



## “The Art of Writing Posthumous Papers”: Kierkegaard and the Spectral Audience

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to develop a postmetaphysical conception of reading by following Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* Part I (1843) through such Derridian concepts as secret, hospitality, and spectrality. The work focuses on the three essays addressed to the *Symparaneक्रमνοι* (“the community of the dead”), a fellowship neither young nor old with an aphoristic way of life (2010b, pp. 137–225) that can be understood as a figure of alterity. Special attention is paid to paratextual features of the book: the texts are actually presented as old papers found in a secretary desk by a pseudonymous editor (“Victor Eremita”), which suggests that every text is a posthumous paper, that is to say, it will always be read after the death of its author. Instead of finding a solid author who holds the semantic weight of the text, these papers are based in a blank of sense, a specter, a secret: if they are sustained on its author, then they are sustained in a mystery, not in a sort of revelation of meaning.

**Keywords:** Kierkegaard; specter; alterity; metaphysics of reading; author.

When Walter Benjamin wrote about Kafka as a storyteller, he stated that good stories are like those seeds of grain that have lain for centuries in the chambers of the pyramids (2007, p. 90). Despite the passage of time, both stories and seeds of grain retain their germinative power, and they can grow endlessly in the most diverse lands and fields. Derrida pointed out something similar when he argued that the “a” of *différance* remains always silent, secret, and discreet as a grave, or when he considered that, according to Hegel, the signifier’s body was also a sort of grave (1972, pp. 4, 95). Lastly, Freud observed in *Civilization and its Discontents* that “writing was in its origin the voice of an absent person” (2010, p. 18). This persistent link between textuality and death seems to suggest that the best way to approach a literary work is from a distance and after time has exerted its cold expropriation.

Why do these thinkers link language and literature with a sort of “economy of death” (Derrida, 1974, p. 95)? Why is textuality related to pyramids, graves, absence, and other kinds of distance? Barthes (1998) and Foucault (1969) classically sentenced the death of the author as the end of biography and intentionality as semantic keys for understanding and interpretation, but after this symbolic murder there is still a grave that remains a paradoxical source of meaning: a grave that can be read, or a text that can only be read as a grave, even if this also implies that, far from being a transparent expression of authorial intentions and *vouloir-dires*, the text can never be fully read or understood. But then, what is *inside* a textual grave? To what corpse does a textual grave belong?

The aim of this study is to reflect on these questions through Kierkegaard’s texts devoted to the *Symparaneikromenoi* (“the community of the dead”), which are included in the first part of *Either/Or* (Kierkegaard, 1988, 2010b, pp. 137–225). These texts were published under the pseudonym of Victor Eremita, the main character in *Either/Or*’s preface but also the one who plays the role of the editor of the fragments.<sup>1</sup> The fragmentary texts, which have just been found in a second-hand writing desk, do not have an identified author, and in them Kierkegaard indirectly states that “in a certain sense everything a poet has produced is something left behind” (1988, p. 152; 2010b, p. 151). Could it be said that all texts, or at least all literary texts, come from a forgotten desk—their bureaucratic grave, so to speak?

### Empty Graves of Sorrow

Il n’y a pas de passion sans secret, ce secret-ci, mais pas de secret sans cette passion. Au lieu du secret: là où pourtant tout est dit et où le reste n’est rien—que le reste, pas même de la littérature. (Derrida, 1999, p. 64)

I will focus on the fragmentary texts “Shadowgraphs” and “The Unhappiest One” (Kierkegaard, 1988, pp. 165–230; 2010b, pp. 163–225), two speeches or discourses delivered before the already-dead. Before I start, however, I would like to clearly distinguish between the authorial strategy and the textual play Kierkegaard develops in these earlier pieces and the overall textuality of Kierkegaard’s corpus. The richness of Kierkegaard’s *oeuvre* lies in the polyphony of his invented authors—to invoke Mikhail Bakhtin’s terminology<sup>2</sup>—and in the diversity of textual strategies he employs to disrupt the metaphysical order of idealism and the rise of Hegelianism as a Christian theology, among other purposes. The claims I will make in the following pages concern only one of these many strategies deployed by Kierkegaard at the beginning of his philosophical career, and they should not be understood as general statements about the whole of Kierkegaard’s corpus. The relevance of Kierkegaard in philosophy and literary theory stems precisely from his resistance to such kind of overall assertions.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed commentary of the pseudonym “Victor Eremita,” see Hernandez-Dispiaux’s contribution to Stewart & Nun (2015).

