THE REED

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10th Anniversary

Northfield, Minnesota

Editors' Note

It seems fitting that this, the 10th anniversary issue of *The Reed*, should mark a number of milestones. Not long after the publication of our 2006 issue, the Howard V. and Edna H. Hong Kierkegaard Library here at St. Olaf College celebrated its 30th anniversary. To mark the occasion, the college dedicated Finholt House as a residence for Kierkegaard scholars studying long-term at the Kierkegaard Library. Although the student authors featured in these pages are not yet so established as to take up residence in Finholt, their enthusiasm for existentialism in general and, in this issue, for Kierkegaard in particular bodes well for the continued study of Kierkegaard and existentialism at St. Olaf and throughout academia.

For non Danish-speaking and beginning Kierkegaard scholars, advanced Kierkegaard studies would be vastly more difficult without the work of Howard and Edna Hong, who dedicated their professional lives to the translation of all of the philosopher's writings into English. Their personal Kierkegaard collection formed the core of the Kierkegaard Library when they donated it to St. Olaf, their alma mater, in 1976. We at *The Reed* were deeply saddened to hear of the death of Edna H. Hong '38 on April 3, 2006, at the age of 94. In recognition of her essential and inspirational work on Kierkegaard, whose influence on existentialism cannot be overestimated, this issue of *The Reed* is dedicated to Edna Hong's memory.

Finally, this issue of *The Reed* will be the last helmed by we three senior editors. Having joined the staff as callow sophomores (Greek scholars will recognize that the word denotes a "wise fool"), it has been our privilege and pleasure to work on the journal for the past three years. We have been pleased to provide a truly interdisciplinary undergraduate forum for the study and discussion of existentialism, and we are certain that, with the help of the rest of the staff and of our undergraduate contributors, *The Reed* will continue to do so as we move on to wrestle with the meaning of our own lives in settings beyond St. Olaf.

We hope you enjoy the 2007 issue. Our deepest thanks go to the professors across the country and around the world who helped to advertise *The Reed*, and also to those students who so courageously submitted their works. Lastly, we owe our gratitude as well to the St. Olaf Student Government Association for its generous funding of this project, to our professorial advisors, and to Cynthia Lund and everyone at the Hong Kierkegaard Library for their constant support.

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To Submit a Work

The Reed is an annual, undergraduate, interdisciplinary, student-published and peer-reviewed journal of existential philosophy published at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. We are constantly accepting work (essays, poetry, creative writing, and visual art) from current undergraduate students anywhere in the world. If you would like to submit a piece, please send it as a Word document attached to an email to thereed@stolaf.edu.

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The Afterlife

Purgatory

Like AA meetings, I'll begin each sentence
with what I'm ashamed of
and the things that I love: the arched back
of a married woman,
the grind and drive of Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song*,
how a Lexus can change your life.

God will show up like a parole officer,
to check pockets, ask if I've tried to leave,
if the wavering rain is His fault,
if I've let my blood run lukewarm.

After introductions, questions:
Will I have my choice of beige houses?
Can I salt my tofu, pepper my eggs?
Can I find the one-way streets?
Will it be London everyday?
Is bisexuality the way forward?
Will the gloriosas be dried out,
but clinging to color?

The shoulder shrugs,
the pauses,
the shifting of feet,
the mumbling,
they all just drone like crumpled phrases,
Who knows? Maybe then, maybe now,
Maybe?

That's where I'll be then, almost tripping,
taking the roundabouts,
pacing myself, looking for someone
who has a complete sentence for me...

Hell

I still can recite my *Glory Be,*
I was the altar server, the aisle usher.
I stuffed bulletins, I manned
the dunk tank at the bazaar.
and when I close my eyes here,
I swear these fires of Hell become a Pentecost of light,
the hissing and growling
a version of every language in the world.

I've convinced myself
that I'm pinned against Hell's ceiling,
so close to Purgatory
that I can hear their hived humming,
their pacing footsteps.

We're not the demons down here,
our cars broke down on the way
to confession.

I'm here next to the unbaptized stillborns,
the SIDS babies, the Communion-less carbon monoxide victims,
the teenage moms who clawed the fetus out.

I'm above Bosch's antlered beast,
above the axe-wielding, the stray spears,
the scoliosis backs.
I'm above where the laddered worker climbs.
I'm on top of the red sky,
I converse by screaming until my voice goes silent.

When the aneurysm flooded my brain,
the priest rushed over for Last Rites,
only to find me in a flat line,
but he still tried to absolve me
at the sources of my sins,
he touched my hands,
my eyes, my nose, my ears,
my mouth, my legs and feet,
he touched my loins – hoping
I held a breath in my chest, a word.

Heaven

For everything that lives is Holy – William Blake

But this isn't life, the oranges
won't drop to the ground,
wood won't dry out,
these baptized babies
will never take a step.

But now I'm slated clean forever,
lofted up and bedded down, left
showered and shaved
on Saturday afternoon for eternity,
but where is weary four A.M. here?
Where can I flea-market and coupon the streets?
Where can I barter and compromise?
Where are the hell-raisers I can look down upon?

Just one giant meadow here,
the *Day Lilies, Moon Flowers,*
and *Naked Ladies* are evergreens,
all the halos light the streetcorners.
We are compelled to saunter,
to smile as we wake,
when we pick something off the ground,
we must not look down,
there is no South, no valley.

There are spots on this hill
where the sun is too strong,
and I need to squint
when I walk outside.
But other times, there are clouds,
and I will gaze up at them
and wait for a bit of light.
I follow it,
imagine where it might
hit the earth, on a baseball diamond
where a pop-up is dropped,
a half-blighted vineyard, on the top
of a condemned apartment building,
or in the ditch of a major highway
where the yellowed grass is still about to grow.

– Joshua D. Kalscheur

The Great Gatsby as a Self-Stylized Existential Hero

The ability to craft and stylize the nature of one's individuality remains a most distinct characteristic of existentialism. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche reveals, "*One thing is needful* – 'Giving style' to one's character – a great and rare art!" (290) Such an art form would require determination, discipline, and an unparalleled freedom of the spirit amongst other characteristics. The infamous Jay Gatsby of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* embodies Nietzsche's self-stylizing existential hero. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the Nietzschean notion of one who truly 'gives style' to his or her character. I will use the character of Jay Gatsby to show that this great and rare art requires a supreme understanding of one's nature, a steadfast resolve for improvement, a sense of the tragic, and a tendency toward the affirmation of life.

In order for one to begin to stylize their character, they must first start by recognizing certain truths about themselves. But how does one accomplish such a formidable task? In an article titled "How One Becomes What One Is," Alexander Nehamas tackles Nietzsche's stance on being and becoming. He says of Nietzsche, "In general, he vastly prefers to speak of creating rather than of discovering truth, and exactly the same holds of his attitude toward the self" (76). The creation as opposed to the discovery of truth and the self will be very important when we examine Gatsby's particular existential situation. Aside from the methodology chosen in ascertaining truth about one's nature, we must begin to focus on *why* truth of the self matters to Nietzsche before we turn to Gatsby.

In the aphorism mentioned above, Nietzsche declares in the final paragraph, "For one thing is needful: that human beings attain satisfaction with themselves..." (290) There is a sense in which self-satisfaction and self-truth are intimately connected. There is also a sense in which the two are interdependent. An underlying current of the debate between satisfaction and truth is the notion of unity. Nehamas makes a claim of Nietzsche's stance:

Its unity, he seems to believe, is to be found (if it is to be found at all) in the unity and coherence of the contents of the acts performed by an organism. It is the unity of these effects that gives rise to the unity of the self, and not the other way around (81).

Thus we are to take from both Nietzsche and Nehamas's reading of Nietzsche that unity of actions is crucial in the understanding of the self. There must be a cohesive force that binds the actions of the individual to the identity of the self. We will now redirect our focus to an individual whose actions seem to posses unity. We now focus on a character whose attention centered around self-creation and self-stylization; we will now turn to Mr. Jay Gatsby.

Gatsby fashioned his existence in a number of ways and also for a variety of reasons. I claim that the unity of his actions enabled him to truly craft his character. He created his character working with virtually nothing to start with. As the novel begins, Fitzgerald's foreshadowing of Gatsby creates a general inquisitiveness in the reader. Upon meeting Gatsby for the first time the protagonist, Nick Callaway, is surprised by Gatsby's poise and manner. He reflects on Gatsby's countenance, "He smiled understandingly – much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life" (48). There is no question that Gatsby knew where he came from, knew who he was, knew who he wanted to be, and knew how to achieve that status. The narrator fills in the reader with the details of Gatsby's life, or rather the pre-Gatsby

existence. We are told he was born James Gatz. We are also painted a quite vivid picture of his quite humble beginnings. Here the narrator describes how Gatsby came about his name, position, and self-creation:

> I suppose he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people – his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that – and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old-boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (99)

I take Gatsby's supreme understanding of his own nature to be one of the four pillars that constitute Nietzsche's self-stylizing existential hero. Gatsby could not have even begun to fashion the multiplicity of his background into the unity of his foreground if he had not possessed a wellspring of self knowledge. The second pillar of the self-stylizing existential hero has its foundations set in the steadfast resolve for self-improvement.

Nietzsche says the great and rare art of self-stylization can be honed only "through long practice and daily work" (290). We are given even more insight into the life of Jay Gatz at his melancholic funeral. In fact only three mourners showed up; Nick Callaway, Gatz's father, and another somewhat random stranger. During the course of making the funeral arrangements, Mr. Gatz shows Nick something very personal that he had discovered about his son. In an old copy of Hopalong Cassidy, there appears a hand scribbled schedule from when Gatsby was a boy. The schedule reads:

Rise from bed	6.00	A.M.
Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling	6.15-6.30	"
Study electricity, etc.	7.15-8.15	"
Work	8.30-4.30	P.M.
Baseball and sports	4.30-5.00	"
Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it	5.00-6.00	"
Study needed inventions	7.00-9.00	"

General Resolves

No wasting time at Shafters or [a name, indecipherable]
No more smoking or chewing
Bath every other day
Read one improving book or magazine per week
Save $5.00 [crossed out] $3.00 per week
Be better to parents (174)

Mr. Gatz concludes this insight into the life of his deceased son by saying to Nick, "Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something" (175). It is obvious that the character of Jay Gatsby had been conjured up and constructed in the mind of Jimmy Gatz over the course of many formative years. What is important for the purposes of this paper is that we note *how* Gatsby created and stylized his character.

A steadfast resolve toward self-improvement means, in other words, an unconquerable determination for self-realization. In his article titled "A More Severe Morality," Robert C. Solomon juxtaposes Nietzschean and Aristotelian moral systems in an effort to highlight

Nietzsche's more affirmative side and dismiss the commonplace myths of his Nihilism. We can take from Solomon that when Nietzsche says Nihilism is necessary, he does not mean that we ought not to care about anything: quite the contrary! Solomon explains, "Nietzsche's functionalism is most evident in his constant insistence that we *evaluate* values, see what they are *for*, what role they play in the survival and life of a people" (64-65). He goes on to reiterate, "But on a strictly human (if not all-too-human) level, Nietzsche's ethics like Aristotle's can best be classified in introductory ethics readers as an ethics of 'self-realization.'" (65) The portrait we are given of Gatsby indicates that he would have adhered to the Nietzschean ethical system of self-realization. Once the self is realized, Nietzsche would say that "style" must now be added to complete the formation of the character.

The great and rare art of giving style to one's character appears to ring true with the old adage of "Putting one's best face forward." Indeed the two are of the same vein of guiding counsel. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche puts forward of the great and rare art that "It is practiced by those who survey everything that their nature offers in the way of strengths and weaknesses, and then fit them all into an artistic plan, until each thing appears as art and reason, and even weakness charms the eye" (290). And still with Gatsby's character, we see the self-stylizing existential hero exemplified. We note the way in which Gatsby created a quasi-factual quasi-fictitious biography of himself. We note his attention to detail concerning his ornate parties. And all the while, we understand why Gatsby has created himself in the way that he did: in order to woo the woman of his dreams.

One of the primary reasons that Gatsby fashioned his character in the way that he did can be found in his obsession with a woman. Daisy Buchanan, Gatsby's idealized woman, represented the goal or finalized product of his artistic production. The artistic production being his self-stylization and creation of himself. The goal being the acquisition of the girl. His drive toward creating himself in high society vehemently held onto the hope that she would be with him and love him. Upon meeting Daisy after a five-year hiatus, Fitzgerald describes the extent to which Gatsby had built her up in his dreams: "There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion" (97). All Gatsby's previous actions, preparations, musings, etc. had led up to the moment in which he would encounter the mistress of his dreams. Nehamas offers an interesting thought here: "The unity of the self, which thus also constitutes its identity, is not something given, but something acquired; not a beginning, but a goal" (82). Gatsby's goal was to stylize himself in order to persuade Daisy to fall in love with him. Ultimately the reader discovers how fickle Daisy really is; just one tragic story twist.

