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The art of existentialism: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer and the American existential tradition

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The Art of Existentialism: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway,
Norman Mailer and the American Existential Tradition

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

In dedication to my mother, Joyce, for a lifetime of friendship, support, and encouragement, and to my father and brother, John and Jason, for their silent pride.

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The Art of Existentialism:
F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, and the
American Existential Tradition

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my research is to examine the philosophic influences on three literary works: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*, and Norman Mailer's *An American Dream*. Through an investigation of biographical, historical, cultural, and textual evidence, I will argue for the influence of several European philosophers—Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, and Martin Heidegger—on these authors and on the structures and messages of their works. I will discuss how the specific works I have selected not only reveal each author's apt understanding of the existential-philosophical crises facing the individual in the twentieth century, but also reveal these authors' attempt to disseminate philosophic instruction on the “art of living” to their post-war American readers. I will argue that Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer address what they see as the universal philosophical crises of their generations in the form of literary art by appropriating and translating the existential concerns of existence to American interests and concerns. I will argue that Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer's emphasis on the individual's personal responsibility to first become self-aware and then to strive to see the world more clearly and truly reflects their own sense of responsibility as authors and artists of their generations, a point of view that

repositions these authors as prophets, seers, healers, so to speak, of their times. Finally, I will discuss how, in *An American Dream*, Mailer builds on the Americanized existential foundations laid by Fitzgerald and Hemingway through his explicit invocation of and subtle references to the art and ideas of his literary-philosophic predecessors—Fitzgerald and Hemingway.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Foundations of Existentialism in America

Because F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Norman Mailer are writers who contributed to the shape of our national identity and our national consciousness, their American literary and philosophic roots, as well as the American cultural currents of their times, have been extensively explored in their literary art. A point of agreement among scholars is that Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer's contributions to American culture reach far beyond their roles as American literary artists—they are not only considered vociferous social critics of twentieth-century America, but articulate interpreters of their American cultural milieu. Literary works such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Death in the Afternoon*, and *An American Dream* stand as testaments to these authors' engagement with and apt understanding of their cultural moments, yet these works also reveal that their art takes shape as a vision inspired by the intellectual and philosophic currents of their time.

Scholars have variously argued that the philosophic voices that reverberate in the American consciousness—and in the works of Fitzgerald and Hemingway—can be attributed to American philosophers such as William James, John Dewey, George Santayana, Paul Tillich, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.¹ As a result of research focused on

¹ See critical works by Ronald Berman and Wright Morris for discussions of American philosophers influence on Fitzgerald's ideas and works.

claiming the “Americanness” of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, the influence of the European existentialists on the American consciousness and on the works of Fitzgerald and Hemingway has received much less critical attention. Mailer’s appropriation of European existentialisms, on the other hand, has been the focus of many book-length studies, interviews, and articles in the years since Mailer himself claimed that he was developing his own brand of existentialism (Adams 4). Yet, what is significant about these three authors taken together is not merely the influence of European existentialisms on their canon of works, but the depth of the cultural moments they capture in their art in works such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Death in the Afternoon*, and *An American Dream*, moments that reflect the growing influence of European existentialisms in American culture. For Fitzgerald, the historic moment of *Gatsby*—the postwar Jazz Age—reflects the dominant strain of cultural discourse, which focused on the applicability of Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophies of modern civilization and the modern individual to American interests and concerns. In Hemingway’s bullfight manifesto *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway’s study of death via the Spanish bullfight reflects the philosophic discourse of Søren Kierkegaard, a philosopher whose importance to twentieth century thought was being recognized in the 1920s and 1930s. In Mailer’s cultural milieu, the applicability of Martin Heidegger’s notions of the individual’s struggle for authenticity and the growing discourse on the viability of existential psychology as an alternative to psychoanalytic approaches to mental health become the subject of Mailer’s analytic of American culture in *An American Dream*. It is through the uniqueness of these authors’ adaptations, interpretations, and translations of existential philosophies to American interests and

concerns that Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer not only capture their specific American cultural moments and crises and put their cultural moments in motion in the form of literary art, but they add depth and dimensions to their art through their engagement with and espousal of the existential discourses that were gaining currency in their cultural moments.

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*, and Mailer's *An American Dream* were each written during a time when the foundations were being laid for the study of existential philosophy in America via Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger respectively. In Fitzgerald's postwar 1920s, American cultural critics and intellectuals focused in on Nietzsche's philosophies of morality and perspectivism and attempted to apply Nietzsche's philosophies on modern subjectivity to modern American culture, something Fitzgerald himself addresses in *The Great Gatsby*. In Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*, although it was written and published just prior to the explosion of Kierkegaard translations on the American scene in the early to mid 1930s, Hemingway engages with the growing discourse on Kierkegaard's philosophies of life and death, discourses which correlate to postwar American concerns—i.e., how to live in the face of literal and existential death. In Mailer's postwar era, Nietzschean and Kierkegaardian existentialisms remained a part of America's growing discourse on the applicability of existentialism to American culture, yet Mailer writes *An American Dream* at the moment existential psychology is replacing the traditional Freudian and Jungian approaches to psychoanalysis in America, a moment when Heideggerian philosophy and psychology flooded American discourse, a moment Mailer captures in *An American Dream*. Yet

although the specific cultural moments and the specific philosophies each of these authors engage with vary, they find common ground in their shared *existential* vision of the dilemmas of and remedies for the modern individual and the modern, “civilized” world.

Like Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer, “The Existentialists” share a similar vision of the complications of existence and of living in modern times. Specifically, existentialists focus in on the implications of our inherent subjectivity and thus our inability to ever achieve a truly objective viewpoint; they focus on the difficulty of making choices, decisions, and commitments in the absence of absolute “Truths” and objective guides; they focus on our existence as meaning-seeking and self-creating beings who must find meaning and value for our lives in spite of the fact that the world in which we have been “thrown” is irrational, meaningless, and absurd. Significantly, existentialists both build on and answer Naturalism: yes, the world is comprised of brute forces beyond our control—political, social, economic, and natural—yet existing individuals are not merely animals swept along by urges, impulses, and the basic, biological struggle to survive. Existing individuals have the ability to and must strive to transcend these forces and create genuine meaning and content for their own lives. In short, the existing individual is responsible for developing his/her essence, and although there are undeniable biological and social forces that shape the individual, existing individuals have the ability to become aware of these forces and choose how they will respond to them, or let them shape them, in their everyday lives. Achieving the proper perspective through which the individual comes to see self and world more clearly,

embracing our freedom to choose what our lives will amount to, and taking responsibility for our lives, these are the subjects of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer's critiques of and remedies for the modern individual and the modern world. Yet, although Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer's visions are undeniably existential in nature, the specifics of their philosophic visions, like those of their existential-philosophic predecessors, greatly vary. Thus, it is necessary to trace the reception of Nietzschean, Kierkegaardian, and Heideggerian philosophies in America and thus show the specific philosophy and the specific philosophic-cultural moments Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Mailer engage with, Americanize, and make accessible to their American readers in the form of literary art.

Friedrich Nietzsche:

The Philosopher-Critic and Prophet in American Discourse

Friedrich Nietzsche's introduction to the American scene was marred by early misconceptions of and misinterpretations of Nietzsche and his works. The first work to appear in English on Nietzsche was Max Nordau's *Entartung*, published in English as *Degeneration* in 1895, a best-seller but a "highly contaminated source" of Nietzschean thought (Pütz 3).² Nordau's work "summarily claimed Nietzsche's writings as prime exhibits for the diagnosis of rapidly spreading madness and degeneracy" in modern European culture (Pütz 3). Although American readers could identify with what Nordau presented as Nietzsche's view of modern civilization as in decline, Nordau's "raving

² See William James 1895 "Review of Max Nordau's 'Entartung'" and Alfred Hake's 1896 work *Degeneration: A Reply to Max Nordau* for analyses of Max Nordau's interpretation of Nietzschean thought.

denunciation of all modern art, literature, and thought as indications” of the corruption of modern European culture is not, as Nordeau claims, a Nietzschean-based sentiment (Pütz 3). In addition to Nordeau’s distortion of Nietzschean thought, the first English translations of Nietzsche’s works that followed were some of the last works Nietzsche wrote and published. In 1896 *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was the first of Nietzsche’s works to be translated into English, followed by the 1896 publication of *The Case of Wagner*, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, *The Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Anti-Christ*. The result was that the English-speaking world’s picture of Nietzsche and Nietzschean thought was “distorted beyond recognition” (Pütz 3).

Between 1899 and 1908, several studies on Nietzsche aimed to present a more accurate picture of Nietzsche and Nietzschean philosophy and addressed the applicability of Nietzschean thought to American interests. In 1899, Grace Neal Dolson’s Cornell University doctoral dissertation, which was published in 1901 as *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, turned attention to Nietzsche’s moral system and his views on the moral relativity inherent in modern civilizations. This early focus on Nietzschean morality was in part due to the cultural climate in America, a climate in which Victorian values and standards were being reevaluated, questioned, and criticized. Hayes Steilberg notes that

The turmoil of change that overshadows the beginning of the twentieth century brought forth an almost panic-stricken insecurity about the validity of all accepted values (which was paradoxically accompanied by a manic hopefulness regarding the possibility of achieving new values).

We need not be surprised that this affected the readings of a philosopher who envisioned the modern era as one of a decisive “transvaluation.”
(258-259)

Nietzsche’s push for “a transvaluation of values” in the modern world, a concept tied to the epistemological shift to modern subjectivity and the rejection of the absolutism of Victorian morality and perception, is evident in the early focus on Nietzsche’s moral system and the moral relativity he claims persists in all modern civilizations (Mencken 62, 125). Since the modern world required “a transvaluation of values” and a new approach to thinking about morality, the emergence of a new, modern individual who could live authentically, so to speak, in the midst of moral, personal, and social relativity, was not only a concern of Nietzsche’s, but an concern of Americans who no longer identified with the old, bureaucratic values of the nation. As Hays Steilberg notes:

The dominant strains in the ‘first wave’ of philosophical Nietzsche reception in American were, undoubtedly, political and moral: phrased as the questions of power and new values. This befits the era. The age of modernism responded to the fin de siècle’s paralytic obsession with the double burden of hypertrophic historical consciousness and exhausted culture by producing a cult of the new man who must...find completely new values in order to redefine the human as the superhuman. (259)

This focus on Nietzschean morality was perpetuated by the first American monograph on Nietzsche: H.L. Mencken’s 1908 *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Touted by Hays Steilberg as a “remarkable study” and by Edwin Slosson as the “most complete

exposition of Nietzschean philosophy,” Mencken’s monograph became a seminal work in Nietzsche studies that had not been matched by 1913 or by 1917, the years in which Mencken published subsequent editions of this work (Steilberg 20; Slosson 697). Manfred Pütz notes that the popularity of Mencken’s monograph was due to the fact that Mencken’s “dealings with Nietzsche were rather borderline cases of an intricate mixture of literary, philosophical, and popular concerns, which finally made Mencken one of the most vociferous Nietzsche-inspired cultural critics of his time” (Pütz 6). Mencken’s goals, according to Steilberg, were to make Nietzsche’s philosophy accessible, show that his philosophy was logical, and show that “Nietzsche had a definite importance for current events in America” (243). Manfred Pütz explains:

Of course, some of the drastically foregrounded issues of the first major wave of Nietzsche reception in America bore the stamp of genuinely American concerns. One of them aggressively addressed the question of Nietzsche’s “Americanness,” an issue that pointed to the problematics of whether the philosopher’s ideas could either be seen as compatible or as totally incompatible with the whole framework of principles, tenets, and suppositions that supplied the basis for a genuinely “American creed” constitutive of the encompassing cultural and political practices of American society as such. (Pütz 5)

Because Mencken’s monograph included Mencken’s own explication of Nietzschean ideology in terms of “genuinely American concerns,” *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* stands as “a landmark of the reception, interpretation, and propagation of

Nietzschean ideas in America,” and Mencken stands as “the best-known American propagator, if not disciple, of the German philosopher at the beginning of the twentieth century” (Pütz 5-6).

