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Keywords: names; pseudonyms; truth; fiction; work; play

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What's in a name: a Kierkegaardian approach to Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, Paul Auster's *City of glass* and Albert Camus' *The myth of Sisyphus*

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Abstract

In *The point of view on my work as an author* (1851) Søren Kierkegaard speaks of Governance, a voice informing his writing. In *The concept of anxiety* (1844) the pseudonymous Vigilius elucidates the categories of the temporary, the eternal and the moment and defines the demonic as anxiety about the good, a predominant motif in Herman Melville's novel *Billy Budd* (1891). Pseudonyms play an important role in Paul Auster's novel *City of glass* (1987), a narrative constructing fictions within fictions while striving towards truth and pitting play against work. Albert Camus' *The myth of Sisyphus* (1942) is relevant as the philosopher argues that reason approximates truth while faith betrays truth, a standpoint he reverses in the later work *The rebel* (1951).

Keywords: names; pseudonyms; truth; fiction; work; play

The name. Aesthetics, ontology, epistemology

Is the name a prelude to the unnamable? Is the potential presence implied in naming an admission of absence? How may Being and knowledge best be subsumed under an aesthetic project and how will the aesthetic enhance the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the human mind and of everyday existence

Kierkegaard's response to these questions is clear. The philosopher engages in a narrative whose dual objective is to speak while remaining silent. The sound of the narrative voices, writing, and language is surrounded by authorial silence. The author is absent, or at least distant. The narrative distancing constitutes a maneuver by which Kierkegaard submerges

his work in silence and the mode of this submerging is play – a play conceived as work while negating work. The silence of the author and his work is to stimulate a reader response that will somehow fill the silence by suggesting interpretation or interpretations. Thus, Kierkegaard makes the writing process relate to, or rather be relational to the contingency of accident, chance. In doing so the philosopher produces a fictional emulation or repetition of the accident of existence which he sees as absolutely given. The aesthetic is existence; specifically, the aesthetic makes manifest the essence of Being and knowledge, *ontos* and cognition. The aesthetic works as a disclosing of human nature and the human mind through language, employing poetic expression and form. Hence Being and knowledge are contingent upon that which is absolutely posited: the accident of ex-

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istence. Exactly how this accident of existence may be posited is worked out in a series of narratives authored by pseudonyms and through the play and the varieties of poetic form performed by the pseudonyms. Here Kierkegaard situates himself in the dual position of writer and reader, becoming a textual “I” and an empirical “I”.

Kierkegaard speculated at great length on who the author or authority of his work was in *The point of view for my work as an author* which he did not want to be published but which was published posthumously in 1859. In the essay, Kierkegaard discusses the part played by Governance in the authorship, declaring that he did not have an overview of the entire dialectical construction of the whole authorship. The details of this dialectical construction eludes him. Kierkegaard is aware of the fact that he is dealing with some sort of surplus, ontological and epistemological, of which he cannot define the source but which manifests itself as a paradox in the writing process itself: the paradox of relationality and a self-other dialogue that may only be worked out, or that actually only works as an intricate aesthetical play that clearly shows that the aesthetic and the existential dimensions are bound together in Kierkegaard's discourse and in the conception of his discourse. The relationality implicit in the self-other dialogue and in Kierkegaard as textual “I” and empirical “I” now emerges as a *sine qua non* in existence itself; and not only that: relationality, paradoxically, is the precondition for the revelation of the Absolute – the source the philosopher calls Governance. Relationality in its existential sense is an absolutely given which precedes the aesthetical and the rhetorical. However, existence may only be revealed in the aesthetical – the aesthetical being conceived as a creative process engendering an infinite variety of potential, fictional (yet real) identities through artistic playing with language.

Kierkegaard aestheticizes his relationship to

God and to the Absolute, making “God” into a super-metaphor for writing in an effort to draw the boundary between the religious and the aesthetic. Faith in God is faith in the unknown Other which (or who) may only be approximated by the playful language of the artist. That language is designed to conceive of the non-conceptual, the religious, by producing images and metaphors which may serve to visualize God but which may not grasp Him fully. Paradoxically, then, the infinite play of the aesthete becomes conducive to the religious by admitting, so to speak, that the act of creation engaged in by Kierkegaard through his pseudonyms, falls short of conceiving of God while being the only avenue left to the believing human subject. Kierkegaard hears a voice admonishing him to hold on to his pen properly. The production or source of this voice which blends with his is not an intellectual or poetic passion but a passion stemming from God. Kierkegaard maintains a dialogue with this voice. In the article “The Eyes of Argus” Joakim Garff comments: “ ‘the voice’ functions as a linguistic or grammatical authority, a *transcendental signifié*: ‘the voice’ determines Kierkegaard's writing, just as ‘Governance’ governs it” (Garff 1991: 46). Responding to the author-ity of the voice Kierkegaard is transformed into a textual *persona*, someone other than his empirical self. As Garff notes, “Kierkegaard renounces every connection with his pseudonyms, in *The point of view* he claims that the pseudonymity has been the tactical dissembling of a religious author, whose intention was to catch and keep the reader's attention” (33).

