In a journal entry from 1846, Kierkegaard stated that Either/Or was written "lock, stock, and barrel in eleven months. At most there was only a page (of 'Diapsalmata') prior to that time. As far as that goes, I have spent more time on all the later works. Most of Either/Or was written only twice (besides, of course, what I thought through while walking, but that is always the case); nowadays I usually write three times." The work presumably began to germinate and to take form during the few months before Kierkegaard's departure for Berlin on October 25, 1841—the eventful months of September-October, during which he broke his engagement to Regine Olsen and published and defended his dissertation, The Concept of Irony. In his first letter from Berlin, October 31, 1841, Kierkegaard wrote to his old friend Emil Boesen: "I have much to think about and am suffering from a monstrous productivity block. I have as yet no occasion to let its nisis [persistent pressure] wear off . . . ." But on January 6, 1842, he was able to report to Boesen: "I am working hard. So that you may see that I am the same, I shall tell you that I have again written a major section of a piece, 'Either/Or.' It has not gone quickly, but that is due to its not being an expository work, but one of pure invention, which in a very special way demands that one be in the mood." In November 1842, the editor's preface to Either/Or was finished, and the two volumes were published February 20, 1843.

Before the journey to Berlin, Kierkegaard had written a draft of Judge William's "The Esthetic Validity of Marriage,"

1 JP V 5983 (Pap. VII A 92).
2 October 11, 1841.
3 Published September 16 and defended September 29, 1841.
4 Kierkegaard: Letters and Documents, Letter 99, pp. 89-90, KW XXV.
5 Letters, Letter 62, p. 123, KW XXV.
the first piece in Part II of *Either/Or*. His second piece in Part II and most of Part I were written afterward in Berlin and Copenhagen.\(^7\)

In February 1842, he wrote to Boesen:

> It is absolutely imperative that I return to Copenhagen this spring. For either I shall finish *Either/Or* by spring, or I shall never finish it. The title is approximately that which you know. I hope you will keep this between us. Anonymity is of the utmost importance to me. . . .  

*Either/Or* is indeed an excellent title. It is piquant and at the same time also has a speculative meaning. But for my own sake I will not rob you prematurely of any enjoyment.

This winter in Berlin will always have great significance for me. I have done a lot of work. When you consider that I have had three or four hours of lectures every day, have a daily language lesson, and have still gotten so much written (and that regardless of the fact that in the beginning I had to spend a lot of time writing down Schelling’s lectures\(^8\) and making fair copies), and have read a lot, I cannot complain. And then all my suffering, all my monologues! I feel strongly that I cannot continue for long; I never expected to; but I can for a short while and all the more intensively.\(^9\)

Schelling talks endless nonsense both in an extensive and an intensive sense. I am leaving Berlin and hastening to Copenhagen, but not, you understand, to be bound by a new tie, oh no, for now I feel more strongly than ever that I need my freedom. A person with my eccentricity should have his freedom until he meets a force in life that, as such, can bind him. I am coming to Copenhagen to complete *Either/Or*. It is my favorite idea, and in it I exist. You will see that this

\(^7\) See *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, *KW* XXII (SV XIII 569-70 fn.); *Letters*, Letter 54, p. 104, *KW* XXV.

\(^8\) In 1841, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) was called from Munich to be professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin. His lectures on the philosophy of revelation were Kierkegaard’s main reason for going to Berlin. The lectures drew auditors, including Jakob Burkhhardt and Friedrich Engels, from throughout Europe.

idea is not to be made light of. In no way can my life yet be considered finished. I feel I still have great resources within me.