Aside from Mencken’s apt, though not flawless, explication of Nietzschean thought, Nietzsche’s sister, Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche, attempted to present a more accurate picture of Nietzsche to the world when she published a two volume biography of her brother called *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches* in 1895. Although Forster-Nietzsche’s biographical volumes were not translated into English until 1912 and 1915, her volumes were cited in newspapers and journal articles well-before the English translations appeared (Steilberg 21). Forster-Nietzsche also contributed an “Introduction” to Thomas Common’s English translation of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in 1909 in which she traces “How Zarathustra Came into Being.” Although her narrative focused on clearing away misconceptions of Nietzsche’s concept of the Superman, for example, and focused on positioning her brother not merely as a philosopher and a social critic but as a poet as well, her work has been highly criticized for creating an inaccurate picture of Nietzsche and his philosophy (Steilberg 21-22).

Although Mencken’s and Forster-Nietzsche’s works were flawed, both went a long way toward presenting a more comprehensive picture of Nietzsche and his works in many respects. Yet, due to the persistence of inadequate English translations of Nietzschean thought as well as misinterpretations of Nietzsche, the man, and Nietzschean philosophy as a whole, Nietzsche remained a “hotly debated” topic throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Pütz 6). According to Hays Steilberg’s assessment of early

English studies of Nietzsche, works such as Paul Elmer More's *Nietzsche* (1912), William August Huassmann's collection *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorized English Translation* (completed in 1913), Paul Carus' *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism* (1914), George Santayana's *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1915), and William Salter's *Nietzsche the Thinker* (1917), were all individually flawed either in translation or explication, but their existence provides insight into Nietzsche's popularity in the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, as early as 1913, Paul Elmore More concludes that "if the number of books written about a subject is any proof of interest in it, Nietzsche must have become the most popular of authors among Englishmen and Americans" (qtd. in Pütz 12-13).

In the beginning of the twentieth century Nietzschean thought was being advanced not only through philosophers, theologians, and social critics, but also through American literary artists. Writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Eugene O'Neill, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot, for instance, have been studied for their intimate knowledge of and espousal of Nietzschean philosophy in their works.³ Manfred Pütz notes that Dreiser and London in particular

were demonstrably interested in and influenced by Nietzsche, but they never played a noticeable role in the raging public debates as sketched above. Instead, they turned what intrigued them in Nietzsche's philosophy (of which they had anything but a complete picture) into literature by

³ See Manfred Pütz *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, Sidney Finkelstein's *Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature*, and John Killinger's *Hemingway and the Dead Gods* for comprehensive studies of Nietzsche's influence on modern and postmodern American literary artists.

weaving their reflections on certain Nietzschean ideas that fascinated them into the very texture of their novels. (Pütz 6)

Additionally, scholars such as David Ullrich argue for Nietzsche's influence on Fitzgerald's formation of his own "complex philosophy of culture," a philosophy Ullrich traces to the influence of Nietzschean philosophy on Fitzgerald's early short stories and novels ("Memorials" 2). In *Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature*, Sidney Finkelstein explicates the Nietzschean influence on Fitzgerald's short story "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," and both Ronald Berman's *The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas* and Olaf Hansen's "Stanley Cavell Reading Nietzsche Reading Emerson" note differing aspects of *The Great Gatsby* they see as influenced by Nietzschean thought (Finkelstein 293; Berman 9; Hansen 293-294). Although scholarship that traces the influence of Nietzsche on Fitzgerald's canon of works is certainly not lacking, studies of *The Great Gatsby* as a Nietzschean-inspired vision of the philosophic dilemmas of American culture and American identity remains to be examined.

Søren Kierkegaard:

The Philosopher-Critic and Prophet in American Discourse

Although Søren Kierkegaard's influence in America took hold well after Nietzsche had been a "hotly debated" topic for decades in American culture, discourse on Kierkegaard and Kierkegaardian thought began in American theological and philosophical societies in the early twentieth-century (Pütz 6). According to Kierkegaard

scholars Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard's theological and philosophical importance was recognized first by the Swedes and the Germans as early as the middle of the nineteenth-century, and then by the French before the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ The Hong and Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf's Lutheran College houses the first critical articles and translations of Kierkegaard's work in English dating as far back as Adolf Hult's 1906 study *Søren Kierkegaard in His Life and Literature* and Francis Fulford's 1911 study *Søren Aabye Kierkegaard: A Study*. By 1916 David F. Swenson, who later became one of the most notable Kierkegaard scholars of the early twentieth century, had presented and published "The Anti-Intellectualism of Kierkegaard" in which he praised the accessibility of Kierkegaard's writing and illustrations and provided a brief explication of Kierkegaard's views on the formation of the personality. But, the first selections of Kierkegaard's writings that were translated into English did not appear until 1923 when L.M. Hollander, an adjunct professor of Germanic languages at the University of Texas, published his translations under the title *Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard*. Hollander's translated selections were from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, "Diapsalmata" (from *Either-Or*, Part I), "The Banquet" (from *Stages on Life's Road*, Part I), *Preparation for a Christian Life*, and *The Present Moment*. Since Hollander's translations of Kierkegaard were part of Hollander's study of Scandinavian literature, he introduced Kierkegaard to the English-speaking world as a literary figure instead of a philosopher and provided very little explication of Kierkegaardian thought in his "Introduction" to his *Selections*. David Swenson, on the other hand, was actively investigating the philosophical and theological implications of

⁴ See Victor Deleuran's 1897 dissertation "Esquisse d'une Étude sur Soeren Kierkegaard."

Kierkegaard's writings throughout the first quarter of the twentieth-century, and he continued to translate, explicate, and give lectures on Kierkegaard and Kierkegaardian thought until his death in 1940.⁵ Yet it was not until the 1930s with the explosion of translations of Kierkegaard's writings into English that Kierkegaard began to be viewed by the English-speaking world as one of the premier existentialists of the nineteenth-century and began to gain more wide-spread attention as an important voice in twentieth century philosophy and religious studies.

From the foundations laid by German and French translations of Kierkegaard's writings before the turn of the century and the early discourse in English on Kierkegaard and Kierkegaardian thought, by the 1930s the demand for translations of Kierkegaard's writings in English-speaking world began to be satisfied. Interest in Kierkegaard is evident in the sheer number of and types of studies published in the 1930s. E.L. Allen's semi-biographical study titled *Kierkegaard: His Life and Thought* appeared in 1930. Studies such as John Bain's *Søren Kierkegaard, His Life and Religious Teaching* (1935), Theodor Haecker and Alexander Dru's study *Søren Kierkegaard* (1937), Walter Lowrie's study *Kierkegaard* (1938), and Melville Channing-Pearce's study *The Terrible Crystal: Studies in Kierkegaard and Modern Christianity* (1941) engaged with the existing discourse on Kierkegaard's life and writings and offered new insights into his writing and thought. Eduard Geismar's collection of 1936 lectures on Kierkegaard entitled *Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard*, appeared in print in 1937 with an

⁵ David Swenson's lectures and addresses on Kierkegaard, collected and published posthumously by his wife Lillian Swenson, spanned the years 1927 through 1936. See *Something about Kierkegaard* (1941) and *Kierkegaardian Philosophy in the Faith of a Scholar* (1949), which are collections of Swenson's philosophical talks on Kierkegaard's writings.

introduction by translator David Swenson. Swenson's own addresses and lectures on Kierkegaardian thought dating from 1927 to 1936 were published posthumously by his wife in 1941 and 1949 under the titles *Something About Kierkegaard* and *Kierkegaardian Philosophy in the Faith of a Scholar*. As for the influx of English translations of Kierkegaard's works, translations of *Diary of a Seducer* and *Philosophical Fragments; or a Fragment of Philosophy by Johannes Climacus* were published in 1932 and 1936 respectively. Posthumously published translations by Swenson, again edited and compiled by his wife, such as *Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life, Three Discourses of Imagined Occasions* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* appeared in 1941, the same year Walter Lowrie published his translation of *Repetition* under the title *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*.⁶ Otto Kraushaar notes that the influx of English language translations by David F. Swenson, Walter Lowrie, and Alexander Dru in the 1930s and early 1940s "marks a philosophical and literary event of the first magnitude" and marks a shift from Kierkegaard's influence in theological, philosophical, intellectual, academic and literary circles to his instatement in American universities and as an emerging subject in American cultural discourse (563). Although German theologians, philosophers, and academics had been touting Kierkegaard as "one of the seminal minds of the nineteenth century" for decades, in America, England, France, and Spain Kierkegaard's importance was just beginning to be recognized in the first quarter

⁶ *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* contains the selection "At the Side of a Grave," which is a discourse on the earnest thought of one's own death. Although this English-language translation did not appear until 1941, since it was posthumously edited and published by Swenson's wife Lillian, it is unclear when Swenson began translating this work. It is important here to note that the Germans enjoyed translations of Kierkegaard's "Discourses" as early as 1922. Since much of the early discourse in the English-speaking world relied on German translations of Kierkegaard (including Swenson's early readings of Kierkegaard), Theodor Haecker's translation of Kierkegaard's discourses entitled *Religiöse Reden* is worth mentioning.

of the twentieth century (Kraushaar 562). Aside from the cultural discourse on Kierkegaard in French and Spanish, *The Diary of a Seducer* (*Le Journal du Seducteur*) and *The Sickness unto Death* (*Traite du Désespoir* (*La Maladie Mortelle*)) were translated into French in 1929 and 1932 respectively, and in Spain *The Concept of Dread* (*El Concepto de la Angustia*) and “Displamata” (from *Either/Or* Part I) appeared in translation in 1930 and 1931. Although the English, French, and Spanish speaking worlds only had a few of their own translations of Kierkegaard’s writings by 1932, a handful of seminal book-length studies, master’s theses, PhD dissertations, and articles appearing in journals provides evidence that there was already significant literary, cultural, and academic discourse on Kierkegaard world-wide⁷.