<sup>2</sup> See Pattison (2006) for a detailed approach to Kierkegaard’s thought from the perspective of Bakhtin’s theories.

In *Either/Or Part I*, the first of the texts mentioned above, "Shadowgraphs," is on sorrow, a particular version of melancholia. The essential quality of sorrow is its lack of repose, its continuous movement. While other feelings such as joy remain solid and quiet, sorrow—or, to be precise, "reflective sorrow" (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 171; 2010b, p. 165)—is constantly changing and it differs from itself. The observer can only notice the disappearance of sorrow, since its nature is "to pass by" (1988, p. 175; 2010b, p. 173). Such instability disrupts the distinction between presence and absence, and sorrow always "stands" in between, inhabiting the very margins of the distinction. Maybe it is this that makes the representation of sorrow impossible: "this sorrow cannot be depicted artistically, for the interior and the exterior are out of balance, and thus it does not lie within spatial categories" (1988, p. 171; 2010b, p. 165). But its spatial ambivalence is not the only reason why sorrow cannot be artistically represented; there is also its temporal character to be considered: it is "never really present but is continually in the process of becoming" (1988, p. 172; 2010b, p. 165).

These qualities show the proximity of reflective sorrow to Derrida's concept of trembling (Derrida, 1999, p. 82ff; 2006, pp. 97–98). According to Derrida, feelings like anxiety, fear, terror, or panic have already begun in trembling (2006, p. 97), and each of them is a different version of it. We should add Kierkegaard's reflective sorrow to that list, since it is a feeling with the very same features: like trembling, reflective sorrow is an experience of not-knowing, a movement in darkness that generates non-determination and ambivalence, breaking solid distinctions, disrupting limits, and questioning the logics of presence. Reflective sorrow is, like trembling, an experience of secret (Derrida, 2006, p. 98), the experience that shows that identity is always haunted by shadows of alterity and uncertainty.

Its lack of constitution and entity makes sorrow non-representable and unsayable. While joy is "communicative, sociable, and open," sorrow is "silent, solitary" (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 169; 2010b, p. 165). If speech discusses sorrow, it does so only indirectly, in an oblique way and through *reflexes*. Sorrow calls into question the very capability of language to communicate, but it does not challenge it in the sense in which absolute absence would: sorrow challenges communication because it involves secrecy. Unlike communication and noncommunication or presence and absence, sorrow and joy are not binarily *opposed*, but have a more complex relationship: while joy does belong to the binary distinction sayable/unsayable, sorrow does not really fit in either of these categories, but in both at the same time: it is characterized by a lack of repose, by a fluctuation that blurs binary oppositions.<sup>3</sup> Sorrow is a marginal or differing feeling that makes discourse tremble. It can only be grasped fragmentarily or ironically. It haunts language, disturbing our confidence in words as meaning-carriers, and it challenges the metaphysical entirety of discourse. A word of sorrow does not mean anything, but it cannot help meaning something either: it speaks

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<sup>3</sup> In this respect, I do not agree with Strawser when he states that "silence, then, is the absolute beginning. . . . for Kierkegaard it is the absolute beginning of the communication of that meaning which is essentially related to existence" (Strawser, 2006, p. 56). The detailed description of reflective sorrow points out that the origin of existential "communication" is not the full absence of silence, but a ruined silence, a silence full of shadows.

without speaking, not thanks to light, but to shadows. Its fecundity lies in its indeterminacy, in its resistance to light and to full manifestation. Like Derrida's experience of secret, reflective sorrow

reste inviolable même quand on croit l'avoir révélé. . . . il excède le jeu du voilement/dévoilement. . . . Il n'appartient donc pas à la vérité, ni à la vérité comme *homioiosis* ou adéquation, ni à la vérité comme mémoire. . . . Sa non-phénoménalité est sans rapport, même négatif, avec la phénoménalité. Il reste étranger à la parole, sans même qu'on puisse dire, syntagme distingué, "le secret, c'est ce qui est, dans la parole, étranger à la parole." (Derrida, 1999, p. 60)