I do owe Schelling something. For I have learned that I enjoy traveling, even though not for the sake of studying. As soon as I have finished Either/Or, I shall fly away again like a happy bird. I must travel. Formerly I never had the inclination for it, but first I must finish Either/Or and that I can do only in Copenhagen.\textsuperscript{10}

Although only a few journal entries from earlier writing were used as diapsalmata in Either/Or,\textsuperscript{11} the earlier writing is nevertheless present in tone and substance. The sardonic irony of Mr. A, especially in “Diapsalmata” and “Rotation of Crops,” reflects the tone of a “Faustian doubter”\textsuperscript{12} and represents the irony of despairing estheticism in contrast to what is called “Irony as a Controlled Element. The Truth of Irony” in The Concept of Irony.\textsuperscript{13} On the other hand, “The Seducer’s Diary”\textsuperscript{14} is an explicit example of the romantic individualism discussed in Irony,\textsuperscript{15} a particularized delineation of what Friedrich Schlegel calls life as “a work of art,” an “airy dance.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., Letter 69, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{11} “If I had not decided when publishing Either/Or not to use any old material, I would have found in going through my papers some aphorisms that could have been used very well. Today I found a little scrap of paper with the following written on it: ‘I am so tired that I feel that I need an eternity to rest, so troubled that I feel that I need an eternity to forget my sorrows; I wish that I could sleep so long that I would wake up an old man and then could lie down again to sleep the eternal sleep’” (JPV 5631; Pap IV A 221).
\textsuperscript{12} This is Emanuel Hirsch’s description. See Supplement, p. 453 and note 1
\textsuperscript{13} KWII (SV XIII 388-93).
\textsuperscript{14} “In a review in Forposten [Københavnsposten, 13, March 26, 1843], I see that it is quite properly pointed out that this narrative is not called a seducer’s diary but the seducer’s, suggesting that it is the method that is really of prime importance, not the portrayal of either Johannes or Cordelia” (JPV 5633; Pap IV A 231).
\textsuperscript{15} Irony, KWII (SV XIII 357-70).
Kierkegaard's first use of the title phrase "either/or" is also found in *Irony* in its Latin form *aut/aut*. Later, the Danish form found currency even on Copenhagen streets. As Kierkegaard remarked, "I am without authority, only a poet—but oddly enough around here, even on the street, I go by the name 'Either/Or.'"

Despite the tension indicated by the very title *Either/Or* and publication in two separate volumes, Kierkegaard regarded the work as having "a plan from the first word to the last," a view hardly shared by his contemporaries. If the cohesion of the dialectically balanced volumes was overlooked at the time, it is not surprising that later readers generally failed to relate *Either/Or* to the other pseudonymous and signed works by Kierkegaard. He himself maintained that *Either/Or* has an integral wholeness and constitutes part of a larger whole: "My contemporaries cannot grasp the design of my writing. *Either/Or* divided into four parts or six parts and published separately over six years would have been all right. But that each essay in *Either/Or* is only part of a whole, and then the whole of *Either/Or* a part of a whole: that, after all, think my bourgeois contemporaries, is enough to drive one daft."

Three years later, and again eighteen years later, Kierkegaard reaffirmed the integrality of the complex series of writ-

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18 *JP VI* 6947 (Pap. XI B 57).


ings beginning with *Either/Or*, and he defined the nature of the whole. "An authorship that began with *Either/Or* and advanced step by step seeks here its consummating place of rest at the foot of the altar, where the author, personally most aware of his own imperfection and guilt, certainly does not call himself a witness to the truth but only a singular kind of poet and thinker who, 'without authority,' has had nothing new to bring but 'has wanted to read through once again, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships, the old, familiar text handed down from the fathers' (see my postscript to Concluding Postscript)."21 "What I have understood as the task of the authorship has been done. It is one idea, this continuity from *Either/Or* to Anti-Climacus, the idea of religiousness in reflection."22 One of the latest items (1854) in Kierkegaard's papers reiterates this thought and goes beyond Anti-Climacus. The title page of the proposed summary work briefly and comprehensively reads: "My Program: Either/Or By S. Kierkegaard."23

