as a preface. Indeed, reading the preface, we see that the book’s lack of proportion, “Dens Uforholdsmæssighed,” is contrasted with the limited range of a journal,

¹⁴ Derrida, *Dissemination* 11.

but not merely because half of that magazine's contents were devoted to Swedish and Norwegian literature. (Princeton 5; Danish 9). The comparison is anything but what it appears to be, for this review, in its in-betweenness, is incommensurable; it cannot be part of something else. Lacking a code for its potential, the text can have no meaning, no true "pith," Kierkegaard's "Fynd." (Danish 24) This foreword does not merely compare and contrast, it removes the review to follow from the comparative relationship altogether and interrogates how the rules of form and content rely on empirical and formalistic regulations established by the times and by notions of timeliness. More than an external obligation, the recognition of the "disproportion" of the text at hand led the review's author also to an awareness, an awakening, and a removal. It, the disproportion, soon became obvious to me, Kierkegaard writes in the preface: "Dens Uforholdsmæssighed [...] blev mig snart indlysende, [...]" In a textual space where nothing is readily apparent, Kierkegaard marks as obvious and even reasonable his incapability, incompetence, and uselessness as a writer for journals - "Blade" - and as a reviewer in these times. This moment of light, the 'Lys' of "indlysende," of removal into the light, draws attention to a lack, an opening for something else that elevates itself from the requirements of practical capability and from the utilitarian economy of information that haunts the genre of the review.

From the very beginning, the review serves as a marker for a problem of proportions - past, present and future - and of (*un*)timeliness. Excessive, the review reveals the unfittingness, incapability, and incompetence of both author and text. With this potential for transgression, for border crossing, for the bursting of proportions, review and reviewer demonstrate an incompetence in that for which they have been named and for which they have named themselves, subverting the operation of naming and the identity it hopes to imply by eluding genre definitions. Kierkegaard's review, then, fails to conform to the logic of proportions dictated by the culture of information, of reviewing, that dominates the times. The text cannot fit the content of the journals that

define the location, the form and the content of reviews.¹⁵ Thus, it brings to light the central topic of the text, namely the excessive rhetoric for which there is no place in mass culture and its reviews.

The call, 'Anmeldelse,' to the incompetent, other, and unfitting that is sited in the character of the preface opens the possibilities of Kierkegaard's text that are often neutralized in the historicizing reception and in the inevitable losses of translation. The Princeton translation, for example, renders the reviewer's "incapability" to write for journals as a matter of qualification and comparison, of expectationary rules set by another power. There, the author is "unqualified" and Kierkegaard, quite simply, realizes that he is "unqualified to write for journals."¹⁶ Within this shift of idiom from competency to qualification, the English translators render the Danish "Omfang," the German "Umfang," as "space," excluding the connotations of range, circumference, extent, and proportions that delimit as they resist the limitations of translation and interpretation. In the definition of space, the Princeton translation creates two implied categories of qualified and unqualified, one dependent upon the culture of the journal, the other upon the author's person. Suddenly, the journal lacks in space and, in the English translation, disproportionality becomes a matter of being too long for a limited space.

Reading further, Kierkegaard's "min Uduelighed" bursts the "unqualified" of the Princeton translation, giving the meaning of the Ger-

¹⁵ The descriptive strategy employed here embraces characterization, for the review refuses to say what it will *not* do. It exists in a movement of becoming; the negative characteristics applied to it come from a certain reading and not from the text itself. A lack of space signals the content of the other, the possibility of what the other could be if it is not willed to sameness by a certain kind of reader of reviews. Not characteristic, but having character, the text is singular in its disproportions. The comparison of two ages and their accouterments in this context creates the in-between of differentiation and does not provide usable information, it does not mean an ending of a (teleological) process, but rather marks the presence of such a possibility.