But Kierkegaard is ambiguous on this point. In *The point of view* he argues that “One can deceive a person for the truth's sake, and (to recall old Socrates) one can deceive a person into the truth” (Kierkegaard 1962: 38). Concerning his writing Kierkegaard has the following to say: “Likewise there is a difference between writing on a blank sheet of paper and bring-

ing to light by the application of a caustic fluid the text which is hidden under another text" (39). The text which is hidden under another text is recognized, brought to light, by the creative endeavors undertaken by the pseudonyms which make manifest that which is hidden. The negative is exposed and turned into a positive following a chemical process emulating the action of the developer, the liquid used in a photographer's dark chamber. However, the 'bringing to light' is an experimental procedure that may not terminate in a finite positive. Hence Kierkegaard is still working in the dark while attempting to bring something to light. As author he remains within the bounds of the pseudonyms, signing *The point of view* 'S. Kierkegaard' rather than 'Søren Kierkegaard'. The omission of the personal first name is significant as it emphasizes the persistently experimental mode of 'Kierkegaard's' writings. Paradoxically, *the individual, individuality*, is represented and enhanced by the pseudonyms rather than by an authoritative author. This author, Kierkegaard 'himself', is bracketed.

The 'text which is hidden' is the text produced by what I have called the author-ity of Governance.

The existential implications are significant. Kierkegaard speaks of the individual, *Den Enkelte*, as the category of spiritual awakening. Here the importance of relationality, of losing oneself in order to become oneself, cannot be minimized. In the unpublished *Lectures on communication* Kierkegaard remarks that ethico-religious truth is related to personality and may only be communicated by an "I" to an "I". Through the aesthetical project, the narrative work/play presided over by the pseudonyms, the gap between direct and indirect communication narrows as Kierkegaard claims that by bringing poeticized personalities, the pseudonyms, who say *I* into the center of life's actuality he has contributed to familiarizing the contemporary age with hearing a personal *I* speak.

The complicity of the aesthetic and the religious is part of a greater paradox, analyzed in *Concluding unscientific postscript*. Here reason and existence also appear linked yet they are separate. The relation of reason to existence is dialectical; reason is dialectical in itself; and existence is dialectical. Understanding and existing are two different things. Existing is serious, speculation is unserious. Reason has a limit but when defining this limit Kierkegaard thinks existence as different from thought, thus aggravating the paradox. The passion of thought evoked in the *Philosophical fragments* involves a breach of reason and leads to belief against understanding. But isn't belief a higher form of knowledge? May we not situate belief within the constant search for access to the deeper layers of understanding that emanate from and at the same time approximate knowledge – or wisdom? Granted, the hidden source, Governance, is present in language only as an absence, but absence in the sense of infinite potential, an openness that does not negate but affirms. In Victor Eremita's *Either-or* the second pseudonym called *A* explores the limit-relation between language and music, stating that the musical is a higher artistic and epistemological category than language, and music is an expression of sensuous eros, or the immediate-erotic. Hence music is the language or non-language of sensuous immediacy, and the immediate is also indeterminate, a non-representational mode.

An additional underminer of representation is Socratic irony which Kierkegaard, in *The concept of irony*, designates as play as opposed to work, the latter determined by the economic market conditions and the general demands of the establishment, Work does not 'work' unless it is placed within an aesthetical, narrative framework as it indeed is in *Either-or* where, as John Vignaux Smyth points out in *A question of Eros*, "the relation between A's theoretical and Johannes's novelistic discourse" is put in question, as "suggested by Victor Eremita's am-

biguous novelistic framing of both of these". As Smyth states, referring to *The diary of a seducer*, "both A's reflective-theoretical determination of immediacy and Johannes's self-reflective determination of reflection must be regarded as fictive"; what is undecided is "whether Johannes's discourse should be regarded as doubly fictive, in the sense of a fiction within a fiction"; and it is not to be taken for granted that "the fiction of a fiction is *more* fictional than a fiction "pure and simple". Smyth claims that a double fiction may take "a pseudodialectical turn, so to speak, back toward fact" (Smyth 1986: 244).