In part due to America’s consuming interest in Nietzsche in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and in part due to the limited amount of English-speaking scholars qualified to translate Danish, Kierkegaard did not “inundate the fields of philosophy, theology, and criticism,” as Otto F. Kraushaar notes, until the 1930s and 1940s.

Kraushaar writes:

bolstered by the influence of Jaspers and Barth, as well as the enthusiasm of torch-bearing American students returning from German universities in the ‘twenties and early ‘thirties, and the recent influx into American and English universities of German refugee scholars, the name of Kierkegaard

⁷ The mention of the reception of Kierkegaard’s works in France and Spain is pertinent to this study due to Hemingway’s fluency in both French and Spanish. Since the French, as Hong and Hong correctly note, recognized the importance of Kierkegaard’s writing much earlier than the English-speaking world, early studies of Kierkegaard in France deserve mention. See in particular Victor Deleuran’s dissertation *Esquisse d'une Étude sur Soren Kierkegaard* (1897), Raoul Hoffmann’s *Kierkegaard et la Certitude Religieuse: Esquisse Biographique et Critique* (1907), Maurice Blondel’s *Études sur Pascal* (1923), and Eduard Geismar’s *La Victoire sur le Doute Chez Sören Kierkegaard* (1926).

was given some currency in the conversations and writings of American philosophers. In the meantime, Kierkegaard's thoughts were being introduced into the literary world by Franz Kafka and W. H. Auden and contributors to some of the advanced literary reviews. (Kraushaar 562)

Like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard's writings and thought attracted the attention of literary artists world-wide. As early as 1900, Kierkegaard's literariness as well as his influence on the literary world was recognized. Early academic endeavors include Clyde Charles Holler's Boston University Dissertation *Kierkegaard's Concept of Tragedy in the Context of his Pseudonymous Works* (1900) and Einar Wulfsberg Anderson Master's thesis *The Influence of Kierkegaard's Philosophy on the Works of Henrik Ibsen* (1926). In addition, articles such as Edwin Muir's "A Note on Franz Kafka" (1931), which focuses on the spiritual qualities of Kafka's work as Kierkegaardian, began to appear in the pages of literary journals.

In respect to Kierkegaard's influence on the writing and thought of Ernest Hemingway, critical studies on this influence did not begin in the English-speaking world until the 1960s. The most notable of these studies, although it does not focus exclusively on Kierkegaardian philosophy, is John Killinger's *Hemingway and the Dead Gods* (1960). Yet, just as the importance of Kierkegaard was recognized by the English-speaking world more than fifty years after Germans began studying Kierkegaard, scholarship tracing the influence of Kierkegaard on modern American and English writers was almost fifty years behind as well. Works by German scholars such as Wayne Kvam not only trace the critical reception of Hemingway's works in Germany after

World War I, but he and other scholars attribute some of Hemingway's early popularity in Germany to his articulation of existentialisms, Kierkegaardianism included. Although I have yet to find direct evidence in Hemingway's letters, manuscripts, or reading collection that proves Kierkegaard's influence on Hemingway, the cultural discourse on Kierkegaard in the years leading up to Hemingway's publication of *Death in the Afternoon*, as well as the text itself, tells an entirely different story.⁸

Martin Heidegger:

The Philosopher-Critic and Prophet in American Discourse

Although existential psychology was not widely known or practiced in America until the middle and late twentieth-century, both practical and theoretical existential therapies were being developed in Europe during the first half of the twentieth-century. For example, Martin Heidegger's existential-phenomenological approach to "authentic" being discussed in his work *Being and Time* (1927) influenced a group of Swiss therapists who sought alternatives to Freudian psychoanalytic theories and treatments for psychological concerns and disorders. Psychiatrist Hans Cohn notes in his book *Heidegger and the Roots of Existential Therapy* that "this was the first attempt to develop a method of psychotherapy from "existential' roots" (Cohn xviii). Swiss therapists

⁸ Kierkegaard's influence on Hemingway may have been indirect, but it is an influence that is evident throughout Hemingway's study of death in *Death in the Afternoon*. It is likely that if Hemingway did not personally read translations of Kierkegaard's writings, he was introduced to Kierkegaardian philosophy through Swenson or Hollander, through the works and critical studies of Kafka and Ibsen, and/or through the dominant strain of intellectual, literary, and artistic discourse on Kierkegaard in the 1910s, 20s, and early 30s.

turned to Heidegger's philosophies of existence and created a new approach to therapy that eventually became known as *Daseinsanalyse*.⁹ Although this approach was in the process of being developed before it was dubbed *Daseinsanalyse* in 1941, it was not until Heidegger became personally and actively involved in the development of this approach from 1959 to 1969 that *Daseinsanalyse* began to replace more traditional approaches to psychiatry world-wide. Cohn notes that "Heidegger played an active part in contributing to the first model of an existentially oriented psychotherapy" by teaching psychotherapists and psychiatrists his view of the world and "its potential relevance to their work" (xviii, 5).

The institutionalization of Heideggerian philosophy in America is marked by the explosion of cultural discourse on Heidegger and Heideggerian-based *Daseinsanalyse* in 1950s and 1960s America, most notably during the years that Heidegger formed friendships with founding members of *Daseinsanalyse*, Medard Boss, Gion Condrau, and Ludwig Binswanger. Although Binswanger stopped working with Boss and Condrau in 1957, Boss and Condrau continued to develop *Daseinsanalyse* as an alternative therapy to Freudian and Jungian approaches to mental rehabilitation.¹⁰ Yet aside from Boss' school of Heideggerian-inspired *Daseinsanalyse* and Binswanger's school, which was a mixture of Freudian, Jungian, and Heideggerian approaches to psychology, several

⁹ The main distinctions between Heideggerian-based existential psychology and the prevailing trends in the psychology of the times are two-fold: 1) where the traditional Freudian approach to psychology, for example, is a *psychoanalysis* in which the psychoanalyst is an integral part of the process, existential psychology is a *psychotherapy* that emphasizes the importance of continual self-analysis; 2) existential psychotherapy focuses in on the individual's recognition of his/her absorption in the social world in which identity is shaped and individual expression is thwarted, where psychoanalysis promotes normalizing the patient according to what is viewed as acceptable (in terms of identity, behavior, and choices for one's life, for example) in the everyday social world.

¹⁰ Due to Boss' publication of a critique of Binswanger's approach to existential psychology, Binswanger left the group and continued to formulate his own existential approaches to psychology.

other existential approaches to psychology emerged in the 1950s. For example, Viktor Frankl's analysis of existence, *Existenzanalyse*, and Jean-Paul Sartre's existential psychoanalysis, *psychoanalyse existentielle*, were also being developed and sought to institute a phenomenological approach to mental health. Thus, not only was *Daseinsanalysis* gaining currency world-wide as late as the 1950s, but a new field of psychology—existential psychology—was actively being developed and debated.

American discourse on existential-phenomenological approaches to mental health began to inundate the field of psychology as early as 1950. Early English language studies of the developing field of existential psychology include Werner Wolff's book-length study *Values and Personality: An Existential Psychology of Crisis* (1950), Adrian Van Kaam's study of the differing approaches to existential therapy in his collection *The Phenomenological-Existential Trends in Psychology: A Series of Papers*, published in the 1950s, and Ulrich Sonnemann's *Existence and Therapy: An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology and Existential Analysis* (1954). Articles such as Stephan Strasser's "Phenomenological Trends in European Psychology," which appeared in the journal of *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* in 1957, and Maurice Freidman's "Existential Psychotherapy and the Image of Man" originally published in *Commentary* in 1959 and reprinted several times between 1959 and 1964, illustrate the English-speaking world's growing interest in existential psychology. In 1958, two of the major voices in existential psychology, Rollo May and Medard Boss, published book-length studies under the titles *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* and *The Analysis of Dreams* respectively. Boss' study is significant in that he presented his

Heideggerian-based approach to dream analysis as an alternative to the Freudian and Jungian approaches that dominated the field of psychology at this time.

American interest in existential psychological approaches to mental health drastically increased throughout the 1950s, yet the number of English language book-length studies in the beginning years of the 1960s alone more than doubled. In 1960, Adrian Van Kaam published another study on the field of existential psychology entitled *The Third Force in European Psychology: Its Expression in a Theory of Psychotherapy*, the same year Paul Tillich published *Existentialism and Psychotherapy*. In 1961, Rudolf Aller's collection of lectures *Existentialism and Psychiatry: Four Lectures* was published the same year Rollo May contributed to and edited another collection under the title *Existential Psychology*. Yet the most significant publication of 1961 came in the form of a periodical published by the Association of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry under the title *Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry*. Thus, existential psychology was not only recognized a valid, emerging field of psychology, but one important enough to dedicate a journal to. In 1962, the most significant publications in the field came in the form of taped lectures and conferences. Abraham Maslow and Rollo May's joint lectures, catalogued as dialogues on existential psychology, were published as audio tapes entitled "Existential Psychology I" and "Existential Psychology II." In addition, the Proceedings from The Sonoma State College Conference on Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy were released on audio tape—eight tapes to be precise. In 1963, Medard Boss' study entitled *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis* was translated into English by Ludwig Lefebre, the same year Boss' estranged colleague Ludwig Binswanger's papers

were translated by Jacob Needleman under the title *Being-in-the-world; Selected Papers of Ludwig Binswanger*. Also published in 1963 was James Bugental's study *Existential-analytic Psychotherapy*, followed by a 1964 translation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*. The influx of translations in the early 1960s provides evidence that the field of existential psychology was not only gaining a strong foothold in the English-speaking world, but that researchers and practicing therapists alike were debating differing ways to approach mental health phenomenologically, i.e. existentially.