¹⁶ The Princeton translation is as follows: "I soon realized that it was too long for the **limited** space of that journal, since as much as half of it is devoted to Swedish and Norwegian literature, and also that I am **unqualified** to write for journals." (Princeton 5; last emphasis mine)

man “Untauglichkeit” with its references to both military conscription, incapability, clumsiness, and impotency (German 3). Indeed, Kierkegaard recounts his experience with conscription and military service in yet another appendage, a footnote at the beginning of the introduction to *A Literary Review*. There, Kierkegaard’s dismissal by the military authorities provides an opportunity for eluding the aesthetic experience of the times, “Tidens Fordring,” via his own unsuitability (Danish 12). The result of this incapability, the footnote states, was an immediate “discharge”/“Afskeden,” an excessiveness that propelled Kierkegaard out of the realm of timely demands (Danish 12; Princeton 9). Back at the elusive preface, too, personal history enters the action in a similar fashion, and Kierkegaard accepts the consequences:

Intet æsthetisk Tidsskrift **existerer**: nu vel, saa lad dette ogsaa være, hvad der oftere i Anmeldelsen bliver Tale om, Eenheden af Omgivelsens Reflex og den psykologiske Consequents, Eenheden af, at jeg er Forfatteren og Anmeldelsen derfor uforholdsmæssig stor, og af, at en udførligere Anmeldelse **nuomstunder** maa udgives som en Bog for sig selv. (Danish 9, my emphases)

No aesthetic journal exists: well, let that be that which is oftentimes the talk of in a review, the unity of the environment’s reflexion and the psychological consequence, the unity of my being the author and thus the review being disproportionately long, and that under today’s circumstances a more detailed/fuller review must be published as a book of its own. (my translation)¹⁷

Historical time in two ages is introduced here in a playful strategy by placing the review as a victim and simultaneously the product of the

¹⁷ The Princeton translation is as follows: “There is no journal of esthetics - well, then, let this also be what reviews presently refer to as the unity of the reflexion of the environment and the psychological consequence - the unity of my being the author, which explains the excessive length of the review, and of the circumstance that nowadays a more detailed review must be published as a book by itself.” (Princeton 5)

times, albeit a singular, un-same product, a metaphor of fullness. Kierkegaard was found lacking for the military establishment, but his review discharges all too much for the literary one. In exploring the presence of aesthetics, the author exits the relationship in which s/he must provide value for the paper money of production, extricating herself/himself from that economy, from the proportions, resisting integration into the mass of appropriately composed reviews. Just as Kierkegaard avoided military conscription through a lack, his review avoids formalistic constraints by literally overflowing the boundaries of criticism. That no aesthetic journal exists is thus a function of a fashion that links the product of the text directly to the producer. The age's expectations deem the review disproportionate because Kierkegaard wrote it. This lack of aesthetics describes the psychological consequence of an age in which aesthetics must be determined by 'individual' intentions. Since there are no 'individuals' in this leveled age of the general public, there can be no place for aesthetics in writing.¹⁸ Lack of proportion and qualification, it would seem, have saved this reviewer from many a conscriptive trauma.

The times render this preface a matter of a lack of qualifications, but the conditions of the age and its circumstances, the Danish "nuomstunder," also disqualify the review from the categories of a magazine, since, as Kierkegaard notes in the preface, no "aesthetic" journal exists. Hence, this excessive review must appear as a prefaced book. The missing "aesthetic," the lack that necessitates this book, serves as the force behind the differentiation of the culture of the review and the singular-

¹⁸ Kierkegaard notes in part III of *A Literary Review*, "Conclusions from the Consideration of the Two Ages"/"Udbytte for Iagttagelsen af de tvende Tidsaldere": "Together with the passionlessness and reflectiveness of the age, the abstraction 'the press' (for a newspaper, a periodical, is not a political concretion and is an individual only in an abstract sense) gives rise to the abstraction's phantom, 'the public,' which is the real leveler." (Princeton 93). The Danish is as follows: "Pressens Abstraktion (thi et Blad, en Avis er ingen statsborgerlig Concretion og kun i abstrakt Forstand et Individuum) i Forening med Tidens Lidenskabsløshed og Reflekterethed afføder Abstraktions Phantom: Publikum, der er den egentlige Nivellerende." (Danish 86)