In a critical essay titled "Fitzgerald's Gatsby: The World as Ash Heap," James E. Miller Jr. offers a well-crafted metaphor from the novel to depict the tragic tone of irony. He says that "Gatsby is touched with terror at the discovery that the world is not a garden of delights but something of an ash-heap [...]" and goes on to conclude, "In a world become ash-heap, one's fate has no relevance to one's life: accident rules supreme" (248-9). The next pillar to the formation of Nietzsche's self-stylizing existential hero has its base lodged in tragedy.

A sense of the tragic in life remains a dominant facet of existentialism. This overriding characteristic also seems to apply to the character of self-stylization. Although Gatsby proved to have a tragic fate in the novel, his sense of the tragic was already fully developed before his

untimely death. As we have seen, Gatsby came to terms and dealt with the fact that his lineage was not prestigious. He had dealt with, what seemed to him, the tragedy of his roots. Through the power of his spirit and unyielding determination, however, he was able to move beyond the tragedy. Indeed Gatsby *chose* not to submit to the situation that he had been given. Gatsby *chose* to work his way up the societal ladder, albeit grueling at times, to arrive at a position of his own making. Gatsby's transcendence of the tragic leads us to the fourth and final pillar of Nietzsche's self-stylizing existential hero: the tendency toward the affirmation of life.

As we have seen through various interpretations, including both that of Nehamas and Solomon, Nietzsche's ethical outlook has been understood to promote a general positive nature with regard to life. He strongly encouraged the affirmation of life. All signs indicate that Gatsby would have adhered to this philosophy. A man of perpetual self-improvement, Gatsby had to have affirmed his existence on a daily basis. From what we have seen hitherto, Gatsby accepted the fact that to better his life meant to strive through daily development. Nietzsche aids in the capturing of Gatsby's particular situation, "It will be the strong, domineering natures who, in such a compulsion, in such a constraint and completion under their own laws, will savor their most refined joys" (290. Each step of the way in Fitzgerald's development of the character we note Gatsby's affliction for the finer pleasures. His finest pursuit was the woman of his wild obsession. He did not drink during his lavish parties. Rather, he threw such outlandish bashes with the hopes that she might happen to attend. Nietzsche says, "Finally, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how is was the compulsion of a single taste that was ruling and forming, in things both great and small" (270). Gatsby's single taste was for Daisy Buchanan. He focused the breadth of his efforts so specifically on crafting himself for her that she became his only sight, or goal, or taste.

For Nietzsche, he saw self-satisfaction as needful in order for the individual to understand the self correctly. Once the individual was satisfied in understanding themselves, they might even begin to stylize their character. A stylized character came from a profound understanding of one's strengths and weaker points. The ability to "give style" to ones character truly is a rare and great art. Gatsby was a master of the art of self-creation through the unity of his actions and remains a model of Nietzsche's self-stylizing existential hero.

– *Trevor H. Terndrup*

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NB: For the Nietzsche references, I cited the number of the aphorism in place of the page number to avoid confusion of differing texts and editions.

Art as the Cipher of Hope Amidst the Ruins of Subjective Inwardness and the Imageless: Adorno's Critique of Kierkegaard

Theodor W. Adorno once said in his book *Minima Moralia* that "[t]rue thoughts are those alone that do not understand themselves."[1] Certainly Søren Kierkegaard must have had this paradoxical statement in mind when he spoke against posthumous texts, "Posthumous texts are like a ruin, and what a haunted place could be more natural for the interred…art, then, is artistically to produce the same effect, the same appearance of careless and the accidental, the same anacoluthic flight of thought…"[2] If Kierkegaard's statement implies that both posthumous texts and art share the same interred coffin, and that thought is led to a graveyard of superfluous meanings, then his statement seems to denounce Adorno's polemic on art in *Aesthetic Theory* as a posthumous text. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* enigmatically positions art, along with its truth content, as caesuras to/and in its identity with thought. This pause within thought's identity with art, presents its truth content as an enciphered hope for what is not identical with thought: which is the non-identical. The non-identical is the truth content of artworks, and its caesural moment offers the possibility for a utopian hope through negative dialectics. In other words, art presents itself as a mimetic image of a *possible* enciphered utopian hope through dialectics; its counter image is the *actuality* of a reified empirical reality.

The image of hope for Adorno was not something that originated in *Aesthetic Theory* as a peripheral addition to his oeuvre; in fact, the semblance of hope is a constellating piece of his philosophy. No two texts written by Adorno best exemplify the image of hope through the semblance of art then in his Habilitation *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, and his posthumous *Aesthetic Theory*. The development of Adorno's thought from *Kierkegaard* to *Aesthetic Theory* is not one that shows any fundamental changes in his philosophy. Instead, Adorno's *Kierkegaard* is a response to Kierkegaard's inwardness subjectivity, the paradoxy of sacrifice, and the spheres of existence. Adorno constructs the aesthetic in Kierkegaard's metaphorically, ambiguous, philosophy through a dialectical moment that must critique subjective inwardness, sacrifice, and the reified spheres of existence in order to show, through the semblance of the image in the aesthetic sphere, an enciphered hope that breaks away from idealist constructions of reality.

This essay will show Adorno's construction of the aesthetic in *Kierkegaard* by critiquing Kierkegaard's subjective inwardness in relation to the loss of the imagery in Kierkegaard's concept of existence. More importantly, it will also show how Kierkegaard's subjective inwardness, as "objectless inwardness" constitutes "imageless" spheres of existence through the loss of semblance that Kierkegaard's spheres of existence lose their material comportment, while being reduced to a mathematical-rational conceptuality. Kierkegaard chooses to ignore the mimetic image in the aesthetic sphere, and instead posits a subjectivity that places existence within its own reflection. Adorno wants to construct the semblance of the image in the aesthetic sphere as a dialectical resistance to mathematical-rational conceptuality. In doing so, Adorno believes that he will momentarily disclose ciphers of hope amidst the despair of subjective inwardness. Adorno's situating of the mimetic image in Kierkegaard's aesthetic offers a better possibility of hope enciphered than Kierkegaard's disparaging subjective inwardness.

Kierkegaard's Subjective Inwardness and the "Imageless" Sphere of the Aesthetic in Adorno's Habilitation

In Adorno's Habilitation *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, Adorno states that

Kierkegaard devises three criteria for describing the aesthetic. First, the aesthetic means, in its more common usage, the realm of artworks and theories of art. The realm of artworks is developed and sustained through aesthetic deportment, which later on in Kierkegaard's terminology means, "sphere."[3] Here the aesthete uses art as a means of expression, which becomes through aesthetic deportment the thesis to the ethical antithesis of the "moralist." The significance this dialectical relationship has between the aesthete and the moralist is one which the aesthete is supposed to be convinced that the *becoming* of subjectivity starts with the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical. This proves to be what underlies Kierkegaard's second criteria of the aesthetic. In the second criterion, Adorno quotes Kierkegaard as saying, "The aesthetical in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is; the ethical is that whereby he becomes what he becomes. He who lives in and by and of and for the aesthetical in him lives aesthetically."[4] Adorno interprets Kierkegaard's statement as one that transforms aesthetic deportment, within the sphere of the ethical, into an absence of decisiveness in favor of pure immediacy. Adorno sees this dialectical shift in Kierkegaard's thinking about the aesthetic as one which is inimical to decisiveness; it virtually attacks art's possible decisive moment of critical reflection. But reflection still abides in Kierkegaard's aesthetic criteria, according to Adorno, under the communication of the subjective thinker. This is what characterizes the third criterion of the aesthetic for Kierkegaard, and that is why Adorno critically states, "[the] 'aesthetic' refers to the form of subjective communication and justifies itself on the basis of Kierkegaard's concept of existence."[5] The form of subjective communication in Kierkegaard's aesthetic is characteristically an existing individual interested essentially in his/her own thinking; existing as he or she does in his or her own thought.[6] Kierkegaard defines this reflective thinking "inwardness," and that is why Adorno says that for Kierkegaard the "aesthetic means precisely the manner in which inwardness...is manifested, since it cannot, according to his doctrine, become 'objective.'"[7] So for Kierkegaard the aesthetic becomes a form of communicating subjective inwardness-as pure immediacy-and "the greater the artistry, the greater the inwardness."[8]

Adorno carries his exposition on Kierkegaard's aesthetic into a critical interpretation of Kierkegaard's subjective inwardness. Subjective inwardness, according to Adorno's critique, becomes "objectless" in the face of subjective identity. Here Adorno aligns the aesthetic deportment of Kierkegaard's subjective inwardness with Fichte's infinite ego. In order for subjective inwardness to reign under pure immediacy, Kierkegaard must abrogate, and alienate, any mediation between subject and object. Adorno sees the Kierkegaardian move to alienate subjectivity and objectivity as an antinomical move that claims both to conceive of ontological meaning-or aesthetic deportment – as purely immanent to subjectivity and, at the same time, unreachable by subjectivity because meaning is transcendent.[9] The antinomy arises due to the importance of Kierkegaard overlooking that both subjectivity and objectivity are not ontological concepts serving the needs of the "projects" of inwardness, but rather, that both subject and object are historical concepts: they help to structure the very concrete conditions of Kierkegaard's description of existence.[10] Nevertheless, Kierkegaard ignores this pivotal moment of conceiving in subjectivity its mediation with objectivity, and instead, creates an

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (New York: Verso Publishing, 2005), 192.

2. *Theodor W. Adorno, Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Publishing, 1989),* 139.

antinomical subjective inwardness that claims to have both immanent meaning and transcendent meaning beyond itself. The result is that objectivity is lost under the hegemony of the subject; that is why Adorno states, "[f]ree, active subjectivity is for Kierkegaard the bearer of all reality."[11]

Certainly if subjective inwardness is the bearer of all reality, then no object could possibly exist outside the immanent reality of the subject. Consequently, all moments of objectivity get exhausted through the existence of a pure "I." This is where Kierkegaard's affiliation with Fichte's idealism begins to crystallize. For Adorno, Kierkegaard sided with Fichte in attacking Kant's "thing-in-itself" when Adorno quoted Kierkegaard as saying:

> Now that which is external to experience, that which collided with the experiencing subject like a solid body, after which each recoiled from the force of the impact in its own direction; the thing-in-itself, which constantly persisted in tempting the experiencing subject...this externality, this thing-in-itself was what constituted the weakness of Kant's system. It even became a problem whether the ego itself was not a thing in itself...He [Fichte] removed the difficulty connected with this 'in-itself' by placing it within thought, that is, he rendered the ego infinite as I=I...With this he infinitely emancipated thought.[12]

Kierkegaard's affiliation with Fichte's idealism is further exposited by Adorno when the thing-in-itself – the moment of objectivity – is no longer distinct from absolute subjectivity (e.g., a subjectivity spiritually transcendent from material concretion). By abrogating the thing-in-itself from the "I think," Fichte attaches infinity to thought by relegating it to the spontaneity of the absolute subject. In Fichte, absolute subjectivity conceived of thought as spontaneously abiding within itself – it never, within its infinite power to transcend objectivity, mediated with finite objectivity; instead, thought's undialectical relationship with finitude became negative infinity, an infinity void of all content. Kierkegaard, although agreeing with Fichte's criticism of Kant's thing-in-itself, criticizes Fichte for positing an attached negative infinity onto an absolute subject. What happens is that negative infinite thought becomes an infinite longing for meaning. Consequently, Kierkegaard says that Fichte's idealism amounts to liquidating a positive endeavor of happiness in favor of negative ethical "ought."[13]

Even though Kierkegaard's relationship to Fichte's idealism is somewhat dialectical in Kierkegaard's interpretation of Fichte, nevertheless, Adorno points out that while Fichte may have wanted to reduce objectivity to the identity of the absolute subject – relegating reality (objectivity) negatively to infinite subjectivity – Kierkegaard, on the other hand, wanted neither to posit objectivity as being a part of absolute subjectivity nor outside of it. Rather, for Kierkegaard objective reality is omitted from subjectivity.[14] Unlike Fichte, Kierkegaard does not posit that reality is merely reducible to a positive being that transcends consciousness. In other words, no moment of objectivity is simply reducible to the projects of absolute infinite subjec-

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia (New* York: Verso Publishing, 2005), 192.
2. *Theodor W. Adorno, Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Publishing, 1989),* 139.
3. Ibid, 14.
4. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Publishing, 1989), 15, quoted in Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), 182.
5. Ibid, 15.
6. Ibid, 15.
7. Ibid, 15.
8. Ibid, 15.

tivity; there is no World Spirit that simply operates within objectified reality in the Hegelian sense of Absolute Spirit. On the contrary, Kierkegaard completely abrogates Hegel's subject/object dialectic to the point where there is no such thing as objectivity; all there is for Kierkegaard, according to Adorno, is an objectless isolated subjectivity that finds meaning only within its own solipsism. There cannot be any meaning outside of Kierkegaard's solitary subjectivity – it is objectless – and that is why Adorno states that for Kierkegaard, "[s]ubjectivity, in the form of objectless inwardness mourns in its painful affects for the world of things as for 'meaning.'"[15]