When Kierkegaard (indirectly) claims that reflective sorrow is solitary, he is pointing at this very critique of the logics of manifestation which Derrida develops through the concept of secret. According to Caputo,

this secret—which is *sans savoir* and *non-savoir*—has no semantic content. This secret has nothing to hide. This is an odd sort of a secret, something of a non-secret, the secret that *there is no secret* in the sense of some sort of secret knowledge, some secret knowing, some positive content. (1997, p. 107)<sup>4</sup>

Kierkegaard (1992, p. 324ff; 2010a, p. 352ff) would call this kind of discourse "irony," as would Derrida (1999, p. 86), since it is a language deprived of a message, a word that has nothing to say or manifest directly. Consistent with the above, the speaker of this paradoxical speech refers to it as "shadowgraphs" or "silhouettes" [*skyggerids*]:

It is this reflective sorrow that I aim to single out and, as far as possible, have emerged in a few pictures. I call them silhouettes, partly to suggest at once by the name that I draw them from the dark side of life and partly because, like silhouettes, they are not immediately visible. If I pick up a silhouette, I have no impression of it, cannot arrive at an actual conception of it; only when I hold it up toward the wall and do not look at it directly but at what appears on the wall, only then do I see it. (Kierkegaard, 1988, pp. 172–173; 2010b, p. 171)

Sorrow can then only be depicted through non-depiction and non-manifestation: it is seen thanks to darkness and contrast. Expressions of sorrow, then, are just an announcement: the "telegraphic report" (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 173; 2010b, p. 172) that there is something hidden that cannot be apprehended, but only reflected, suggested, insinuated. Sorrow transforms discourse into a space of secret and oblique light and darkness; it states that words do not possess a definite meaning for us to disclose as a treasure in a chamber, but that they are always fragmentary and excessive or insufficient, since they always try to capture a tremble. While Hegel's systematic works always include a section on unhappy consciousness (1988, p. 222; 2010b, pp. 215–216), in which sorrow is controlled and explained, the discourse before the already-dead is a fragment, a silhouette, an impossible word. Kierkegaard makes of textuality a space of experience, dark pleasure, secret, and sorrow. Sorrow is not meant: it is the spectre that haunts the text and makes it tremble.

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<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description, see Caputo (1995) as well. These observations are contained in the etymology of "secret," which means "to put at distance, set apart," as Llewelyn reminds us (2008, p. 37).

Words of sorrow are not like a chamber containing a treasure of meaning, but, in a similar way to Benjamin's stories or Derrida's *différance*, they might resemble an empty grave. That is what is suggested by the speech "The Unhappiest One," which takes its title from the inscription on the tombstone that the community of the already-dead is talking about. It is from a grave in England that was opened, but in which no trace of a corpse was found. And so this question arises: who will be the unhappiest on earth? To whom does the English grave belong? The unhappiest one is the carrier of the greatest and darkest sorrow, and has the same confusing qualities. First, he is neither alive nor dead: "in a sense he cannot die, for indeed he has not lived; in a sense he cannot live, for indeed he is already dead" (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 227; 2010b, p. 213). Secondly, like sorrow itself, he is always absent from himself, and at the same time never present to himself: the "substance of his life" is always "outside himself" (1988, p. 227; 2010b, p. 214), distant and differed, and he is always in the tense process of becoming. In consequence, "why the grave was empty could be explained—namely, to indicate that the unhappiest one was the person who could not die" (1988, p. 226; 2010b, p. 220). Sorrow and unhappiness are the source of spectres and phantoms. As long as there is sorrow in the world, spectres and phantoms will haunt it, and graves will be empty. That is why Kierkegaard's sorrow shares its indeterminacy with Derrida's spectre:

le spectre est une incorporation paradoxale, le devenir-corps, une certaine forme phénoménale et charnelle de l'esprit. Il devient plutôt quelque « chose » qu'il reste difficile de nommer : ni âme ni corps, et l'une et l'autre. Car la chair et la phénoménalité, voilà ce qui donne à l'esprit son apparition spectrale, mais disparaît aussitôt dans l'apparition, dans la venue même du revenant ou le retour du spectre. Il y a du disparu dans l'apparition même comme réapparition du disparu. (Derrida, 1993, p. 26)