ity of this text and its desired reader. Like the work reviewed, this “review” is a ‘pseudonymous’ book, an impossibility for a culture of reviewing that demands the naming of both authors and their literary intentions. The age cannot equate the review’s author (form) with its contents and thus cannot see that this is S.K.’s review.¹⁹ The incommensurability of this non-identical demands a pseudonym, since a name, with its implications of differentiating the ‘individual’ from the mass and thus indeed placing him/her into that relation, would spell the end of singularity. Once named, an author as reviewer, in these times, would necessarily become a moniker, like the paper money, the “representatives” to which Kierkegaard refers in the review itself (Princeton 75; Danish 69). Paradoxically, Kierkegaard has named himself the author of this text, but he has reviewed without being a reviewer, for the preface tells us that this review must appear in book form, at least nowadays.

In these games of avoiding a kind of aesthetics that would identify and equate, this preface embodies the ethical conundrum of authorship, of seeing to the reader. Unlike Gyllembourg’s *Two_Ages*, however, this non-review cannot appear anonymously, since it is threatened by both the culture of reviewing and that culture’s leveling effect. This preface must be signed “S.K.,” for it faces a threat from a certain kind of non-reader, an ‘individual’ reader who would level it into the average. The text presents its author with a problem, with an either/or for which a decision must be made. In embracing the authorship of the review as the only ethical possibility, as the site where a decision is made, its author simultaneously rejects ownership as a function of production, of utility, since there can be no benefit from this naming of the work, for the naming of the work, its signature, only serves to underscore the gulf between this text and what it means to be a review nowadays. In writing this non-review and its preface, the author commits to an authorship by submitting to attribution and citation, by submitting himself to the test of mass culture and by daring to speak to a certain reader.

¹⁹ Stephen N. Dunning, ‘Paradoxes in Interpretation: Kierkegaard and Gadamer,’ *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. M.J. Matustik and M. Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 126.

In registering his name and his call, Kierkegaard avoids leveling himself into an identity with the review, for the preface installs a barrier between the public and the potential of a singular reader. This submission is of a different kind than the admission that perhaps the review is too long because Kierkegaard wrote it. To resist, to withstand this test of 'individual' will to sameness will be to avoid leveling with tricks and theatrics, with literary devices that elude identification. The 'individual', thus, must submit his/her 'individuality' to the test of the mass culture of the review at the same time as s/he refuses to be same as that culture. In so doing, s/he takes on a singularity in the admission that being 'individual' is being rapt by 'one's' multiplicity, what Werner Hamacher has termed "dividuality."²⁰ The seemingly mundane problem of size again becomes a question of literary, social and ethical circumstances that bear consequences for the readers of this review and its preface.²¹ The decision has no purpose in reaching existence, for it is not the decision taken that determines ethics, but rather the action to the decision, the possibility of its coming into being, the potential. The decision, made again and again, is restated and drawn inward, away from any absolute. In this way, the ethical movement around decision becomes an incommensurability that appears in the rupture, in the space created in the moment of decision.

²⁰ Werner Hamacher, "Disgregation of the Will: Nietzsche on the Individual and Individuality," *Nietzsche. Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 193-212, here 175.

²¹ The ethical question posed here is not valuative, but rather decisive: where and by whom will the ethical decision be made and what will the site for this decision be? That site of decision involves 'giving oneself' to the question, devoting oneself to the problem and taking decisive action based on inwardness, taking a loss of world in a gain of inwardness, since, the expression of the individual as a totality necessarily brings about an elimination, a repression of difference if that representation aims at repeating something from the past. Thus, an ethical approach to reading must be fashioned in a manner that does not attempt to recreate the past in the present. In this approach, the destructive generalization is suspended outside the space between potentiality and actuality: the description of the individual, like the other, but not identical to it, moves, becomes, in a space that can be described but not defined, not ended.