Adorno further argues that for Kierkegaard any notion of subjectivity is, like Absolute Idealism, related to Spirit; but unlike idealism, Kierkegaard's subjective inwardness – as Spirit, relinquishes all objectifying moments connected with nature. Consequently, self-as-Spirit is, for Kierkegaard, separated from nature in its disdain of imagery.[16] The contents of all objects, the world, and nature are usurped by self-positing subjectivity into the self's own reflection upon itself. From this "[c]reation is reduced to spirit in the self in order to rescue the self from its fallenness to guilt-laden nature."[17] The self must completely annihilate any affiliation with nature-it must not see itself as a "creation," for otherwise the self would loose itself as Spirit under the power of nature. On the contrary, the only affiliation the self has is with itself as Spirit. That is why Adorno says of Kierkegaard that, "Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. This is Kierkegaard's axiom."[18] Kierkegaard defines this axiom of existence as "the self is a relation which relates itself to its own self." The self-as-Spirit no longer is ontologically defined within the context of nature; it doesn't exist, according to Kierkegaard, statically but functionally as it transcends the natural world in making reflection its own ontological substratum. This is where Adorno believes Kierkegaard reveals the mythical content of his concept of existence. For Adorno, to merely posit ontologically that the substratum of subjectivity is within the relation between self and itself-as-Spirit is to completely withdraw from a substratum. Any concept of relation says nothing additionally concrete other than how its elements relate to one another. Without a substratum the self-as-Spirit which "relates itself to its own self" is mathematically fixed within the macrocosm of infinite totality; functionally this macrocosm of infinite totality is hidden within the microcosm of Kierkegaard's self-Spirit. The Kierkegaardian self-Spirit becomes a fixed, mathematical "point" whereby all existential conditions are measured, and deduced from Kierkegaard's self-positing subjectivity. All imagery, all of nature, is suspect of making the self remind itself of how much the self-as-Spirit is a "creation;" imagery must be abrogated by Kierkegaard in order to give subjectivity the powerful status of creator. Imagery is liquidated, and it is replaced by a mathematical-conceptual system whereby Kierkegaard's concept of existence has its fixed point within a self-positing subjectivity. Kierkegaard's aesthetic is both objectless and imageless in its attempt to put omnipotence within a infinite subject. The aesthetic without images and objects are left in ruins.

Adorno's Construction of the Aesthetic in Kierkegaard

Adorno poignantly goes after Kierkegaard's objectless and imageless spheres of exis-

9. Ibid, 27.
10. Ibid, 27.
11. Ibid, 27.
12. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Publishing, 1989), 28, quoted in Søren Kierkegaard, *Concept of Irony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 289-90.
13. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Publishing, 1989)

tence by stating that the quintessence of imagery is in Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere. The contents surrounding Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere are not posited by imageless reflections of an infinite subjectivity. On the contrary:

> [The] unity [of all imagery] is based on its contents and not on the manner of its subjective constitution. It is the region of dialectical semblance, in which truth is promised historically through the collapse of existence whereas the "ethical" and "religious" spheres, on the contrary, remain those of subjectivity, sacrificial conjuration, forfeiting hope with the abnegation of semblance.[19]

Kierkegaard overlooked the dialectical moment of the aesthetic sphere in that, while the aesthetic may claim that the subject is what he/she actually is, also too, conversely, the aesthetic offers up the possibility that the image can have efficacious affects on subjectivity. In other words, the image in the aesthetic sphere offers itself up as a cipher of hope from the thwarted despair in Kierkegaard's ethical and religious spheres.

The biggest point in which Kierkegaard overlooked the logic of spheres of existence, in positing a mathematical-conceptual relation which separates the spheres into hierarchical stages of subjective inwardness (e.g. the aesthetic being the most banal and the religious being the highest point of fulfillment), is contained in the image of Christ crucified. Kierkegaard comments that the image of Christ-the image of his crucifixion-creates in every small child who hears the story, coupled with the image, an immense "anxi[ety] and sorrowful[ness], for his parents, for the world, and for himself..."[20] That is why Adorno states:

Accordingly, for Kierkegaard the original experience of Christianity remains bound to the image...[the image] endures dialectically: it is at the same time the overcoming of the demonic in nature; it is the ultimate image, as it is the ultimate sacrifice, before the image of Christ all images must "avert their eyes." His image goes beyond all art; it is "insignificant from the artistic point of view" and yet itself an image; thus it rescues the aesthetic even as the aesthetic is lost, and remaining paradoxical, opens the way for reconciliation.[21]

Just what is it that Adorno is trying to say here? What Adorno is saying is that Kierkegaard misconceived the moment where the logic of the spheres of existence has their concretization in the mimetic image. The example of the image of Christ's crucifixion shows that the melancholy often accompanying Kierkegaard's religious sphere gets conjoined in, and by, the aesthetic. Dialectically, just has subjective inwardness has its moment of concretion in the transcendence of the self-Spirit's relation to itself, heightened and elevated by the religious sphere, so too, does the religious sphere fall back into the mimetic image by the very act of abrogating transcendence. In other words, both the religious and aesthetic spheres pass into each other as conjoining forces – transcendence falls back into concretion, and the self finds its substratum in the mimetic image as both a sign of hope and a symbol of melancholy.

Adorno sees that hope needs to adhere in the aesthetic image least it fall into the melancholy of despair most associative with Kierkegaard's ethical and religious spheres of existence. The ethical sphere becomes despairing in that, like Fichte, the mere "ought" becomes an issue of command that compels the subject to inwardly transcend its own "creaturely" limitations. The reli-

14. Ibid, 29.
15. Ibid, 30.
16. Ibid, 78.
17. Ibid, 79.
18. Ibid, 79.

gious sphere's despairing compulsion is more paradoxical: while it drives the subject to obey an issuing command from something otherworldly (e.g., God), the subject, in turn, is compelled to transgress any ethical prerogative(s) that is/are deemed "right and just." In both spheres despair becomes objective when no objectivity exists for subjective inwardness. That is why hope must abide within the image as the image returns in Kierkegaard to abrogate the transcending moment of subjectivity in subjective inwardness' quest to liquidate objectivity. Hope is that which gives us the ability to anticipate the possibility that the problems we face in society could be eradicated. In other words, the evils that we experience cannot be simply thwarted through a positive theory of praxis; praxis itself must be ciphered in hope.

The despairing moments of Kierkegaard's philosophy come at the price of abrogating the cipher of hope found in images. That is why Adorno believes that "[j]ust as the isolated and enciphered letter [or image] is not subordinated to the total 'existential' expression of the author [artist], so in Kierkegaard's theology enciphered images oppose the existential sacrifice and in the midst of its abstracting annihilation grants the solace of their concretion."[22] By opposing the existential sacrifice, imagery opposes the objectifying despair characteristic of the immanence of subjective inwardness under the self-as-Spirit. In its opposition to despair the mimetic image becomes hope enciphered. Hope is enciphered because hope is still struggling with making itself known through the objectifying despair of the self. Hope itself cannot be made identical with subjective inwardness; hope only reveals itself as the non-identity to objectifying despair. As a moment of revealing itself, hope momentarily shows through imagery its reclaim of objectivity-it places objectivity back into the context of the non-identical. The force exercised by hope is one which gains momentum by its own enciphered existence; its force is a counterforce to the objectifying despair of pure subjective inwardness. Subjective inwardness cannot accommodate hope for a better existence, a better society, because it relinquished all content through its abrogation of objectivity.

Consequently, relation became the poignant force that allowed subjectivity to transcend this world by constituting only a reality in immanent reflection of the self-Spirit; this proved to be a nihilating force that undermined self-Spirit as it gave up both objectivity and imagery. The result – objective despair: the only objectivity possible. Imagery in the aesthetic sphere operates as the only counterforce to objectifying despair; it is the only possible theory of praxis available that cannot be wholly subsumed by subjective inwardness. The image, the artwork, proves to be the only force that can break down Kierkegaard's hierarchical relation of the spheres of existence. In so doing, the mimetic image in Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere is like a depersonalization of subjective inwardness without liquidating subjectivity. The metaphorical image of hope that best fits this description is, according to Adorno, like a person sleeping. And just as the person sleeps so he believes: "Blessed is he who is not offended but believes, who (like a child who is taught to say these words as it falls asleep) says, 'I believe'... 'I must have my sleep to maintain passion in the long run.' For in sleep passio [passion] obeys nature and yet receives the promise of blissful awakening."[23]

– *Christopher Rubie*

19. Ibid, 131.
20. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Publishing, 1989), 132, quoted in Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity and the Edifying Discourse Which 'Accompanied' It* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), 175.
21. Ibid, 133. 23. Ibid, 133-134

Authenticity in Nietzsche

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger identifies two modes of Being: the authentic and the inauthentic. In an inauthentic mode of Being, one's Dasein, or the experiential quality of man's existence, is lost among the Others. In the existential act of affirming one's own existence as outside and independent of the Others, or the "they," Heidegger finds the authentic mode of being. Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy also encourages the individual to exist in an authentic state, by overcoming the superfluity of the self in relation to the Others, and striving to become a purely creative being. In this sense, Nietzsche's philosophy has foreshadowed and influenced Heidegger's model of authentic behavior, and this paper intends to demonstrate how.

I. Authenticity and Individuality

The significance of the problem of existing authentically became apparent with Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God.[1] This declaration stimulates in man the existential anxiety of Being-towards-nothingness, and an absolute isolation. Without an ultimate source of definition that man once looked towards God to obtain, man is forced, by default, into creating his own value. Nietzsche has established the basis for the creation of an existential self-definition, attainable through creativity and the overcoming of one's self. What Heidegger establishes, drawing on Nietzsche's directive to define one's self, is a model for living a life in the absence of God.[2]

Regardless of whether Dasein is in an authentic or inauthentic state, by simply being it cannot help the fact that it is propelled towards nonbeing. Heidegger says: "Factically one's own Dasein is always dying already; that is to say, it is in a Being-towards-its-end."[3] Heidegger sees existence as something defined by its end. In order to affirm this existence and live authentically, one must come to grips with the inevitability of the temporary nature of one's existence. To deny this inevitability is to give in to the mentality of the "they," which seeks to deceive itself concerning its temporary nature.

> One says, "Death certainly comes, but not right away". With this 'but...,' the "they" denies that death is certain. 'Not right away' is not a purely negative assertion, but a way in which the "they" interprets itself. With this interpretation, the "they" refers itself to that which is proximally accessible to Dasein and amenable to its concern. Everydayness forces its way into the urgency of concern, and divests itself of the fetters of a weary 'inactive thinking about death.' Death is deferred to 'sometime later,' and this is done by invoking the so-called 'general opinion.' Thus the "they" covers up what is peculiar in death's certainty – *that it is possible at any moment.*[4]

This idea, that death is possible at any moment, is essential to Heidegger's authentic mode.[5]

1.GS 108, 109, 125, 343; Z2.

2. As William barret states, "Heidegger's philosophy is neither atheism nor theism, but a description f the world from which God is absent" (*Irrational Man* p.209).

3. *Being and Time* 254, p. 298 "*Being-towardsdeath and the Everydayness of Dasein.*"

4. Ibid, 258 p.302.

5. Barrett: "The authentic meaning of death – 'I am to die' – is not as an external and public fact within the world, but as an internal possibility of my own being. Nor is it a possibility like the point at the end of a road, which I will in time reach. So long as I think in this way, I still hold death at a distance outside myself. The point is that I may die at any moment, and therefore death is my *possibility* now" (*Irrational Man*, p. 225).

Nietzsche's recognition of mn being-towards-his end can be drawn from Zarathustra's parable "On Free Death." In this parable, Zarathustra describes the "free death which comes to me because *I* want it" (Z I-21). This is Nietzsche's method of contrasting the worldviews of the authentic man and the inauthentic. The authentic man has established this recognition of the inevitability of death and has embraced it-or else how could he want it? The Others, however, prefer to approach death as a non-reality, something that is vague and uncertain, or a mere possibility. They are the ones who "hang dry wreaths in the sanctuary of life," and prefer "to be eaten when [they] taste best." Zarathustra says of them: "all-too-long they hang on their branches." According to Heidegger's model, this is an inauthentic behavior.

Heidegger makes no specific ethical judgments about authenticity and inauthenticity – in fact, he seems to think that we all are living, at least most of the time, inauthentically. He writes: "The 'they,' which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness."[6] It would seem, however, that Heidegger does believe that the Dasein ought to be independent from the they during death. Death is intrinsically non-relational, and Heidegger writes, "Dying, which is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my representative, is perverted into an event of public occurrence which the 'they' encounters."[7] In relation to the *they*, death is threatening and is denied. When Dasein exists inauthentically within the *they*, it is not allowed to acknowledge death properly.