The 'double fiction' becoming 'fact' is indicative of Kierkegaard's deeper textual intention: Pivoting adeptly towards 'fact' via the pseudonyms, employing rhetorical devices (poetic imagery, metaphor, irony), is meant to approximate the hidden source: the immanence of the voice transcending the multiple voices of the text. Thus Kierkegaard approximates the 'synthesis of the psychical and the physical' which is to be posited by spirit", as Vigilius writes in *The concept of anxiety* (Kierkegaard 1980: 90). The aesthetic dimension exceeds the purely grammatical as it brings to light the religious - the religious being, as we have noted, the non-conceptual which the individual may only relate to through faith.

Freedom, anxiety and the demonic

The concept of anxiety is a psychological supplement to Kierkegaard's epistemological investigations. In the present work the aim is to expand the understanding of the obstacles to freedom and spiritual fulfilment by analyzing anxiety, the major impediment to the attainment of freedom and truth. The text is written under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis whose task it is to tackle two connected dialectical theses: body - soul - spirit and the temporal - the eternal - the moment. Body

and soul are united in a third, spirit, present in man's innocent state as "immediate, as dreaming", says Vigilius, adding that in this dreaming state spirit is a hostile power since it disturbs the relation between body and soul. On the other hand, "spirit is a friendly power, since it is precisely that which constitutes the relation". Vigilius asks, "What, then, is man's relation to this ambiguous power? How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety" (Kierkegaard 1980: 44). *Angest*, then, is an emotional state expressing fear of becoming conscious and at the same time a fear of remaining unconscious.

Vigilius now proceeds to discuss the second synthesis, that of the temporal and the eternal, asking what the third element of the synthesis might be and providing the answer that this third is the moment, *Øieblikket*, adding that the "moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other" (89). Further, the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal is not separate from the synthesis of body and soul but a manifestation of it. Spirit is created with the arrival of the moment, spirit being consciousness of the moment and as such consciousness of eternity and time, the precondition for the individual's awareness of his/her place in history. How is anxiety now related to this process? Anxiety is the psychological prerequisite for the arrival of spirit and moment. Vigilius terms this arrival "freedom" and says "the spirit . . . when it is about to posit the synthesis as the spirit's (freedom's) possibility in the individuality, expresses itself as anxiety" (91), further comparing anxiety to a state of dizziness, vertigo. Moreover, there are two kinds of anxiety, anxiety about the evil, and the opposite or rather, the inverse, anxiety about the good, which is the demonic. As Vigilius has it, "the demonic is an unfree relation to the good" (119) and "unfreedom that wants to close itself off" (123) Vigilius' argument culminates in the following analysis:

The demonic is inclosing reserve (det In-

desluttete) and the unfreely disclosed. The two definitions indicate, as intended, the same thing, because inclosing reserve is precisely the mute, and when it is to express itself, this must take place contrary to its will, since freedom, which underlies unfreedom or is its ground, by entering into communication with unfreedom from without, revolts and now betrays unfreedom in such a way that it is the individual who in anxiety betrays himself against his will (123).

The demonic is a suppression of reality, then, and a rejection of freedom and self-consciousness. By contrast, achieving spirit in the moment means becoming real, emphasizing 'becoming' here. However, achieving spirit also involves solving the dichotomy between the unconscious state and the conscious state, a dichotomy which continuously precipitates the individual into an ambiguous relation to freedom, spirit and the moment, the ambiguity consisting in anxiety. The individual is afraid to be free yet anxious to embrace freedom. Furthermore, the path to freedom is strewn with thorny roses, the principal element of which is an innate obscurity that is engaged in and practiced professionally, i.e. poetically, by the demonic and the aesthetical, both of which assume an incognito, the pseudonymous approach to truth. At this point the aesthetical may indeed be said to be complicit with the demonic in the sense that hiding, or even lying, is part of a psychological cum epistemological process aiming to disclose the truth.

Kierkegaard's work is a play – play conceived as a literary method endowing the philosophical argument with an illuminating poetic force. The application of a 'caustic fluid' erases the direct philosophical approach to truth, facilitating the appearance of a deeper understanding, emerging through indirect communication. Indirect communication is essentially aesthetic, poetic, literary, using irony, image and metaphor as instruments of illumination. Kierkegaard reverses Plato's interdiction of the poet, elevating poetry to the highest

form of human cognition. Thus Kierkegaard's work/play becomes a hybrid of philosophy and literature, created in order to reveal truth through fiction. Therefore Kierkegaard's writings make for an eminent tool of literary criticism.