But the interest of sorrow lies in the connection between the empty graves and language, a connection made through the fragmentary textuality of the already-dead's discourses. The same inscription announcing the greatest sorrow is the law of the text—the title—and the inscription on the grave. The text is the grave, announcing its distance, its differing, its incommunication, and its indirect meaning. What the *Symparanekromenoi* are asking themselves is to whom a text belongs, since it is like a grave dedicated to the unhappiest one. But the text-grave refuses all appropriation, and it keeps waiting for the unhappiest. Its inscription challenges every reader to ask themselves whether they carry the heaviest sorrow and whether they should occupy the empty grave. But in this sense, it never belongs to anyone. There is no place for property in a text.

The text itself proclaims that there is nothing to be said, that words cannot be trusted any more as messengers of a particular truth or sense, but only as the tombstones of empty graves, as announcers of spectres:

See, language breaks down, and thought is confused, for who indeed is the happiest but the unhappiest and who the unhappiest but the happiest, and what is life but madness, and faith but foolishness, and hope but a staving off of the evil day, and love but vinegar in the wound. He disappeared, and we stand again by the empty grave. (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 230; 2010b, p. 223)

Sorrow challenges solid distinctions and limitations and introduces its very tremble in them. It shakes the solidity of the text as a keeper of a meaningful spirit. Like a grave, a text is empty, because it does not hold a meaning but a secret, something hidden that can neither be represented nor depicted by art nor said: textuality remains in excess in any representation. What we have is just the name of the text, and its secret: words and words announcing a difference of sense, presence, and life. We can read the text and hear it, but its content (the corpse, the meaning) remains absent. Despite that, words still say something, as does the inscription on the tombstone: they are not absurd. They say something that is never clearly present, though, but is only a shadow. At the same time, then, the text-grave is unreadable—non-accessible—and readable. Like sorrow, its exterior qualities (words, sentences) are completely visible, as are the stone and its inscription, but this is just like a shadowgraph, an empty silhouette, an empty grave.

The text, like the empty grave consecrated to the unhappiest one, belongs to no one and to everybody at the same time. It is readable, but its words only announce a vacuum, or rather a meaning always in the process of becoming, a meaning to come. In this regard, the meaning of the text is not showable or readable, just as the corpse of an empty grave cannot be exhumed. There is no exorcism of meaning in a text, but only the disturbing haunting of spectres. The discourses before the *Symparankromenoi*, with their incompleteness and shadows, help to develop a literature of alterity. Textuality is not based on the joy of identities of meaning, communicable and preserved as a present body that is mourned over by the family of the deceased (lovers, widows, publishing houses, university, academia, etc.). The sorrow of a text—like Derrida's *différance*—introduces the economy of death into language and brings about the end of identity as a source of textual immobility and of interpretation as a process of deciphering. Like an open, empty grave, the text is forever waiting for its addressee.

### The Spectral Audience

Through Kierkegaard's sorrow, which is closely similar to Derrida's *différance* or spectre, the text loses any dependence on a reference or meaning and becomes an empty grave. This indicates that a text is not the result of the expression of an ideal meaning, but rather that meaning is always an (im)possible and conventional appropriation of a text: spectral and melancholic texts wait for some meaning to come, just as the unhappiest one's empty grave waits forever for its impossible owner. Both are a promise of meaning. The text and the grave are open to everyone, to the wholly other.