Although differing schools of existential psychology began to emerge in the 1950s and 1960s, due to the translation of Heidegger's *Being and Time* into English in 1962 and Heidegger's direct involvement with formulating and fine-tuning *Daseinsanalysis*, his version of existential psychology received a great amount of attention in the world of psychology.¹¹ In literature there are no Heideggerian connections to my knowledge until decades after existential psychology inundated the fields of philosophy and psychology world-wide. Mailer, it seems, with his 1960s publication of *An American Dream*, was the first literary artist to fully engage with Heideggerian philosophy and Heideggerian-based existential psychology in his historic moment.¹² Although Heidegger's name can be found alongside Mailer's in numerous literary studies today, the influence of Heideggerian philosophy and psychology on

¹¹ Simultaneously, led by French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, *psychoanalyse existentielle* (existential psychoanalysis) was being developed and formed another school of existential psychology at this time.

¹² Mailer's *An American Dream* was first published in serialized form in 1964 and then in novel form in 1965.

Mailer's creation of Rojack as a professor of existential psychology and as an existing individual who is concerned with his existential predicament in life, has yet to be fully explored.

Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer's Cultural Moments and the "Art of Living" Existentially

The postmodern focus on existential philosophy is, in part, discussed in the context of literary theory, which, among other points of focus, scholars such as Bernd Magnus argue for the erasure of "the boundaries between philosophy and literature," a distinction that seems to me to be overdue in the case of Fitzgerald and Hemingway (qtd. in Pütz 11). Although the traditional distinction between philosophy and art is not that they differ "in the depth and general quality of their thinking about life, but that they differ "in the form taken by the working out of this thinking" (Finkelstein 8). On one hand philosophy "offers itself in terms abstracted from the concrete life and the social and historical conditions that gave birth to it" (Finkelstein 8). A work of art, on the other hand, "offers itself as the very life it is discussing" (Finkelstein 8). The "common ground" that philosophy and art share is that both attempt to present their readers with the real world, the world that the philosopher, the artist, and the reader all share (Finkelstein 8). The worlds that Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer share with their readers are, in part, the worlds they inhabit and, in part, the world they share with their readers. The worlds they inhabit—the realms of heightened perception and acute self-awareness—are

the worlds they share with their readers, worlds of consciousness they can teach their readers about, guide them to, and help them to understand and actualize. It is in this way that their art is inseparable from the philosophies they espouse. Their literary art takes the shape of their philosophic visions and become living illustrations, so to speak, of the existential predicaments of existence, visions that dance in the readers' imaginations as the reality of their uniquely American historic and human moments. In fact, it is in *how* these authors capture their respective historic moments and put philosophy in motion through their art that Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer's art and philosophy become inseparable. Their characters serve as more than mouthpieces for the "art of living" each author espouses; they serve as living illustrations of individual's faced with and attempting to work out "the dilemmas of philosophy" (Berman, *World* 31).

Although Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer's philosophies vary, their visions are the same: they each strive to break all illusions and present an "art of living" to their fellow Americans, and they present philosophies through which their readers can learn to live more authentically. Specifically, they attempt to inspire readers to find a more genuine, meaningful existence than the one offered by the modern and postmodern "American Dream" consumer culture that America had been cultivating throughout the twentieth-century. These authors not only address what they see as the universal philosophic crises facing the individual American in the twentieth century in the form of literary art, but *The Great Gatsby*, *Death in the Afternoon*, and *An American Dream* stand as evidence of these authors' desire to disseminate philosophic instruction on "the art of living" to their postwar American readers. In fact, their concerns for their fellow

Americans, as a whole, are the same: they are concerned with their culture, which breeds, nay demands, mediocrity and conformity, and they are concerned with the direction they see American culture heading—towards the death of the vitality and spirit of the individual and the nation. Further, they each emphasize the individual's personal responsibility to become more self-aware, to strive to see the world more clearly and truly, and to take responsibility for what their lives amount to. Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer not only marry philosophy and art, but they do so in a way that they instruct their readers without being overtly didactic, pretentious, or pompous; in short, they translate their philosophic visions and show readers “the dilemmas of philosophy” and the dilemmas of human existence by putting their chosen philosophy in novelistic motion. In fact, the major symbols of *The Great Gatsby*, *Death in the Afternoon*, and *An American Dream* embody the philosophy these authors espouse in these works, works that reposition Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer as prophets, seers, and healers, so to speak, as well as ingenious artists of their generations.

Chapter 2

Fitzgerald's Eckleburgian Vision:

Advertising Corrective Lenses for the Modern Individual

As Ronald Berman aptly notes, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes *The Great Gatsby* at the moment the Victorian public conscience is replaced by modern subjectivity—an epistemological shift from which questions of truth and morality inevitably rise (*Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and the Twenties* 53). In *Gatsby* we see that Fitzgerald is not only aware of and concerned with the problems that accompany a shift to modern subjectivity, but is also conscious of the persistence of the competing perceptions of the differing classes typified in New York's Long Island area. Fitzgerald's choice of landscape—from the old-moned East Egg, to the new-moned West Egg, to the no-moned valley of ashes—provides Fitzgerald with a stratified locale through which he can illustrate the competing perceptions of morality and truth of Long Island's inhabitants. But we know that Fitzgerald transformed the historical New York landscape of the 1920s by infusing his own vision of New York, both changing and adding places and images to further illustrate his vision of the complexities of modernity, and more specifically, the complexities of living in Jazz Age New York.

The most profound of Fitzgerald's transformations of the landscape is located between Long Island's West Egg and New York, in what Nick calls "a valley of ashes"

(27). Fitzgerald's significant contribution to this re-envisioned locale is the addition of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg's worn-out billboard advertisement, which "brood[s] on over the solemn dumping ground" found between Queen and Astoria (28). The billboard's form and placement provides us with a complex image of the times. The form—the billboard itself—points to modern America's growing capitalism, consumerism, and materialism, all which had a transformative effect on the standards of truth and morality of the American people. The billboard's placement—"above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust," a place where "ash-grey men swarm with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operation from your sight"—is more than a comment on the dilemmas of modern vision (27). For eighty years scholars and critics have, in fact, focused on Doctor Eckleburg's billboard eyes and their placement in the "ash heaps" as the central symbolic device of the narrative and as the thematic center of Fitzgerald's comments on the implications of modern subjectivity.¹³ Yet it is what Doctor Eckleburg is advertising—corrective lenses—that persists as the *moral* center of Fitzgerald's modern vision. It is a view that "our perceptions, corrected by our experience and our common sense, must serve as guides for us, and we must seize every opportunity to widen their range and increase their accuracy," what Friedrich Nietzsche prescribes as the perspective for finding "truth" in modern times (Mencken 89). This is what Doctor Eckleburg's "enormous yellow spectacles" advertise—they preach a change of vision, an

¹³ The earliest comment I have found is in a letter from Maxwell Perkins to Fitzgerald dated 20 December 1924 where Perkins writes: "In the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg various readers will see different significances; but their presence gives a superb touch to the whole thing: great unblinking eyes, expressionless, looking down upon the human scene. It's magnificent!" See Scott Donaldson's *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby* p. 260-261.

improvement in seeing, the need to strive for a new, clearer, and more accurate point of view (*Gatsby* 28).¹⁴

Since my understanding of Fitzgerald's construction of Doctor Eckleburg assumes Fitzgerald's conscious infusion of Nietzschean philosophy into the novel, it is important here to note that Fitzgerald was *not* "an innocent of philosophy" as many scholars believe (Foster 229). In fact, thanks to Matthew Bruccoli's extensive research into and published collections of Fitzgerald's interviews, life, and letters, it is possible to recreate a rough chronology of the years prior to and during Fitzgerald's writing of *Gatsby* when Fitzgerald was influenced by Nietzsche. For example, Fitzgerald himself reveals in a 1924 interview that at the age of twenty he "wanted to be King of the World, a sort of combined J.P. Morgan, General Ludendorff, Abraham Lincoln, and Nietzsche not to omit Shakespeare" (qtd. in Bruccoli, *Conversations* 65).¹⁵ This means that by 1916 or 1917 Fitzgerald was already an admirer of Nietzsche's works, what Fitzgerald describes in a 1927 interview as his being "a hot Nietzschean" ever since he first read *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (qtd. in Bruccoli, *Conversations* 87).¹⁶ Although Princeton University Libraries does not catalogue Fitzgerald's copy of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as one of the books owned by Fitzgerald, H.L. Mencken's 1913 edition of *The Philosophy*

¹⁴ In a world in which there is an the absence of absolute "Truths" and absolute objectivity, Nietzsche advocates that we view ourselves and our world from varying perspectives, from multiple viewpoints; by doing so, we will come increasingly closer to understanding what is true for our own, undeniably subjective lives. Yet, hand-in-hand with this perspective is Nietzsche's demand that we hold all things we have found to be true tentatively, since the world is invariably in a constant state of change as is our knowledge and what we think to be true. Thus, "truth" does not refer to absolute "Truths," nor does it connote objectivity.

¹⁵ Interviewer B.F. Wilson follows this quote with a note that "There is an implication that he [Fitzgerald] has hopes of being all this still" (65).

¹⁶ Although Bruccoli and Baughman footnote that Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was published in English "in four parts between 1883 and 1892" (see p. 87), the first complete English translation did not appear until 1896 (see Alexander Tille's translation).

of *Friedrich Nietzsche* is listed (Princeton). Fitzgerald's copy, a third edition of Mencken's highly popular original 1908 publication, is personally inscribed to Fitzgerald from Mencken, who was not only one of the most influential literary and cultural critics of the Jazz Age but was considered "the best-known American propagator" of Nietzschean philosophy and "one of the most vociferous Nietzsche-inspired cultural critics of his time" (Pütz 5-6).

Fitzgerald did not become personally acquainted with Mencken until 1919 when Mencken, then an editor for *Smart Set* magazine, accepted Fitzgerald's story "Babes in the Woods" for publication. This was Fitzgerald's first commercial sale of his work, as well as his entrance into the American literary community. Whether Fitzgerald had read Mencken's work on Nietzsche before they met is unclear; but what is clear is that by December of 1920, Fitzgerald writes to his aunt and uncle of Mencken, describing him as "A keen, hard intelligence interpreting the Great Modern Philosopher" and as "my current idol" (qtd. in Bruccoli, *F. Scott Fitzgerald on Authorship* 86).¹⁷ Three years later, in a 1923 interview, Fitzgerald lists Mencken's *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* as number two on his list of favorite works (Bruccoli, *Conversations* 44). In this same interview Fitzgerald also reveals that Nietzsche, to cite the interviewer's words, was one of the "intellectual influences which molded Fitzgerald's mind" (Bruccoli, *Conversations* 44).¹⁸ In 1924 Mencken is still admittedly one of Fitzgerald's idols. Interviewer B.F.

¹⁷ The letter Fitzgerald wrote to his aunt and uncle is dated 28 December 1920.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald's top three books were *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* (the Joyce novel's shared third place). Also, in this article, Samuel Butler, Friedrich Nietzsche and Anatole France are cited as the main "intellectual influences which molded Fitzgerald's mind." See *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald* where Bruccoli and Baughman have reproduced this article, p. 44-45.