As part of the whole including the pseudonymous works, *Either/Or* lacked one element, according to Kierkegaard: a narrative section or an imaginary construction24 in the experiential mode. On the flyleaf of a copy of *Either/Or*, I, Kierkegaard wrote: "Some think that *Either/Or* is a collection of loose papers I had lying in my desk. Bravo! —As a matter of fact, it was the reverse. The only thing this work lacks is a narrative, which I did begin but omitted, just as Aladdin left a window incomplete. It was to be called 'Unhappy Love.' It was to form a contrast to the Seducer. The hero in the story acted in exactly the same way as the Seducer, but behind it was depression. He

21 Preface to *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (1851), *KW* XVIII (SV XII 267). The reference to a postscript is to "A First and Last Explanation," *Postscript, KW* XII (SV VII [548-49]).
22 *JP* VI 6770 (Pap. Xe B 4:3), from an unused draft of the preface to *For Self-Examination* (1851).
23 *JP* VI 6944 (Pap. XP B 54).
24 See *Repetition*, note to subtitle, pp 357-62, *KW* VI.
was not unhappy because he could not get the girl he loved. Such heroes are beneath me. He had capacities comparable to the Seducer's; he was certain of capturing her. He won her. As long as the struggle went on, he detected nothing; then she surrendered, he was loved with all the enthusiasm a young girl has—then he became unhappy, went into a depression, pulled back; he could struggle with the whole world but not with himself. His love made him indescribably happy at the moment; as soon as he thought of time, he despaired.Ó After the appearance of the contemplated narrative (with appropriate modifications) in Stages on Life's Way, Kierkegaard cryptically explained its omission from the earlier work. “The imaginary construction, however, is precisely what is lacking in Either/Or (see a note in my own copy [Pap. IV A 215]); but before it could be done absolutely right, an enormous detour had to be made.”

In an appendix to Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 27 Johannes Climacus discusses in some detail the substantive relation of Either/Or to the other pseudonymous works: “I mention these books,” Climacus modestly writes, “only insofar as they constitute elements in the realization of the idea I had but which in an ironical way I was exempted from realizing.” 28 The idea, that of “existential inwardness,” 29 involves various “elements” of Either/Or: the esthetic and the ethical, immediacy and reflection, the individual and the universally human, time and eternity, history as a given and the gaining of a personal history, the momentary and the moment, existential dialectic, the use of freedom, erotic love and ethical love, living poetically and living responsibly, despair and hope, possibility and actuality, choosing, immanence and transcendence, the

25 JP V 5628 (Pap. IV A 215). A “sequel to ‘The Seducer's Diary’ ” was also contemplated, something that “must be in a piquant vein, his relation to a young married woman” (JP V 5677; Pap. IV A 129). See also Either/Or, II, pp. 409-10, KW IV (Pap. IV A 181).


27 “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature,” KW XII (SV VII 212-57).

28 Ibid. (228).

29 Ibid. (229).
inner and the outer, concealment and openness, imagination and actuality, thought and actuality, knowledge and action.

In addition to the relation of *Either/Or* to the other pseudonymous works, there is another kind of relation to the parallel series of signed works that began with *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, published (May 16, 1843)\textsuperscript{30} three months and a day after *Either/Or* appeared. In *Point of View*, Kierkegaard characterizes himself as a poet with a leaning toward the religious. *Either/Or* was the work of the poet, and the discourses were his own.\textsuperscript{31} This self-description accounts not only for the conscious and deliberate duplexity (differentiated parallelism) of the two writing series but also for the linear development and dynamic coherence of the entire authorship. Therefore, in a journal entry from 1848 he could write:

Yes, it was a good thing to publish that little article. I began with *Either/Or* and two upbuilding discourses; now it ends, after the whole upbuilding series—with a little esthetic essay.\textsuperscript{32} It expresses: that it was the upbuilding, the religious, that should advance, and that now the esthetic has been traversed; they are inversely related, or it is something of an inverse confrontation, to show that the writer was not an esthetic author who in the course of time grew older and for that reason became religious.\textsuperscript{33}

The dialectical complexity of the pseudonymous series of writings and the duplexity of the two differentiated parallel series were Kierkegaard’s way of combining Socratic maieutic

\textsuperscript{30} This small volume was followed by *Three Upbuilding Discourses* and *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (October 13, December 6, 1843) and by *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, *Three Upbuilding Discourses*, and *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (March 5, June 8, August 31, 1844), which were paralleled by the publication of *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* (October 7, 1843), *Philosophical Fragments* (June 13, 1844), and *The Concept of Anxiety* (June 17, 1844).