But who are the addressees of the speech? What are the *Symparankromenoi* like? As the addressees of a speech about sorrow, they are first and foremost a figure of alterity: being beyond death, they avoid all identification or recognition. It is a community based on the desire to come to an end and fully disappear, constituted in the victory of the night: a society that professes the doctrine of the downfall of everything (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 167ff; 2010b, p. 170ff). It is a society of spectres, since the complete and full absence

of its members is only a desire, or a prayer, but never a reality. Thus, it is a society of dead members, but also the community of those who have never lived, but have always *survived*. Like reflexive sorrow or a spectre, they lead an aphoristic life:

we who live *aphorismos* and *segregati*, as aphorisms in life, without association with men, having no share in their griefs and their joys; we who are not consonants in the clamor of life but are solitary birds in the stillness of night. (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 220; 2010b, p. 214)

What does all this mean? We usually understand that, even if a text does not have an inherent meaning, its reader will provide it with one by placing it in a particular context. In that sense, we tend to acknowledge the polysemy of a text, and we take into account the reader whom the author had in mind when he wrote the text, that is, we try to determine textual meaning by projecting a reader's profile, and therefore we assess the text according to extratextual factors. Kierkegaard cancels out this metaphysical source by describing the figure of a fragmentary and spectral reader. The addressee is always the other, the wholly other: someone beyond identification, someone simultaneously dead and alive. Being beyond life, it *survives* after all possible determination or contextualization has taken place. The *Sympanekromenoi* are then

a society that knows but one passion, namely, sympathy with sorrow's secret. . . . the cheery smiles of happy maidens do not move us, but rather the secret hint of grief. . . . Our choice is made: we love only sorrow. We are in quest only of sorrow, and wherever we find its trail, we follow it, fearlessly, unwaveringly, until it discloses itself. (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 174; 2010b, p. 171)

Two consequences arise from this passage: first, the reader is dismissed as a solid instance or reference for contextualization and meaning and, far from providing a framework for the text, it comes to emphasize its indeterminacy. The *Sympanekromenoi* are a spectral audience, and to read is to insist on the mystery of an empty grave, to love the trembling of sorrow through words. According to Agacinski, "l'écrit n'a jamais de 'public'. Il prend le lecteur à part, l'isole nécessairement, l'entraîne à l'écart, le convoque à un simulacre de tête-à-tête d'où l'auteur demeure absent: écrire, lire, c'est toujours entrer dans cet aparté" (1977, p. 110).

Secondly, to read is a gesture of passion by which one waits with infinite patience for a meaning to come and for the secret of sorrow to be revealed. Kierkegaard shows us that reading is not about understanding, apprehending, or communicating, but that it is rather a passive activity stimulated by the essential unreadability of the text, that is, by the impossibility of its full translation or its full saturation by meaning (Lisse, 1996, p. 191ff). The reader loves sorrow and the enigma of an empty grave waiting for its corpse. The reader is also calling out and waiting for a meaning that has been promised by the inscription of the text ("the unhappiest one"), but that promise is constantly deferred and never accomplished.

The trembling of sorrow disrupted common notions of space and time: it was neither absent nor present, and it was always in the process of becoming. Derrida called it "the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time" (1972, p. 8; 1982, p. 8). Since meaning is subjected to the same displacement, readability and unreadability are no longer

in opposition. Rather, unreadability is the condition of the possibility of readability (Lisse, 1996, p. 215). *Symparankromenoi* are passionate about the secret of sorrow, and it is this not full understanding, this inconclusiveness, that generates the active passivity of reading and turns reading into a kind of writing—a kind of waiting for the unhappiest one. *Symparankromenoi* show that reading a text is possible and impossible at the same time, and it is this paradox that transforms every text into irony and into a call for alterity: “I hail you, great unknown, whose name I do not know; I hail you with your title of honor: the unhappiest one. Greetings and salutations from the community of the unhappy to you here in your home” (1988, p. 229; 2010b, p. 222). Like Derrida, Kierkegaard links the unreadability of secret with the infinite passion of reading in order to think literature:

si, sans aimer la littérature en général et pour elle-même, j’aime quelque chose *en elle* qui ne se réduise surtout pas à quelque qualité esthétique, à quelque source de jouissance formelle, ce serait *au lieu du secret*. Au lieu d’un secret absolu. Là serait la passion. Il n’y a pas de passion sans secret, ce secret-ci, mais pas de secret sans cette passion. *Au lieu du secret* : là où pourtant tout est dit et où le reste n’est rien—que le reste, pas même de la littérature. (Derrida, 1999, p. 64)

### What’s that Voice? The Art of Writing Posthumous Papers

Having considered the spectrality of the text, and the reader as a figure of alterity—i.e. the spectral audience—it is time to examine where the text comes from, to analyse the “origin” of the text. It is the last element of the metaphysics of reading (author, work, reader) that needs to be called into question.