Fathers and sons

The motif of fathers and sons in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* and Paul Auster's *City of glass* clearly show the relevance of Kierkegaard's philosophy for literature and literary criticism. Melville's novel may be seen as a study of the demonic, exhibiting all the features associated with the demonic state of mind: fear of the good and of innocence, coupled with a simultaneous attraction to innocence; anxiety or anxiousness in relation to freedom; a state of mind characterized by self-enclosure, i.e. mental imprisonment. Auster's novel produces a fictional emulation of the accident of existence, much in line with Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms. In both novels, plot and character manifest a fusion of the aesthetic and the demonic. The aesthetic is pitted in a struggle to free itself from the negative psychic and moral effects of the fusion, a fusion which ironically has contributed to the 'delicate play' of emancipating spirit from its dreaming state. The demonic subject possesses reason in the form of a cynical intellect dissecting innocence and provoking the innocent subject to come out and to ascend to consciousness. The liberating of the aesthetic from this negative fusion will entail a new concept and practice of speaking and writing.

Billy Budd which was written during the years 1888 to 1891 is set in the year 1797, the year of the Great Mutiny in the British Navy that has been quelled but continually threatens to break out anew. The young sailor Billy Budd has been press-ganged on to the vessel *The Indomitable* commanded by Captain Vere. Billy is referred to as The Handsome Sailor by

his shipmates on account of his distinctive physical beauty and his superior physical strength. He has a speech impediment, a stutter. His personality emanates innocence and a spontaneous happiness. The master at arms, Claggart, nourishes a hatred for the young man, an envy of Billy's innocent nature. Billy is described in language rich in images and metaphors:

He was young; and despite his all but fully developed frame in aspect looked even younger than he actually was, owing to a lingering adolescent expression in the as yet smooth face all but feminine in purity in natural complexion but where, thanks to his seagoing, the lily was quite suppressed and the rose had some ado visibly to flush through the tan. (Melville 1968: 297)

The 'lily' is 'suppressed' and the 'rose' does not quite 'flush through' the tan – the images recall Vigilius' analysis of the dreaming state. – Claggart, a man app. 35 years old, is described as follows:

His brow was of the sort phrenologically associated with more than average intellect; silken jet curls partly clustering over it, making a foil to the pallor below, a pallor tinged with a faint shade of amber akin to the hue of time-tinted marbles of old. (311)

The 'faint shade of amber' is indicative of something concealed within, clandestinely showing itself imbedded, so to speak, in the pallor of the face. The first person narrator comments that Claggart is a specimen of 'natural depravity', a depravity according to nature, referring to Plato. Further, the faculty of reason in Claggart is peculiar: Claggart's general bearing seems to indicate that he is a man subject to the law of reason, however, "not the less in his heart he would seem to riot in complete

exemption from that law having apparently little to do with reason further than to employ it as an ambidexter implement for effecting the irrational" and "he will direct a cool judgment sagacious and sound" (321–322) to accomplish an aim so malign that it is almost insane. The demonic nature emerges full force here; reason thwarted to serve a malign purpose and hiding that purpose by hiding himself, inclosing himself: the double hiding and inclosing of the demonic mind is an 'ambidexter implement'.

Claggart's figure is described as 'not amiss' and his face, excepting the chin, well moulded. 'But the form of Billy Budd was heroic; and if his face was without the intellectual look of the pallid Claggart's, not the less was it lit, like his, from within, though from a different source. The bonfire in his heart made luminous the rose-tan in his cheek" (323). The faces of both are lit from within, one source giving testimony to a slowly emerging, blooming spirit, in the case of Billy, the other source feeding a malignant purpose. The quote from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is pertinent here: "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet". Granted. But for fragrance to be emitted the rose has to bloom in maturity. Billy's 'rose-tan' is made 'luminous', indicating that the potential state of spirit is about to unfold naturally. Whereas Claggart's depraved purpose results in the hiding of the source within yet employing reason 'ambidexterously' to enclose and disclose at the same time. It may be that inadvertently, subconsciously, Claggart aims to facilitate the emergence of spirit in Billy, which would mean that Claggart's envy of innocence is also an attraction to innocence; yet his attraction to innocence and his secret wish to possess it propels him into a series of acts whose purpose is to turn innocence and unconsciousness into consciousness and self-consciousness. The meaning of this secret psychic and moral purpose would be, then, that Claggart actually aims to assist in the making luminous the rose-tan in Billy's

cheek. In Claggart's eyes Billy's nature is to be 'nothing more than innocent' and this state of mind must be ameliorated so Claggart "recoils" upon himself "like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible" (324) and acts as he must. His acting against Billy culminates in an accusation of The Handsome Sailor, charging him in front of Captain Vere with plotting a mutiny. Precipitating the charge is a curious event involving soup spilt by Billy, coursing across the deck and hitting Claggart's feet. Claggart interprets this as a wilful demonstration of antipathy on Billy's part. The symbolism of the spilt liquid is fairly obvious: the soup qua nourishment unites the two men, flowing from Billy's hand to the master at arms' feet. The dietary nourishment constitutes the 'surplus' which Kierkegaard refers to as Governance, spiritual and aesthetic at one and the same time, manifesting itself as a *common source* endowing narrator and character – I emphasize both men – with natural sustenance.