But the Dasein exists not outside of time, but in a state of being-towards-its-end. Because, then, death must be acknowledged in order for one to live authentically, and because it must be acknowledged that death is the inevitable boundary which defines existence, we can posit that the authentic Dasein must exist in life as it would at the moment of death, which, according to Heidegger, is at any moment anyway. We can see, upon examining the philosophy of Nietzsche that influenced Heidegger, that this philosophy of dying is actually a philosophy of living.

II. Life and Overcoming vs. Existing

Nietzsche's philosophy of living extends beyond the will to exist, however, and even holds that the will to exist is a characteristic quality possessed by what Heidegger would call the Others. It is not enough, for Nietzsche, for man to simply possess the will to exist, but he must possess a will to power instead. This will to power does not refer to the power that subjugates people, but power which allows one to affirm oneself and to overcome oneself. Of Nietzsche's will to power Paul Tillich writes:

[It is] neither will in the psychological sense nor power in the sociological sense. It designates the self-affirmation of life as life, including self-preservation and growth. Therefore the will does not strive for something it does not have, for some object outside itself, but wills itself in the double sense of preserving and transcending itself [...]. Will to power is the self-affirmation of the will as ultimate reality.[8]

The will to power goes beyond and defies the will to exist – that is to say, Nietzsche's ideal authentic Being recognizes and embraces his free death, maintaining that creativity is something higher than simple existence. Zarathustra tells us, "life confided this secret to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am *that which must always overcome itself*'" (Z II-12). Creativity requires not only

6. *Being and Time* 27, p. 164.

7. Ibid 253, p. 297.

8. *The Courage to Be*, p. 267.

an initial conquering of the Others and affirmation of the self, but also a constant self-overcoming. Jacob Golomb writes in *In Search Of Authenticity* that self-overcoming is "the key to the meaning of the will to power:"

> This is illustrated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche discusses the will to power in terms of the unceasing will to overcome one's self. The will to be rid of the super fluous elements of one's character and culture indicates spiritual maturity. If one were to ask Nietzsche the purpose of this self-overcoming, his answer would be, to attain maturity, authenticity, and power. In this respect the will to power is of a piece with the quest for authenticity – the will to become the free author of one's own self.[9]

The will to power, as Nietzsche describes it, is what allows the individual to remain authentic. Just as Heidegger holds that all are the "they," this authenticity is not something Nietzsche feels is completely possible but is simply an ideal to strive for. His authentic individual, represented in parable by the *Übermensch*, is comparable and perhaps synonymous with the philosophers he writes of in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> They reach for the future with creative hand, and everything that is or has been becomes for them a means, an instrument, a hammer. Their "knowing" is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to truth is – *will to power*. – Are there such philosophers today? Have there been such philosophers? *Must* there not be such philosophers? (211)

Nietzsche answers his own question with these words from *The Gay Science*: "To be a human being with one elevated feeling – to be a single great mood incarnate – that has hitherto been a mere dream and a delightful possibility; as yet history does not offer us any certain examples" (288).

Lacking these examples of a purely creative being, Nietzsche gives us the *Übermensch* as an allegory. The *Übermensch* is purely authentic and subscribes only to the master morality. He recognizes his ultimate position as a Being-towards-an-end and responds with a constant self-overcoming. While Nietzsche holds this as his ideal, his perspectivism does not allow him to dismiss inauthentic behavior as wrong, but he does hold that it is not compatible with his wish that man overcomes himself. As Golomb explains:

> Nietzsche does not reject the 'negative' (inauthentic) types of power/pathos because they are less true. They are rejected as detrimental and destructive to his ideal of the pathos of authenticity, which is concretized in the notion of the *Übermensch*, in whom the will to power becomes identical with the will to authenticity. Nietzsche is aware that such a person cannot be realized completely; the *Übermensch* provides only a regulative idea, a model to approximate and emulate.[1]

III. The Optimistic Being-towards-death

Much of Nietzsche's writings have been interpreted as embodying a philosophy of pessimism, but it has been demonstrated here that Nietzsche optimistically embraces the authentic existence. Everywhere Nietzsche urges us to affirm our existence in spite of tragedy or hardship, we can just as easily affirm our existence even though we are Beings-towards-our-end, and Nietzsche's free spirit exemplifies this affirmation.

While in Heidegger's philosophy of authenticity he observes that the "they" deceives itself about the ultimacy of death and in doing so harms Dasein, Nietzsche's version of authentic living deals instead with pity. In book four of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains

9. *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*, p. 70

10. *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*, p.83.

how pity is harmful to those who suffer, because – much like the Others do to Dasein – it intrudes on what is "distinctively personal."[11] Suffering, according to Nietzsche, is something essential, and it feeds what he calls the "personal necessity of distress." It involves

[t]he whole economy of my soul and the balance effected by "distress," the way new springs and needs break open, the way in which old wounds are healing, the way whole periods of the past are shed [...]

and to interfere with this is not "helping," as those who pity might believe. "It never occurs to them," says Nietzsche, "that...the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell" (338). And Nietzsche would have us embrace even our hell, as he urges us to do in *The Gay Science*, when he has us imagine a scenario in which we are faced with the eternal repetition of our present existence, complete with all of its hardships and suffering (341).

When we take into account the level of influence Nietzsche's writing had on Heidegger's philosophy, we can now see that perhaps Heidegger is the pessimist and Nietzsche an optimist. Where Heidegger's philosophy creates an existential angst concerning the Being-towards-death, Nietzsche's philosophy was one that affirmed life *even in dying*. Nietzsche is operating already on the assumption that Heidegger later makes, which is that man is ultimately alone and is propelled towards non-existence. Nietzsche has, as Paul Tillich says, "the courage to look into the abyss of non-being in the complete loneliness of him who accepts the message that 'God is dead.'" Nietzsche's free spirit knows it is being propelled towards non-existence just as well as Heidegger's Dasein does, but Nietzsche assumes that the free spirit can only embrace this. Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science*, "pursue your best or your worst desires, and above all perish!" (1)

In conclusion, Nietzsche's philosophy of self-overcoming and creativity fits so well with Heidegger's philosophy of authenticity because it has directly influenced it. Heidegger's authentic mode is a reaction to both Nietzsche's claim of the death of God and his directive to overcome the self, thereby maintaining a free spirit and effectively overcoming the Others as well. While man is unable to exist as a purely authentic being or an *Übermensch*, Nietzsche has provided us with the ideal to attempt to emulate, and Heidegger has followed in his footsteps with a model of how to attempt this.

– *Jon St. Peter*

11. Barrett: "Death is the most personal and intimate of possibilities, since it is what I must suffer for myself: nobody else can die for me" (*Irrational Man* p. 225).

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THE DRAMA OF EXISTENTIALISM IN O'NEILL'S *BEYOND THE HORIZON*

Many consider the novel to be the epitome of literature. Every writer shares the challenge of re-creating, in words, the experience of life. Where the novelist parts company with her literary siblings, however, is in the effort to create a world where life-likeness emerges through the self-understanding of characters themselves. For that reason, an intriguing philosophical dimension emerges. As Albert Camus writes of the novel, "[it] is never anything but a philosophy expressed in images. And in a good novel the philosophy has disappeared into the images."[1] Camus is a unique figure in this respect. Typically limiting his focus to classical French writers, Camus did show an interest in modern American authors such as William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, taking his curiosities so far as to write several essays on them.[2] Conspicuously absent from this literary company, however, is Eugene O'Neill. Some effort has been made to read O'Neill in light of Camus's philosophy of absurdity.[3] By adding to this group one of O'Neill's greatest works, *Beyond the Horizon*, O'Neill's early exploration of absurdity and his jests at humanity's ignorance of life reveal their existential depths.

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Eugene O'Neill creates a solitary character seeking purpose and destination, a character meant to represent all of humanity. He creates Robert Mayo, in whom the all-too-human pursuit of life's horizons is dramatically expressed. "[Robert] got to know all the different kinds of sunsets by heart. And all those sunsets took place over there – beyond the horizon."[4] Despite growing up on a generational family farm, Robert longs for something more out of life: to escape and experience the world. Yet what he winds up doing is the complete opposite. Despite all opportunity pointing in the direction of hope and new experiences, Robert walks an existential path.

It was Albert Camus who said that "[the] nostalgia for unity, [this] appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama."[5] Robert's appetite is for something he is not destined to have – a craving experienced by all of humanity at some point. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Robert's situation is magnified through the dramatic setting of a farm. Typically, the farm symbolizes the desire of humanity to be one with nature, but it can also be made to represent a failure of these same efforts. It is on this farm that Robert's tragedy is amplified and proven existential, as he struggles not only with being successful on the farm but also with being successful in life. Robert is his own worst enemy and yet a heroic figure, his overall meaning in O'Neill's play extending greatly to an existential symbol of sacrifice, failure, and discontent.

For Robert Mayo, the question asked by William Shakespeare is not merely "to be or not to be." Instead, his question falls more along the lines of simply *what* to be. That is his question, and it is one that comes across in drama quite often. The question first asked by a playwright should be "What is the purpose of my work?" The question asked by Robert is "What is the purpose of my life?" O'Neill gives the actor a role to play in which the role itself is undefined and reveals drama's mirroring of reality.

Albert Camus, a fore-runner of the Existential movement and author of such works as *The*

1. Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 199.
2. Ibid. See the essays on Faulkner, p. 311-20.
3. J. Dennis Rich, "Exile Without Remedy: The Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill" in *Eugene O'Neill – A Worldview* (New York: Friedrich Ungar Publishing Co., 1979), p. 257-76.
4. Eugene O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon* in *Four Plays by Eugene O'Neill* (New York: Signet Classics, 1998), 15.
5. Albert Camus, T*he Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 13.

Stranger and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, writes characters that are in similar situations to that of Robert Mayo. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he writes about actors and observes that,

> The everyday man does not enjoy tarrying. Everything, on the contrary, hurries him onward. But at the same time nothing interests him more than himself, especially his potentialities. Whence his interest in the theatre, in the show, where so many fates are offered him, where he can accept the poetry without feeling the sorrow.[6]

An actor is blissfully hopeful because he has so many options, so many different roles he could possibly play. Set in this context, Robert is an actor. He wants to define his life as a specific part and yet he cannot stand to play any of the roles set out for him.

Offered a chance to travel the world by ship, Robert gives this up to commit himself to a life of farming and marriage – the simple life. O'Neill knows better than to give a horizon-loving character the place on a small-town farm married to a woman who doesn't truly love him. Andrew Mayo, Robert's brother, even says to Robert that "Farming ain't your nature. There's all the difference shown in just the way us two feel about the farm. You – well you like the home part of it, I expect; but as a place to work and grow things, you hate it."[7] When a love triangle unfolds and Robert decides to stay on the farm with his newfound fiancée Ruth, Andy takes the opportunity to travel that Robert is leaving behind. There is a dramatic switching of roles between the two brothers at this point. Grown jealous by the fact that his brother Andy went off to see the world in his place, Robert becomes bitter and spiteful. The pastoral setting gives way to the human condition, revealing the latent dimension of existentialism.

In brief, Existentialism focuses on the individual's unique position as a self-determining agent responsible for the authenticity of his or her choices. Despite his constant association with the philosophical movement, Albert Camus rejected membership: "No, I am not an existentialist. [...] the only book of ideas that I have published, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was directed against the so-called existential philosophers."[8] He himself did not directly associate with the philosophy, and yet so much of his work relates to its themes and motifs. On the concept of absurdity, Camus writes that "I said the world is absurd, but I was being too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world."[9] This is exactly what O'Neill sets out to prove.

According to Camus, irrational is the man who has rational thoughts.[10] Robert tries to be very logical in his purpose and thought. In order to take any action, he must have justified motivation. Once stuck on the farm where he has no bearing, Robert runs it to the ground. In doing so he amplifies his already failed relationship with his wife and unleashes a persistent questioning of the ultimate purpose of life. He sets himself up to fail by trying to define his life in terms of specific roles or duties. What Robert does not know is that he is doomed to fail from the beginning.

Robert Mayo's struggle is incorporating failure without admitting defeat – he is being asked to run and maintain a farm when nothing is in his favor. When he fails on the farm, he remarks that "It *is* my fault… The best I've ever done is to make ends meet."[11] From this point forward, Robert begins to question his role. What was he truly meant to do with his life? He can not see the

6. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 77.
7. O'Neill, 8.
8. Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays,* 45.
9. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 21.
10. Ibid, 17. 11.O'Neil, 67.

possibility of an entire life's work resulting in hardship, all for nothing. Robert no longer feels as though he has a place on the farm, the only home he has ever known. Ironically, he can no longer travel due to illness, as well as lack of opportunity. Camus writes that "In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land."[12] Robert is this alienated man, having lost ground in his own home and now no longer at liberty to dream of and wish for another life. Robert is alone on a different plane of existence because he realizes the lack of structured purpose.