We could actually think of two origins of the text. The first is fictive and is described and suggested by means of paratextual marks. In this sense, the fragmentary texts were found in the secret drawer of a writing desk bought in an antique shop by their editor, Victor Eremita. If the subtitle indicates that the texts are fragmentary, it is also because they are detached from their origin. They were left behind by someone, separated from the one who wrote them, and compiled—together with other drafts—in a new volume, which works as a collage. The emphasis thus shifts away from the author to distance and elusiveness: from the clarity of identity to the ambivalence of old desks, secret drawers, unknown authors, a mysterious editor (whose name, which means “the victory of the solitary” in Latin, is not exactly an ordinary Danish name), and the fragmentary nature indicated in the subtitle. And if we ask the text directly, we obtain a similar response:

Let us, then, designate our intention as a venture in fragmentary endeavor or the art of writing posthumous [*efterladt*] papers. . . . the art is to evoke an enjoyment that is never present tense but always has an element of the past and thus is present in the past. This is already expressed in the expression “left behind” [*efterladt*]. Indeed, in a certain sense everything a poet has produced is something left behind [*efterladt*]. (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 152; 2010b, p. 152)

The text refers to itself and states that it is a ruin, and that its origin is ruined as well, lost in the past and erased by time. These assertions stand in tension with the subtitle, which describes the text as a “peroration” (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 217; 2010b, p. 211) and as a conference, since it is delivered [*Forelæst*] *before* the fellowship of the dead (Kierkegaard, 1988, pp. 165, 217; 2010b, pp. 137, 163). At the same time, the text belongs to a genre that requires full presence and recognition (that of speech, public discourses or conferences), and it is an excerpt left behind, abandoned and feeding on distance. The contradiction of these indirect claims invites us to regard every scene of communication as full of distance, misunderstanding, and the alterity of language. Even if the text, as a peroration or a lecture, is always *addressed* to someone, we do not know where it comes from, who owned it as its master or its authority, and we do not need to know it to read a text. According to Crépon,

le poème atteste d’abord et avant tout la présence d’une solitude et d’une singularité conjointes (qui sont davantage les siennes propres que celles du poète). Il résiste à toute reconduction à une appartenance quelconque—à toute appartenance qui viendrait entamer ou compromettre sa portée universelle et indéterminée. (as cited in Jdey, 2011, p. 102)

Cohen-Lévinas agrees when she points out that “le poème deviendrait étranger à sa source. Il se soustrairait à elle, se désaccorderait. Il serait une figure de disharmonie, l’intempestivité même de la langue, son risque, sa plainte, ses éclats de rire et ses sanglots” (as cited in Jdey, 2011, p. 116).

The second origin of the text we could identify is its “real” one, so to speak: why did a writer named Kierkegaard decide to compose such a text under the form of such perorations? We can read the following in Kierkegaard’s diary:

Precisely I was looking for an expression to designate that kind of people to whom I would like to write, convinced that they will share my conception, and now I have found it in Luciano: *paranekroi* (one who, like me, is dead), and I would feel like publishing a text for *paranekroi*. (1988, p. 25)<sup>5</sup>

The author abandons his position as master and declares himself dead or absent, a member of the fellowship of the dead. Kierkegaard’s voice rises from the dead and comes from a city in ruins. It is a voice that keeps speaking independently of its author—a voice without a master, prolonging his words through masks and distances. It is then a spectral voice that paradoxically belongs to a dead author: a written voice that makes an author absent to himself, that confronts the author with something other than himself. In Delecroix’ words,

l’écriture se déploie dans la contestation de la pleine présence de l’être. Ses signes naissent de l’introduction d’une différence qui diffère l’immédiat rapport de soi à soi de l’être plein. . . . on pourrait dire que le geste qui chez Kierkegaard lie l’écriture au devenir atteste une double contestation similaire : celle de l’identité à soi (de l’être) et de son corollaire, à avoir la présence à soi (du sujet). (2009, p. 444)

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<sup>5</sup> For further reading about Kierkegaard’s interruption of the continuity between the author and its philosophical “I” through writing, see Garff (2003). In addition, Watkin (1993) offers an interesting analysis of the denegation of authority and the critique of authorship in Kierkegaard’s early works.