\textsuperscript{31} *KW* XXII (SV XIII 569).

\textsuperscript{32} *The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (1848), *KW* XVII (SV X 319-44). Midway between *Either/Or* and *Crisis*, Kierkegaard also wrote a piece reminiscent of *Either/Or* under the title “A Cursory Observation Concerning a Detail in Don Giovanni,” *The Corsair Affair*, pp. 28-37, *KW* XIII (SV XIII 447-56).

\textsuperscript{33} *JP* VI 6238 (Pap. IX A 227). See also, for example, ibid., 6356 (X' A 138).
indirection in the one series and the direct approach in the other. In "The Accounting," in On My Work as an Author, Kierkegaard explains why he used the pseudonymous approach:

The maieutic lies in the relation between the esthetic productivity as the beginning and the religious as the τέλος [goal]. It begins with the esthetic, in which possibly the majority have their lives, and then the religious is introduced so quickly that those who, moved by the esthetic, decide to follow along, are suddenly standing right in the middle of decisive qualifications of the essentially Christian, are prompted at least to become aware.34

Kierkegaard went to great lengths to protect the pseudonymity of Either/Or. Not only was the transcribing of the final copy done by various hands,35 lest the secret be detected and divulged by someone at the printing house, but he added an element to his usual practice of walking and conversing in the streets of Copenhagen.36

If I wanted to tell about it, a whole book could be written on how ingeniously I have fooled people about my pattern of life.

During the time I was reading proofs of Either/Or and writing the upbuilding discourses, I had almost no time to walk the streets. I then used another method. Every evening when I left home exhausted and had eaten at Mini’s, I stopped at the theater for ten minutes—not one minute more. Familiar as I was, I counted on there being several gossips at the theater who would now say: Every single night he goes to the theater; he does not do another thing.

34 KW XXII (SV XIII 496). See also, for example, Point of View, KW XXII (SV XIII 540-42).
35 Kierkegaard mentions, for example, Peter Vilhelm Christensen (1819-1863) as a copyist. See Letters, Letter 188, p. 268, KW XXV.
36 See Andrew Hamilton, Sixteen Months in the Danish Isles, I-II (London: 1852), II, p. 269: “The fact is he walks about town all day, and generally in some person’s company . . . . When walking, he is very communicative.” See also Point of View, KW XXII (SV XIII 543-56).
O, you darling gossips, thank you—without you I could never have achieved what I wanted.\(^{37}\)

The pseudonymity of *Either/Or* was reinforced by a signed disclaimer, “Public Confession,” in which Kierkegaard declined “the undeserved honor” of being regarded as “the author of a number of substantial, informative, and witty articles in various newspapers” and requested “the good people who show an interest in me never to regard me as the author of anything that does not bear my name.”\(^{38}\) A week after the publication of *Either/Or* (February 27, 1843), “Who is the Author of *Either/Or*” appeared in *Fædrelandet* over the initials A. F. . . . .\(^{39}\) A week later, the same paper carried Victor Eremita’s “A Word of Thanks to Professor Heiberg,”\(^{40}\) a reply to Johan Ludvig Heiberg’s review of *Either/Or* in his *Intelligensblade*.\(^{41}\) A few weeks later, “A Little Explanation”\(^{42}\) appeared over Kierkegaard’s name in response to a “fairly widespread and persistent rumor” that he was the author of the sermon at the end of *Either/Or*, II, because he had once delivered a sermon and therefore was the author of *Either/Or*. In “An Explanation and a Little More,” after the first published attribution\(^{43}\) of *Either/Or* and *Stages* to Kierkegaard, he declared, “If I am not the author of these books, then the rumor is a falsehood. However, if I am the author, then I am the only one authorized to say that I am that.”\(^{44}\) He exercised that au-


\(^{38}\) *Fædrelandet*, 904, June 12, 1842; Corsair Affair, pp. 3, 5, *KW* XIII (SV XIII 397, 399).

