



Sketch of Søren Kierkegaard, by a member of his extended family, Niels Christian Kierkegaard, in 1840.

## THE GLOBAL DANE

# SØREN KIERKEGAARD

## THEOLOGIAN PHILOSOPHER AUTHOR

BORN: MAY 5, 1813

DIED: NOVEMBER 11, 1855

Søren Kierkegaard is the man behind one of the most original and fascinating authorships in recent centuries. Juxtaposed both philosophical and political systems, Kierkegaard emphasizes the significance and responsibility of the individual person and is thus often called the father of existentialism. But with his penetrating analyses of psychological phenomena such as anxiety and despair, he is also far ahead of his time in a psychological context. Kierkegaard lived, thought, and died in Copenhagen, where his books – many of them authored pseudonymously – reached very few readers and he himself received only limited recognition. His labyrinth-like authorship, which includes a long series

of devotional discourses published in his own name, has been called a literary world within the literary world, and is today the object of intense scholarship across the globe. Kierkegaard was a significant influence on Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus, and also inspired Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Ludvig Wittgenstein. Theologically, Kierkegaard has engaged thinkers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. In a literary context, he impacted authors like Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and Franz Kafka. But his influence is global today and his works continue to be translated all over the world.



THE DANISH CULTURAL INSTITUTE



Οὐκ ἔστιν οὐρανὸς οὐδὲ γῆ· ἡ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐκτίθησαν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ. 1 Κορ. Χ, 11  
1 Τιμ. 4, 15. 1 Κορ. 15, 51. 1 Φιλ. 5, 7-9. 1 2ο Κορ. 2, 18. 1 Τιμ. 4, 5.  
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Sketch of Søren Kierkegaard, by a member of his extended family, Niels Christian Kierkegaard, in 1838.

# THEOLOGY STUDENT TIME OF STUDIES

Immediately after completing his preparatory schooling in 1830, Kierkegaard began to study theology at the university, but he used much of his time reading philosophy and romantic literature. As a student he published a string of articles in newspapers and academic journals, and in 1838 he published a small book, *From the Papers of One Still Living, Published Against His Will*, an extremely harsh review of Hans Christian Andersen's novel, *Only a Fiddler*. After reading Kierkegaard's critique, Andersen writes that he wandered around »in a haze« and needed to take some »cooling powders« in order to regain his normal mental temperature.

## THE OPENHANDED STUDENT

From the woolen cocoon that the school boys called »Søren Sock« emerged a dashing fop, who seemed to be tailor-made for late romanticism. Taking loans and using credit – and completely out of step with the frugal ways of home – the young theology student developed extravagant habits, which included necessities such as chic jackets, fashionable hats, walking canes, silk scarves, gloves, café visits, good wine, cigars, pipe tobacco, theatre performances and coach rides. In 1836 alone, the openhanded student worked up a debt of 1,262 rigsdalars, which was about the same as the annual wage of a college professor.

## THE CURSED FAMILY

The extravagant lifestyle was presumably – also – a reaction to the somber events at home. Before Søren Aabye could celebrate his 21st birthday, he had lost five siblings and his mother. His father interpreted the deaths as an act of revenge from a God who hadn't forgotten

that when the wealthy businessman was still a young shivering shepherd, he had once climbed a small hill on the Jutland heath and cursed God. Like Job, he thought he was to lose all his children in or before their 33th year, Jesus' age.

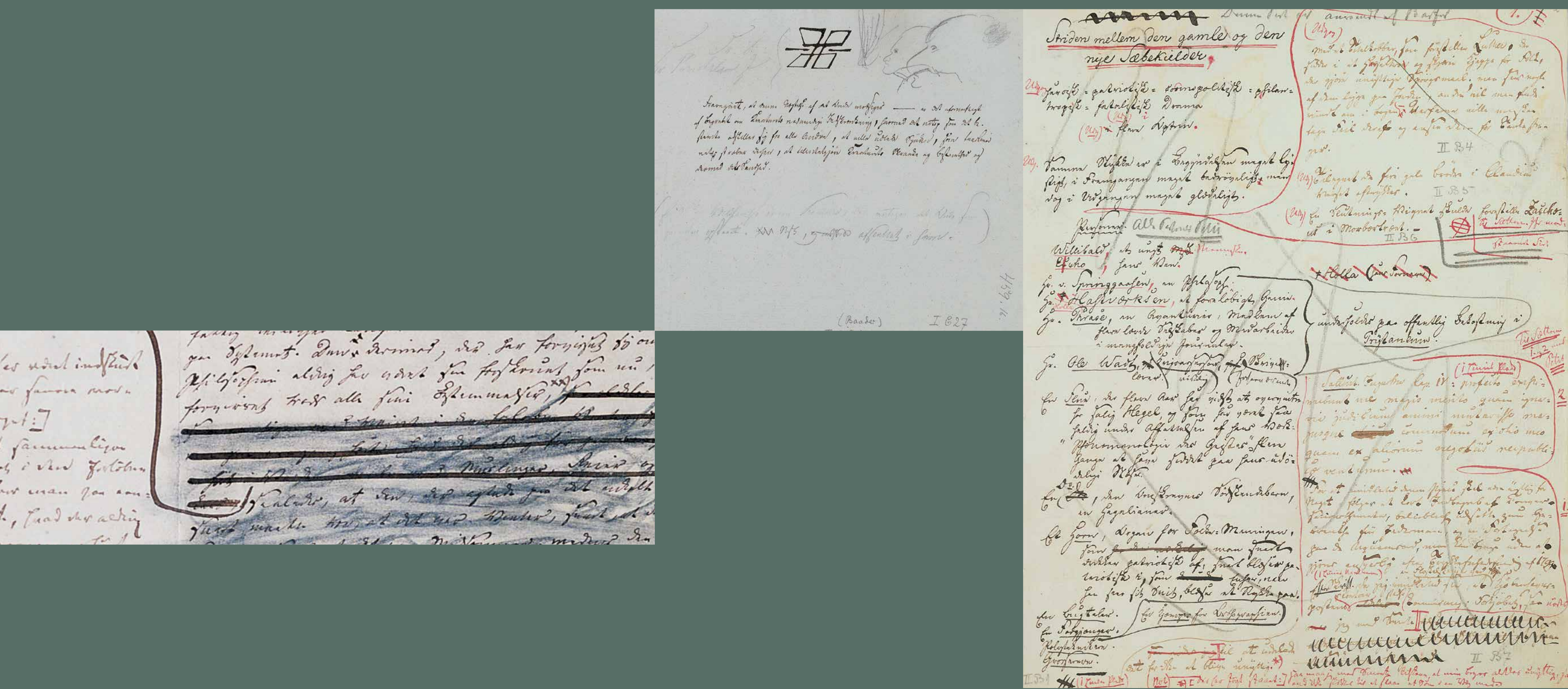
## THE MAID'S LAST SON

In addition to the episode on the hill, one can add the awkward fact that following the death of Michael Kierkegaard's first wife, he made his maid pregnant. When Søren Aabye, the last child born to this same woman, was made aware of these circumstances, it was as if the ground began to quake beneath him:

*That's when the great earthquake took place, the terrifying upheaval that suddenly forced upon me a new law of interpretation for all phenomena. That's when I sensed that my father's advanced age was not a divine blessing, but rather a curse.*

Even though the macabre curse hypothesis was disproven with his father's death on August 9, 1838, Kierkegaard junior was so bewitched with the equation, with God as the great unknown, that on May 5, 1847, he noted in his journal:

*How strange that I have turned 34. It is utterly inconceivable to me. I was so sure that I would die before or on this birthday that I could actually be tempted to suppose that my birthday was erroneously recorded and that I will still die on my 34th.*





Painting of Regine Olsen, by Emil Børentzen.

# ENGAGEMENT REGINE

## »YOU, THE RULER OF MY HEART«

As a fresh theology graduate, Kierkegaard embarked on a trip in the summer of 1840 to Jutland on a kind of pilgrimage, with his father's wind-blown hometown as the symbolic destination. When he returned, he became engaged on September 10 to a girl ten years his younger, Regine Olsen, who, like him, was the youngest of seven siblings.

## THE POWER OF ART

Regine not only stirred his sensual passions but also set such powerful artistic powers in motion that a dismayed Kierkegaard was forced to admit that he was not called to be a husband, but rather to be – Kierkegaard. He was thus compelled to break the engagement on October 12, 1841, which aroused general indignation and caused Regine great despair. This guilt-invoking episode had broad implications for the authorship. Regine never shows up under her proper name, but she is poetically present in the romantic conflicts that are played out with ingenious frequency over and over again throughout the authorship.

## SILENT MEETINGS

After their breakup, the former fiancées met each other strikingly often: sometimes within the walls of chilly and dimly-lit churches, sometimes out on the streets of Copenhagen, and sometimes on the paths along the old city ramparts. They passed by each other for a few intense seconds, without uttering a word, proving that platonic love can be wilder than fully consummated erotic love.

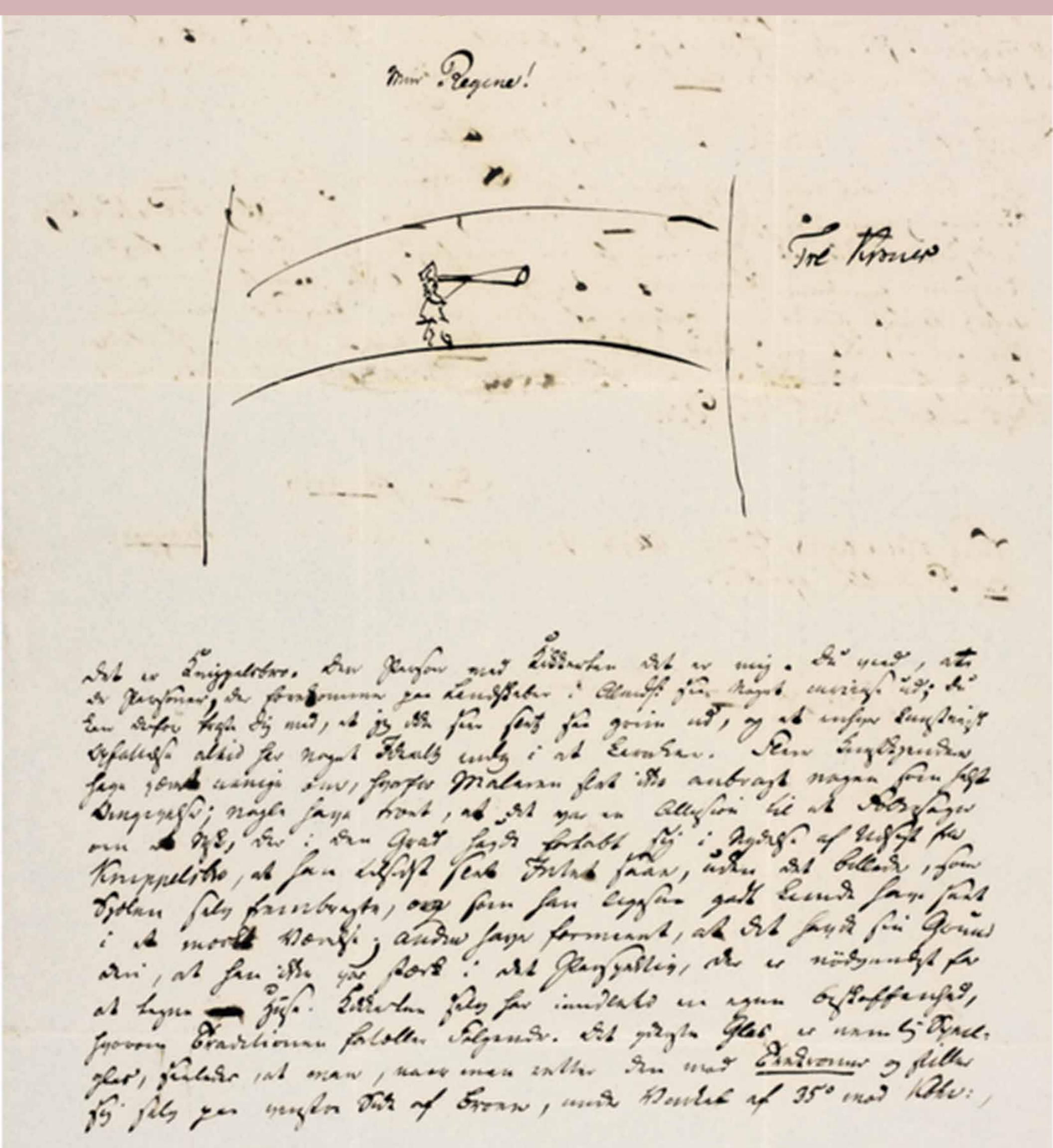
*Misfortune doesn't lie in the fact that the lovers didn't get to be with each other, but in the fact that they couldn't understand each other.*

Kierkegaard made Regine his literary life companion and they can be included among other unfortunate lovers – Pyramus & Thisbe, Dante & Beatrice, Romeo & Julie, Kafka & Felice – who belong to each other forever because they were never together in temporality, but had to wait patiently for eternity.