And he adds: “être absent à soi-même, c’est ainsi le mal, structurel, d’où naît l’écriture ; devenir présent à soi-même, par elle, c’est l’horizon paradoxal de la tâche d’écrire, paradoxal au plus haut point puisque l’écriture creuse d’abord cette absence” (2009, p. 448). The text embodies a voice, but this voice is continuously losing the sonority and the light of the logos.

Without a Father, textuality is no longer a Son: it embodies an “impossible filiation” (Derrida, 1999, p. 85ff). But this absence of Father is linked as well with the absence of a concrete and determinate addressee. If the audience is composed of spectres, of dead listeners, and there is not a solid identity that can be singled out as the voice of the text, then there is no world in common, no idea of community or identity that is shared by the text and the reader, and therefore meaning is destabilized and interrupted. This radical independence gives the reader the opportunity of becoming fully responsible for the text, even when there is no space for family or proximity in it. Distance and alterity give way to ethics of infinite responsibility in textuality. According to Derrida, distance and the absence of a common world are the only source for a responsibility worthy of its name:

Pour être responsable il faut qu’il n’y ait plus de monde. Alors on peut dire : là où il n’y a plus de monde je suis responsable de toi ; ou bien, dès que je suis responsable de toi, et je te porte, à ce moment-là j’anéantis le monde, il n’y a plus de monde, au moment où je suis responsable devant toi le monde disparaît. Pour être vraiment, singulièrement responsable devant la singularité de l’autre, il faut qu’il n’y ait plus de monde. (Derrida, 2006, p. 103)<sup>6</sup>

Kierkegaard is tackling the same question when he breaks all references of the text and replaces them by distances, spectres, and secrets. If the text does not belong to anybody, anyone who wants to read it has to answer for it, and has to do it endlessly.

In sum, both of the text’s origins are disturbed by distance, made indeterminate, and ruined by haunting spectres. The text comes from an unknown place, carries an impossible message of sorrow, and flows towards alterity. In Cohen-Lévinas’ words,

Avant de dire ou de vouloir dire, le poème appelle, comme *demeuré* dans un lieu de résonance qui n’est déjà plus sa langue ni sa voix ni son écoute. C’est sans doute là que résiderait aussi sa singularité non originaire, mais plutôt primitive. (Cohen-Lévinas as cited in Jdey, 2011, p. 114)

Text is, like a meteorite (Derrida, 1999, p. 185), readable and seen only in its impossible manifestation while it crosses the sky of time and travels beyond death. Like a faraway star, it is only perceivable in its mystery. As we read it, it lets us know that there is nothing to read. We are the only carriers of such a bottomless secret, the messengers of the obscurity brought by the glance of the text.

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<sup>6</sup> For further reading on this topic, see Derrida (2003). In addition, for a more detailed explanation about Kierkegaard and Derrida’s ethics of alterity and infinite responsibility, see Llevadot (2013).

### **Conclusions: Towards a Literature of Alterity**

Kierkegaard challenges the metaphysics of reading and calls into question the unitary character of a work. He becomes a paradoxical heir of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, and develops a conception of literature and language based on death and empty graves. His idea of sorrow is very close to Derrida’s *différance*, secret and trembling, and his *Symparankromenoi* are the impossible sons of spectres. Like Benjamin, he can be seen as a gravedigger of the Word and of the Aura of meaning (the Presence) (Benjamin, 2007, p. 221), and he is able to demythologize textuality, freeing it from any kind of authority, truth, or determinate structure. By adopting all these strategies, Kierkegaard is developing a literature of alterity, a sense of textuality that avoids any kind of appropriation, referentialism, biographicism, and contextualism, and allows us to discover its singularity and its enigmatic secret. Remaining a ruin, speaking without saying, and haunting like a spectre, literature is a space of dispossession that demarcates the dissolution of all identity. The secret chambers of literary pyramids, then, might be a precious opportunity to think about a literary ethics of alterity and gift. The radical expropriation of ruined texts could be the best chance for hospitality.

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