Some characters believe that Robert does indeed have a purpose, but one that he is failing to achieve. Ruth Mayo, Robert's wife, says herself that all their hardship is due to Robert's lack of skill, planning, and passion, that "it is [Robert's] own fault."[13] It truly is his own fault that the farm has gone downhill. Robert was never much of the "earthly" type to take on laborious tasks, especially given the inconsistent condition of his frail health. Playing the role of farmer was always Andy's physical and symbolic strength, and Robert knows this. In fact, he even tells Andy that "You're a Mayo through and through. You're wedded to the soil. You're as much a product of it as an ear of corn is, or a tree. Father is the same. This farm is his life-work, and he's happy in knowing that another Mayo, inspired by the same love, will take up the work where he leaves off. I can understand your attitude, and Pa's; and I think it's wonderful and sincere. But I – well, I'm not made that way."[14]

To put it in terms borrowed from Camus, Andy is an anti-Mersault, a figure in whom the absurdity of the world is eliminated. Andy feels as though he has an obvious purpose that both he and Robert are to fulfill: to be a farmer. But then again, Robert was never expected to be a strong farmer. So then who is anyone to criticize him or say he is not doing the best he can? Who is Ruth to be unhappy when she cannot expect any more than he can possibly give? Robert has no motivation to be a farmer: it was never expected of him, nor did he have any desire to play or be this person. His true calling in life is to travel and explore the various aspects of society. Robert is a prisoner in his self-created conflict. When he comes to accept it, it literally kills him.

At the end of the play, as Robert lies dying, he comes to realize that he held no purpose in life. He hated every choice he ever made, and could not stand to live one more moment unfulfilled. He says that "I couldn't stand it back there in the room. It seemed as if all my life – I'd been cooped in a room. So I thought I'd try to end as I might have – if I'd had the courage – alone – in a ditch by the open road – watching the sun rise."[15] Every purpose Robert has ever tried or thought in life has failed him.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus's fable of human existence, Sisyphus is destined to forever push a giant rock up the mountain only to watch it fall back down, knowing he has to do it all over again. Camus observes that this is the struggle of life: just as we are at a pinnacle, just when we think we have a purpose and are about to achieve it, it is lost to us entirely. Yet Camus writes that this struggle is the human condition, both the attempt and the unpredictable yet unavoidable failure. This is our desire for freedom, our desire for unity. Not only can Robert Mayo be interpreted to represent the figure of Sisyphus, but his setting on the farm exemplifies humanity's desire to be one with nature. Ultimately, this union with Earth is in itself a failure. What Camus writes can be

12. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 17.
13. O'Neill, 71.
14. Ibid, 9.
15. Ibid, 106.

applied equally to the character of Robert Mayo: "I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion."[16]

While Robert longs for clarity, he also seeks a resolution to the ongoing illness he has endured throughout his entire life. Robert's physical illness can also be seen in an existential light. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus remarks that "The hypochondriac is anxious about every insignificant thing, but when the significant appears he beings to breathe more easily. And why? Because the significant actuality is after all not so terrible as the possibility he himself had fashioned, and which he used his strength to fashion, whereas he can now see all this strength against actuality. Yet the hypochondriac is only an imperfect autodidact when compared with the person who is educated by possibility, because hypochondria is partly dependant upon the somatic and is consequently accidental."[17]

Robert can be viewed as this described hypochondriac. While educated, he has educated himself only about the parts of the world and the literature that he loves. Clearly an ill person, however, his mind and body can seemingly be viewed as separate entities. Being sick all the time (literally and figuratively), hypochondriacs think they can fall ill at any moment. They are happy when they are sick because they escape the possibility of being sick. Hypochondriacs show how it is so easy to flee from choice and ultimate freedom.

In the final moments of his life, Robert Mayo realizes just how sick he is and that his illness will be the death of him. In a way this relieves him: he no longer has to imagine any new possibilities, no longer has to ponder the purpose of his failed life. And he no longer has to hope that he will be ill once again. Robert embraces his life in its experiences and in a strange way, this in itself is fulfilling. Leaving behind the existential tricks played by the hypochondriac, he no longer has to look his failure in the eye. He is escaping from himself, and this makes him happier than anything in life ever will. That is what makes his death poignantly satisfying in the play. Robert cries out during his final moments, "And this time I'm going! It isn't the end. It's a free beginning – the start of my voyage! I"ve won to my trip – the right of release – beyond the horizon! Oh, you ought to be glad – glad – for my sake!"[18] Robert's heart was never on the farm. It was long beyond the horizon before he was, and it was only in death that their fateful joining was fulfilled.

Paradoxically, but consistent with the main themes in existentialism, Robert finally attaches meaning to his life in death. Camus writes that "I do not know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I understand only in human terms."[19] Human beings are the only creatures who are fully aware of their lack of purpose. As Camus explains in his writings on the concept of absurdity, the world is not a rational place; humans have less control than they think. It is always comforting to imagine there are specific roles which denote purpose in life. But ultimately, and as a condition of its existential plight, humanity is doomed to fail: there is really no meaning to the Sisyphean "push." When Robert Mayo comes to this realization, it almost comforts him. He fails at life in a setting supposedly united with humanity. The natural landscape has always been ours to conquer, taming it for our needs and transforming it into a passion commingled with our struggle for meaning. Just as the crops go through seasons and cycles, so too do individuals caught up in the seeming continuity of the events

16. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 51.
17. Ibid, 162.
18. O'Neill, 106.19. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 51.

of living, as the cycle of seeking purpose continues. They do things for reasons they deem valid, but then they pause and reflect. In that moment their entire being is overtaken by a questioning whose lurking presence was unnoticed theretofore.

What *Beyond the Horizon* truly gets at in the core of the human condition, and what is essentially existential, is that we as human beings do not have defined roles, ever. This insight is the fundamental absurdity of life. Instead of having and then losing an ultimate purpose, for Camus we are deprived of one from the beginning. Because we never had it in the first place, there really is no absolute solace, nor is there a final exit. What Robert Mayo suffers from, when he realizes he can not escape, is the belief that he can change. He wants there to be one more last chance to define his and Ruth's life together as something more than hardship and pain. He asks her, "Do you know, Ruth, what I've been dreaming back there in the dark? After all, why shouldn't we have a future? We're young yet. If we can only shake off the curse of this farm!"[20] But when Robert tries and is not meant to change – is not meant to define his life in terms of success – then has he fulfilled the terms of his existential failure.

For Robert, the only solution is to have no solution. If humanity could posses a solution or meaning through the certainty of judgment, there would be no need for God. While playing a minor role in *Beyond the Horizon*, God is mentioned as a hope and almost an excuse for what happens to the Mayo family. In order to understand good and evil, or even to justify it, the Mayos look to (even "make up") a divine power such as God. Robert questions his point in this absurd life when he reflects on the hardship he has suffered and the accomplishment he has been deprived of. Coming up with very little accomplishment but much adversity, he can not fathom to put the ultimate blame on himself. Camus ultimately states that God is not needed for there to be absurdity.[21] An absurd man lives without appeal. He lives without transcending human ideals and without the hope for clarity. He joins the struggle for clarity without creating an ideal that would terminate the effort or the journey. Even the smallest glimpse of false hope inspires him. "I feel completely well, really I do," claims Robert, "now that I can hope again. Oh if you knew how glorious it feels to have something to look forward to! Can't you feel the thrill of it, too – the vision of a new life opening up after all the horrible years?"[22] Robert wants what he does not have, but he never defines this realistically. All he knows is that he wants his life to hold meaning. He wants his efforts to be recognized and he wants to be able to tell himself what he is living for.

The question that Robert Mayo should raise for humanity, then, is "What are we living for?" That is the ultimate question for O'Neill and Camus. Robert struggles to find meaning his entire life. He can easily be seen as saying "I should *be* this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me in opposition to all creation."[23] What he says instead is "I'm not a farmer. I've never claimed to be one. But there's nothing else I can do under the circumstances, and I've got to pull things through somehow."[24]

One day Robert is struggling with his health and the mere thought of making it through to see another sunrise. The next day he wrestles with his emotions of love and hate. The day after that he struggles with lost dreams and regret. He has no consistent purpose except the visible lack of a

20. O'Neill, 84.
21. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 17.
22. O'Neill, 86.
23. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 51.
24. O'Neill, 55.

purpose, and he learns to live with his indecisions: "Oh, those cursed hills out there that I used to think promised me so much!" cries Robert;

"How I've grown to hate the sight of them! They're like the walls of a narrow prison yard shutting me in from all the freedom and wonder of life! Sometimes I think if it wasn't for you Ruth… I'd chuck everything up and walk down the road with just one desire in my heart – to put the whole rim of the world between me and those hills, and be able to breathe freely once more! There I go dreaming again – my old fool dreams."[25]

Robert, having given up on his dreams, cannot shake their hold on him.

Having no purpose, Robert is nevertheless a sacrificial character in *Beyond the Horizon*. This is in order for the play to have a proper ending and the other characters to be released from the existential burden of hope. That is, the surface goal for them is for life to assume a level of normalcy tracing back to a time before the farm's harmony was disrupted. When Robert is gone, Ruth and Andy no longer have to hope that there is a point to their suffering. They will not suffer once their future is again secured with the return of the farm to its former success. The absurdity of life will once again be masked.

Yet as we learn from Camus, humanity bears inescapable freedom and craves a role. Actuality is escape from freedom and defines, if only momentarily. It was better for Robert to escape from thinking he choose his own path. Ruth and Andy, in particular, never wanted more out of life than to simply live and work on the farm – and receive only respect in return for their toils. One day Ruth has enough of Robert's disregard for their way of life: "I should think you might have some feeling for me, Rob," she says, "and not always be late for meals. If you think it's fun sweltering in that oven of a kitchen to keep things warm for you, you're mistaken."[26] What Robert was to them both was an itch – a reminder that there was something beyond the farm.

Ruth and Andy do not want to comprehend any other life because it is not what they know, and they are afraid of failure. They do not realize that their apparent roles are not truly theirs to have. Ruth never seems to understand Robert – all she is able to do is chastise him and pity herself. "Bad luck…," he says, "And my own apparent unfitness for the job, I was going to add; but you can't deny there's been bad luck to it, too. Why don't you take things into consideration? Why can't we pull together? We used to. I know it's hard on you also. Then why can't we help each other instead of hindering? […] But let's both of us try to do better. We can improve."[27]

Unfortunately, despite his words of encouragement, the farm will ultimately be the end of them. No one but Robert catches a glimpse of existence, however awkward it is. Even Robert himself realizes at times his own discomfort and evades it, trying to persuade Ruth that "life owes [them] some happiness after what [they've] been through. It must! Otherwise [their] suffering would be meaningless – and that is unthinkable."[28]

It is unthinkable to have a life with absolutely no purpose except to suffer. Yet it seems that is all Robert Mayo does, and he is a crucial character in O'Neill's by now very existential play. Robert sought beauty and purpose. Never attaining either, he was left with only experiences and the ultimate conclusion of life in death. However, throughout all his heartache, he recognized the beauty of this nature he was not able to tame. "At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman," writes Camus, "and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very moment lose

25. Ibid, 58.
26. Ibid, 54.
27. Ibid, 55.
28. Ibid, 86.

the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across the millennia."[29] Before Robert Mayo, the farm was a place of unity and harmony, the world and human life in an apparent union. With Robert's inability to maintain this supposed harmony came a disruption of the very thing always counted on to be stable and reliable. As a symbolic figure, he represents the human tear in the bucolic fabric of the natural world.

While all the characters are left suffering and dumbfounded at this journey called life, Robert questions its very purpose and wonders as to his role. There must be more than suffering, otherwise that would make the journey worthless. But is it not human nature to be unhappy first and happy second, thus justifying the chaotic void before the rewarding, calm sunset? Ultimately, Robert chooses unhappiness because he knows he will never truly be happy with life until he is dead. So in the end, is he not happy knowing that he can do nothing more nor ask for anything less from the world because of the path he has chosen? He is condemned to have no purpose in life other than that of a foil. Ironically, this winds up being the most important purpose of all in the play.

Because of Robert Mayo, almost every other character in *Beyond the Horizon* is able to grasp one glimpse of happiness and hope by the play's end. After Robert dies in the hills, Andy looks to Ruth and stutters: "I – you – we've both made a mess of things. We must try to help each other – and – in time – we'll come to know what's right [...]."[30] They are able to realize their purpose because Robert visibly held none. All they could see was that their harmony with nature was disrupted no matter what the season. Ruth and Andy cannot understand that Robert is the reason for this disharmony, which is theirs as well, although they refuse to admit the existential truth. What Robert does for Ruth and Andy is save them from the same uncertainty and suffering he experiences. As Robert joins his heart beyond the horizon, stage directions indicate that Ruth "remains silent, gazing at him dully with the sad humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope."[31] Just as Camus writes that "the mind that aims to understand reality can consider itself satisfied only by reducing it to terms of thought," so does O'Neill finally bring the cycle of humanity's ignorance full circle by burying its brief appearance in thought's invisible monologue.[32] By writing characters such as Ruth and Andy, he shows us how simplistic and meaningless life can truly be. By giving life to and then killing the character of Robert Mayo, O'Neill gives us hope that while life will end one day, it is the experience of living that gives us meaning in the interim.