## »GOD BLESS YOU«

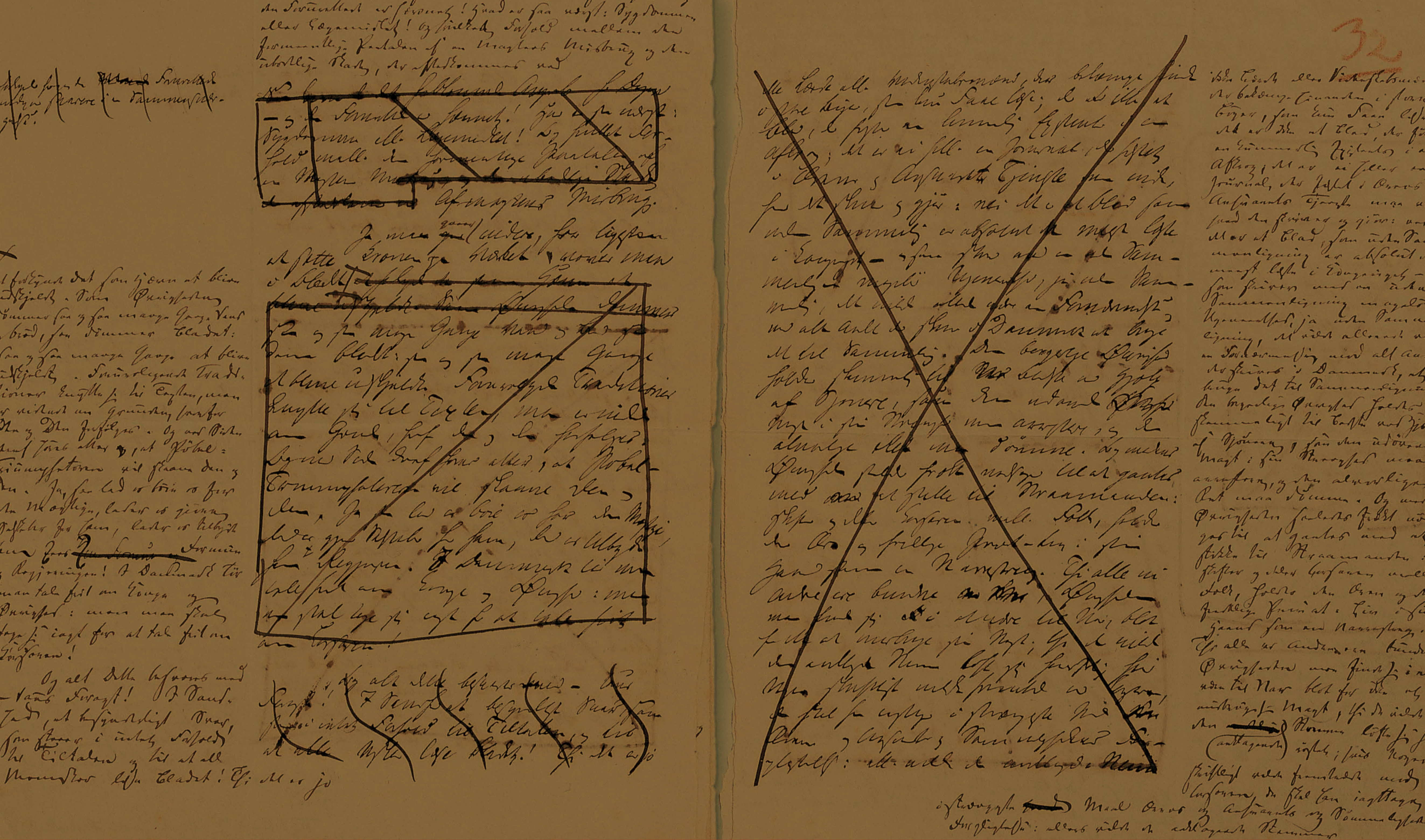
In November 1847, Regine married Johan Frederik Schlegel, who was later appointed Governor of the Danish West Indies, where the couple resided from 1855 to 1860. On the day of their departure, Regine found Kierkegaard in the crowd and quietly said: »God bless you – I hope the best for you!« Kierkegaard froze, but managed to tip his hat as a greeting to his former love – for the last time ever. No one knows what the brilliant thinker and theologian was thinking during those blessed moments. Perhaps quite exceptionally he didn't have any thoughts at all but just allowed himself to be blessed by the woman of his life.

*Beloved she was. My existence was to accentuate her life absolutely, my activity as an author could also be viewed as a monument to her praise and honor. I am taking her with me into history.*



In a letter to Regine on September 23, 1840, Kierkegaard sketched himself standing on the middle of Knippelsbro, one of the bridges that spans Copenhagen harbour. He is equipped with a giant telescope pointed in the direction of Trekroner, a small island fort, but thanks to some cleverly placed mirrors, he's able to see Regine in her home on Børsgade on the opposite side of the bridge.





# A DIALOGUE BETWEEN WORLDVIEWS EITHER/OR

## MASKS AND EMPTINESS

*Either/Or* is organized as a comprehensive dialogue between a younger aesthete and an older ethicist. The aesthete lives a bohemian existence. He celebrates everything beautiful in this world, loves the enchantment of the theatre, writes rapturously about Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, hates the petty bourgeois lifestyle, and desires the intensity and sublimity of momentary pleasures. He is fond of donning masks, but his many disguises are really a strategy for hiding his lack of identity. He isn't able to bring order and direction to his existence and he's lost his existential freedom of movement: »I feel like a piece in a chess game must feel when the opponent says: 'that piece can't be moved.'«

## THE ART OF SEDUCTION

The first part of *Either/Or* ends with »The Seducer's Diary«, in which Johannes the Seducer slyly manages to ease his way into the existence of the innocent Cordelia, awakening her desire and running away with her virtue in the last pages of the book. While it is a matter of numbers for *Don Giovanni* – 1003 in Spain alone – Johannes is interested in seduction as an intriguing psychological process. »The Seducer's Diary« caused a sensation in its own time and, justified or not, was tied to Kierkegaard own engagement. »It is revolting, disgusting, and shocking« wrote one of the leading cultural critics, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, when he spoke of the diary.

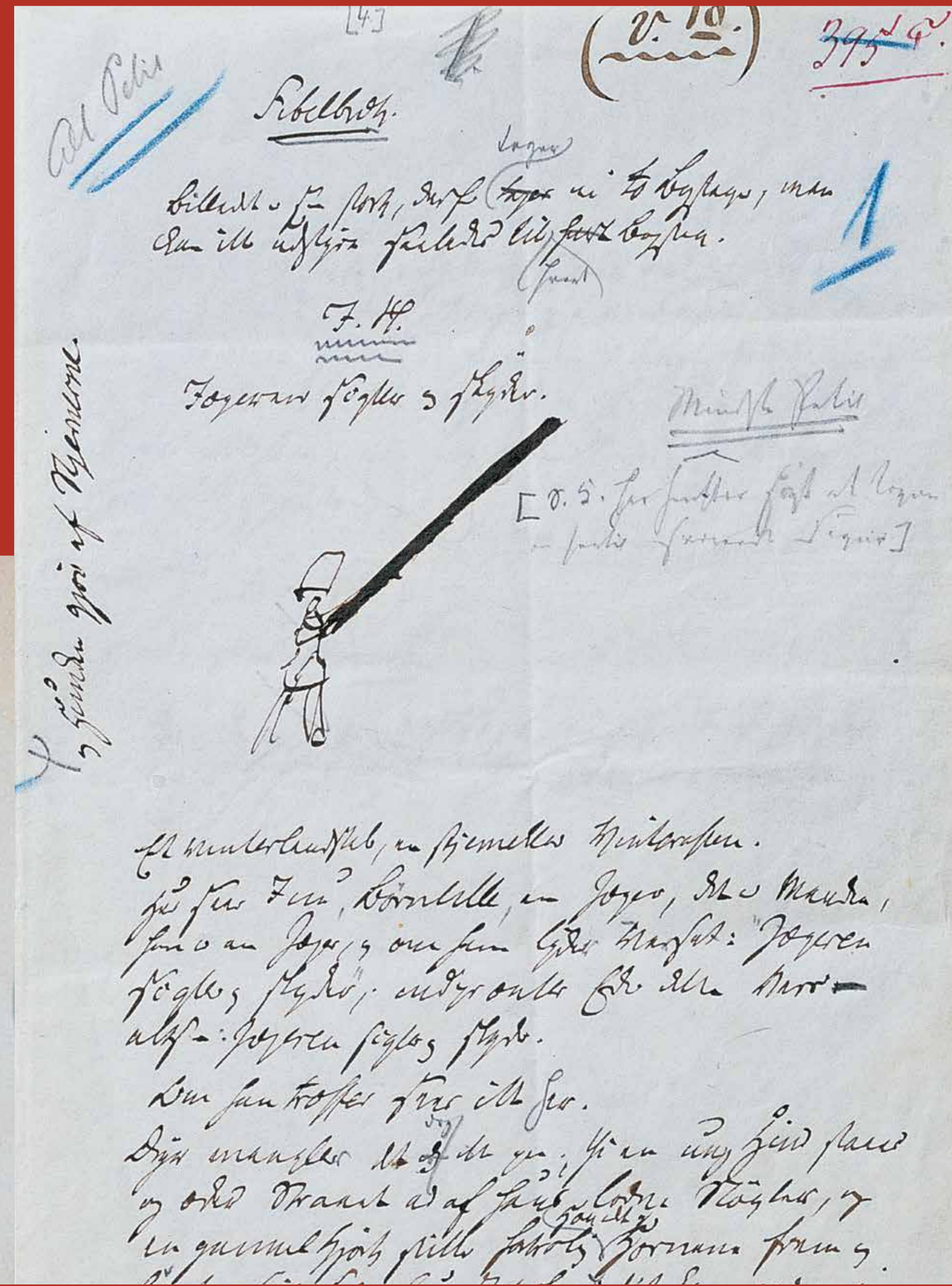
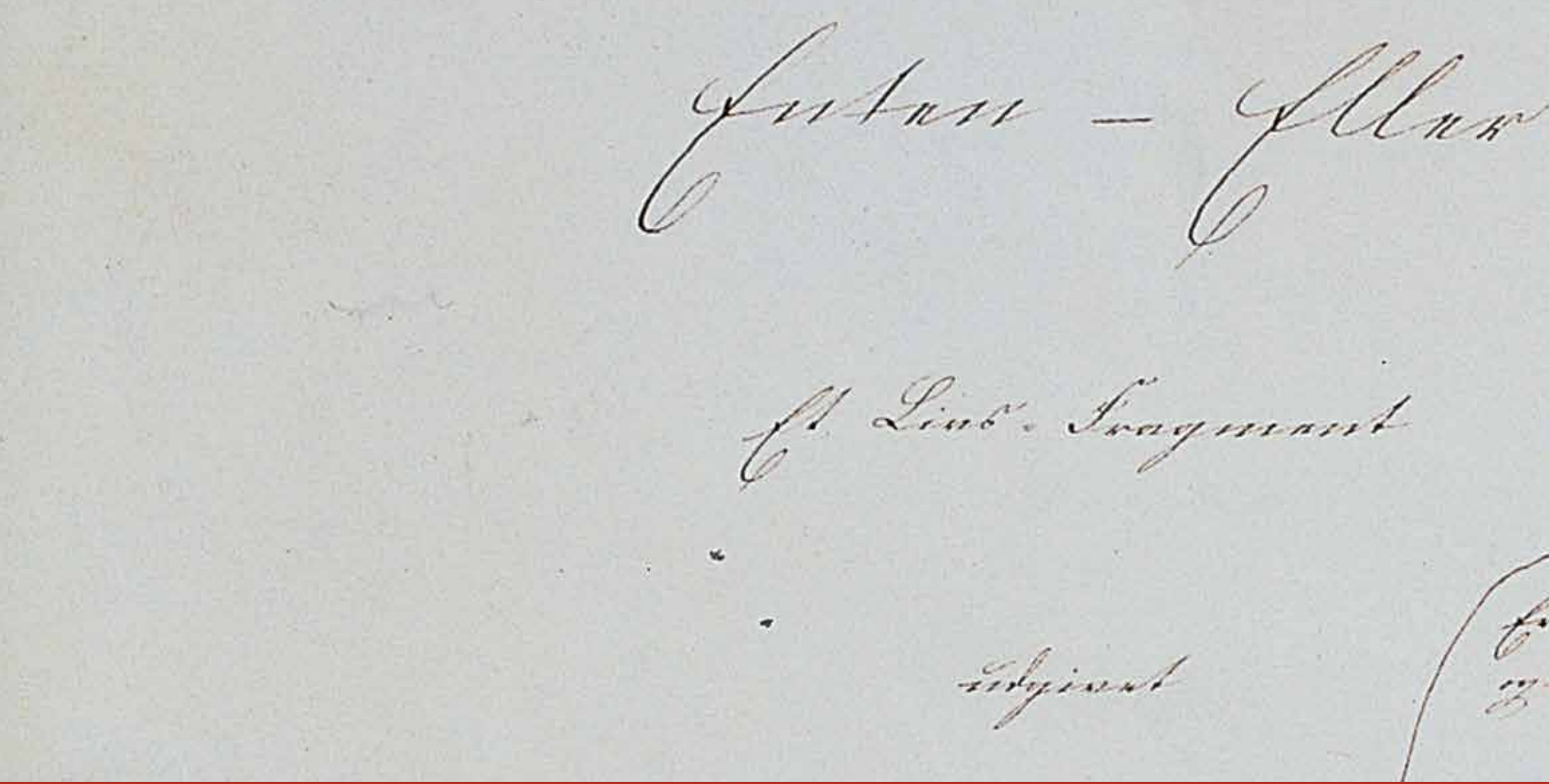
## THE NECESSITY OF CHOICE

Kierkegaard's reputation as the father of existentialism can be traced in large part to the ethicist figure from the second part of *Either/Or*, Judge Wilhelm, who underscores the importance of making choices, of taking ownership of oneself. For a human being does not passively develop into the self he or she ought to become. The process can go wrong along with way and a person can become someone different from who he or she was constituted to be. To become *oneself* in the stricter sense, a person must *appropriate*, *choose*, or *receive* him – or herself. Formulated paradoxically, becoming oneself means becoming someone *different* from the self one was *before* one began to become oneself. Wilhelm himself is a married man and offers a host of examples from his own experience of the necessity of choice, and presents an extended defense of the legitimacy of marriage. From beginning to end, Wilhelm insists that it is a matter of becoming the »general editor« of one's own life, thereby becoming the active and culpable protagonist of one's own life narrative.