The charge of mutiny by Claggart made to Captain Vere makes Billy speechless and the captain's repeated enticement to Billy "Speak, man" (343) elicits no response save a "strange dumb gesturing and gurgling in Billy" (342). Billy finally strikes Claggart a fatal blow to the head and the master at arms dies on the spot. An inquiry follows and although several officers plead for acquittal Vere decides to pronounce a verdict of death by hanging. The sequence of events indicate a fatal civilizational dilemma caused by a reversal of the Freudian oedipal dynamics. The overthrow or slaying of the fathers by the sons as depicted by Freud in *Totem and taboo* is transformed into the slaying of the sons by the fathers. The consequences are fatal and ultimately lead to the death of the fathers as both Claggart and Vere die, the latter being lethally wounded in battle at a later date. On his deathbed Vere mumbles to himself "Billy Budd, Billy Budd", not a token of remorse but a sign of resurrection – resurrecting the son by naming him. The name is the

name of the rose in bud.

The hanging scene also becomes a resurrection as Billy speaks at the end, saying "God bless Captain Vere!" demonstrating a singularly generous forgiveness and understanding of what prompted the captain to arrive at the verdict. At the hanging the sky emits a glow, "it chanced that the vapory fleece hanging low in the East, was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the lamb of God"; and "Billy ascended; and ascending, took the full rose of the dawn". 367

Claggart serves his purpose after all, in spite of himself, as Billy's death becomes spirit blooming in the rose of dawn. The rose-color of the dawning sky is the visual accompaniment of the sounds of nature forming the new language – heard when Billy is lowered into the ocean –, the speech Billy made a stuttering effort to enounce:

a second strange human murmur was heard, blended now with another inarticulate sound proceeding from certain larger sea-foul whose attention having been attracted by the peculiar commotion in the water resulting from the heavy sloped dive of the shotted hammock into the sea flew screaming to the spot. So near the hull did they come, that the stridor or bony creak of their gaunt double-jointed pinions was audible. (370)

The cry of the birds are a 'croaked requiem'. The croaking and the inarticulate sounds of the sea-foul is the sound of a language before language representing the natural unfolding of spirit in immediacy, non-mediated by a dialectical consciousness. This may serve as a corrective to Vigilius' dialogue in the mind.

Daniel Quinn, the protagonist of Paul Auster's *City of glass*, was prior to the loss of his wife and son an accomplished writer of fiction. After the loss he has turned to writing detective stories simply to pass the time in what

seems to him to be a meaningless existence. He has retired to a position above and beyond his own writing, distancing himself from his work like Kierkegaard and is consistently using the pseudonym William Wilson as the author of his novels. The reference here to Edgar Allan Poe's tale "William Wilson" is naturally no coincidence as the name reverberates with the sinister overtones of the perhaps most radical example in literature of the Romantic double. The private eye/narrator of Wilson's detective fiction is named Max Work, a name serving as an antidote to the fictive universe he operates in, although 'work' appearing within a fiction or, as it is, a double fiction, may rather be termed play instead of work. Quinn contemplates his relationship to Max Work:

Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist. Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. (Auster 1987: 6)

A late night phonecall changes Quinn's life. The person calling asks if this is the Paul Auster detective agency. Quinn hangs up the first time but answers the phone the second time and agrees to meet with a Virginia Stillman, married to a Peter Stillman, posing as the detective Paul Auster. He learns at the interview with Virginia Stillman that he is to follow a person being released from prison, her husband Peter's father, Stillman senior, who has served time in jail for keeping his son in a locked closet for years in an effort to isolate him from conventional intercourse and communication, the objective being that the son was to learn a new language, a 'real' language. The project fails

as the father is discovered by the authorities. The isolation has obviously impacted Stillman junior's mind and caused his speech to be something approaching the language used by autistic or schizophrenic persons. Introducing himself at the meeting Peter Stillman says:

'I am Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. My real name is Peter Rabbit. In the winter I am Mr. White, in the summer I am Mr. Green. Think what you like of this. I say it of my own free will. Wimble click crumblechaw below. It is beautiful, is it not? I make up words like this all the time. That can't be helped. They just come out of my mouth by themselves. They cannot be translated. (18)

The made-up words resemble, or may even be taken from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* which contains several passages of nonsense language, so-called, jumbled words that may exist in the dream-sphere of the subconscious or in the pre-symbolic strata of the mind analyzed by Julia Kristeva, the semiotic *chora* which may breach the symbolic order. Peter Stillman continues "I am mostly now a poet. Every day I sit in my room and write another poem. I make up all the words myself, just like when I lived in the dark"; and "Later perhaps I will do something else. After I am done being a poet. Sooner or later I will run out of words, you see. Everyone has just so many words inside him" (19).