– *Melissa L. Gaffney*

29. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* 17.
30. O'Neill, 107.
31. Ibid, 108.
32. Camus, op cit, 22.

The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Silentio

"What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not." – Hamann[1]

Fear and Trembling begins with this quote from Hamann, opening the book with an ironic device. The king Tarquinius Superbus delivers a message to his son that expresses one meaning but conceal another. The irony exists in that the servant believes he is communicating a message about poppies, but in reality, conveys to king's son his father's order to kill their political enemies. Andrew Cross defines irony as "that which involves a contradiction between the external and the internal, between the ironist's inward state and his outward behavior."[2] He derives this definition from Søren Kierkegaard's exposition on the subject in his doctoral thesis *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates.* Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, uses a similar understanding of irony to critique those who, in his estimation, do not practice faith properly. The allegory of the king and his messenger serves as a prequel, as a warning of things to come and how to interpret his authorship. In opening with this passage, he asks his readers to be alert and to have their wits about them, to appreciate his nuances, and catch his subtleties. De Silentio employs three forms of irony in *Fear and Trembling*, drawing heavily upon the ideas developed in Kierkegaard's doctoral thesis. Understanding the meanings behind the messages de Silentio offers his readers is a crucial aspect of understanding the totality of his authorship.

An examination of the relationship between irony and *Fear and Trembling* requires the development of four points. The first will be an analysis of Kierkegaard's definition of irony as explained in his doctoral thesis and a comparison with de Silentio's use and employment of the concept. This aspect will be difficult because de Silentio never explains directly how he understands irony. Only through examples and indirect references does de Silentio reveal his conception of irony in any substantial way. The second will be a definition for the forms of irony de Silentio uses in *Fear and Trembling*: verbal irony, radical verbal irony, and formal irony. The third part will be an identification of these forms, which de Silentio uses to develop some of the most important themes in his book. This indicates how essential an accurate understanding of irony becomes to a proper reading of his work. The fourth will be a meditation on how these ironic examples might change readers' appreciation of the text. These points will elucidate why de Silentio finds such an affinity with this deceptive concept, irony.

Because of the author's duplicity, reading *Fear and Trembling* leads to a variety of interpretations, and this inevitability seems to be intentional. He asks for no followers: whether the reader catches his wit or misses it seems of little consequence to him. With this charge of duplicity, the reader must from his own perspective appreciate his irony in order to be open the meaning behind his words.

1. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3.
2. As described in *The Cambridge Companion to Kirkegaard*, "Andrew Cross is an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of California Irvine, who writes on Kierkegaard and the relations between ethics, agency, and self-interpretation." Cross, Andrew. "Neither either nor or: The perils of reflexive irony." *The Cambridge Companion to Kirkegaard* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 127.

Now that we have established the many layers of ambiguity surrounding the concept of irony in *Fear and Trembling*, the reason for beginning with its definition becomes clear, as Kierkegaard masks his true intentions throughout his authorship. The quintessential example is the presentation of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or.* Kierkegaard is the true author of the work, yet the pseudonym "Victor Eremita" claims to be the editor. To further complicate the matter, Eremita explains, how the writings compiled in the text are not his, but a collection of manuscripts found in a desk, written by two men: the nameless author A and the ethical Judge William.[3] The deception reaches an even higher level when author A claims that he did not write parts of the text either, but rather stole them from a friend named "Johannes."[4] Each pseudonym puts more distance between the work and the true author. In each case, the reader must remember that the personae of the pseudonym colors and changes the text.

Kierkegaard addresses the distant relationship between himself and the pseudonyms in the addendum to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript.* As Kierkegaard writes,

> "What is written is indeed my own, but only insofar as I put into the mouth of the poetically actual individual whom I produced, his life view expressed in audible lines. [...] So in the pseudonymous works, there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about them except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them. [...] My wish, my prayer, is that if it might occur to anyone to cite a particular saying from the books, he would do me the favor to cite the name of the respective pseudonym."[5]

Kierkegaard's plea in this passage provides two important insights that aid this investigation. It first provides evidence that he purposefully created these pseudonymous characters that differed, in at least some respects from his own philosophy. The extent of their difference in totality is beyond the scope of this paper but the recognition that a tension exists between the author and the pseudonym is essential to understanding de Silentio's conception of irony. Second, the passage underscores the care one must take to separate Kierkegaard from his pseudonyms in an accurate way. This distinction provides a solid foundation upon which to properly analyze irony in de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling.*

Kierkegaard's claim that not one word of the pseudonymous authorship is his own exposes him as a master of misdirection and a keeper of hidden truth. To contrast this claim, Josiah Thompson points out that "Twenty-seven of the first twenty-eight "Diapsalmata" (or refrains) in *Either/Or* were lifted verbatim from his journal, and later on, the young man in *Stages on Life's Way* used word for word Kierkegaard's own letter [...] in returning his fiancée's ring."[6] With these facts, we cannot possibly take him at his word. His personality clearly influences and directs the pseudonyms, as Thompson exclaims: "He is his characters in so many ways. His ironic glance is theirs. [...] It is almost as if his life had been refracted by a powerful prism into a multitude of different images."[7] These new insights allow us to return to his claim about his pseudonyms with a more sophisticated understanding of the man. Even then,

3. Thompson, Josiah. "The Master of Irony." In *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Josiah Thompson (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), 212.
4. Ibid, 212.
5. Kierkegaard, Søren, *Cncluding UnScientific Postscript* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941) 551 unpaginated.
6. Thompson, Josiah, op cit., 106..
7. Ibid, 105.

his postscript remains ambiguous and purposefully so.

There are many ways of interpreting his relationship to the pseudonyms. One could argue that his estrangement from the works was the means Kierkegaard used to allow the reader to interpret the text freely. Had he signed his name to the works, his audience would read them in relation to his life. Kierkegaard clearly did not want this, yet his presence in the pseudonyms works is impossible to overlook. Another possibility is that the collection of pseudonyms reflects his intellectual and spiritual development. That each pseudonymous author holds a belief system which Kierkegaard surpassed in his own life, but saw as important moments in his maturity. Still another interpretation is that Kierkegaard needed the pseudonyms in order to express these aspects of himself for which he could not bear to be held accountable. On this last point, the life of the aesthetic in *Either/Or* provides a compelling example. The section attributed to the aesthete author A culminates with the diary of the seducer Johannes, who Kierkegaard holds at the greatest distance from himself. Johannes' cold and spiritless existence spawns such egregious offenses against the women he seduces that Kierkegaard – given his deeply religious temperament – must have shuddered in repugnance at the thought of him. Yet the description is so rich and the portrait is so detailed that the reader must wonder how could he possibly express the depths of this individual without understanding Johannes so well himself. These examples illustrate the numerous ways in which to understand just a single line of his voluminous authorship. His duplicity, intelligence, and wit are aspects that play pivotal roles in differentiating Kierkegaard's and de Silentio's conceptions of irony.

In his doctoral thesis Kierkegaard explains how irony creates distance between an expression and its meaning. In its most common use, the meaning expresses its opposite. Kierkegaard explains,

> In oratorical discourse, there frequently occurs a figure of speech which bears the name irony and whose characteristic is this: to say the opposite of what is meant. With this we already have a determination present in all forms of irony, namely, the phenomenon is not the essence, but the opposite of the essence.[8]

As Kierkegaard rightly points out, there is in all instances of irony, this incongruency between the message and the ironist's intent.

This definition is exemplified in the figure of Socrates. His claim of ignorance when he was actually the wisest of all fits with Kierkegaard's definition perfectly. He develops the similarity between Socrates and his ironist in many of the Platonic dialogues, but most notably in the *Apology*. Socrates' speech about the Delphic oracle underscores his entire ironic project. He knows that he is the wisest of men, since the Delphic oracle always speaks the truth; nonetheless, he questions his contemporaries, seeming to recognize their superior wisdom. In truth however, Socrates knows he is the wisest, and uses irony to expose their ignorance.

Socrates also uses irony to amuse himself, exemplifying the playful nature of the concept. He explains in the *Apology* that through his questioning, he has not had time to do anything of importance in public or private because of his constant seeking of wisdom.[9] This sentiment is ironic, since through an analysis of how he lived and taught, clearly he believed

8. Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 264.
9. Ibid, 76.

philosophy was the height of human achievement and his questioning was the most important task of all. To attest to this, we turn to the phrase which seems to capture the essence of his being, *the unexamined life is not worth living*. His life embodied contradiction: a small and ugly man who had within him one of the greatest and most beautiful souls. This is what Kierkegaard loved about him – his existence as an ironist who began the tradition of philosophy. Socrates, ironically enough, started philosophy through exposing the limitations of human intelligence. As Kierkegaard poetically describes it, "Socrates, like Sampson, seizes the columns bearing the edifice of knowledge and plunges everything down into the nothingness of ignorance."[10]

After Kierkegaard presents Socrates as his exemplar of the ironic hero, he goes on to explain how one exists as an ironist. Beyond irony as pure opposition, Kierkegaard defines it to be an intellectual superiority, where the ironist critiques through affirmation a situation or tradition that is beneath him, as Socrates did with Athens. The ironist revels in his superiority, deceiving those whom he is beyond by making them believe he is part of their tradition. Kierkegaard writes, "The more the ironist succeeds in deceiving and the better his falsification progresses, so much the greater is his satisfaction."[11] The pleasure of the ironist in this situation is that he knows himself to be above that which he disingenuously affirms through his words. He writes, "This is a form of irony which occurs more seldom, though it is equally profound and easier to effect than the irony appearing in the form of an opposition."[12] This is what Kierkegaard saw in Socrates and his treatment of Athens – an affinity with city, but a constant need to go beyond it. In this way, Socrates' life mirrors Kierkegaard's relationship to his age, which he saw as misguided under the Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries. Finally, Kierkegaard develops his idea of irony as infinite negativity, a phrase he borrows from Hegel.[13] Kierkegaard expresses this where he writes,

I again have a determination present in all forms of irony, namely, the subject is negatively free. If I am conscious when I speak that what I say is my meaning, and I assume that the person with whom I am speaking comprehends perfectly the meaning in what is said, then I am about by what is said.

Kierkegaard wants to emphasize the freeing aspect of irony, where the ironist is not directly responsible for his expressions. Josiah Thompson refers to this notion of freedom with respect to irony when he writes, "The ironist, of course, is the man who is absent from his words."[14] The positive aspect of negativity in this sense is that it distances the ironist from his situation as he focuses on his own individuality. Infinite negativity comes at a price, however, as the ironist exists as a "stranger and an alien" to his situation.[15] He exists as a constant negation, and can never stand truly for anything, for as soon as he does, he ceases to be an ironist.[16] Kierkegaard's definition of irony is clear, and much of it carries over into de Silentio's understanding. Despite these similarities however, Kierkegaard's postscript echoes

10. Ibid, 77.
11. Ibid, 266.
12. Ibid, 266.
13. Ibid, 72.
14. Thompson, Josiah, op cit, 116.
15. Ibid, 116.
16. Cross, Andrew, op cit, 139.

throughout his authorship: *not a single word is my own.* Thus our inquiry turns to the differences between their concepts of irony, and their subsequent implications in *Fear and Trembling.*

This crucial difference between the two resides in a single passage. De Silentio explains that with respect to irony and humor,

> I am not completely unfamiliar with these two passions; I know a little more about them than is found in German and German-Danish compendiums. Therefore, I know that these two passions are essentially different from the passion of faith. Irony and humor are also self reflective, and thus belong to the sphere of infinite resignation; their elasticity is owing to the individual's incommensurability with actuality.[17]

De Silentio makes an essential distinction between what he calls the movement of infinite resignation and the movement of faith proper. The man who makes the movement of infinite resignation identifies the one thing in his life which makes him completely fulfilled but he knows that he cannot have it. Abraham, who lost his son Isaac after God told him to sacrifice his only child, is de Silentio's most poignant example. He also uses the image of a lover whose beloved cannot be won.Interestingly enough, this mirrors Kierkegaard's situation when he lost his fiancée. The connection between De Silentio and Kierkegaard is important in this respect, because he also identifies himself as a knight of infinite resignation. Conversely, the man of faith recognizes the impossibility of realizing his passion, but believes, through God and by virtue of the absurd, the object of his passion will be returned to him in full. To become a knight of faith for de Silentio, one must believe that "For God, all things are possible."[18] Including irony in the sphere of infinite resignation is a deviation from how Kierkegaard treats irony in his dissertation.