*The individual becomes aware of himself as this particular individual, with these abilities, these proclivities, these desires, these passions, influenced by these particular surroundings, as this particular product of this particular social environment. And as he becomes aware of all this, he takes responsibility for it.*

## STAGES ON LIFE'S WAY

The aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious are different perspectives of existence, different ways to deal with – or fail to deal with – existential problems and religious possibilities, different ways to approach oneself, or to remain at a distance from oneself.





To Gabriella's Birth  
at her thirteenth  
N.N.

A hand-drawn birthday flower from Kierkegaard to his niece Henriette Lund on her thirteenth birthday.

## THE AESTHETIC EITHER/OR PART ONE

### APATHY

I don't feel like doing anything. I don't feel like riding, it's too much agitation; I don't feel like walking, it's too tiring; I don't feel like lying down because I'd either have to remain there, and I don't feel like doing that, or I'd have to get up again, and I don't feel like doing that, either. Summa Summarum: I don't feel like doing anything.

### THE END OF THE WORLD AS A JOKE

In a theater, it happened that a fire started offstage. The clown came out to tell the audience. They thought it was a joke and applauded. He told them again, and they found it even more hilarious. This is the way, I suppose, that the world will be destroyed – amid the universal hilarity of wits and wags who think it's all a joke.

### A SINGLE COLOR

My life achievement amounts to nothing at all, a mood, a single color. My achievement resembles the painting by that artist who was supposed to paint the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea and thus painted the entire wall red, explaining that the Israelites had already walked across and the Egyptians had drowned.

### THE PHILOSOPHERS SELL OUT

What philosophers say about reality is often just as disappointing as reading a sign in a secondhand shop that says: »Pressing Done Here.« If someone were to bring his clothes to be pressed, he'd be duped, for it's only the sign that's for sale.

### A SUNDAY MOOD AND SORROWFUL LONGING

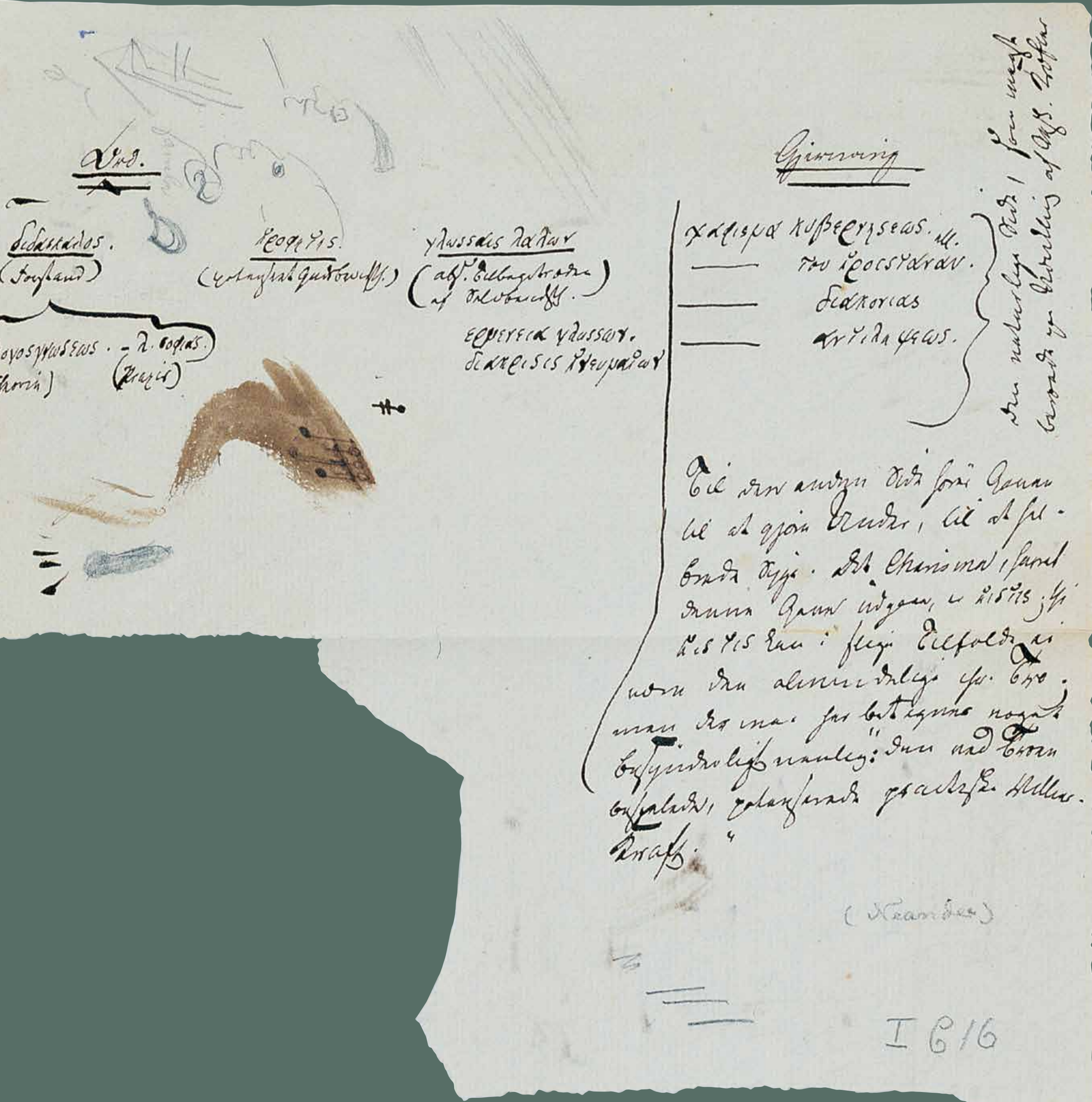
The sun is shining brilliantly and beautifully into my room; the window in the next room is open. Out on the street, everything is quiet. It is Sunday afternoon. I distinctly hear a lark warbling outside a window in one of the neighboring courtyards, outside the window where the beautiful girl lives. Far away in a distant street, I hear a man crying »Shrimp for sale.« The air is so warm, and yet the whole city is as if deserted. Then I call to mind my youth and my first love when I was filled with longing; now I long only for my first longing. What is youth? A dream. What is love? The content of the dream.

### THE TOTALITY OF REGRET

Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way. Whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret it either way.

### DON JUAN'S MOUNT VENUS

In the Middle Ages, much was said about a mountain that isn't found on any map; it's called Mount Venus. There sensuousness has its home; there it has its wild pleasures, for it is a kingdom, a state. In this kingdom, language has no home, nor the collectedness of thought, nor the laborious achievements of reflection; there is heard only the elemental voice of passion, the play of desires, the wild noise of intoxication. There everything is only one giddy round of pleasure. The firstborn of this kingdom is Don Juan.







Painting of the city jail next to Copenhagen town hall and courthouse, by Martinus Rørbye, in 1831.

# PRIVATE EYE AND STREET PREACHER KIERKEGAARD'S COPENHAGEN

Some of my fellow countrymen no doubt think that Copenhagen is a boring little town. But I think (...) it's the greatest place I could ask for. Big enough to be a fair-sized city, small enough that there isn't a price tag on people.

This warm description of Kierkegaard's Copenhagen is from *Stages on Life's Way*, published in 1845, when the city had 126,787 inhabitants. Kierkegaard knew the city like the back of his hand, and maybe even better than that.

Populated with the finest objects of study of virtually every kind – crazy and genius, plebian and aristocratic, impoverished and wealthy – Copenhagen was a pulsating psychological laboratory for Kierkegaard. He returned home to his writing desk enriched with situation and mood, which he retained in his notebooks.

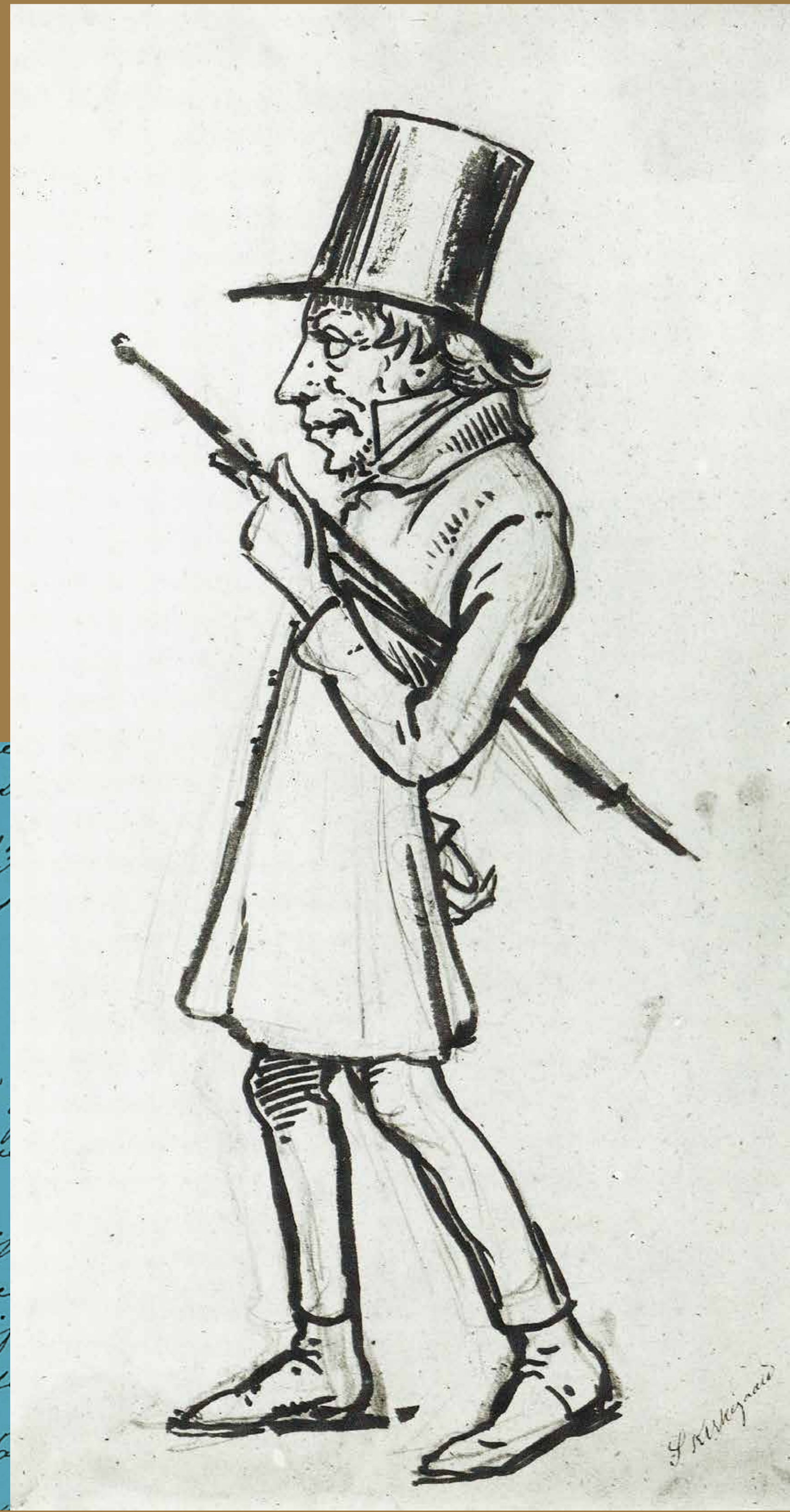
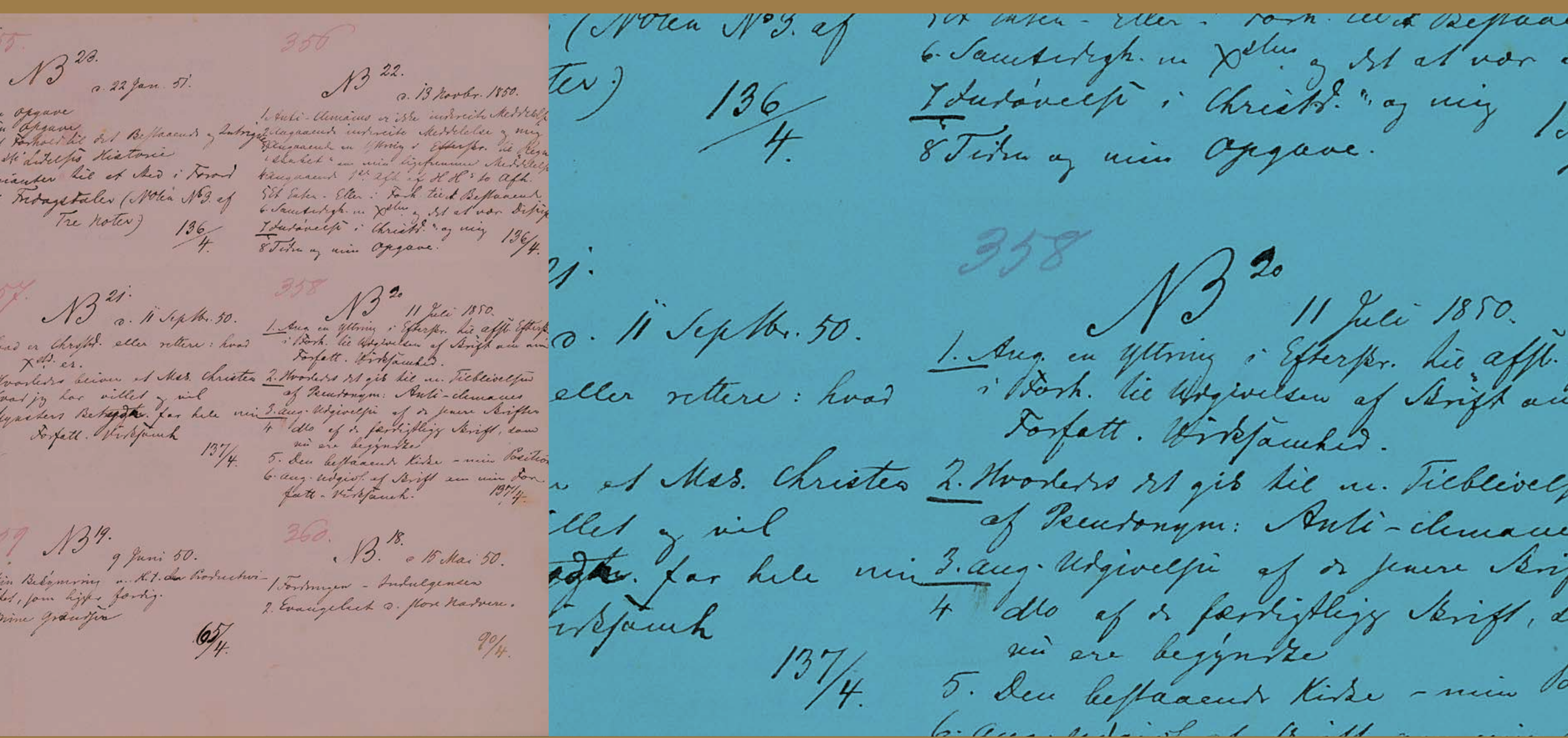
## PRIVATE EYE