Quinn/Auster's job is to follow Stillman senior after he gets out of jail in order to protect Stillman junior. Virginia fears that the father will try to murder his son. The motif of the father repressing the son returns and is clearly symptomatic of a wider cultural malaise that also manifests itself as a crisis in the subject's relation to language. As Quinn/Auster follows Stillman round the streets of New York City he discovers that the old man is picking up discarded objects from the street, putting them in

a bag and taking them back to his hotel room where he is making a systematic attempt to name these objects, an example being a broken umbrella which must be assigned a new name since it is no longer an umbrella. In other words, Stillman has not given up his project of constructing a new language. Further, Quinn discovers that walking round the streets Stillman is tracing a pattern, a series of words that spell Tower of Babel, according to the old man an apt name for New York, a confused chaos of multiple tongues at war with one another. Under this confused surface a genuine language is to be found and this is the task Stillman has ordained for himself. Quinn contemplates the words Stillman has been tracing:

Quinn's thoughts momentarily flew off to the concluding pages of *A. Gordon Pym* and to the discovery of the strange hieroglyphics on the inner wall of the chasm – letters inscribed into the earth itself, as though they were trying to say something that could no longer be understood. But on second thought this did not seem apt. For Stillman had not left his message anywhere. True, he had created the letters by the movement of his steps, but they had not been written down, It was like drawing a picture in the air with your finger. The image vanishes as you are making it. There is no result, no trace to mark what you have done. (70–71)

Writing something down that will represent reality, like the Kierkegaardian pseudonyms, is bound to disappear as a fiction, a purely fictional representation of a reality that remains elusive: the image vanishes as you are making it. The vanishing point of language is perhaps an apt characterization of the fictions created by Kierkegaard's pseudonyms whose favorite rhetorical mode is irony: the infinitely delicate play with nothingness. Ironically, the 'infinitely delicate play' constructed to conceive

of the inconceivable will eventually manifest its own inherent fallacy. Play does not amount to work, finally. Yet play remains the sole foundation for work, just as the fictional potentialities of the pseudonyms remain the only way to bring facts to light.

At one point Paul Auster appears as a character in his own novel. Quinn approaches him in order to ask him to cash a check for \$500 he has received as payment for his detective work. Auster informs him that Stillman senior committed suicide several months ago. In the meantime, all during the summer, Quinn has been living in a garbage dumpster across from Virginia's and Peter's apartment, watching it. After the meeting with Auster he enters the apartment, finds it empty and moves in, occupying the farthest back room where Peter was cooped up in a closet. He has begun work on a so-called Red Notebook where we find the following excerpt: "To be inside that music, to be drawn into the circle of its repetitions; perhaps that is a place where one could finally disappear" (109). The entry in *The Red Notebook* refers to a tune Quinn hears being played in the street, a piece of jazz "beating out a weird and precise syncopation" (*loc. cit.*).

Quinn gravitates towards 'a place where one could finally disappear'. In another entry in *The Red Notebook* he quotes Charles Baudelaire: "It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place where I am not". Adding: "Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself" (110). As noted above, before finally entering the Stillman apartment Quinn has been living in a garbage dumpster in an alley across from the apartment building, watching it and spending hours looking at the sky:

He saw that, above all, the sky was never still. Even on cloudless days, when the blue seemed to be everywhere, there were constant little shifts, gradual disturbances as the sky thinned out and grew thick, the sudden whitenesses of planes, birds, and

flying papers. Clouds complicated the picture, and Quinn spent many afternoons studying them, trying to learn their ways, seeing if he could not predict what would happen to them. (117)

The metamorphosing sky anticipates and becomes one with his own metamorphosis. Stopping in front of a shop he is confronted by his own image in the window:

At 84th Street he paused momentarily in front of a shop. There was a mirror on the facade, and for the first time since he had begun his vigil, Quinn saw himself. It was not that he had been afraid to confront his own image. Quite simply, it had not occurred to him. He had been too busy with his job to think about himself, and it was as though the question of his appearance had ceased to exist. Now, as he looked at himself in the shop mirror, he was neither shocked or disappointed. He had no feeling about it at all, for the fact was that he did not recognize the person he saw there as himself. He thought that he had spotted a stranger in the mirror, and in that first moment he turned around sharply to see who it was. But there was no one near him. (119)

The brief, instantaneous glimpse of the unrecognizable 'stranger in the mirror' alerts the reader to the fact that a person's identity and very existence may change abruptly and without warning. The metamorphosis is so radical that it is not even perceived. The intermediate stages of transformation are omitted and the individual is thrown into the unknown. The human subject's lack of insight into the physical, psychological and metaphysical transformative process precipitates the subject into a sudden confrontation with a mirror image of the strange and the unknown. The unknown is, impossibly, visibly present in the mirror.

Yet it remains unknown, of course. The experience of the unknown possesses universal implications: It is an experience of otherness in the extreme; and it is also an experience of homelessness, material and spiritual. This composite experience is evoked in Bruce Springsteen's song "Streets of Philadelphia": "bruised and battered; I couldn't / tell what I felt. I was / unrecognizable to myself. Saw my / reflection in a window and didn't / know my own face" (Springsteen 1994: 1). As in Kierkegaard, the Unknown remains impenetrable, absent yet present, and inaccessible to the faculty of cognition. Yet it is acutely experienced as an accident of existence.

The experience of self-estrangement precipitates Quinn's decision to move into the empty Stillman apartment where he can finally disappear in a place where he is not, vanishing into *The Red Notebook*. People coming to the apartment find that Quinn has indeed disappeared, leaving behind *The Red Notebook*, the last sentence of which reads: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (131). When there are no more pages in the red notebook Quinn will disappear, physically. Writing is existence. Or rather: existence is the other writing, created, paradoxically, in part by the thwarted efforts of the father. Quinn thus becomes the poet he once was – the poet Peter Stillman is. A poet with another name. Or no name.

Reason and belief

Albert Camus' *The myth of Sisyphus* (1942), while confirming reason, explores the limits of reason as does Kierkegaard in his elaborate discussions of human cognition which culminate in an embracing of faith as a logical consequence of the failure of epistemology to grasp the Unknown Other. In his essay Camus initially confirms reason as the faculty that dispels the illusion that conventional human endeavors, e.g. work, economic and social advancement,

the fulfilment of basic desires and ambitions, ingrained habits, etc, are somehow meaningful. Camus declares that the absurd emerges in the confrontation between man and world. The world emits a strangeness and a denseness and this is what Camus conceives as the absurd. The objects of the world, e.g. stones, are foreign to us and hence the desire for unity with the world is obsolete. The awareness of the absurdity arising from the gap between man and world is characterized by the philosopher as lucid reason and reason notes its limits. Noting the limits means recognizing the fact that ultimate insight into existence is impossible. This recognition leads to a state of what Camus refers to as conscious revolt, or the revolt of consciousness which cannot be abolished. The revolt of man – *l'homme révolté* – represents an advanced state of permanent consciousness that is also a permanent revolution, a revolution of thought itself, explored later by Camus as metaphysical revolt. This revolution amounts to admitting antinomy and paradox in man's relation to the world.

Camus' critique of Kierkegaard revolves around this point. Kierkegaard takes the leap, Camus says, before knowing. That is, the leap according to Camus is not an admission of the rational but an admission of the irrational. In Kierkegaard "antinomy and paradox become criteria for the religious" (Camus 1991: 13) Camus claims, and "what Kierkegaard calls for is the third sacrifice required by Ignatius Loyola" (loc. cit.), the sacrifice of the intellect. In the eyes of Camus this 'leap' is a moral as well as an epistemological error because it "makes of the absurd the criterion of the other world, whereas it is simply a residue of the experience of this world" (loc. cit.). But for Kierkegaard, "the believer finds his triumph in his failure" (loc. cit.). This amounts to suppressing the absurd – by denying one of the terms of its equation. According to Camus, the leap is denial, then, and does not represent the extreme danger as Kierkegaard would like it to do, Camus

writes that the danger "lies in the subtle instant that precedes the leap. Being able to remain on that dizzying crest – that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge" (17). The contrary position is the recognition that living means keeping the absurd alive. Existing in itself means revolt against the abolition of awareness – existing *is* that awareness and hence Camus refuses suicide, ultimately, because dying would eliminate his revolt and his reason. The revolt of reason means maintaining the "constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second", (18) Camus writes. It is a metaphysical revolt that extends awareness.