By including irony in the sphere of infinite resignation, and defining it as a passion, De Silentio sees the ironist as one with a concrete object of desire, yet an inability to actualize it. This is not the man of infinite negativity that Kierkegaard describes in his doctoral thesis. This ironist cannot understand the world if he cannot have the object of his desire in reality. He thus subordinates it in favor of the ideal. Kierkegaard's Socrates took the knowledge of his day and reduced it to comedy through irony. He deconstructed the concrete ideas of his contemporaries, and left them with abstract *eide.* Kierkegaard writes of Socrates, "His abstract is a designation utterly void of content. He proceeds from the concrete and arrives at the most abstract, and where the inquiry should begin, there he stops."[19] Through his questions, he forces these concrete ideas such as love in the *Symposium* and piety in the *Euthyphro* to dissipate into the abstract. If Socrates is a pure ironist by Kierkegaard's definition, he cannot stand for anything, because once de does, he is no longer an ironist. By contrast, if Socrates is an ironist by de Silentio's definition, he can stand for the passion he knows he cannot realize. For Socrates, this could be the dream of his ideal Athens. This distinguishing characteristic separates Kierkegaard's understanding of irony from de Silentio's.

Returning to irony as belonging to the sphere of infinite resignation, a few words on the place of intelligence are in order. To use irony requires sophistication and a mastery of language. One needs intelligence and wit to be ironic, but neither of these qualities to make the

17. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 51.
18. Ibid, 43.
19. Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 83.

movement of infinite resignation. Emphasizing this point, de Silentio asserts that, "Every person can make the movement of infinite resignation."[20] For de Silentio, irony is then only one way of rejecting the world because of the loss of one's passion. His example of the youth who lost the princess and withdrew into the sphere of infinite resignation did not respond to the situation ironically. He instead accepted the loss of his beloved and allowed the pain to consume him. The youth freezes the princess in her innocence and beauty, lamenting the life they could have shared together. The real princess is gone. She is married with children perhaps, yet the youth pays no attention to this figure. For the youth, she is not his princess, only a shadow among many that swirls beneath the painful image of a life that will never come to pass. Intelligence holds a place then, in the sphere of resignation, but is only a way among many of expressing this infinite loss.

De Silentio chooses to use irony to express his infinite resignation. Abraham also approaches infinite resignation ironically, as de Silentio explicates in his work. Reading *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates* in De Silentio's terms, both the subject Socrates and the author Kierkegaard make the movement of infinite resignation through irony as well. De Silentio writes of Socrates, "In an intellectual sense, he did make the movement of infinity. His ignorance is the infinite resignation."[21] The fact that these four central figures in Kierkegaard's thought-Socrates, Abraham, Johannes de Silentio, and Kierkegaard himself-used irony to express a personal longing for fulfillment speaks to its importance in Kierkegaard's thought. This connection will develop more clearly when a sharper picture of de Silentio's Abraham comes into focus. Before this however, our endeavor calls for a definition of the different forms of irony de Silentio uses in *Fear and Trembling*.

The first and most common form is verbal irony, where the language expressed is intended to mean its opposite. An example of this would be two friends at an obviously dull party talking about how much fun they are having. This is on the level of sarcasm, and expresses for Kierkegaard only a shallow difference between the inner state of the speaker and his outward expressions. In speaking positively about the party, the speaker is expecting that his friend understands his sarcasm. It is not completely isolating since it requires an audience to understand it, yet nevertheless functions as a means of excluding those who are not within the selective group. Andrew Cross compares this form of irony to a pair of lovers in a public gathering communicating in secret and taking pleasure in the fact that only they can decipher the messages.[22] This expresses an intelligence and superiority on the part of the ironist, but he is still bound to others, which is not the radical expression of subjectivity Kierkegaard admires in Socrates or that de Silentio sees as the highest form of irony in the knight of infinite resignation.

This kind of expression would rather be radical verbal irony, which goes beyond the superficial level of binary opposition. It is a phrase intended only to puzzle the reader, and force him to interpret it as a message with a certain meaning. In truth however, the radical verbal ironist does not have a particular message to convey to the reader. Cross explains, "For Kierkegaard, the more one speaks [...] in riddles that are left up to the hearer to solve [...]

20. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 51-2.

21. Ibid, 69.

22. Cross, Andrew, op cit, 129.

the more one is an ironist."[23] Speaking in riddles does not create the kind of binary opposition that the irony in a form such as sarcasm would require. The tension it creates between the exterior behavior of the ironist and his inner state of being is more subtle. The only objective for the ironist is to produce a statement that evokes a response. His audience could take him to be sincere, sarcastic, offensive, or flattering. They could take the ironist to be expressing some deep insight into the human condition, or dismiss it as pure nonsense. These interpretations are of no consequence to the ironist himself. He has no meaning behind his words and only relishes in his ability to play with the tensions of language created by the particular situation. Concerning the radical verbal ironist Cross explains that he "has no interest in communicating, directly or indirectly, deceptively or no deceptively; his only interest is in luxuriating in the freedom that comes from [...] tossing out statements that can be take in a variety of ways, and letting the hearer who takes this to be a real conversation flounder among the interpretative possibilities."[24] This is the most pure form of irony for Kierkegaard because the ties between his words and his meaning are the so loose. He cannot be held responsible for the interpretations, since in truth, he has no direct intention behind his words. De Silentio's ironist can also use this form of irony because in his infinite resignation, he rejects the world. In using radical verbal irony, he asserts his superiority through the manipulation of language. This frees him from the world and allows him to experience his loss as a singular individual. The radical verbal ironist's motivation is only to assert himself as higher than the situation his irony critiques. He does this by watching his audience attempt to pin his language down to a single meaning when in fact there is none.

The third form is formal irony, where the ironist acts in a way which opposes how he truly feels. A mother with her disrespectful teenage son, for example, might take on his apathetic attitude or selfish mannerisms in order to express indirectly, the problems she has with his behavior. In this example, the mother cannot be held responsible for her true intentions. The son only indicts himself by getting angry at his mother because all he is responding to is a reflection of his own bad behavior. De Silentio loves this kind of surprise attack, what Kierkegaard calls a wounding from behind. He enjoys how slyly it puts the focus back on the individual. If there is a direct condemnation, if the mother simply said what she meant, the son can reject the mother's opinion as misunderstood or incorrect, but if he becomes angry at her parody of his own actions, it is only because he recognizes the flaw in himself. This form of irony de Silentio uses with reference to Hegel, as he plays on the method and mentality of the Enlightenment. De Silentio views its philosophy of faith understood through reason to be terribly misguided, but like Socrates whom he praises in the work, he begins by affirming its validity then tearing it down through the logical outcomes of its methods. With these forms of irony established, we turn to the text itself. Now we view it as a group of the privileged few, laughing along with this man of unassuming humor as we see with new eyes how he truly understands the human as a being before God.

De Silentio presents *Fear and Trembling* as a book about the nature of faith. He opens the work condemning his age for selling faith at a bargain price. This is a direct assault upon the kind of Christianity inspired by the Enlightenment. Its subordination of faith to reason

23. Ibid, 131.
24. Ibid, 232.

created for de Silentio a society of people who claimed to be religious, but only focused on the bureaucratic aspects, treating religious duty as list of obligations simply to be fulfilled. Once these Christians finished the duty of going to church and reciting prayers, they could turn their attention back to science and reason, which they saw as a more important matter. Both Kierkegaard and de Silentio had a distain for this kind of Christianity, which they did not even consider Christianity at all. To them, it was Christendom, a perverse deviation from the purer Christianity of the early church. Nietzsche offers his interpretation of this phenomenon in the passage about the mad man in *The Gay Science.* He claims that through the same focus on rationality, which Kierkegaard condemned, religious men in Europe during the 19th century made themselves strangers to the God of St. Paul and St. Peter with whom they claimed such a familiarity.[25]

In his critique of Christianity, de Silentio also refers to Hegel's philosophy as a symptom of the problem of faith. For de Silentio, Hegel's assertion that the way to know God is through logic and the construction of a rational system is misguided. Faith for de Silentio is a paradox, which goes beyond reason and is grounded in subjectivity. Kierkegaard distances his interpretation of faith from that of Hegel and the difference goes back to his reverence of the Greeks, which de Silentio also praises in *Fear and Trembling.*

The Greeks for Kierkegaard were a people who saw philosophy as an individual activity. To understand beauty, or the nature of ones soul, an individual could not rely solely upon the edifice of knowledge built up by his predecessors. Philosophy was a discipline in which the student could only find answers through his own introspection, rather than the Hegelian notion of beginning from where the last philosopher ended in a sequence of progress that culminates in absolute knowledge. A focus on subjectivity is what both Kierkegaard and de Silentio want to bring back from Athens. To learn how to live the good life requires an inward examination of what it means to be an individual and unique human being.

From his own introspection, de Silentio sees this subjectivity only resolved in the person of faith who views himself transparently as an individual in relation to God. The figure of Abraham serves as his archetype and he takes the book to explain how we all must follow him in his great faith if we want to fulfill our lives. The story of Abraham's binding of Isaac, however, has deep philosophical implications, and we must, as de Silentio writes, go beyond those who "recite the whole story in clichés."[26] Silentio wants to make the point that Abraham taken seriously is an absolute mystery because what he was prepared to do was incomprehensible.

Abraham had to kill his only son to fulfill his duty to God. In this action, as de Silentio points out, he had to violate his ethical duty to his son and his obligation to uphold the moral standards of the community. The collection of these standards de Silentio defines as the ethical universal. To kill one's son is unacceptable to the ethical sphere, and within it, no justification for the deed can result in its affirmation. Abraham knew that what he planned to do would destroy his son and that in this deed, he would lose all that was important to him: his

25. This mentality is exemplified in the conception of the last man whom Nietzsche condemns in his magnum opus *Thus Spake Zarathustra.* The connection between the two is noteworthy, since they each came to similar conclusions about the predicament of the modern human and an overcoming through a spiritual subjectivity. Given Nietzsche's radical atheism, their agreement from such different perspectives may speak to the truth in their insights into needing to address the apathy, malaise and alienation people expressed after the Industrial Revolution.
26. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 28.

child, his legacy as the father of a great nation, and his role in the glorification of the God whom he loved. In the movement of infinite resignation, Abraham gives up all of this in recognition that all is lost if he kills Isaac.

He can take no comfort in the sphere of infinite resignation because God's request goes beyond rational understanding. De Silentio demands the reader work to understand the story. When asking to move beyond clichés, he wants us to try to stand next to the man as he gazes upon the mountain where God asked him to sacrifice his son.[27] Often, readers view the story retrospectively, not acknowledging that Abraham did not see the ram until the final moment before he plunges the knife into his young son. For each moment before he catches sight of the true holocaust and after God speaks to him is one of fear and trembling; this is what de Silentio describes as the "distress, anxiety, and paradox" of acting beyond reason in faith.[28] He cannot understand how Isaac, who represents the totality of his passion in life, could be returned to him after the sacrifice. He also had to constantly look back at his son and remind himself about the dereliction of his highest ethical duty for the sake of God's will. He had to consider each moment that he might be wrong and that he should drop his walking staff, embrace the son and plead for his forgiveness. Instead though, he walks on up the mountain towards the theater of his son's demise. In each of these moments, Abraham makes the movement of faith because he believes that God will return his son to him through His absolute power. He writes, "Abraham had faith, and had faith for this life. In fact, if his faith had been only for a life to come, he certainly would have more readily discarded everything in order to rush out of a world which he did not belong."[29] Abraham had faith that through God, all things are possible. He won his son back through his undying faith in the absolute.

De Silentio also offers Mary as a person of faith. He praises this wonderful child who sacrificed all for the sake of God when she solemnly proclaimed herself the handmaid of the Lord.[30] In that moment, she also makes the movement of infinite resignation with her acceptance of the loss. She doubted her resolve. She knew her community would disown her for having a child out of wedlock, and she would lose her life as the daughter of a Jewish family, which was all she knew and loved. Weighing the implications of the decision, her anxiety must have been crushing. How could she explain to her family her interior conversation with God? How could she communicate that He asked her to transgress the ethical obligation she had as a woman and as a betrothed? Mary could only believe that through God, her life would be returned and with this, she made the leap of faith.

Mary exemplifies another crucial aspect of de Silentio's philosophy. The movements of infinite resignation and faith are spiritual, and thus cannot be qualified by time. Mary's movement of resignation and faith occur in just moments. Her movement of resignation happened in an instant, yet spiritually, she leapt mountains. The movement of infinite resignation to the movement of faith can happen in a single moment or after an entire life time. De Silentio implies that many people exist as knights of infinite resignation, many for most of their lives. His focus is not the time spent as people of infinite resignation, but the spiritual movement of the individual, which one can make at any moment, if they are open to the possibility of

27. Mt. Moriah; see Gen 22: 1-19, *The New American Bible* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1970).

28. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 64,

29. Ibid, 20.

30. See Luke 1: 26-38.

God. De Silentio's focus on the spiritual individual begins with the movement of infinite resignation and is behind his affinity for irony as a device that focuses the ironist's attention on himself.