He wore boots of special design with inlaid cork, which was no doubt added to help protect his weak legs. In addition, these boots must have been completely practical for the brilliant »private eye« who sneaked silently through his city. It's hardly a coincidence that he called the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius Haufniensis: the vigilant Copenhagener. He loved to disappear into the crowd and leave his cares behind. He wrote this to his sister-in-law Henriette in 1847:

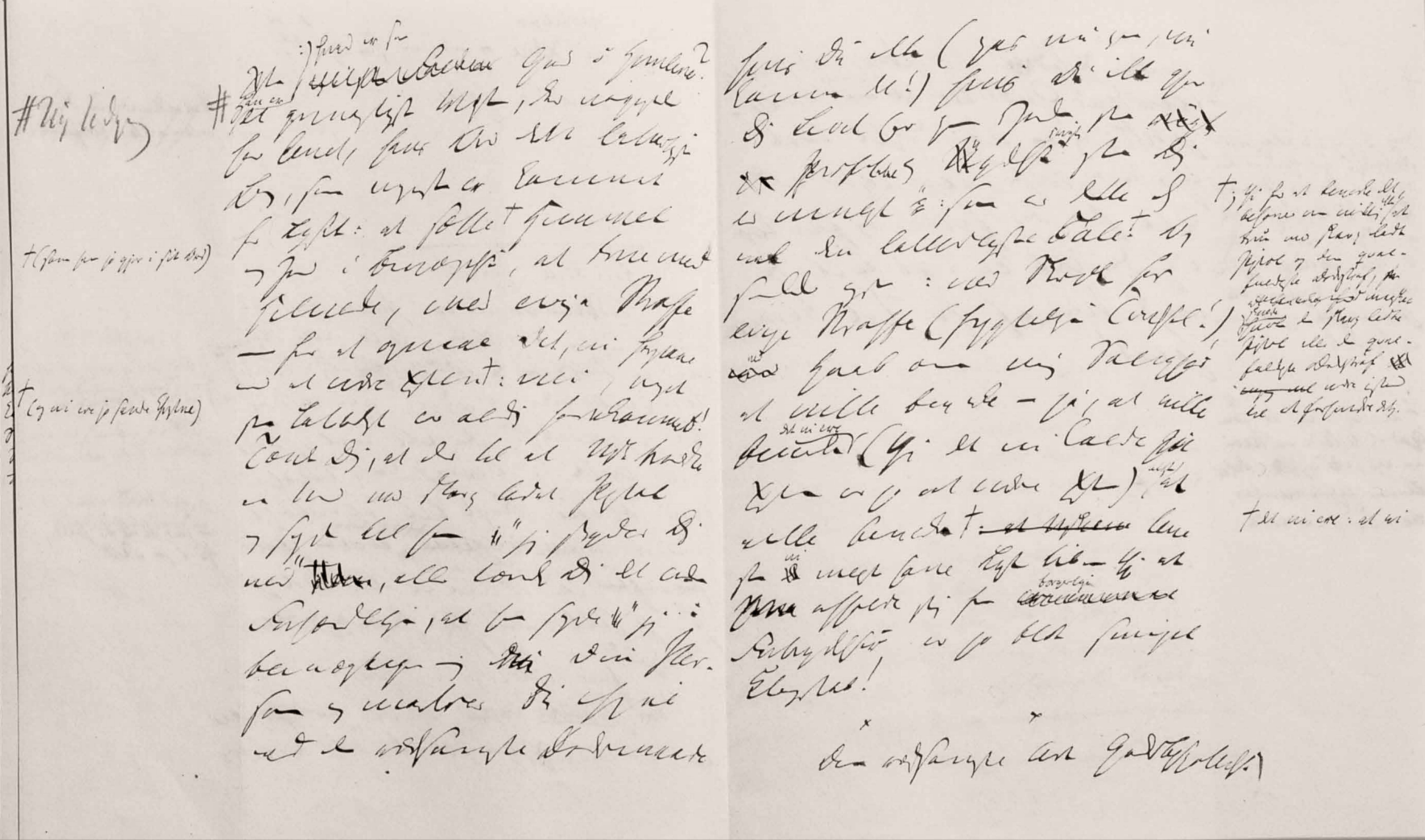
Above all, do not lose the desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness; I have walked myself into my best thoughts and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it. (...) Thus, if one just keeps on walking, everything will be all right.

## THE STREET PREACHER

Kierkegaard liked to take his walking companions by the arm, which gave the walk a kind of intimacy. Just as he brought the lights and sounds of the city to books, he also practiced his understanding of existence out in the city. He was a Danish street preacher before the concept existed, a practitioner of democracy before democracy was established in Denmark. But it wasn't easy to keep in step with him. Because of his physical awkwardness and his lively gait, his walking companions risked either being pushed up against the buildings and into the stairwells on the one side, or being pushed into the open gutters on the other side. He was a spirit out for a walk, a dialectical spirit – and thus the zig-zag on the streets. The fact that he gesticulated with a walking cane and suddenly crossed the street to avoid direct sunlight made it even more difficult to avoid detection when accompanying the genius on his walks.







# CRITIQUE AND DIAGNOSIS THE SYSTEM AND ANXIETY

## THE SYSTEM AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Repetition and Fear and Trembling are formed as psychological dramatizations of the Old Testament stories of Job and Abraham, whose fates were shaped in the meeting with a majestic God beyond conceptualization. With these works, Kierkegaard began a direct and an indirect critique of the interpretation of existence that G.W.F. Hegel had formulated in his »system«, the hottest philosophical fashion in the Danish Golden Age.

*Most systematic philosophers have the same relation to their systems as a man who builds an enormous castle but lives beside it in a storage shed: they themselves don't live in the enormous systematic structure.*

The critique continues in the works that follow, and culminates in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which satirically presents Hegel's followers as eggheads who have forgotten the concrete existence of the individual human being, including their own existences.

*Existence must come to an end in the eternal before the system is completed. There can be no remnant left over, not the slightest dingle-dangle – such as the esteemed Professor writing the system.*

## AMBIGUOUS ANXIETY

Long before modern psychology had entered puberty, Kierkegaard unfurled advanced psychological concepts that in many senses were Freudian before Freud was around. In his primary psychological work, *The Concept of Anxiety*, he presents his detailed analyses of the relationship of anxiety to phenomena such as freedom, sexuality, original sin, and history. He sketched the field of investigation in a journal entry in 1842:

*Anxiety is a desire for what one fears, a sympathetic antipathy. Anxiety is an alien power that seizes the individual, and yet he cannot tear himself free of it, nor does he want to, for he fears it, but what he fears is what he desires.*

As spirit, human beings are different from everything else in this world. The stone on a beach cannot be anxious, nor can a stork, nor a giraffe, even if they live dangerous lives. According to Kierkegaard, animals cannot be anxious, but they can experience fear, because fear is always directed at a concrete, definable object. Anxiety doesn't arise out of the blue, however. A person is anxious about becoming him- or herself, he claims.

*If a human being were an animal or an angel, he wouldn't feel anxiety. But because he is a synthesis, he can be anxious, and the more anxious he is, the greater he is.*

According to Kierkegaard, anxiety isn't just a negative phenomenon. It also reveals that human beings are spirit, but spirit in an unbalanced state. Related to anxiety is despair, the essence of which Kierkegaard treats in *The Sickness unto Death*. It includes a number of detailed diagnoses of the human desire not to want to be oneself, not to want to be the person one is constituted to be but anything else or perhaps not anything at all.

This is illustrated with an image of the human person as a house consisting of a cellar, a main floor, and an attic. Each individual is free to choose where to dwell, but most people choose to crawl around in the cellar, like a Dostoyevskian underground man, in order to enjoy a self-tormenting isolation from the world. Kierkegaard calls this desire to descend away from oneself 'sin' and describes it with the formula: *Sin is, before God, in despair not want to be oneself, or, in despair, to want to be oneself.*





Søren Kierkegaard at the Centre of the Universe. One of P.C. Klæstrup's satirical cartoons from *The Corsair*, 1846.

## THE CORSAIR LAUGHTER'S MARTYR

After publishing *A Literary Review* on March 30, 1846, it was Kierkegaard's intention to end his activity as an author and seek a position as a priest. The plan was disrupted, however, by the young editor M.A. Goldschmidt and his successful weekly newspaper *The Corsair*, which assessed the political situation of the day with sophomoric humor and sarcasm, and made fun of all the local pioneers.

*The Corsair* had praised several of Kierkegaard's works in glowing terms, which Kierkegaard found inappropriate. He therefore published a lengthy article which ended with the words, »I would like to request that I be chided. The indignity of being immortalized by *The Corsair* is too much to bear.«

### UNEVEN PANT LEGS

Kierkegaard had presumably envisioned an intellectual fight with Goldschmidt and his deputy, author and literary critic P.L. Møller, but ironically, the master of irony had miscalculated. *The Corsair* answered his call to be »chided« with a series of humiliating cartoon caricatures of him as a frail and hunchbacked oddball with uneven pant legs. The caricature of the master thinker with lopsided pants turned out to be a polemical work of genius, which tripped Kierkegaard up and made a response completely impossible – no one publishes a denial about the length of pant legs.