Wilson cites Fitzgerald as saying, “My heroes? Well, I consider H.L. Mencken and Theodore Dreiser the greatest men living in the country today” (qtd. in Bruccoli, *Conversations* 65). Although Wilson does not qualify Fitzgerald’s choice of heroes, a closer look reveals that Mencken and Dreiser both participated in the propagation of Nietzschean philosophy in American culture—Mencken via his explication of Nietzsche’s works and his Nietzschean-based critiques of American culture and Dreiser through infusing his own “reflections of certain Nietzschean ideas that fascinated” him into his novels—something Fitzgerald himself sought to achieve as a cultural critic, a literary artist, and as an aspiring Nietzschean (Pütz 6).¹⁹

Significantly, Fitzgerald’s infusion of Nietzschean ideology into the fabric of *The Great Gatsby* precedes Fitzgerald’s creation of Doctor Eckleburg. In fact, Fitzgerald created then added the image of Doctor Eckleburg to the pages of a completed manuscript draft of *The Great Gatsby* after he saw a dust jacket illustration in which Daisy’s eyes loomed large over an “amusement park” scene (Eble 89). Fitzgerald took this image and transformed it into a uniquely American “sign and symbol of the times,” one which simultaneously advertises and critiques modern America’s cultural, social, economic, religious, and moral worlds and embodies the Nietzschean philosophy Fitzgerald espouses and illustrates throughout *Gatsby* (Berman, *Fitzgerald* 53). Yet with the addition of Doctor Eckleburg comes a flaw—or what has been identified as “flawed”

¹⁹ In his work *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, Manfred Pütz attributes the popularity of Mencken’s book on Nietzsche to Mencken’s own “intricate mixture of literary, philosophical, and popular concerns,” and notes that this book “is rightly considered as a landmark of the reception, interpretation, and propagation of Nietzschean ideas in America” (5-6). Further, Pütz specifically discusses Nietzsche’s influence on authors Jack London and Theodore Dreiser, who Pütz argues “turned what intrigued them in Nietzschean philosophy... into literature by weaving their reflections of certain Nietzschean ideas that fascinated them into the very texture of their novels” (6).

in Fitzgerald's conception of the image. In his work *Apparatus for F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby [Under the Red, White and Blue]*, Matthew Bruccoli notes that Fitzgerald's use of the word "retinas" found in Nick's description of Doctor Eckleburg's billboard eyes—"blue and gigantic—their retinas... one yard high"—is a mistake (*Apparatus* 33; *Gatsby* 27). "Fitzgerald," Bruccoli claims, "meant irises or pupils" (*Apparatus* 33). Although Bruccoli correctly notes that the "[r]etinas are at the back of the eye and can not be seen," it is unclear why Bruccoli attributes the mistaken use of the word "retinas" to Fitzgerald instead of the narrator, Nick Carraway, who is admittedly struggling with his own perceptions throughout the narrative (*Apparatus* 33).²⁰ Although I accept Bruccoli's note that "retinas" is anatomically incorrect, I cannot overlook the possibility that the "mistake" is a matter of poetic license—that Fitzgerald intentionally and consciously chose the word "retinas" for symbolic purposes commensurate with Nietzsche, Mencken, and the already existent draft of *Gatsby*.

The agreement among textual scholars that it is *Fitzgerald*, not Nick, who incorrectly uses the word "retinas"—an "error" scholars to this day argue should be rectified—accounts for the lack of critical attention to this aspect of Eckleburgian symbology.²¹ Under these critical circumstances, it is not surprising that the symbolic and

²⁰ It remains unclear why Bruccoli notes in *Apparatus* that it is Fitzgerald who misuses the word "retinas" when just a few entries later he attributes the misspelling of the word "appendicitis" to Myrtle's pronunciation instead of Fitzgerald's misspelling. Bruccoli notes, "The misusage is deliberate; and the misspelling *may have been* an attempt to indicate Myrtle's pronunciation" (*emphasis mine*). See Bruccoli's *Apparatus* p. 34.

²¹ In 1970, Richard Johnson identifies an "error" in F. Scott Fitzgerald's description of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg and claims that "Fitzgerald did not want the term retinas to describe Doctor T. J. Eckleburg's eyes" (20). Although Johnson cites no evidence for his claim, he expects "once the error is recognized, the symbolic value of the passage will be reevaluated" and "more references to 'ocular confusions,' 'distorted vision,' and those 'enigmatic eyes'" will follow (21). Although dozens of literary critics including Ronald Berman, Scott Donaldson, and Richard Lehan have, in fact, discussed the significance of Doctor

thematic implications of Doctor Eckleburg's "retinas" have gone wholly unexamined to this day. But because my examination of Doctor Eckleburg's advertisement for prescriptive spectacles assumes Fitzgerald's conscious merging of image and philosophy, a reconsideration of Nick's use of the word "retinas" is essential to our understanding of both the image and the embedded ideology. I will thus briefly examine Nick's use of the word "retinas" and their anatomical functions and anatomical "flaws" as an aspect of Fitzgerald's Eckleburgian vision for and of the modern individual and the modern, "civilized" world.

Doctor Eckleburg's "Retinas" and the Dilemmas of Modern Vision

Although Doctor Eckleburg's advertisement for corrective lenses and its placement in the ash heaps calls attention to the need to see more clearly, this theme of clouded or distorted vision is not only considered a condition of modernity, but more significantly is a condition inherent in the anatomy and function of the retina. While the iris and the pupil, as Bruccoli correctly notes, are visible to the naked eye, they merely function as a camera lens and control the amount of light the retina receives. The retina, on the other hand, functions like a camera: it is the retina that captures the image or the "photograph" the eye receives. It is significant to note that the photograph the retina receives is distorted: the image is always inverted. This inverted photograph is then

Eckleburg's eyes and their placement in the ash heaps as indicative of the moral and spiritual blindness inherent in the modern condition and as symbolically bound to Nick Carraway's narrative view, Johnson's expectation that the "symbolic value" of Doctor Eckleburg's retinas would become the focus of critical reexamination has not been met.

translated or interpreted by the optic nerve, which reconstitutes the image photographed and transfers this image to the brain. The significance of the retina's function here is twofold: first, the retina receives a distorted image, just as subjective beings our initial impressions of the world, of people and things, like Doctor Eckleburg's "enormous yellow spectacles," are colored by our own judgments, prejudices, and hasty generalizations; second, the optic nerve translates the image, just as subjective beings we naturally translate and interpret the world around us and are oftentimes unaware of and/or blinded by our own interpretive processes. This theme of blindness, what has been variously attributed to the blindness of Nick Carraway, Doctor Eckleburg, George Wilson, and Jay Gatsby, points to the modern condition of spiritual and moral blindness, yet blindness is also a condition that is inherent in the retina.²²

Inherent in the anatomy of the retina is a blind spot—one in each eye. The retinal layer is composed of rods and cones which are the photoreceptors of the eye—they capture the image; but there is a "flaw." The place where the retina meets the optic nerve is absent of rods and cones (See Figure 1). Therefore, there are no photoreceptors here to capture the image.

²² See Ronald Berman's discussion of Nick Carraway's and Doctor Eckleburg's blindness in *The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas* (p. 45) and Richard Lehan's discussion of George Wilson as "the blind agent of a blind God" in *The Great Gatsby: Limits of Wonder* (p. 41). Both scholars equate blindness with the loss of religious certainty in the novel.

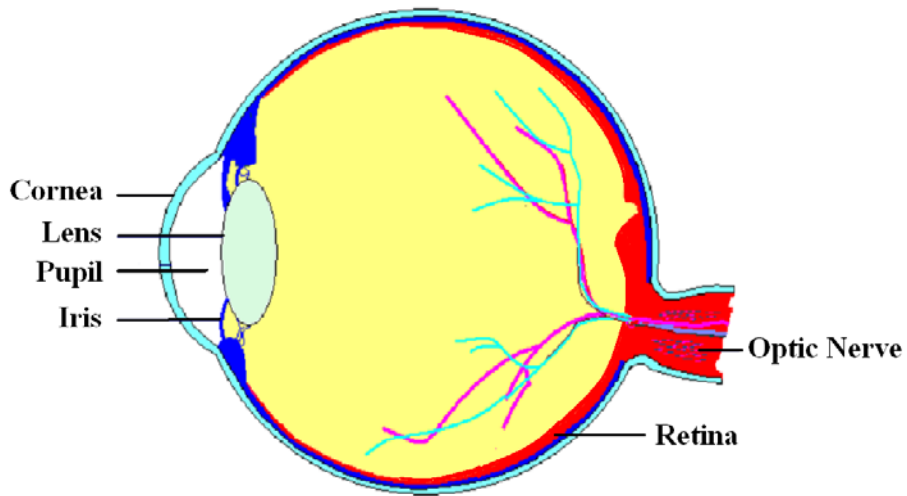


Figure 1

This means that part of the “photograph” the retina receives is always missing. This creates what is known as a “blind spot,” one that goes unnoticed by the seer due to the ability of one eye to compensate for the “blind spot” of the other. To illustrate how we compensate for our blind spots, I have placed two symbols below (See Figure 2). Simply cover your left eye, look directly at the asterisk (*) and move the image closer until the “O” disappears.

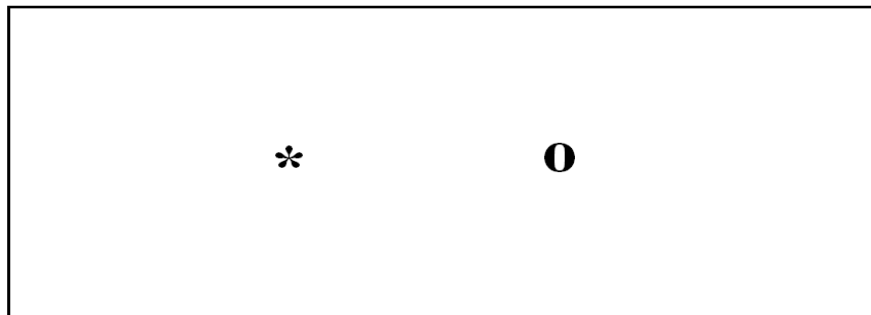


Figure 2

Because the simplicity of this test does not lend itself to fully illustrate the effect of our blind spots on our vision, it is important to note that what the other eye can not compensate for, as illustrated by this simple test, our brain creates. Thus, a portion of what we see is made up by the brain; we automatically fill in the gaps in the “photograph” to create a whole picture.