\(^{39}\) *Fædrelandet*, 1162, February 27, 1843; Corsair Affair, pp. 13-16, *KW* XIII (SV XIII 407-10).

\(^{40}\) *Fædrelandet*, 1168, March 5, 1843; Corsair Affair, pp. 17-21, *KW* XIII (SV XIII 411-15).


\(^{42}\) *Fædrelandet*, 1236, May 16, 1843; Corsair Affair, pp. 22-23, *KW* XIII (SV XIII 416-17).


\(^{44}\) *Fædrelandet*, 1883, May 9, 1845; Corsair Affair, p. 24, *KW* XIII (SV XIII 418-19).
tority in the unnumbered pages of "A First and Last Explanation" at the end of Concluding Unscientific Postscript, published ten months later (February 27, 1846). An additional reason for the pseudonymity of Either/Or concludes the article by A. F. . . . : "Most people, including the author of this article, think it is not worth the trouble to be concerned about who the author is. They are happy not to know his identity, for then they have only the book to deal with, without being bothered or distracted by his personality."45

There was one reader, however, Regine Olsen, whom Kierkegaard wanted to discern him behind the pseudonyms, especially the writer behind the pseudonymous diary, as part of his plan to make it easier for her to part with him. "When I left 'her,' I begged God for one thing, that I might succeed in writing and finishing Either/Or (this was also for her sake, because The Seducer's Diary was, in fact, intended to repel, or as it says in Fear and Trembling,46 'When the baby is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast.') . . . ."47

But Either/Or did have more than a single reader. As a publication it was a "big success."48 Christian Molbech, historian and literary critic, wrote to Kierkegaard that the sell-out of Either/Or was " 'a phenomenon that may need to be studied.' "49 It was the first of the few of Kierkegaard's works to be printed in a second edition during his lifetime.50

45 "Who Is the Author of Either/Or," Corsair Affair, p. 16, KW XIII (SV XIII 410). This was Kierkegaard's main reason for using pseudonyms, of which there are five in Either/Or: (1) Victor Eremita, the editor; (2) Mr. A, author of Part I, except for the portion by (3) Johannes, author of "The Seducer's Diary," although the editor thinks that Mr. A may have been the author; (4) Judge William, author of most of Part II; and (5) William's friend in Jylland, author of "Ultimatum (A Last Word)" at the end of Part II.

46 Fear and Trembling, p. 11, KW VI (SV III 64).


48 JP VI 6853 (Pap. X 146). See also Postscript, KW XII (SV VII 244).

49 JP V 5997 (Pap. VIII 84).

50 See Letters, Letters 152-57, KW XXV. The first edition of 525 copies was sold out within three years. The second was an edition of 750 copies. The
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In keeping with the duplexity of the two series of writings, and in order to "mark the distinction between what is offered with the left hand and what is offered with the right,"51 The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air was published on the same day (May 14, 1849) as the second edition of Either/Or. To reinforce the distinction, but also the connection, between the two series, Kierkegaard at different times contemplated two postscripts to Either/Or. One was composed over Victor Eremita's name,52 and the other he wrote in his own name:

What if I wrote at the back of the second edition of Either/Or:

Postscript

I hereby retract this book. It was a necessary deception in order, if possible, to deceive men into the religious, which has continually been my task all along. Maieutically it certainly has had its influence. Yet I do not need to retract it, for I have never claimed to be its author.53