### KIERKEGAARD AS ADVERTISEMENT

In no time Kierkegaard had become a laughable advertisement for *The Corsair*. Copenhagen had been a source of his daily »emersion in people,« a provision for inspiration and mental health. It was now transformed

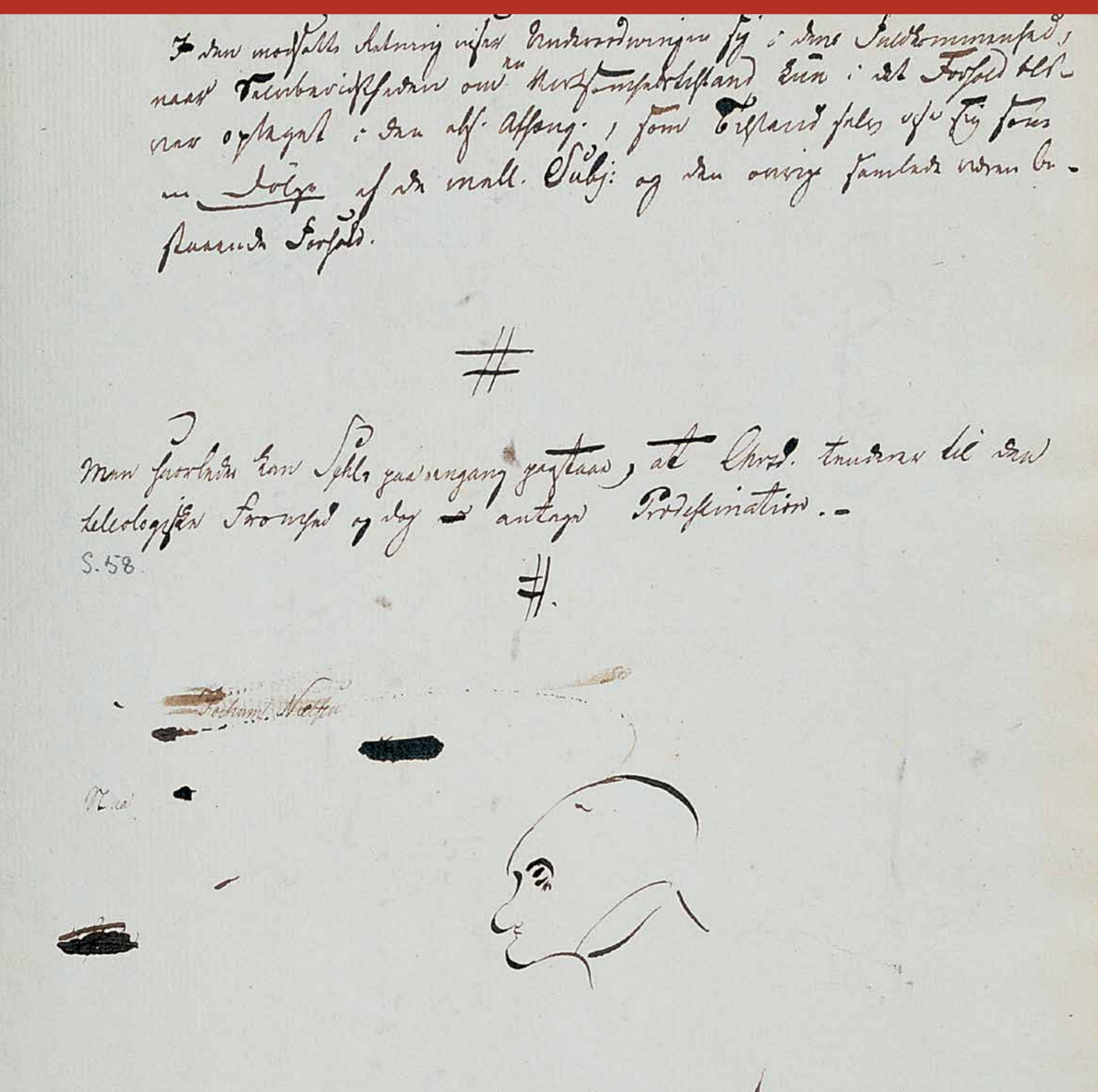
to a »barricaded little pit, without proportions, a rotting bog« populated by a screaming mob, whose stares and smirks accompanied the tortured scholar wherever he went. Kierkegaard, who had done everything he could to hide behind pseudonyms, was identified by the masses, who shouted »either-or« and »Søren« at him on the streets. It went so far that his tailor recommended that he find another place to buy his clothes because the negative talk about the pants he'd made for Kierkegaard was hurting the reputation of his business. Kierkegaard's journals abound with small reports:

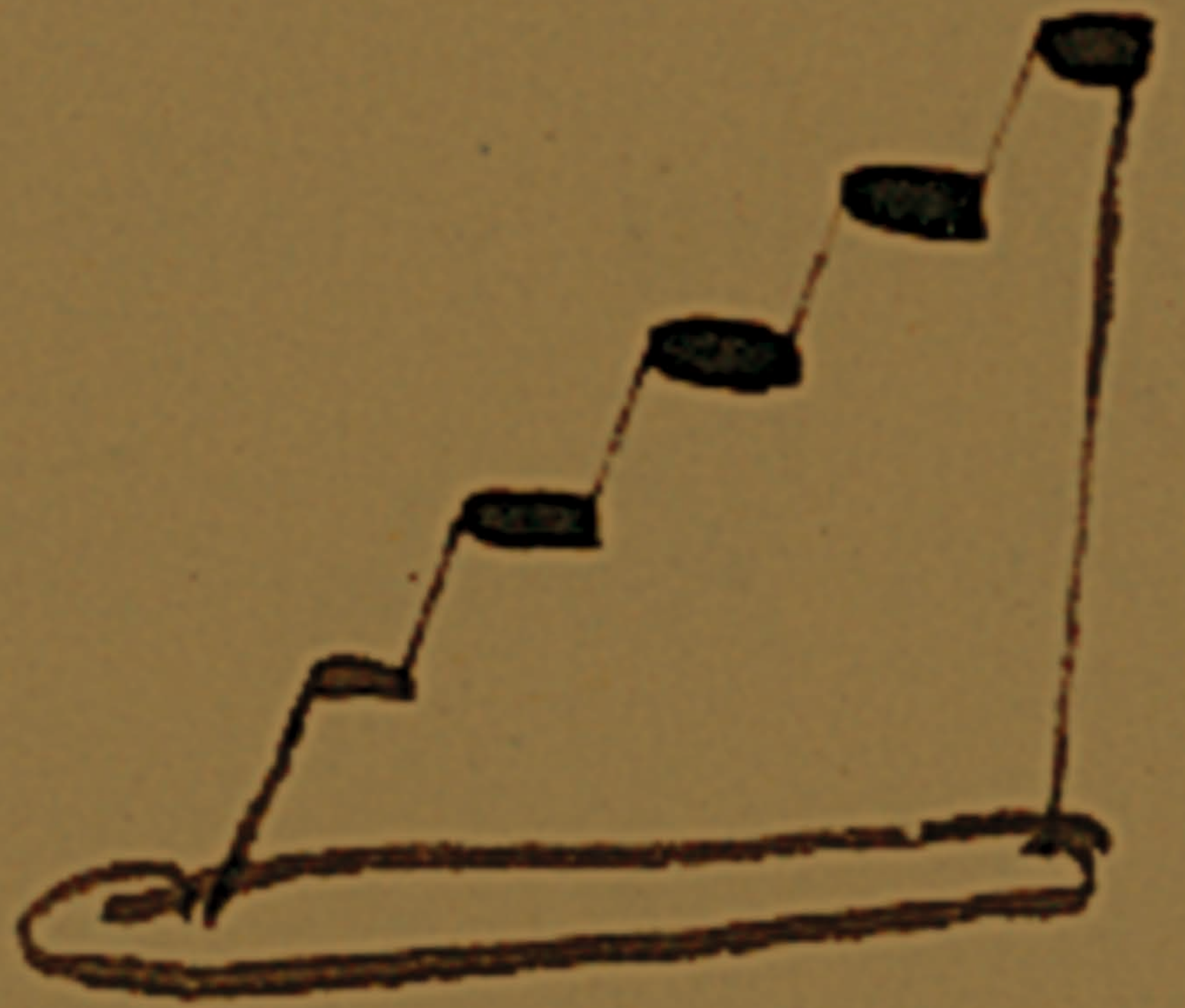
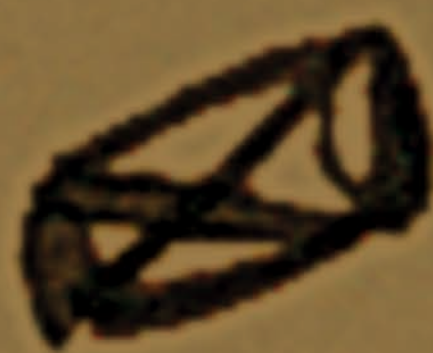
*Every butcher boy believes that he's entitled to insult me on orders issued by The Corsair; the young university students smirk and giggle (...). The least thing I do, even if I merely pay a visit to someone, is mendaciously distorted and repeated everywhere. If The Corsair learns of it, it prints it, and it's read by the entire population.*

### MODERN VIOLENCE

Kierkegaard's hard-earned lessons from the »school of abuse« taught him that violence in modern society had not subsided, it had merely become more civilized and had taken on a symbolic character. There are no longer crucifixions; there is laughter instead. Kierkegaard can therefore speak of himself as »laughter's martyr«:

*In the age of reason, »ridicule« is the most feared of all dangers; in our times a person can easily bear everything but being made a laughingstock, not to mention being exposed to daily ridicule: people shrink more from this danger than from the most torture-filled death.*





In the midst of journal entries about speculative metaphysics, Kierkegaard made these sketches, which are reminiscent of the drawings of an engineer.

# THE PRESS AND NATURAL SCIENCE THE PROPHET OF MODERNITY

In light of his experiences with *The Corsair*, Kierkegaard developed a general distaste for journalists. He was especially repelled by their lack of scruples and responsibility.

*God in Heaven knows that blood-thirst is foreign to my soul (...) and yet I would, in the name of God, take responsibility for giving the order to fire if I, first of all, with the precaution of a most anxious conscience, had convinced myself that there was not one single other man facing the rifles; yes, not one single living creature other than; journalists.*

With great foresight he understood that the press lives by creating and sustaining its own stories, which are only considered good because they are, in reality, evil. As a new source of power, the modern media reshapes the population into the passive »public,« which loves triviality and idolizes banality. The result is:

*Narrow-mindedness, fear of one's peers, embarrassment, gossip, backbiting, lack of an openheartedness to admit to having conviction (...). Spies watching family life, pot-watchers in the household. In short, anything that pleases the highly esteemed public.*

In mass culture, the voice of the individual disappears into the chatter of the times. It's impossible to speak or remain silent. Something intermediate arises:

*With this kind of chatter, all distinctions between the private and the public are erased and become a private-public chattiness, which corresponds loosely to what the public is. The public is a public audience interested in what is most private.*

Along with his attack on the press, Kierkegaard formulated a critique of the natural sciences. In his journals we find the following shot aimed at natural science:

*What excitement was aroused by the use of the stethoscope! Soon it will come to the point where every barber does it, so that after he's shaved you he'll ask, »Perhaps you would also like to be stethoscoped?« Then someone else will invent an instrument for listening to the beating of the brain. It will arouse enormous excitement until, in 50 years' time, every barber can do it. Then, at the barbershop, after you've had a haircut and a shave and have been stethoscoped (because by then this will be quite ordinary), the barber will ask, Perhaps you would also like me to listen to your brain beating?*

Kierkegaard's entries on natural science are like microscopes pointing in all different directions, illustrating his hectic distractedness that characterizes the modern researcher:

*Absolutely no benefit can be derived from involving oneself with the natural sciences. One stands there defenseless, with no control over anything. The researcher immediately begins to distract one with his details: First off to Australia; then to the moon; then into an underground cave; then, by Satan, up the ass – to look for an intestinal worm; first the telescope must be used, then the microscope: Who the Devil can endure it!*





On the back of a loose piece of paper, Kierkegaard has sketched a circle with a dot at the center and added a quote by Plato, in Latin. Translated, it reads, "God is a sphere, the center of which is everywhere and the circumference of which is nowhere."

# DEMANDS, RECONCILIATION, AND OFFENSE THE RELIGIOUS

## THEY SPAT UPON CHRIST

Already as a small child, I was told as solemnly as possible that 'the crowd' spat on Christ, although he was the truth. I've kept this hidden deep within my heart.

## GOD IS BOTH NEAR AND DISTANT

God is at once both infinitely close to and yet infinitely far away from human beings. / To develop a relationship with God is to embark on a voyage of discovery.

## GOD AS POSSIBILITY

The decisive thing is that for God, everything is possible. This is eternally true, i.e., true at every moment.

## TO BE PRESENT

Spirit will not be mocked. It gets its revenge, it binds you with the chains of sadness.

## THE ABSOLUTE

What is joy? What does it mean to be joyful? It is truly to be present to oneself. But truly to be present to oneself is this today, this to be today, truly to be today. The more true it is that you are today, the more completely present you are to yourself today, the less the day of trouble, tomorrow, exists for you. Joy is the present time with the whole emphasis on the present time.