Because every individual’s “blind spots” differ in both location and in size, just as every subjective being’s vision is clouded by his/her own pre-conceived notions, judgments, and generalizations through which he/she fills in his/her gaps of knowledge, Nick’s use of the word “retinas” is not only consistent with the novel’s themes of blindness, clouded vision, and moral and spiritual uncertainty, but reinforces the idea that no two points of view are alike. Therefore, Nick’s (mis)use of the word “retinas” does not necessarily point to an oversight on Fitzgerald’s part—on the contrary. The attention to the retina, blindness, inverted or distorted images, flawed vision, the inability to see clearly, and the need to compensate for our “blind spots” is imbedded in the image of Doctor Eckleburg’s billboard advertisement *as described* by Nick. We must, as Nick subtly suggests with his use of the word “retinas,” survey the world from varying perspectives, from several points of view, in order to see the world around us more clearly; that is, to compensate for our anatomical “blind spots” and for our inherent subjectivity. We must strive to widen our perceptions through “our experience and our common sense...and we must seize every opportunity to widen their range and increase their accuracy” (Mencken 89).²³ This requires that we take responsibility for our own

²³ Significantly, on the same page that Mencken discusses Nietzsche’s perspectivism Mencken discusses the function of the optic nerve in reference to the impressions we receive (89). Mencken writes: “Those

lives and become aware of the complications of modern vision; in short, we must, as Nick does, strive to break all illusions and see self and world more clearly and truly.

Nick as an Aspiring Nietzschean

Nietzsche believed... that there was, in every man of the higher type (the only type he thought worth discussing) an instinctive tendency to seek the true as opposed to the false, that this instinct, as the race progressed, grew more and more accurate, and that its growing accuracy explained the fact that, despite the opposition of codes of morality and of the iron hand of authority, man constantly increased his store of knowledge. A thought, he said, arose in a man without his initiative or volition, and was nothing more or less than an expression of his innate will to obtain power over his environment by accurately observing and interpreting it.²⁴

Nick's opening statement that he "is inclined to reserve all judgements" reveals that his perspective, his epistemology, his personal morality, and his art of living in the

metaphysicians who fared farthest from the philosopher of Cusa evolved the doctrine that, in themselves, things have no existence at all, and that we can think of them only in terms of our impressions of them. The color green, for example, may be nothing but a delusion, for all we can possibly know of it is that, under certain conditions, our optic nerve experience a sensation of greenness. Whether this sensation of greenness is a mere figment of our imagination or the reflection of an actual physical state is something that we cannot tell" (89). Although this idea, Mencken writes, "is entirely impractical," his explication of the metaphysicians questioning of reality and illusion, or delusions, conjures images of Gatsby's illusory and delusory worlds, worlds that revolve around Daisy's green dock light. This passage may have contributed to Fitzgerald's choice of the word "retinas" and to his choice of the color green for Daisy's dock light.

²⁴ Mencken's explication is found on pages 92-93 of *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* in the section entitled "Truth."

modern world all derive from the same source: his inclination to seek what is true. By controlling his perceptions, by avoiding rash judgments and hasty generalizations, and by increasing his own store of knowledge—by becoming “that most limited of all specialists, the ‘well-rounded’ man”—Nick strives to accurately observe and interpret the world around him (9).²⁵ He seeks to “obtain power over his environment” by observing the world with phenomenological precision and thus “come as near to the absolute truth as it is possible for human beings to come” (Mencken 93, 90). What is significant about Nick’s conscious and active striving to observe and interpret the world around him more accurately by “[r]eserving judgements” is that Nick simultaneously calls attention to the dilemmas of the modern epistemological shift to subjectivity and to the creation of his own subjectively developed epistemological maxim.

In the opening pages of his narrative Nick leads the reader to believe that his life maxim—“to reserve all judgements”—is based, in part, on inherited advice and, in part, on his own interpretation of his father’s advice. In fact, decades of literary critics and scholars have focused on Nick’s interpretation of his father’s advice as a *mis*interpretation that calls attention to the freedoms, the flaws, and the relativity of

²⁵ In the opening chapter, part of Nick’s self-introduction contains his aspirations to increase the breadth and depth of his knowledge in order to become a “‘well-rounded’ man.” Nick writes:

There was so much to read for one thing and so much fine health to be pulled down out of the young breath-giving air. I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew. And I had the high intention of reading many other books besides. I was rather literary in college—one year I wrote a series of very solemn and obvious editorials for the “Yale News”—and now I was going to bring back all such things into my life and become again that most limited of all specialists, the “well-rounded” man. (8-9)

modern subjectivity and modern perception.²⁶ Yet the claim that Nick's life-view is based on a misinterpretation diminishes the value and significance of Nick's self-created scheme for living in the modern world by failing to acknowledge Nick's act of interpretation and his adaptation of inherited knowledge as an epistemologically valid process through which Nick seeks "truth" and creates meaning for his own life.

Although the prevailing critical view is that Nick misinterprets his father's message, we must consider that Nick's father's advice, which is interpreted by Nick into a maxim on reserving one's judgments of others, is Nick's modernization of, a revision of, his father's "golden rule."²⁷ Nick's revision of his father's advice, a revision that in its literal reading reveals Nick's pursuit of "truth" as a striving for phenomenologically precise observation, simultaneously reveals his awareness of perceptual and moral relativity and also serves to illustrate the modern epistemological processes Nietzsche espouses. Mencken explains:

The tendency of intelligent men, in a word, is to approach nearer and nearer the truth, by the process of rejection, revision and invention. Many old ideas are rejected by each new generation, but there always remain a few that survive. (Mencken 91)

Although Nick's father's advice continues to have meaning in Nick's generation, Nick creates a maxim that not only embodies his own, personal perspective, but is an apt revision for modern times. Through Nick's interpretation of his father's advice, Nick

²⁶ For an extended discussion of moral and perceptual relativity in *Gatsby*, see Ronald Berman's works *Modernity and Progress*, *The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas*, and *Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and the Twenties*.

²⁷ Nick's father advises: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone...just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had" (*Gatsby* 6).

shows us this process of “rejection, revision, and invention” in action: Nick rejects the traditional meaning of his father’s advice, revises it, modernizes it, and invents his own maxim, one that is applicable for his life and his times. In fact, Nick creates a life maxim with a multitude of meanings and applications commensurate with the multifarious nature of the turn to modern subjectivity. Thus what Nick tells and shows us in the opening pages of his narrative reveals more than his aspirations to “widen the range and increase the accuracy” of his perceptions: Nick also serves to illustrate the process by which one creates what Nietzsche advises; that is, modern individuals must create “a workable personal morality” and a “workable scheme of living” for their own individual and undeniably subjective lives (Mencken 55, 47).

Although Nick’s morality, or lack thereof, has been the subject of much criticism and is often cited as proof of Nick’s unreliability as a narrator, his inclination to “reserve all judgements” is applicable to Nick’s epistemology as well as his view of morality.²⁸ We see that Nick not only resists imposing his judgments on others, but he also refrains from imposing moral standards on others. As Nietzsche advises, Nick rejects traditional Christian morality, moral precepts Nietzsche argues are man-made constructions given “force and permanence” by being put into the “mouths of the gods” (Mencken 44; 46). In terms of Christian morality, which is the basis of Nietzsche’s discussion, Mencken explicates that

²⁸ For discussions on Nick’s narrative unreliability see Scott Donaldson’s “The Trouble with Nick,” A.E. Elmore’s “Nick Carraway’s Self-Introduction,” Ron Nehaus’ “Gatsby and the Failure of the Omniscient ‘I,’” Peter Mallios’ “Undiscovering the Country: Conrad, Fitzgerald, and Meta-National Form,” and Caren J. Town’s “‘Uncommunicable Forever:’ Nick’s Dilemma in *The Great Gatsby*.”

The act of acquiring property by conquest... becomes a crime and is called theft. The act of mating in obedience to natural impulses, without considering the desire of others, becomes adultery; the quite natural act of destroying one's enemies becomes murder. (Mencken 51)

Clearly Nick does not adhere to what Nietzsche considers an outdated Christian morality: he does not speak of heaven and hell or of sin and salvation; he does not allow the prevailing Christian mass morality to color his perceptions or taint his pursuit of "truth." Specifically, Nick does not judge by the standards of Christian morality: he does not judge Tom, Daisy, or Myrtle as adulterous sinners; he does not condemn Daisy as a murderer or Tom as a conspirator in Gatsby's death. Instead, he calls Daisy and Tom "careless people" and sees Tom's actions as "entirely justified," at least from Tom's point of view (*Gatsby* 187). Although Nick does make a judgment about Tom and Daisy by calling them "careless," what is significant is that Nick's judgments are not bound to Christian notions of morality. Nick knows that "morality, in itself is the enemy of truth," thus he avoids moralizing throughout the narrative (Mencken 54). In fact, Nick not only refrains from imposing moral standards on others, but he is also skeptical of the judgments and morality of others and what they discern as truths.

Nick's comment that "life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all," reveals that Nick's aspirations to become a "well-rounded man" are bound to his pursuit of "truth": "he believes a thing to be true when his eyes, his ears, his nose and his hands tell him it is true. And in this he will be at one with all those men who are admittedly above the mass today" (*Gatsby* 9; Mencken 71). As Nietzsche advises,

Nick relies on his *own* acquired knowledge, his *own* observations, and his *own* experiences. “A man,” Mencken explains, “should steer clear of rash generalizations from his own experience, but he should be doubly careful to steer clear of the generalizations of others” (93). Similarly, Nick’s explanation of his “habit” of withholding judgments reveals that Nick is skeptical of what other’s say, believe, and discern as what is true. Nietzsche’s hesitancy to lend validity to the views of others is because of his belief “that the great majority of human beings are utterly incapable of original thought, and so must perforce, borrow their ideas or submit tamely to some authority” (Mencken 94). Nick’s skepticism is introduced in similar terms in his comment that his own experience and observation has taught him that “the intimate revelations of young men or at least the terms in which they express them are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions” (6). Like Nietzsche, Nick’s skepticism toward the views of others, what Nick calls his “unaffected scorn” for the majority of men (6) and Mencken calls “Nietzsche’s violent loathing and contempt for the masses” (94), manifests itself as a tendency to be suspicious and doubtful of the ideas that are generally accepted by the majority. “It is only by skepticism,” Mencken writes, “that we can hope to make any progress” (93). In fact,

If all men accepted without question, the *dicta* of some one supreme sage, it is plain that there could be no further increase of knowledge. It is only by constant turmoil and conflict and exchange of views that the minute granules of truth can be separated from the vast muck heap of superstition

and error. Fixed truths, in the long run, are probably more dangerous to intelligence than falsehoods. (Mencken 93)

This is why Nick claims himself as “one of the few honest people I have ever known”—because of his “tendency to seek the true as opposed to the false,” his inclination to reserve judgments, and his constant skepticism (*Gatsby* 64; Mencken 92-93). He, like Nietzsche, is suspicious of all notions the masses accept as truths because, “What everybody believes,” according to Nietzsche, “is never true” (qtd. in Mencken 94). In Nick’s narrative this translates into Nick’s desire to learn the truth about Gatsby; that is, Nick strives to discern what is mere rumor and speculation and what is true. In fact, Nick’s skepticism is what sets Nick apart from the masses who show up at Gatsby’s parties: Nick stands apart from “the herd” because he does not buy into, nor does he perpetuate, the masses’ speculations and rumors about Gatsby.