Rising above the question of reviewing by expressing its unworthiness and its refusal to produce commodified value, Kierkegaard's preface contains no value judgment as such; it cannot, it may not, decide, for it is suspended in the moment of decision, exiled from the aesthetics of generalization. The author informs the reader, then, that as a writer he is under certain obligations, both social and editorial, that force him to publish this work in book-form in another place. The resistance to the coercion of mass culture aesthetics is too subtle to appear in a foreword, it requires more space for maneuvering. Here though, a lack, the disproportion in size, approaches a coercive counter-lack, the inability to be same as, to trace a singularity. The text embraces difference as it extricates itself from a system it deems unethical, the system that would name and organize the review according to both form and content, that would determine its meaning in the oppression of an absolute interpretation. In this manner, the preface concludes:

Man vil forøvrigt let see, at Anmeldelsen ikke er for æsthetiske og kritiske Avislæsere, men for fornuftige Skabninger, der give sig Tid og Taalmodighed til at kunne læse en lille Bog, uden at deraf følger, at de ville læse denne. At Bogen er skreven for *dem* betyder jo ingenlunde, at den forpligter dem til at læse, det betyder i det Høieste blot, at den fritage de ved Avis-Læsning æsthetisk og kritisk Dannede fra at læse. (Danish 9)

Moreover, one can easily see that this review is not for aesthetic and critical newspaper readers, but rather for reasonable creatures who give themselves time and patience for reading a little book, without it being a matter of course that they would read this particular one. That the book is written for *them* does in no way mean that it obligates them to read; at most it means only that it exempts/excuses/relieves (*fritager*) from reading those educated (*Dannede*) esthetically and critically through the reading of newspapers. (my translation)²²

²² The Princeton translation is as follows: "Moreover, it will be readily apparent that this review is not for esthetic and critical readers of newspapers but for rational creatures who take the time and have the patience to read a little book, although

This subtle and artful attack on mass culture and its reviews and reviewers intensifies when Kierkegaard concludes that it is “easy to see” (“let at see”) that this book, this review, is not for aesthetic and critical readers of newspapers (“Avislæsere”), but rather for “reasonable creatures, who give to themselves (at give sig) time and patience in order to read a little book without the consequence of their wanting to read this one in particular.” Ironically, nothing is easy to see here, for seeing requires enormous dedication, submission, and recognition of the inability, even impossibility of seeing, for to “see” would be to succumb to an aesthetic judgment that denies the paradox of aesthetics by choosing to see only one.

The Princeton translation ignores the Danish reflexive form ‘at give sig.’ There, Kierkegaard’s readers are those who “take the time and have the patience.” This verb is important, however, for in these words Kierkegaard marks a reader who not only gives away, but also gives in, surrenders, submits, groans, stretches, wears off, and passes away - and all for the sake of the time and patience for reading “a little book,” but not necessarily this one, since the preface obligates no one, but rather frees others as it frees itself from the constraints of times and forms. In passing away, the reader relinquishes his/her self for a multiplicity of readings, always decomposing, in decay.²³ To give of and to oneself, to submit, involves tracing a process of decision that is ethical and singular, for this submission presupposes no end-goal or immediate benefit for a presumed subject. Indeed, it is a taking-part and apart, a taking action in which the ‘individuality’ of the ‘individual’ gives way to a “dividuality” that describes Kierkegaard’s desired reader. In its risk-taking, the preface confronts proportionality, the relations to potential readers and the tacit non-obligation of some of them with the rejection of own-

not necessarily this one. The fact that this book is written for *them* does not mean that it obligates them to read; at most it means only that it exempts from reading those whose esthetic and critical discernment had been formed by reading newspapers.” (Princeton 5).

²³ Hamacher 176-177.

ership as a value, unmasking the culture of information that seeks to determine the content and form of literary reviews. To reject the attribution and power of ownership and categorization is to risk an identity, and to finally come to read Kierkegaard's prefacing, his gift - this time following Kierkegaard's advice - by reading and reading again.