## THE STILL WATERS AND THE DEEP WELL-SPRING

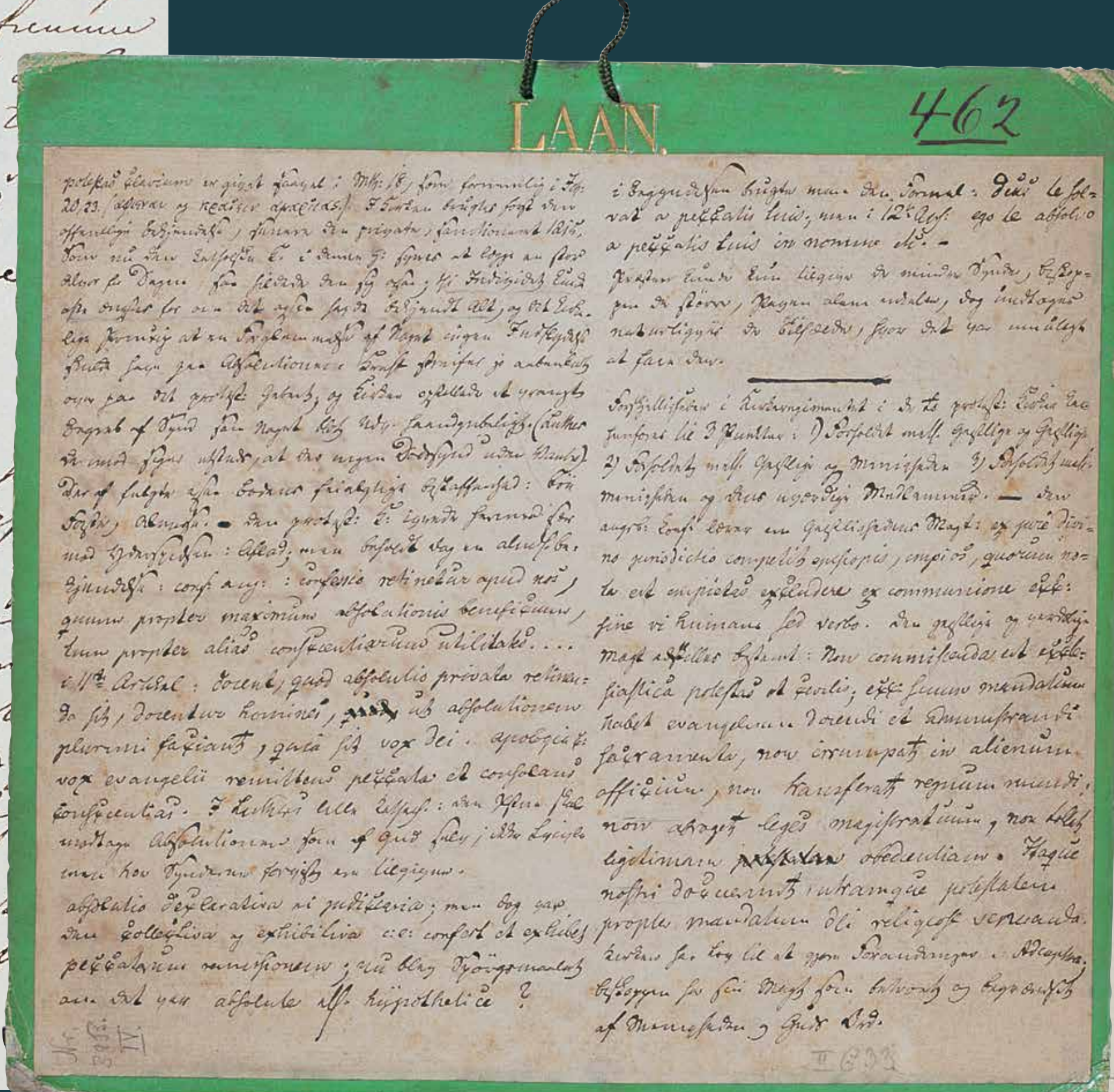
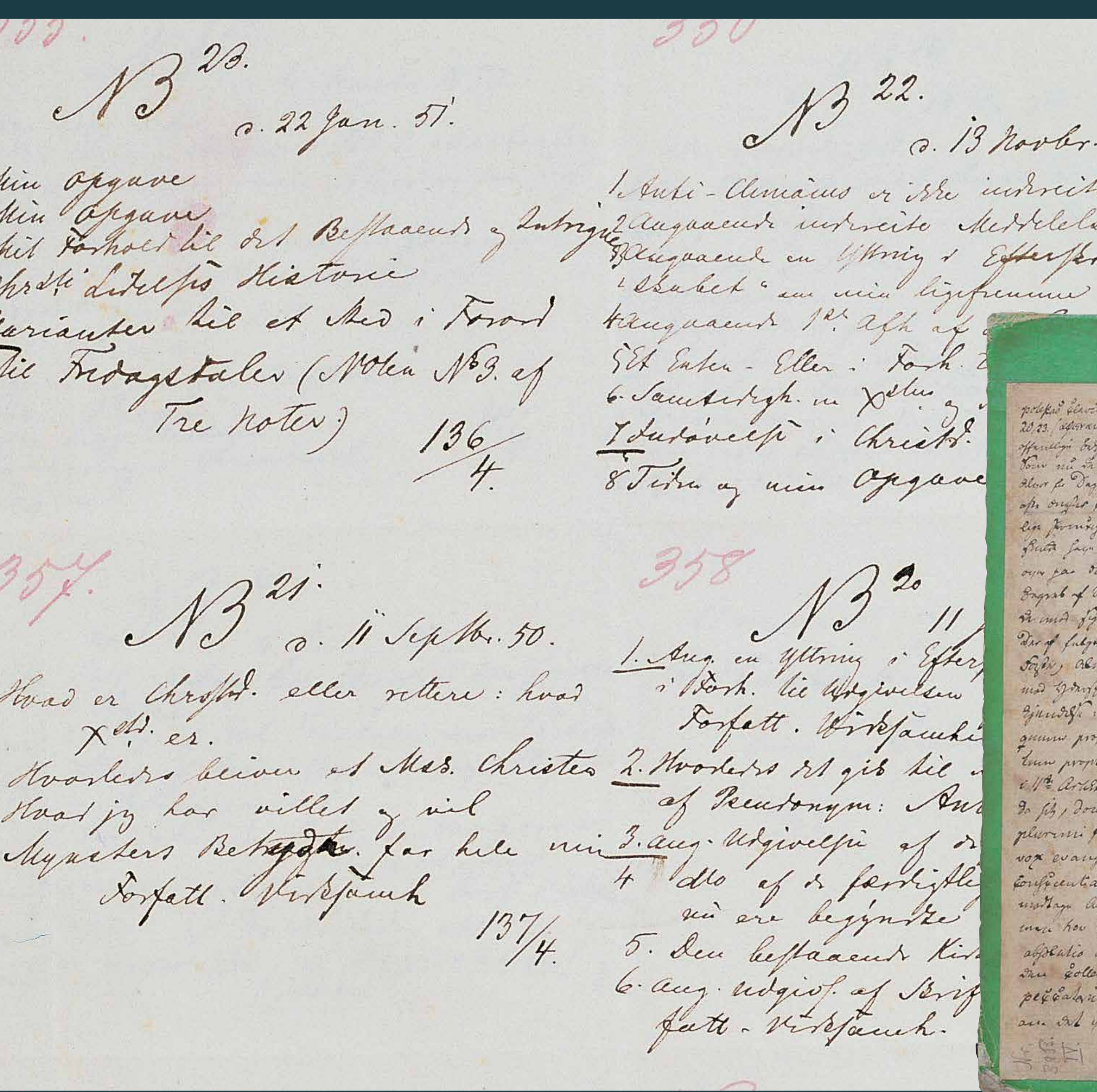
As the quiet lake is fed deep down by the flow of hidden springs, which no eye sees, so a human being's love is grounded, more deeply, in God's love. If there were no spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither a little lake nor human love. As the still waters begin obscurely in the deep spring, so human love begins mysteriously in God's love.

## THE SPEECH OF THE OFFENDED

The most ridiculous thing that can be imagined is (...) that a person, the same as any of us (...) except that is a poorly dressed person, (...) almost beneath the poverty line – is God. What has he done to prepare for his future? Nothing. Does he have a job? No. What prospects does he have? None. He can't even answer simple questions like how he'll spend his time when he's older, how he'll fill long winter nights. He can't even play cards.

## SELF-FORGETFULNESS

I get up in the morning and thank God – then I get to work. At a given time in the evening, I quit and thank God – then I sleep. This is how I live, though not without certain moments of sadness and melancholia, but for the most part, day in and day out, in the most blessed enchantment.





H.P. Hansen's drawing of Kierkegaard in 1854.

## PARODY OF THE PRIESTHOOD THE ONE-MAN REVOLUTIONEN

After a period of three years of literary silence, Kierkegaard again spoke up on December 20, 1854, and did so in such an alarming voice that Christmas peace was in danger. The occasion was professor H.L. Martensen's eulogy to bishop J.P. Mynster, who had been included in a holy series of »witnesses to the truth« that reached back to the time of the apostles. Kierkegaard protested in the newspaper, *The Fatherland*, where he called Mynster a »frail pleasure-seeker, who was great only as an orator« and presented his version of a »witness to the truth«:

*A witness to the truth, a real witness to the truth, is a man who is skinned alive, abused, dragged from one prison to the next, and in the end (...) crucified, beheaded, burned at the stake, or fried on a grill, his soulless body left unburied and sprawling (...) in some remote place – that's how a witness to the truth is buried!*

### POLEMIC AGAINST THE PRIESTHOOD

With this cannon fire, Kierkegaard commenced his so-called »attack on the church,« which began with a dozen articles in the newspaper followed by nine issues of his own series of leaflets, *The Moment*. There he polemicized with abandon and wit against the church and its worldly priesthood. One of his slogans was that genuine Christianity disappeared as it spread across the globe, and he insisted that the authorities of the church admit it. When the admission failed to come, Kierkegaard repeated his protest:

*Not mollified, but in even sharper terms I hereby repeat my objection. I would rather gamble, drink, visit brothels, steal, and murder than participate in making a fool of God. I would rather spend my day at bars and pubs, my nights playing cards or at balls than participate in the kind of seriousness that Martensen calls Christian earnestness.*

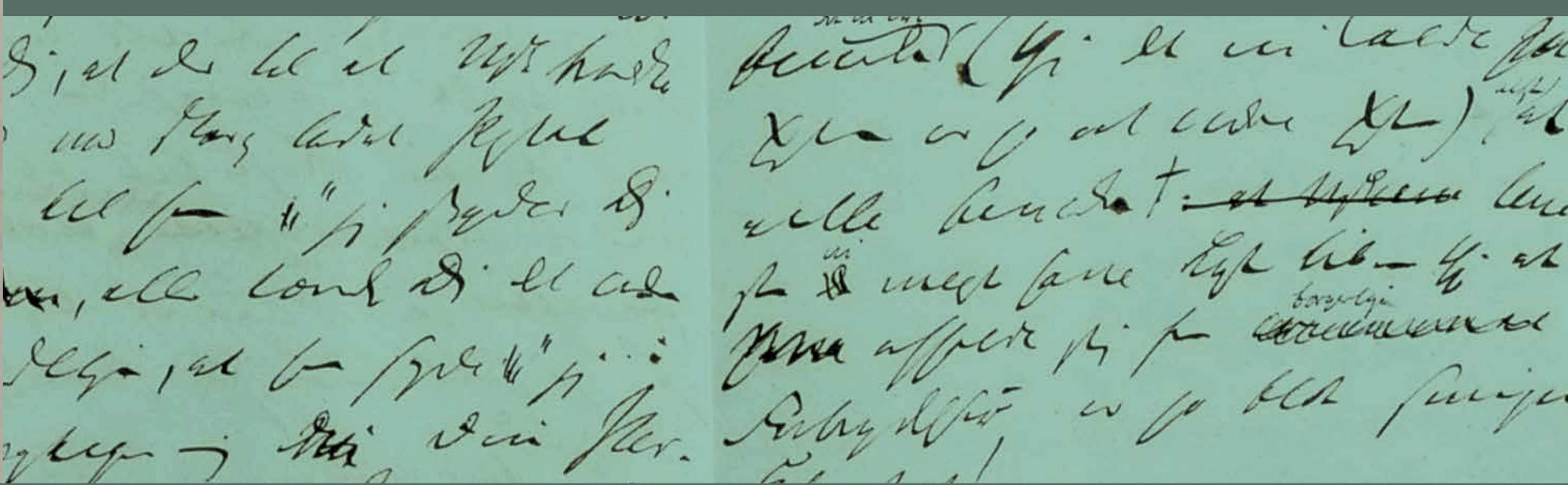
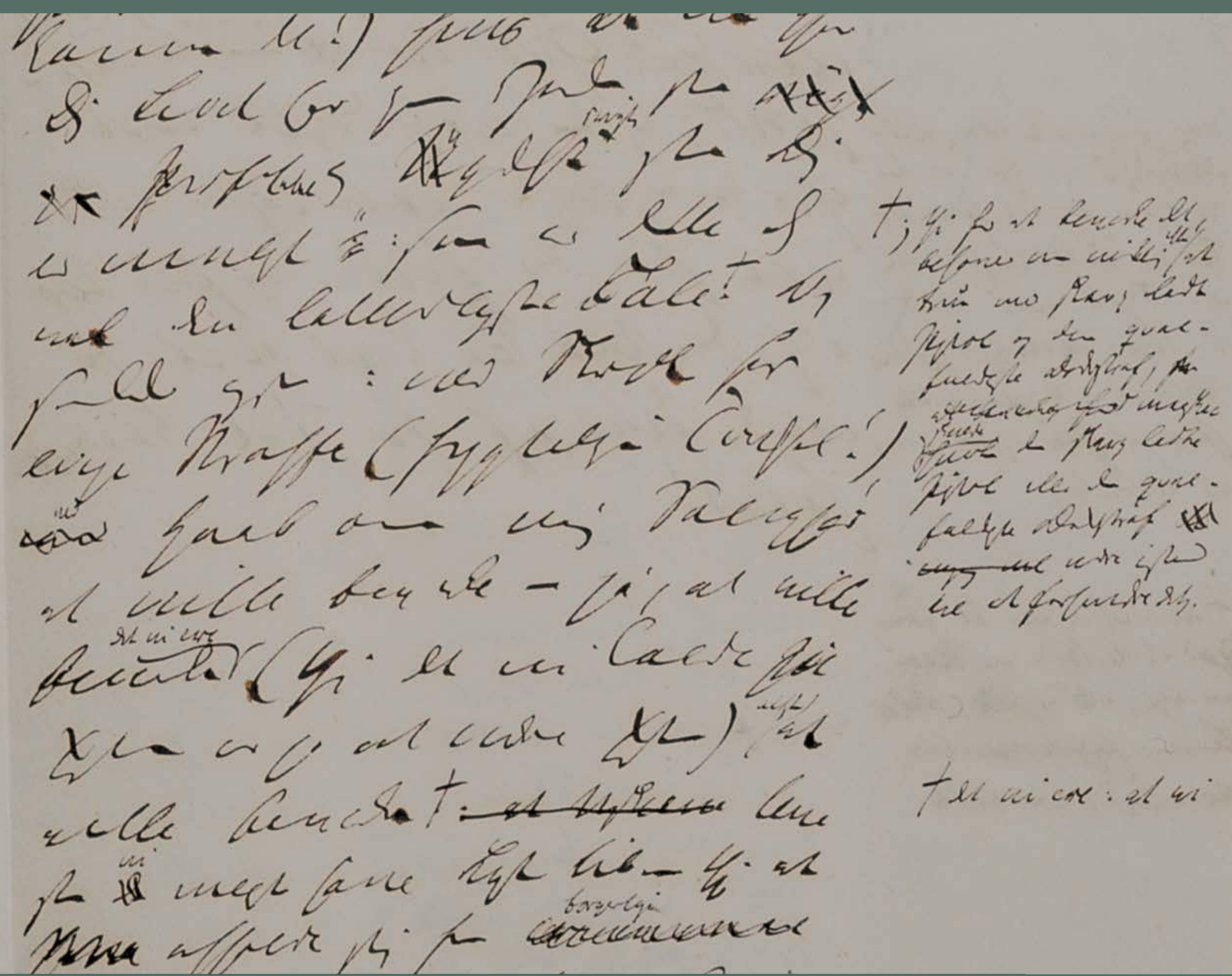
### THE ATTACK INTENSIFIES