Nick views the droves of people who attend Gatsby’s parties as a representative group of modern America’s growing masses and it is through this upwardly mobile group—the nouveau rich—that Nick illustrates the perspective of the general public. Instead of searching for the truth about Gatsby’s past and present, the masses fill in their gaps of knowledge not through a pursuit of truth, but through unfounded speculation. Nick’s attention to these rumors, he tells us, is a “testimony to the romantic speculation he [Gatsby] inspired” (48). Significantly, the sources of the various “facts” that circulate about Gatsby’s past, profession, and source of wealth, for example, are never revealed;

instead “they” and “somebody” are the sources cited, suggestive of the mass mentality of believing what the majority of society believes to be true.²⁹

As the narrative progresses, Nick repeatedly calls attention to what is just rumor and speculation, what he calls “contemporary legends” about Gatsby and “wild rumors, which weren’t even faintly true” (103; 107). After careful observation and investigation, and after two years of contemplating the particulars of his summer with Gatsby, Nick rejects much of the “romantic speculation” surrounding Gatsby and his death as “grotesque, circumstantial, eager and untrue” (171). These comments embody Nick’s skepticism and illustrate the process of “rejection, revision, and invention” Nick introduces the reader to in the opening pages of the narrative: Nick rejects second-hand accounts of Gatsby, revises first-hand accounts, such as the half-truths Gatsby himself perpetuates, and notes the revisions to his own impressions during as well as after the summer of 1922. The most obvious of Nick’s revisions of his impression of Gatsby, Nick tells us, is that Gatsby, “who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” became “exempt” from Nick’s normal reaction (6). Nick also revises, that is, he comes closer to the “truth” about the rumors concerning Gatsby’s Oxford days, his service in the military, his pining for Daisy, and his family and lineage. Although Gatsby perpetuates many of these half-truths himself—he is not *really* an Oxford man, for example—Nick’s skepticism towards the views of others, Gatsby included, is bound to

²⁹ Throughout the narrative Nick recounts the rumors he hears about Gatsby, all of which, Nick subtly notes, are from unidentified sources. Nick cites, for example: “Well, *they* say he’s a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm’s. That’s where all his money comes from” and “*Somebody* told me they thought he killed a man once,” that “he was a German spy during the war.... I heard that from *a man* who knew all about him, grew up with him in Germany” (*emphasis mine* 37, 48). At another party later in the novel, Nick recalls the unidentified “young ladies” suggestion that “He’s [Gatsby’s] a bootlegger.... One time he killed a man who had found out that he was nephew to von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil” in terms that elevate speculation to fact (65).

his pursuit of the truth about Gatsby. Thus, it is through the process of rejection and revision that Nick invents *The Great Gatsby*; that is, Nick not only creates a narrative through his engagement with this process, but it is through Nick that Fitzgerald illustrates this process and sets his philosophy in motion. Thus, what Fitzgerald presents us with is an individual in pursuit of “truth” and in the process of becoming.

Although it is clear that Fitzgerald’s construction of Nick is an illustration of the difficulty of modern perception and the process through which one strives to discover what is true in modern times, what is also clear is that Nick’s rendering of the people and the events in the narrative is colored by his stance as an aspiring Nietzschean. As an aspiring Nietzschean Nick aims to increase his, and thus the world’s, storehouse of knowledge by widening the range and increasing the accuracy of his perceptions; he aspires to increase his own intelligence and efficiency, and thus attain mastery over his environment; he rejects traditional truths and morality and creates his own scheme of living and his own workable personal morality. But as an aspiring Nietzschean Nick also verbalizes his mistrust of the masses and his “unaffected scorn” for the majority of men, a view Nick “snobbishly” repeats as “a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth” (6). Nick’s elitist view, his skepticism towards and loathing of the majority of men, according to scholar Robert Roulston, reflects “Mencken’s attitudes towards the incompetent poor like George Wilson and the plutocratic rich like Tom Buchanan,” yet this point of view should be attributed to Nietzsche since it is Nietzsche’s criticism of two of the “three castes of men” he claims exist in all civilized

societies—what he calls the “laboring class” and the “legal aristocracy”—that are the basis for *Mencken’s* view (57).

Nietzsche’s Three Caste System & Fitzgerald’s Vision of Jazz Age New York

*The order of castes... is the dominating law of nature, against which no merely human agency may prevail. In every healthy society there are three broad classes, each of which has its own morality, its own word, its own notion of perfection and its own sense of mastery. The first class comprises those who are obviously superior to the mass intellectually; the second includes those whose eminence is chiefly muscular, and the third is made up of the mediocre.*³⁰

Through the physical descriptions of the characters and their accompanying locations, Fitzgerald creates a New York that resembles the separate and unequal social, economic, religious, and moral worlds that Nietzsche argues exist in all modern, civilized societies. For example, Nick’s attention to Tom’s aggressive physical presence dominates Nick’s descriptions of Tom in the narrative. In the opening chapter, Nick’s description of the “enormous power” of Tom’s body and his “great pack of muscles” reveals that Nick is doing more than merely describing Tom’s dominating presence (11). Nick’s comment that Tom’s “was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body,” reveals that Nick envisions Tom as part of the “chiefly muscular” caste of the legal aristocracy (*Gatsby* 11;

³⁰ Mencken quotes Nietzsche here. See *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 96.

Mencken 96). Wilson, on the other hand, is presented as one of the “mediocre,” “a blonde, spiritless man, anaemic and faintly handsome,” one of limited aspirations and limited vision, and his place in the valley of ashes reinforces his mediocre existence (*Gatsby* 29). In fact, all of Fitzgerald’s locations—the valley of ashes, East Egg, and West Egg—reinforce the characteristics and beliefs that Nietzsche attributes to the members of each of these distinct castes of men.

The Blind Masses in the Valley of Ashes

*At the bottom are the workers.... It is the law of nature that they should be public utilities—that they should be wheels and functions.... In them the mastery of one thing—i.e., specialism—is an instinct.*³¹

Fitzgerald’s construction of the ashen men who live under the watch of Doctor Eckleburg in a visually “impenetrable cloud” of dust recalls Nietzsche’s discussion of the caste of workingmen and laborers, the “blind” masses who blindly follow tradition, law, and authority instead of thinking or seeing for themselves. Nietzsche notes that the laboring men of this caste are usually “wheels and functions,” thus it is no coincidence that Fitzgerald positions Wilson and his nameless auto garage amidst the laboring “ashen men” whose function is to mechanically move heaps of ash (Mencken 27). Wilson’s sign

Repairs. GERORGE B. WILSON. Cars Bought and Sold

³¹ Mencken quotes Nietzsche here. See *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 97.

is an advertisement for his function: he deals in “wheels,” in automobiles, and serves the transportation needs—such as gas and repairs—of the upper class, of those privileged enough to own a car. Although Wilson’s profession is of a higher rank than those who haul ashes—he does, in fact, own and run his own garage—his “function” and his placement in the valley of ashes suggests he is part of the blind masses.

Fitzgerald reinforces Wilson’s membership in the masses by presenting him as blind to Myrtle’s affair, to Tom’s ruse to sell him his car, and blind to the true identities of Myrtle’s lover and her killer. To reinforce the persistence of Wilson’s blindness, Fitzgerald invokes the image Doctor Eckleburg. Yet, Fitzgerald does not merely place Doctor Eckleburg in the ash heaps as his correlative for spiritual and moral blindness of the masses; he makes the billboard visible from Wilson’s window and illustrates the inherited morality the masses blindly submit to through Wilson’s reference to Doctor Eckleburg.³²

The scene in which Wilson conflates the eyes of Doctor Eckleburg with the eyes of God reveals that Nick’s envisions Wilson as one of the masses who blindly follow tradition and authority, as one whose notions of truth and morality, like the majority of men, are bound to an unreasoning faith in an all-powerful and all-knowing Christian God.³³ Through Wilson’s recollection of his conversation with Myrtle—he takes her to the window, points out Doctor Eckleburg’s billboard and tells her “God knows what you’ve been doing, everything you’ve been doing. You may fool me but you can’t fool

³² See Chapter 9 of *The Great Gatsby*, p. 165-168.

³³ Critics often cite this scene as evidence of Nick’s unreliability as a narrator and argue that Nick clearly invents this scene; he was not a witness to Wilson and Michaelis’ conversation. Although Nick was not a witness to the conversation, Nick suggests that his knowledge derives from Michaelis’ “testimony” after Gatsby’s death. See p. 171.

God!”—we see that Wilson not only submits to the authority of God, a God who Wilson believes “sees everything” and judges accordingly, but Wilson also invokes God as his authority on morality and human sin (167). Like the majority of men Nietzsche discusses, Wilson accepts “without question, the *dicta* of some one supreme sage” (Mencken 93). Nietzsche’s and, as I see it, Nick’s view is that blind submission to God’s authority, morality, and notions of sin, is absurd; modern epistemology, in fact, “discourages unreasoning faith” (Mencken 90). Wilson’s reference to God, coupled with his admission to Michaelis that he does not have a “church” he attends, thus no specific faith of Christianity that he follows, makes Wilson’s belief in God and his blind adherence to Christian morality and Christian Truths seem even more absurd (Mencken 90). Wilson’s, and correlatively the masses, blind submission to perceived authorities, whether past or present, God or man, and their lack of significant contributions to the world’s storehouse of knowledge, explains Nietzsche’s contempt for and, as I see it, Nick’s “unaffected scorn” for the majority of men (*Gatsby* 6). Yet, Nietzsche’s and Nick’s contempt is much stronger for the ruling class—what Nietzsche refers to as “the legal aristocracy” (Mencken 97).

