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Poetry and uncertainty in Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*

Does some privileged relationship exist between poetry and uncertainty? In a first attempt to answer this question, we might turn to the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, which force the reader into continual confrontation with the topos of uncertainty. In this paper, I will examine the ways in which an aesthetics of uncertainty are staged in his 1843 text *Either-Or*, with particular attention to instances in which poetic language and metaphors are used to bring uncertainty to the fore. Cordelia, the blushing, uncertain maid of “The Seducer’s Diary,” is described as “dithyrambic in demeanor.” Earlier in Part I, in one of many examples of the interplay between poetry and uncertainty in the text, we find the well-known fragment titled “Either/Or,” nested within the “Either” of the larger *Either/Or*; I would argue that this fragment obtains not through its clever sophistry, which denies any possibility of uncertainty (because, according to A, choice is meaningless, and all ends in certain regret), but rather through its invocation of lyrical, quasi-catechismal language. Finally, we might consider *Either/Or*’s uncertainties and moments of contingency in the context of Johannes the Seducer’s parting words. At the close of the first half of the text (and thus, as close as possible to the caesura between the two halves of the text), Johannes muses whether it might be possible to “poetize oneself out [“*digte sig ud*”] of a girl” What a strange locution, this “poetize.” I contend that the act of “poetization” is an act that both creates and annihilates uncertainty. This talk will explore the multiple ways in which this text addresses various notions of uncertainty and its relationship to “living poetically,” “poetization,” and the formal structures of poetic language.