During the year of the publication of Either/Or, the work was reviewed in eight Danish papers and journals. Among the reviews was one by Meier Goldschmidt in Corsaren,54 laudatory in its cavalier way and mainly critical of the critics, especially the leading critic of the day, Johan Ludvig Heiberg. In his Intelligensbladet, Heiberg stated that, "like a lightning bolt out of a clear sky, a monster of a book has suddenly plunged down into our reading public; I mean the two big, thick volumes of Either/Or, by Victor Eremita, consisting of fifty-four other eight second editions out of thirty-six titles were of Works of Love (1852), For Self-Examination (1852), Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays (1852), The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air (1854), Practice in Christianity (1855), This Must Be Said (1855), The Moment (1855), and The Concept of Anxiety (1855). In 1845, the eighteen discourses of 1843-1844 were remaindered to Philip G. Philipsen, and in 1847 the other eight books in print at the time (with the exception of Postscript) were remaindered to Carl A. Reitzel.

51 JP VI 6407 (Pap. X1 A 351).
52 See Either/Or, II, pp. 414-29, KW IV (Pap. IV B 59).
53 JP VI 6374 (Pap. X1 A 192).
54 No. 129, March 10, 1843.
full, closely printed sheets [864 pages] . . . . The book may be called a monster, for it is impressive by its very mass . . . .”\(^{55}\)

He concluded: “One closes the book and says, ‘That’s enough [Basta]! I have enough of Either; I do not want any of Or.’ . . . The reader whose approach to the book I have described is ‘one’ . . . . Some individuals may, however, be curious to learn what sort of Or the author contrasts to such an Either, and they will begin at least to page through the second volume.”\(^{56}\)

Victor Eremita’s public response came in “A Word of Thanks to Professor Heiberg,”\(^{57}\) and drafts of unpublished pieces and journal entries reflect Kierkegaard’s displeasure at the uncomprehending superficiality of Heiberg’s reading and appraisal.\(^{58}\)

More substantial and reflective reviews by Johan F. Hagen and by Hans P. Koefoed-Hansen appeared in Fædrelandet\(^{59}\) and in For Literatur og Kritik.\(^{60}\)

Kierkegaard gives his own estimate of Either/Or in two journal entries from around the time of its publication.

**My Opinion of “Either/Or”**

There was a young man as favorably endowed as an Alcibiades. He lost his way in the world. In his need he looked about for a Socrates but found none among his contemporaries. Then he requested the gods to change him into one. But now—he who had been so proud of being an Alcibiades was so humiliated and humbled by the gods’ favor that, just when he received what he could be proud of, he felt inferior to all.\(^{61}\)

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 291.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Fædrelandet, 1168, March 5, 1843; Corsair Affair, pp. 17-21, KW XIII (SV XIII 411-15).


\(^{60}\) I, 1843, pp. 377-405.

\(^{61}\) JP V 5613 (Pap. IV A 43).
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Even if I proved nothing else by writing *Either/Or*, I proved that in Danish literature one can write a book, that one can work, without needing the warm jacket of sympathy, without needing the incentives of anticipation, that one can work even though the stream is against one, that one can work hard without seeming to, that one can privately concentrate while practically every bungling student dares look upon one as a loafer. Even if the book itself were devoid of meaning, the making of it would still be the pithiest epigram I have written over the mauldering philosophic age in which I live.63

62 In *From the Papers of One Still Living*, KW I (SV XIII 72 fn.), Kierkegaard criticized the view found in Hans Christian Andersen’s *Only a Fiddler* that “Genius is an egg that needs warmth for the fertilization of good fortune; otherwise it becomes a wind-egg” (quoted from H. C. Andersen, *Kun en Spillemand*, I-III (Copenhagen: 1837; ASKB 1503), I, p. 161 (ed. tr.). In 1849, Kierkegaard sent Andersen a copy of the second edition of *Either/Or* and received the following reply (Letters, Letter 206, KW XXV):

Copenhagen
May 15, 1849.

Dear Mr. Kierkegaard,
You have given me really great pleasure by sending me your *Either/Or*. I was, as you can well understand, quite surprised; I had no idea at all that you entertained friendly thoughts of me, and yet I now find it so be so. God bless you for it! Thank you, thank you!

Yours with heartfelt sincerity, 
H. C. Andersen

63 *JP V 5614 (Pap. IV A 45).*