Although de Silentio does not mention the husband of Mary by name, he would surely count him as a knight of faith. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and asked of him on behalf of God the impossible-accept this child as your own and marry this girl as your virgin wife. Mary as he knew her was lost since she was carrying a child that was not his. Despite the incommensurable situation, Joseph married her in faith, and gained back his pure wife. This example also expresses the close relationship between faith and love, which de Silentio explicates in *Fear and Trembling*. Joseph's love for his wife was restored through his faith in God. Before the angel appeared to him, he planned to cancel the wedding privately so as to save her from shame, but when approached by God, he humbled himself and thus his love was saved. If only all men could have such faith in love.

This summary of de Silentio's philosophy serves as a precursor for the heart of this examination which is a focus on the author himself – this witty ironist who finds himself in the sphere of resignation without the strength to make the movement of faith. He writes, "I cannot make the final movement, the paradoxical movement of faith, although there is nothing I wish more."[31] From this we can conclude that he is the knight of infinite resignation and thus in a position to exploit the concept of irony. De Silentio writes that "the hero of faith [is] not even an ironist and humorist but something much higher."[32] Irony implies a concealment, where faith is pure disclosure of oneself before God. Irony embodies a negation of the world in favor of the impossible ideal, where faith affirms the temporal and solves the paradox through God by virtue of the absurd.

Irony is present throughout *Fear and Trembling* and gives the reader insight into de Silentio as a person. In his "Eulogy on Abraham," he distinguishes between the hero, as the doer of great human deeds and the poet, who proclaims the actions of the hero in loving admiration. De Silentio defines greatness when he writes, "Everyone shall be remembered, but everyone was great wholly in proportion to the magnitude of that with which he struggled. For he who struggled with the world, became great by conquering the world...but he who struggled with God was the greatest of all."[33] Abraham is clearly the greatest hero for de Silentio, and his book is a retelling of his tale and a praising of his great faith. Yet he offers such a puzzling phrase where he writes, "I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically."[34] It should also be noted that this phrase immediately follows a wonderfully poetic description of the Delphic Bridegroom who decides not marry his bride the moment before his wedding. Does de Silentio not embody the definition of a poet which he himself offered only a few pages before? Would I be correct in calling him a liar and fraud for contradicting himself so blatantly in his own work? Could I take him at his word and try to read the book as only dialectically? The truth of the matter is with any interpretation, de Silentio has achieved his purpose. It is an example of radical verbal irony, where the author himself has no investment in the particular interpretation of the phrase. It exists to puzzle the reader and force him to exhaust the

31. Ibid, 51.
32. Ibid, 51.
33. Ibid, 16.
34. Ibid, 90.

possibilities of the phrase within the confines of the text while the author stands ironically above the situation itself.

The entire relationship between the dialectical and the poetic is a paradox that continues throughout the book. De Silentio goes so far as to define the work as a dialectical lyric in the title. Throughout the work, de Silentio first answers his questions about Abraham through a dialectic method and then illustrated his conclusions with examples through poetic language. He takes his duplicity even further when he claims that, "the present author is by no means a philosopher."[35] This quote precedes an allusion to Hegelian philosophy in terms of his grand philosophical system. He equates the philosopher with the dialectician, of whom Hegel was one of the best. Yet in denying his role as a philosopher, we are left again wondering why it is he later writes that he only approaches things dialectically.

De Silentio uses this style to play with the tensions of the language within the context of the book itself. He wants his readers to delve into the mire of his words – to interpret, reinterpret and still find their answers unsettling. It is here where de Silentio is most distant from his words and the importance of his own interpretation almost disappears. His connection with Kierkegaard in this sense becomes clear. They each praise Socrates in their books, Kierkegaard specifically for using irony in this way to create puzzles which are to be examined and interpreted even though his statements may not have a direct message to convey to the reader. De Silentio affirms this indirectly when he writes that Socrates "did make the movement of infinity. His ignorance is the movement of infinite resignation."[36] Putting Socrates in the sphere of infinite resignation where irony belongs coupled with his employment of the same form of irony which Kierkegaard praises in his dissertation is evidence of de Silentio's affinity with this form of irony.

The most interesting example of this radical verbal irony comes from de Silentio's account of Abraham himself..[37] He writes of Abraham's last words to Isaac as they climb to the place of the sacrifice, "His response to Isaac is in the form of irony, for it is always irony when I say something and still do not say anything. [...] Now if Abraham had replied: I know nothing – he would have spoken an untruth. He cannot say anything, for what he knows he cannot say."[38] Isaac can take his words to mean a number of things, but ultimately, his particular interpretations are inconsequential, since he can never fully understand Abraham. Isaac wants Abraham to explain his inner subjectivity, where God spoke only to him, in a language that only he could fully understand. As much as the father loves his son, this he cannot do.

This passage also highlights the distinction between irony and lying. Irony must always reveal a glimpse of the truth, even in its most radical form. Socrates himself, whose entire life was an ironic event, offers the spectacle of the truth behind his concealment in his last moments before he died. He asks his friend to offer a cock to Asclepius, revealing himself only for an instant.[39] The mask of his love for this world, and his reverence for humanity with

35. Ibid, 7.

36. Ibid, 69.

37. When Isaac asks his father, "Where is the sheep for the holocaust?" Abraham responds, "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust." Gen 22: 7-8.

38. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 119.

39. Asclepius was the god of health. Socrates gives him the gift of a cock, which implies that death will cure him of the sickness of life.

its reason hid a welcoming of death, and a desire to move beyond human existence. This idea of partial revelation amid a life of concealment is a portrait of Kierkegaard himself, who moved heaven and earth to try and escape his own pen. No matter what great efforts he made to conceal his true intentions in his writing, his true self is present, even in his most distant pseudonym.

De Silentio also employs formal irony in connection with his break from Hegel and the philosophy of the enlightenment. We see a foreshadowing of this kind of irony in de Silentio's assertion that "I do not... condemn with my words but with my deeds."[40] De Silentio describes Hegel's philosophy in a dialectical form. At the beginning of each problema, he analyzes different questions about the nature of true faith, and answers them in terms of Abraham's example in the Genesis story. In each instance he begins with the assertion that the ethical is the universal and the best way to act as an individual in relation to God. He then proceeds in each case to explain the Hegelian position through the dialectic that made Hegel so famous. Each time, however, he logically deduces that if the ethical universal is the highest sphere of being, than we must label Abraham a murderer and a monster, for his violation of the ethical in his case was so heinous, considering what he planned to do. Writing this way is itself ironic, since he is using and affirming a method that he condemns in the preface of the book. De Silentio says that he "neither writes the system or gives promises of the system, who neither exhausts himself on the system nor binds himself to the system."[41] His disingenuous affirmation of Hegel's system and the assertion that the universal is highest is only to show the limitations of such a philosophy. When confronted with the paradox of faith, logic fails for de Silentio, and to try to understand the figure of Abraham without humbling oneself before the incommensurability of his act in choosing to bind Isaac is not faith at all.

Faith is a returning to the individual and a movement beyond the universal as one stands transparently before the absolute. As the famous passage explains, "Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal – yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal. If this is not faith, than Abraham is lost."[42] This ironic stance de Silentio takes with respect to Hegelian philosophy puts him as he writes, beyond the system.[43] Through being faithful to the system, de Silentio has pulled it down to express the true meaning of faith.

Irony also takes the form of opposition through speech, as seen in the opening passage of Hamann. He mentions the example of the ironic Faust. His doubting led people to follow him, yet he knew they were following him for the wrong reasons. This is again an indictment of the age, claiming that one can come to faith through doubt. There is also an ironic element to his description of the age wanting to go beyond faith. It is another shrewd way of emphasizing his point that faith is higher than reason. Those looking to move beyond it are mistaken in de Silentio's view, and any argument to the contrary will only lead its advocate further away from God.

A further example of de Silentio's use of his irony occurs in his "Eulogy on Abraham."

40. Ibid, 51.
41. Ibid, 7.
42. Ibid, 55.
43. Ibid, 7.

He writes that "Abraham was the greatest of all, great by the power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by the hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred of oneself."[44] This apparent praise of Abraham's powerlessness, foolishness, and self loathing must be understood ironically. For de Silentio, Abraham existed as the most powerful in his willingness to uphold the absolute duty he had to God, the most wise in his humility before the paradox of faith, and most loving, as he recognized his importance as the single individual before God. De Silentio wants to emphasize the truly awe inspiring nature of what he understands as faith proper; this pure acceptance of the finite individual in loving relation to the infinite God whose possibilities are limitless. To accept this paradox is for de Silentio a form of madness, and any attempt to achieve a rational reconciliation of the paradox will simply fall infinitely short.

As the book opened with an ironic device, it is only fitting that it should close with one. The example of Heraclites and his wayward disciple who used his philosophy to deny motion is analogous to the age of the enlightenment trying to move beyond the faith of the early Christians and the ancient patriarchs and in the process perverting and disfiguring it. This is what de Silentio means when he refers to his age trying to buy faith at a bargain price. It is accepting the perversion and forgetting the teaching. On this issue, Louise Caroll-Keeley writes, "If faith is a movement on the spot, then to go further [...] is to abandon faith in the very act of professing to advance or uphold it."[45] This story exposes the Enlightenment's definition of faith as duplicitous. Though they are affirming faith in God through their words, in reality, they are destroying it by an implicit secular humanism. In raising these objections to holding reason above faith, de Silentio's seemed to have predicted the much more secular 20th century, which carried with it some of the greatest atrocities in history. For this project, whether secularization caused these catastrophes is inconsequential. For de Silentio's purposes, the focus of reason in the 20th century has taken people much further from God, which was his concern throughout *Fear and Trembling.*

The forms of irony employed by Silentio all play on the notion of hiddenness and disclosure. This paper has been in reference to the kind of silence Abraham expresses in his few words to Isaac, a silence in speech. Kierkegaard's choice for the name of this character is quite fitting; he lives in the sphere of infinite resignation, employs irony, and his name is translated as "John of Silence." He cannot move beyond resignation and his irony exposes his inability to disclose himself. In reading, we never get a clear picture of him; this poet philosopher who denies both of these as distinct to his character. He lacks identity in the work, and exists only as an example of the knight of infinite resignation. De Silentio is a character many people can identify with, and may serve as an indictment of the reader's own position. His audience could very well be the knights of resignation who must contemplate the movement of faith in order to recognize their own estrangement from God. This alienation, as de Silentio reminds us, is only rectified through a pure transparency between oneself and God.

The man himself admires disclosure but only from a great distance. This is apparent in his description of the knight of faith. He writes of a man living in harmony with the world around him, putting everything in its proper relation with respect to money, friends, love, tra-

44. Ibid, 16-7.

45. Caroll-Keeley, Louise. "The Parables in Problema III in *Fear and Trembling.*" *International Kierkegaard Commentary, vol. I* (Mercon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1993), 153.

dition, etc.[46] He returns to the finite world and affirms it wholly yet with a new perspective. What he has lost in the movement of infinite resignation is regained in one sense, but regained in a new way because of the spiritual journey, which the knight of faith underwent. When Abraham saw the ram, and held his son again, their relationship was radically altered. Abraham regained his son in a way that completed their relationship. This is also seen in love, de Silentio's usual analogy for faith. The lover who loses his beloved yet has faith that she will return to him even if it is against all probability, wins back something wonderful if she returns as his beloved. If he accepts his loss, and never moves beyond it, even if she comes back to him, he cannot accept her. He needs faith in their relationship to regain his lover in this new way.

De Silentio's focus on love in the work also brings the true author to mind. Kierkegaard wrote that, had he had faith, he would have married Regina.[47] The rich description of the lost lover parallels own rupture with his fiancée. He also wrote *Fear and Trembling* soon after he broke his engagement to her and much of the text is an attempt to explain his breaking of their engagement. This indirect communication, this speaking through a veil, is where he felt most comfortable.He saw such a clear distinction between the exterior world and the interior subjectivity of the person. His own estrangement from the world in his later life speaks to his gravitation towards interiority. The book describes a longing on the part of de Silentio, but also on the part of Kierkegaard. He wants to understand himself in a way that would put him at ease with the world. He wants to present himself transparently to the world and have it accept and make sense to him. He never achieves this and saw himself resigned to the place of the poet. As de Silentio subtly laments, "The poet or orator can do nothing that the hero does; he can only admire, love, and delight in him."[48] Kierkegaard never saw believed he was a hero, but what a poet he was.

From this we see how irony changes the reading of *Fear and Trembling*. Irony understood properly offers a glimpse into the author's interior personhood, and perhaps some insight into our own. Through the forms of irony employed throughout the text, we get a deeper insight into the author's views on the sphere of infinite resignation, and especially his critique of Hegelian philosophy. Through its frequent employment, De Silentio wants to expose irony and hiddenness as a way of life that pales in comparison to the choice of making the movement of faith. He loves the focus irony puts on the subject, the distance it puts between oneself and one's society, but as we have seen, one must go beyond irony in faith to truly understand oneself as a unique individual standing transparently before the absolute.

– Jarrod Abbott

46. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 37-8.
47. Lowrie, Walter. *A Short Life of Kierkegaard.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 146.
48. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15.

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