In the course of the next few months, Kierkegaard accused the priests of failing to convert their tear-filled sermons on Sundays into existential praxis on Mondays. They were bourgeois theologians of convenience, who were primarily interested in idyllic parsonages, non-committal feel-good Christianity, and lucrative advancements. He charged the »clerical swindler union« of doing everything it could to preserve its privileges, even if the »state were to come up with the idea of instituting, e.g., a religion claiming that the moon is made of green cheese.« Or with merciless precision, he writes: »The priest, this epitome of nonsense shrouded in long gowns!« In the same vein, the church was said to be junk that really ought to be closed down or torn down, baptism amounted to nothing but a splash of water while confirmation was an embarrassing face, and marriage was a sleazy erotic spectacle.

### PAUL WASN'T A SERIOUS MAN

Church supporters were just as appalled as church detractors were amused. Kierkegaard had again managed to get laughter on his side, which hadn't been the case since his confrontation with *The Corsair*, whose pithy form he also frequently used. In the last issue of *The Moment*, we find examples of a group of texts called »short and sharp.« Among them we find this dialogue:

»Did the Apostle Paul have an official appointment?«  
No, Paul had no appointment.  
»Did he make a lot of money some other way?«  
No, he didn't make any money.  
»Was he married, at least?«  
No, he wasn't married.  
»So Paul wasn't a serious man!«  
No, Paul wasn't a serious man.





Frederik's Hospital on Brogade in Copenhagen.

# PATIENT NO. 2067 SICKNESS AND DEATH

Kierkegaard's one man revolution came with considerable costs – economic and physical. In early October, 1855, he was admitted to Frederik's Hospital in Copenhagen, where he – »the individual« – was registered as patient number 2067. A few weeks later, Emil Boesen had the first of many conversations with the dying Kierkegaard. Was there anything he hadn't yet said?

*No. Yes, greet everyone for me, I have liked them all very much, and tell them that my life is a great suffering, unknown and inexplicable to other people. Everything looked like pride and vanity, but it wasn't.*

## CAUSE OF DEATH

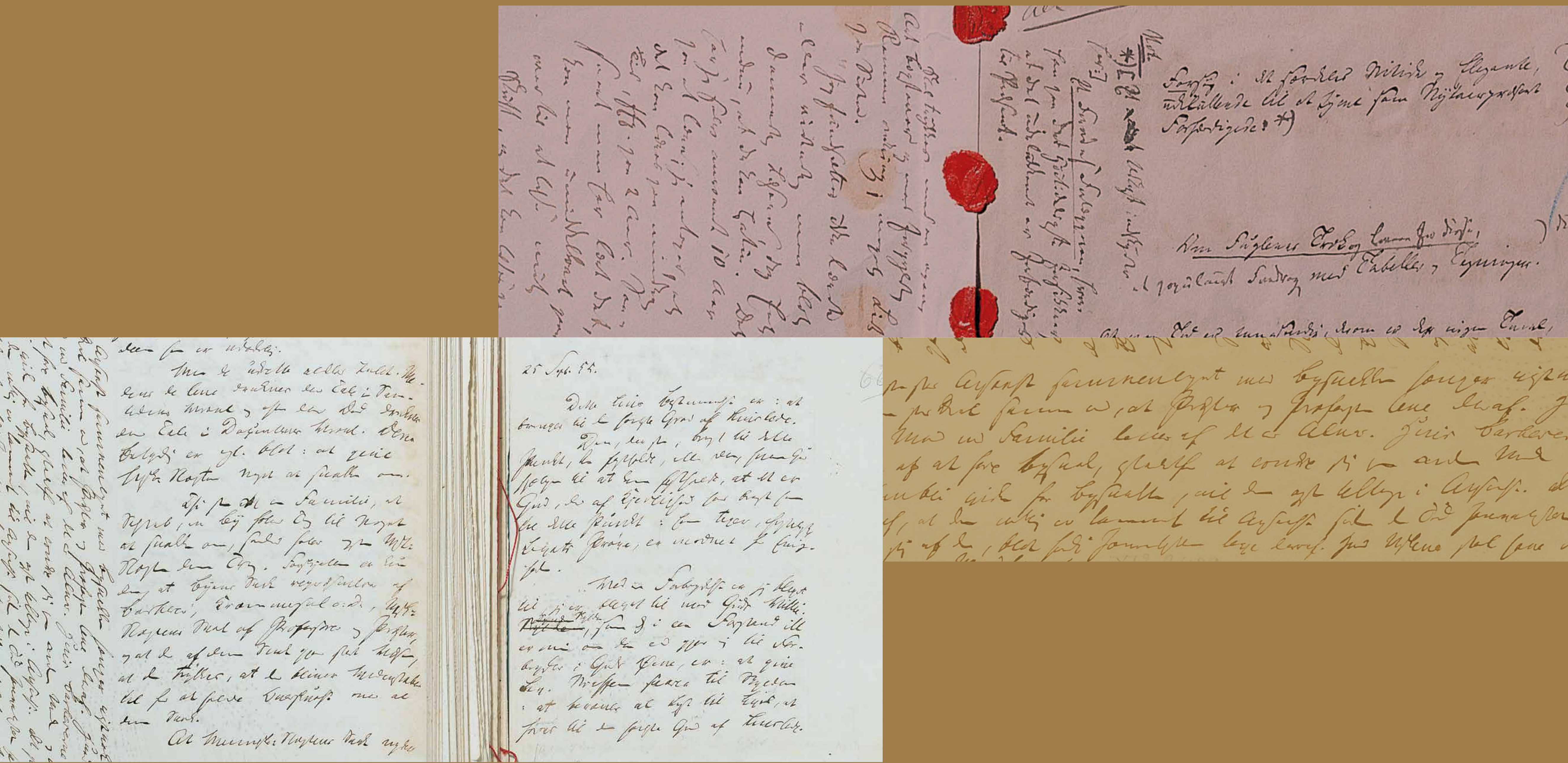
Sunday, November 11 was Kierkegaard's last. The cause of death is still a matter of debate. No autopsy was performed, presumably because he himself was against it. On the cover of the medical journal, someone wrote as a possible diagnosis »tubercul.« an abbreviation of tuberculosis, but a question mark was later added next to it. More recent investigations have suggested that Kierkegaard suffered from a neurological disorder called Guillain-Barré's syndrome or acute polyradiculitis, which is a nerve disease caused by an earlier infection such as influenza. The result is a paralysis that starts in the legs and moves up the body, through the chest, and continues up to the head.

## CHAOTIC FUNERAL

Kierkegaard's funeral on Sunday, November 18 was directed by his older brother, Grundvigian priest Peter Christian, in The Church of Our Lady, the most important church in the country. A huge crowd found their way to the church, including Hans Christian Andersen, who wrote to August Bournonville in Vienna, that the overcrowded church was chaotic and seemed an inappropriate setting for a funeral. »Women with red and blue hats ran in and out« he wrote, and added that he'd even seen »dogs in muzzles.«

A few hours later, Kierkegaard was taken to Assistens Cemetery just outside the ramparts of Copenhagen and buried at the family plot. There, his nephew Henrik Lund caused a scandal with his protest against the Christian funeral just held for the critical Kierkegaard. The grave is just a stone's throw from that of Hans Christian Andersen and the Schlegel couple. According to his own wish, the inscription on the gravestone is a stanza from the Danish psalmist H.A. Brorson:

*In a little while,  
I shall have won,  
The entire battle  
Will at once be done.  
Then I may rest  
In halls of roses  
And unceasingly,  
And unceasingly  
Speak with my Jesus.*





Lajpau Janssen's painting of Kierkegaard, 1902.

# A BIT ABOUT READING KIERKEGAARD THE MASTER OF RHETORIC

»When it was a matter of boldness, enthusiasm, zeal, almost to the border of madness, what was this pen not able to present!« writes an almost resigned Kierkegaard in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. His literary art is, however, a story in and of itself. Kierkegaard's work was a real source of renewal for written Danish, to which he added an almost audible element of the spoken language. Like Hans Christian Andersen, he incorporated into his works the language he took from the streets, pubs, and children's rooms, all idiomatic, lively and authentic. Understandably, he asks his readers to read his works aloud so they can sense the »rhetorical« and »rhythmic« elements. And no one has written with as much understanding and love of the Danish language as Kierkegaard:

*I feel fortunate to be bound to my mother tongue, bound as perhaps only few are, bound as Adam was to Eve because there was no other woman (...) a language that (...) has a lovely, a winsome, a genial partiality for intermediate thoughts and subordinate ideas and adjectives, and the small talk of moods and the humming of transitions and the cordiality of inflections and the secret exuberance of concealed well-being; a language that understands just perhaps even better than earnestness – a mother tongue that captivates its children with a chain that 'is easy to carry – yes, but hard to break.'*

