

# Saving the Text (Kierkegaard): a double sestina

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## Inscriptions

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I held out *Either/Or* to the world in my left hand, and in my right  
the *Two Edifying Discourses*; but all, or as good as all, grasped with their  
right what I held in my left. I had made up my mind before God what I  
should do: I staked my case on the *Two Edifying Discourses*; but I  
understood perfectly that only very few understood them.

Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work  
As an Author*

There is no precautionary measure – ever – that is capable of  
guaranteeing in an absolute sense the earnestness of a given discourse.

Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparté: conceptions et morts de Søren  
Kierkegaard*

No hope for those who cannot learn to read.  
Salvation brooks no ‘on the other hand’.  
It’s up to you: peruse *The Point of View  
For My Work As an Author*, then decide  
As you see fit. No get-out clauses left,  
Just the one choice: shall faith now set you right?

Yet it’s the works I proffered with my right  
Hand that you crafty scanners choose to read  
Ironically, or take up with your left,  
And so ensure you’ve artful ploys in hand  
For that unending failure to decide  
When called upon that marks the aesthete’s view.

Then you retort: ‘but every shift of view  
In texts like *Either/Or* shows we’ve the right,  
As clued-up readers, sometimes to decide  
Against your wishes. We may choose to read  
In ways that don’t come down to second-hand  
Renditions of some study-guide you’ve left

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To wean us deconstructors off our left-  
 Field strategies, our *n'y a pas d'hors-texte* view,  
 And do God's work by taking us in hand,  
 Straight talk at last'. I say: just get me right  
 On my own edifying terms, just read  
 Those boring works of mine, and then decide

As Knights of Faith apply the term 'decide',  
 Not you aesthetic types. You'll find I've left  
 The life-path stages marked up plain to read  
 For those who've come around to either view,  
 The strivers for redemption on my right,  
 The skivers chancing all on the left hand

Of exegetic darkness. Got to hand  
 It to them, those close-readers who decide  
 To call my textual bluff; that's me all right,  
 Read strictly *à la lettre*, but they're left  
 Up dead-end creek if we switch to the view-  
 Point of an author charged, like me, to read

God's purposes as those alone can read  
 Who pass beyond that stage. We know first-hand  
 What aesthetes come at merely with a view  
 To rigging things so they can pre-decide  
 Life's greatest question in the one way left  
 To ironists. They tell me: 'serves you right

If we stick up for every reader's right  
 To quit the passive ways you'd have us read,  
 To set aside those study-notes you left  
 And then, thus liberated, try our hand  
 At letting text and readership decide  
 What novel sense-horizons greet our view?.

But here's my question: how can 'point of view'  
 Denote a view from nowhere, one that's right  
 For nobody except as they decide,  
 Like my young man in *Either/Or*, to read  
 Their own life-choices as they might a hand  
 At cards or some quixotic fiction left

To its own plot-devices. That's a left-  
 Hand take on right-hand business, or a view,  
 Like Hegel's, aimed at giving *Geist* a hand  
 With some high-rise Philosophy of Right  
 While squatting in its shade content to read  
 Whatever trash the *Zeitgeist* might decide.

You'll say I let my pseudonyms decide  
On many things, so there's a lot of left-  
In trickery that gives you scope to read  
The whole job-lot – not least *The Point of View*,  
That trusty *vade mecum* – as a right  
Royal licence for such textual sleights of hand.

That's why you say it's downright underhand,  
My ruse for getting readers to decide  
In my deictic place. So talk of right-  
Hand direct discourse as opposed to left-  
Hand subterfuge sounds like the God's-eye view  
Of one who wills his readers not to read.

No tricks: I showed my hand; no ruses left.  
They too decide who take the aesthete's view.  
Their right, to choose damnation as they read.