How far may awareness be extended without exceeding the bounds of reason and turning into faith? The apparent paradox of faith and reason is resolved in Camus' later work *The rebel* (*L'homme révolté*, 1951). Here Camus explores metaphysical revolt as opposed to political revolt, advocating, like Kierkegaard, a profound transformation of individuality from *within*. In the Introduction Camus writes:

Absurd-ism, like methodical doubt, has wiped the slate clean. It leaves us in a blind alley. But, like methodical doubt, it can, by returning upon itself, open up a new field of investigation, and the process of reasoning then pursues the same course. I proclaim that I believe in nothing and that everything is absurd, but I cannot doubt the validity of my proclamation and I must at least believe in my protest. (Camus 1991: 4)

I must at least believe in my protest. The statement may be applied retroactively to *The myth of Sisyphus* from 1942. Commenting on Sisyphus at the end of the essay Camus says that "if this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious". When Sisyphus walks down the slope to retrieve the rock that has rolled back down

to the bottom of the hill, “that is the hour of consciousness . . . , he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock” (23). Does the hour of consciousness entail freedom, then? Camus replies ‘yes’ and ‘no’. In discussing man’s establishing aims for himself Camus notes that this belief in aims implies a belief in freedom, adding “I am well aware that that higher liberty, that freedom to be, which alone can serve as a basis for a truth, does not exist” (20). The absurd man realizes that he is not really free. However, for Sisyphus ‘the hour of consciousness’ arrives when he is walking back down to retrieve the rock that has rushed down to the bottom of the slope. At that moment, says Camus, “he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock” (23). Sisyphus, the absurd hero, is stronger than the rock and superior to his fate because he *rebels* against his fate. His metaphysical revolt is fed by belief in his protest.

Conclusion. Silence and writing

Through the employment of pseudonyms Kierkegaard constructs narrative approaches to truth. These approaches, or approximations, form a hybrid of philosophy and literature, as Kierkegaard engages in a subtle poeticizing of the philosophical text. In this manner the Kierkegaardian pseudonyms make manifest the multiple, indeed infinite, potential conceptions of the non-conceptual. The ‘caustic fluid’ erases straight philosophical reasoning, revealing the hidden layer of poetic truth. The action of the fluid, then, constitutes a breach of reason, thus dispelling the anxiety that had forced the individual to withdraw from embracing freedom. Freedom must also be considered as the freedom to approach truth and the Unknown, God, through a higher faculty of understanding requiring the practice of faith.

Melville’s exposition of the demonic in the novel *Billy Budd* makes for a dramatic narrative highlighting the dialectic between free-

dom and unfreedom. Auster’s novel *City of glass* places narratives within narratives, fictions within fictions, in order to reveal the hidden text, *The Red Notebook*. And Camus and Kierkegaard have this in common: they are aware of the danger involved in mystifying the truth. They emphasize individual self-consciousness equally, advancing similar arguments. Perhaps Kierkegaard’s leap may be situated within Camus’ epistemological framework by referring to the leap of faith as an absurd response to that impossibility of complete transparency Camus is talking about in the essay. In this context Kierkegaard’s work is not work, then, it is rather the play of multiple fictional modes visualizing, ironically, infinite potential lives. The fictions within fictions are essential in this respect for they issue forth like voices that speak of a silence, as in Samuel Beckett’s *The unnamable* (1955):

This voice that speaks, knowing that it lies, indifferent to what it says, too old perhaps and too abased ever to succeed in saying the words that should be its last, knowing itself useless and its uselessness in vain, not listening to itself but to the silence that it breaks and whence perhaps one day will come stealing the long clear sigh of advent and farewell, is it one? I’ll ask no more questions, there are no more questions, I know none anymore. It issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can’t stop it, I can’t prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know, it’s round I must revolve, of that I must speak. (Beckett 1955 : 307)

Kierkegaard’s many voices that fill him emanate, in the end, from one voice that is not listening to itself but to ‘the silence that it breaks’. Unrecognizable to himself, Kierkegaard may yet recognize the mute voice of silence that

rebels against the ‘voice that speaks, knowing that it lies’.

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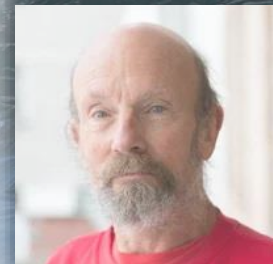
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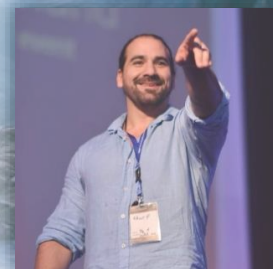
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