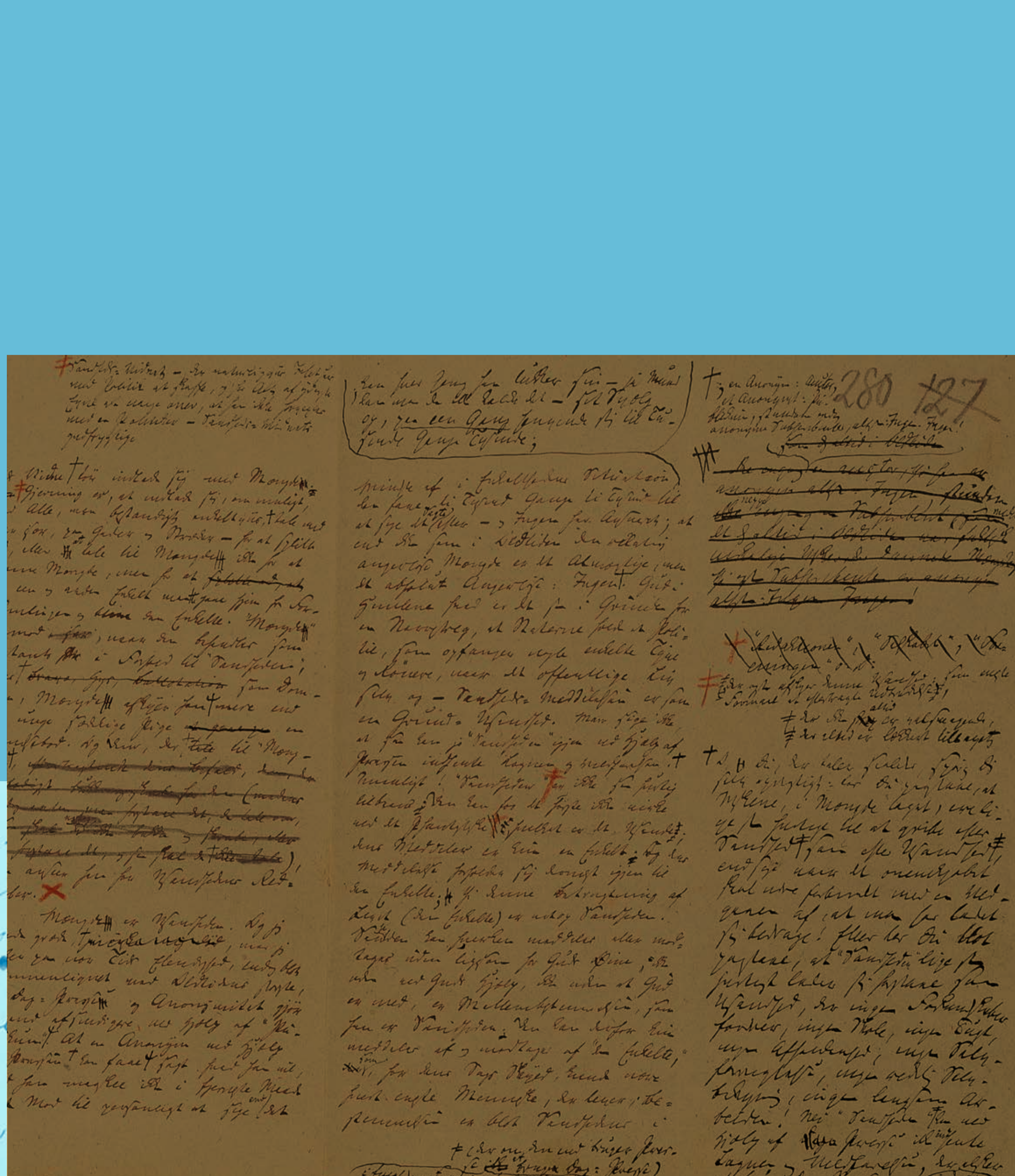
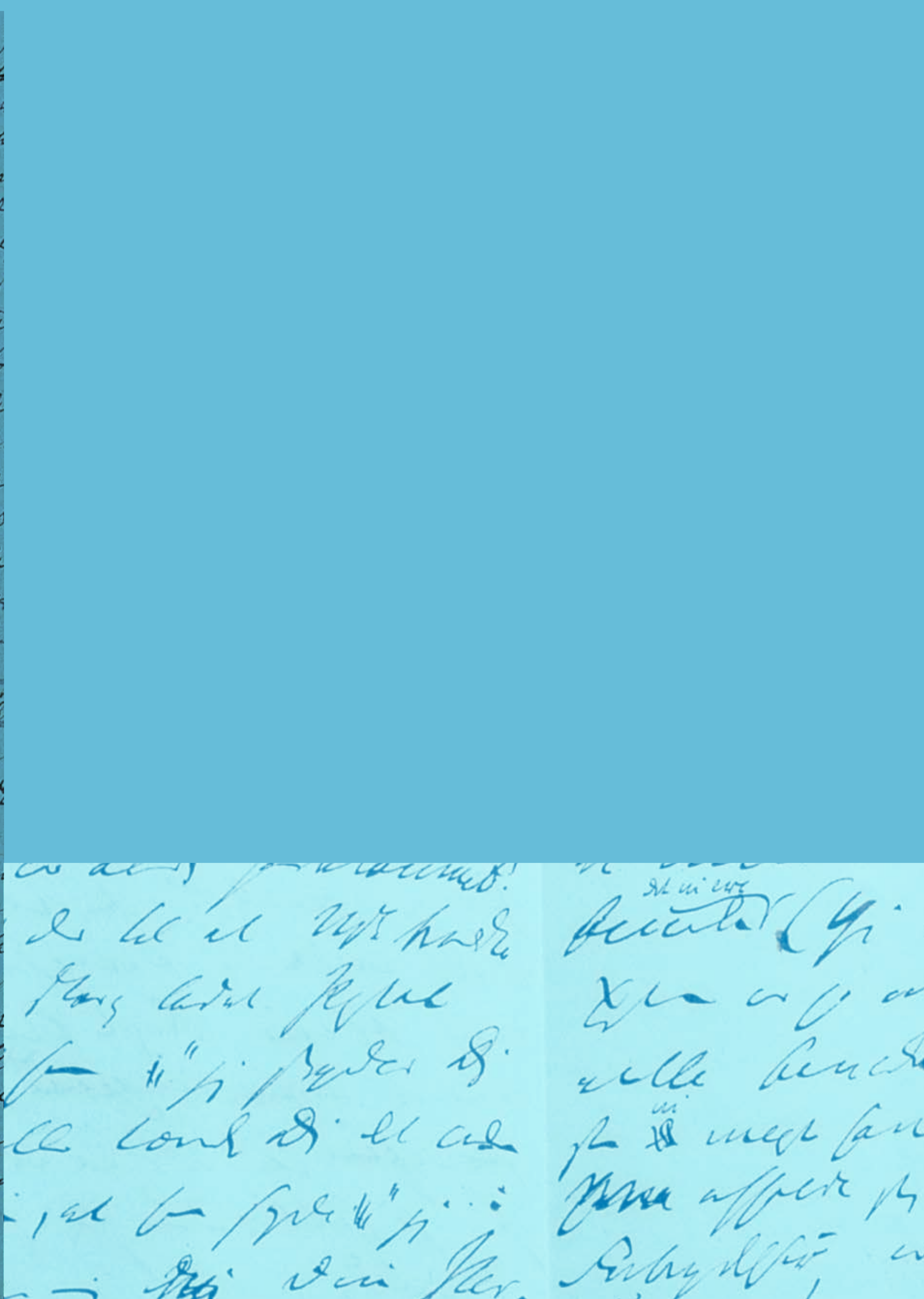
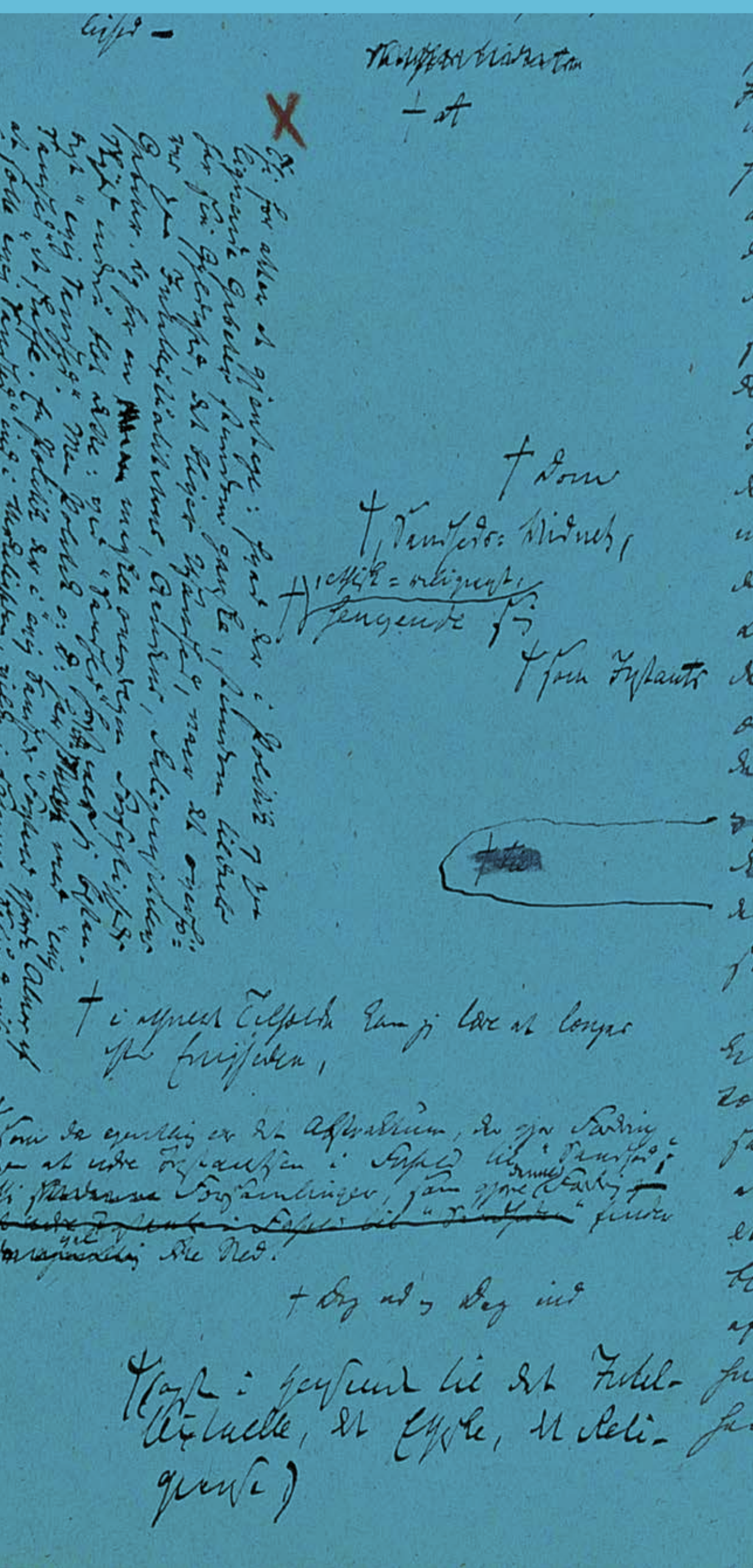
## WRITING DIRECTION

Kierkegaard wrote in the customary direction, left to right. But one could nonetheless claim with a certain justification that Kierkegaard's texts have a writing direction of their own, which doesn't always respect the principle of lines of equal length. It thus requires some getting used to on the part of the reader. When he puts pen to paper, he is freely associative, vivaciously dreamy, with a tendency toward flippancy, but he is also serious to the point of darkness and deep to the point of inscrutability.

Kierkegaard's texts swing seamlessly between concept and image, and he invests enormous rhetorical resources toward maintaining a dimension of experience for the reader, who is often addressed directly and intimately as »dear.« In his works, he switches openly between theology, philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology and is thus interdisciplinary long before the word was coined.

## JUMP IN AND SKIP OVER

When one starts to read Kierkegaard, it's a good idea to do what Kierkegaard himself does: skip and jump. One might, for instance, just skip over the parts that are hard to make sense of! One can also choose to jump to another work or into the journals somewhere, and perhaps even into his letters. And one has to jump a long way to jump completely outside of Kierkegaard's world because it's certainly permitted to read with the goal of an approximate understanding. It's far better to read him superficially than to stare blindly at a complicated passage of text and lose courage. Finally, it's not only a matter of *understanding* Kierkegaard. When one sits and reads Kierkegaard's texts, one can have the wonderful experience of being *understood* by Kierkegaard – and then all the difficulties disappear in the felicitous passion of reading.





The new Danish edition of Søren Kierkegaard's Writings, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, was completed in 2013. An electronic version is available in Danish at: [www.sks.dk](http://www.sks.dk).

# THE WORKS THE LABYRINTHINE AUTHORSHIP

Kierkegaard's authorship consists of more than 40 books and 40 newspaper and journal articles. In many cases, the works are published under pseudonyms. Alongside these, Kierkegaard published a series of religious

discourses in his own name, hereby signaling that he understood himself as a religious and Christian author. Additionally, there are a large number of journals or diaries that are not included on the list below.

## 1838

- *From the Papers of One Still Living. Published Against His Will.*

## 1841

- *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates.*

## 1843

*Either/Or*, edited by Victor Eremita.

- *Two Edifying Discourses.*
- *Repetition by Constantin Constantius.*
- *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes de silentio.
- *Three Edifying Discourses.*
- *Four Edifying Discourses.*

## 1844

- *Two Edifying Discourses.*
- *Three Edifying Discourses.*
- *Philosophical Fragments* by Johannes Climacus, edited by S. Kierkegaard.
- *The Concept of Anxiety* by Vigilius Haufniensis.
- *Prefaces* by Nicolaus Notabene.
- *Four Edifying Discourses.*

## 1845

- *Three Discourses at Imagined Occasions.*
- *Stages on Life's Way*, edited by Hilarius Bookbinder.

## 1846

- *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* by Johannes Climacus, edited by S. Kierkegaard.
- *A Literary Review.*

## 1847

- *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits.*
- *Works of Love.*

## 1848

- *Christian Discourses.*

## 1849

- *The Lilies in the Field and the Birds of the Air. Three Devotional Discourses.*
- *Two Minor Ethical-Religious Works*, by H.H.
- *The Sickness unto Death* by Anti-Climacus, edited by S. Kierkegaard.
- »The High Priest« – »The Tax Collector« – »The Woman Who Sinned«: *Three Discourses at Friday Communion.*

## 1850

- *Practice in Christianity* by Anti-Climacus, published by S. Kierkegaard.
- *An Edifying Discourse.*

## 1851

- *On My Work as an Author.*
- *Two Discourses at Friday Communion.*
- *For Self-Examination. Recommended to the Present Age*

## 1855

- *This Must be Said, So Let It Be Said.*
- *The Moment nos. 1–10.*

## POSTHUMOUS PUBLISHED WORKS

- *The Point of View for My Work as an Author. A Straightforward Account and Report to History, 1859.*
- *Judge for Yourself. A For Self-Examination, Recommended to the Present Age. Second Series, 1876.*
- *The Book on Adler, 1916.*

The exhibition »Søren Kierkegaard – The Global Dane« is supported by the Danish Ministry of Culture in cooperation with the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre and the Program Committee for KEIRKEGAARD 2013 under Golden Days.

The text for plaques were written by Joakim Garff, lic.theol., Research Professor at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre. Garff is co-editor of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* and has served as president of the Søren Kierkegaard Society. Garff is author of *Regines Gåde* [Regine's Riddle] (2013) and *SAK. Søren Aabye Kierkegaard. En Biografi* [SAK. Søren Kierkegaard. A Biography] (2000), which has been translated into numerous languages. Translation: Brian Söderquist.

Photographs of Kierkegaard's manuscripts are from *Skriftbilleder. Søren Kierkegaards journaler, notesbøger, hæfter, ark, lapper og strimler* [Written Images: Søren Kierkegaard's Journals, Notebooks, Booklets, Sheets, Scraps, and Slips of Paper], Copenhagen: Gads Press, 1996.

Other photographs: The Museum of National History, Frederiksborg Castle; The photography studios at the Danish National Library, The National Gallery of Denmark, Museum of Copenhagen, and Adam Garff.

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