The East-Egg “Legal Aristocracy”

*Now, since all moral codes...are merely collections of the rules laid
down by some definite group of human beings for their comfort*

*and protection, it is evident that the morality of the master class has
for its main object the preservation of the authority and kingship
of that class.³⁴*

Nietzsche believed that the legal aristocracy, the Tom Buchanan's of society, "expended its entire energy in combating experiment and change" to ensure its elevated position in society (Mencken 98). The morality of this class, as both Nietzsche and Nick envision, is bound to retaining its power and thus retaining control of the moral and legal apparatuses that keep them in power. In the opening chapter of the novel, Tom's comment that "[i]t's up to us who are the dominant race to watch out or these other races will have control of things," reveals that Tom's morality and his view of what he perceives to be the "inferior" races is bound to the preservation of his and his race's power and authority; Tom, like the members of Nietzsche's legal aristocracy, support the ideas that help him maintain his inheritance and ensure that his power, his authority, and his position in society remains secure. Importantly, Tom's concern with protecting the "white race" from being "utterly submerged" due to "The Rise of the Colored Empires" also translates to his elitist view toward the lower classes later in Nick's narrative (*Gatsby* 17).

Under the uniquely American system of democracy, equal opportunity and freedom of choice make upward mobility a possibility for the "inferior" races and "inferior" classes, a possibility that stands in direct opposition to the agenda, morality, and security of the legal aristocracy. As Mencken explains:

³⁴ See Mencken's *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 48.

Next only to its [the aristocracy's] desire to maintain itself without actual personal effort was its jealous endeavor to prevent accessions to its ranks. Nothing, indeed, disgusts the traditional belted earl quite so much as the ennobling of some upstart brewer or iron-master... (Mencken 98)

—or in Gatsby's case a bootlegger. As “guardians and keepers of order,” as the one's who, as Tom puts it, “produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art and all that,” the legal aristocracy believes they must protect the “civilized society” they helped create from the corruption of the lower classes and “other” races (Mencken 97; *Gatsby* 18). Tom's view of Wilson, for example—“He's so dumb he doesn't know he's alive”—reveals Tom's disdain for the lower classes; but it is through Tom's reaction to Gatsby's desire to be reunited with Daisy that Tom's belief that he is a “guardian” of the “civilized” world is reinforced (30). Tom asks Gatsby:

“What kind of row are your trying to cause in my house anyhow?”

...

“I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out... Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white.” (136-137)

Tom's refusal to allow “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” to make love to his wife has more to do with the power and boundaries of the aristocracy being threatened than Tom's actual jealousy over Daisy's potential affair. Tom, as part of “the dominant race” and the

dominant class, blocks Gatsby's entrance into the aristocracy since his upward mobility would disrupt that closed circle which believed it was responsible for the social and moral foundations of society, structures which revolve around keeping marriages within one's own class and within one's own race. Because the legal aristocracy privileges "civilized society" and those who are monied, educated, civilized, and refined, it is in this class' own best interests to protect itself and everything that is "civilized"—art, civilization, and the foundations of social and moral order—from the coarse, the immoral, the uneducated, the uncivilized. The "legal aristocracy's" view—that they are the guardians of truth and morality and that one can only enter this class through proper birth—conflicts with the uniquely American ideas of democracy, equal opportunity, and upward mobility. From Nietzsche's point of view, the exclusivity of the "legal aristocracy" is absurd since the progress of a civilization, he believed, depends upon "a free and constant interchange of individuals between the three natural castes of men" (Mencken 98). For this reason, Nietzsche finds that "[t]he morality of the master class is irritating to the taste of the present day because of its fundamental principle that a man has obligations only to his equals; that he may act to all of lower rank and to all that are foreign as he pleases" (qtd. in Mencken 49).

In Nietzsche's class structure, the Tom Buchanans of the world belong to this ruling class who, by force of their inherited power and "vast carelessness," as Nick puts it, impose their power on the lower classes (188). Wilson, a man associated with the *blind* masses in both Nietzsche's and Fitzgerald's constructions, is continually undermined by Tom throughout the novel. From Tom's underhanded promise to sell Wilson his car to

Tom's affair with Wilson's wife, and finally to Tom's facilitation of Gatsby's murder and Wilson's resulting suicide, we see that Tom is the catalyst for Wilson's despair and for inciting Wilson's misdirected vengeance towards Gatsby. Thus, like Wilson, Gatsby is victimized by Tom as well. But Gatsby does not belong to the caste of the masses in either Nietzsche's or Nick's view; instead, Gatsby is a victim of another sort. He is exempt from Nick's and Nietzsche's "scorn" because he is neither a man of the masses, nor a man of the aristocracy; instead he, in Nick's view, aspires to the highest class—Gatsby aspires to become a self-made "man of efficiency" (Mencken 98).

West Egg and the "True Aristocracy"

Nietzsche called himself an immoralist. He believed that all progress depended upon the truth and that the truth could not prevail while men yet enmeshed themselves in a web of gratuitous and senseless laws fashioned by their own hands. He was fond of picturing the ideal immoralist as "a magnificent blond beast"—innocent of "virtue" and "sin" and knowing only "good" and "bad." Instead of a god to guide him, with commandments and the fear of hell, this immoralist would have his own instincts and intelligence. Instead of doing a given thing because the church called it a virtue of the current moral code required it, he would do it because he knew that it would benefit him or his descendants after him. Instead of refraining from a given action because the church denounced it as a sin and the law as

*a crime, he would avoid it only if he were convinced that the action itself, or its consequences, might work him or his an injury.*³⁵

In Nietzsche's hierarchy the immoralist belongs to Nietzsche's first and highest caste, what Nietzsche envisions as an "aristocracy of efficiency"—for Nietzsche, the only "true aristocracy" (Mencken 42, 98). In fact, "it was to the aristocrat only," Mencken writes, "that he [Nietzsche] gave, unreservedly, the name of human being" (58). In Nick's hierarchy, Nick envisions Gatsby as Nietzsche envisions his aristocrat: as a man who "would stand forth from the herd" of men; a man like Gatsby who, Nick tells us, is the *only* individual in his narrative "exempt" from his usual "scorn" (Mencken 58; *Gatsby* 6). Although the "priest-ridden, creed-barnacled masses," who submit to Christian morality and the man-made laws that enforce this morality, envision Gatsby as immoral and criminal—a bootlegger, a murderer, an adulterer, his wealth amassed from criminal connections and enterprises—both Nietzsche and Nick venerate the aristocrat for his willingness "to pit his own feelings against the laws laid down by the majority" (Mencken 93). It is this "gorgeous, fatalistic courage and sublime egotism" the majority lacks that separates the "true" aristocrat from "the herd" (Mencken 100). His greatness lies in the fact that he "honors his own power" and thus "seeks every opportunity to increase and exalt his own sense of efficiency, of success, of mastery, of power" (Mencken 60). Significantly, what Nietzsche characterizes of those who aspire to "efficiency," Nick illustrates through Gatsby; yet, where Nietzsche's descriptions of his aspiring superman remain mainly in the abstract, Nick provides us with a living

³⁵ See Mencken p. 57.

illustration by putting Nietzschean philosophy in motion. In short, Nick shows us the ways in which Gatsby increases and exalts his power and gives us glimpses of “Jay Gatsby” in the in the process of becoming.

Nick’s inclusion of the young Gatz’s “SCHEDULE” and “GENERAL RESOLVES” in the latter part of the narrative serves to illustrate, in the particular, how the young James Gatz, like Nietzsche’s aristocrat, creates his own scheme for living and “exercises strictness and severity over himself” in order to increase his knowledge as well as his physical and intellectual efficiency. Although Nick includes this evidence without commentary, we see young Gatz strives to increase his physical strength and efficiency through daily “Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling,” as well as “Baseball and sports” (181). We see his plan to increase his intelligence by reading “one improving book or magazine per week” and by studying “needed inventions” and “electricity, etc.” (181-182). We see how he attempts to increase his social effectiveness by resolving to give up “smokeing” and “chewing,” by resolving to bathe “every other day,” and by practicing his “elocution, poise and how to attain it” (181-182). We also see that his aspirations to efficiency also include not “wasting time at Shafters or [a name, indecipherable]” and saving “\$3.00 per week” (181-182). Although there is no evidence of young Gatz’s implementation of his schedule and resolves, his aspirations alone show us the young Gatz’s “desire to attain and manifest efficiency and superiority” over himself and his environment (Mencken 61). Significantly, it is this desire, what Mencken explicates as a “yearning” for “glory,” that Nietzsche believes stimulates a man to efficiency. Mencken explains:

It is the desire to attain and manifest efficiency and superiority which makes one man explore the wilds of Africa and another pile up vast wealth and another write books of philosophy and another submit to pain and mutilation in the prize ring. It is this yearning which makes men take chances and risk their lives and limbs for glory. (Mencken 61)

Although Gatz's schedule and resolves do not reveal a specific "yearning" for "glory," what they do reveal is Gatz's self-imposed discipline, his creation of his own scheme for living, and his early aspirations to efficiency. The result of Gatz's desire to cultivate his powers—his instincts and intelligence, his knowledge and his mastery—is further illustrated through Nick's account of Gatz's movements after the War; that is, after he loses Daisy.

In Nick's account of the year leading up to Gatz's transformation into Jay Gatsby, Nick presents Gatz in terms that recall Nietzsche's aristocrat's reliance on his own instincts, knowledge, and power. Nick tells us that after Gatz returns from the war to find Daisy gone, Gatz spends more than a year on the shores of Lake Superior, working just enough to provide himself with food and a bed (*Gatsby* 104). Then, according to Nick, one day Gatz's "instinct toward his future glory" leads him to St. Olaf's College, but "dismayed at its ferocious indifference to the drums of his destiny, to destiny itself" he returns to the shores of Lake Superior (105). Although Gatz's "instinct" led him to St. Olaf's, he could not accept "the janitor's work with which he was to pay his way through" as the path to his imagined destiny (105). Thus, like Nietzsche's aristocrat, we see that Gatz "honors his own power" and believes he has the power to create his own

destiny; like Nietzsche's aristocrat, he believes it is his destiny to "progress upward," something "janitor's work" did not offer (Mencken 60, 114, 65). Dismayed, Gatz leaves St. Olaf's after staying only two weeks and returns to Lake Superior "still searching for something to do" when he sees Dan Cody anchor his yacht (105). Although Nick leads us to believe that what stimulated Gatz to "efficiency" was his "yearning" for "glory" now that the War was over—Cody's yacht representing "all the beauty and glamour in the world" and conjuring visions of travel, adventure, far-off treasure, luxury, wealth, and freedom on the sea—what stimulated Gatz to aspire to "efficiency" and to become Jay Gatsby is not merely his life-long desire to progress upward (*Gatsby* 105). Instead, Nick reveals that Gatsby is stimulated to "efficiency" by another catalyst Mencken explicates from Nietzsche's writings; that is, aside from the desire to manifest superiority, women can also stimulate a man to "efficiency."

In Nietzsche's discussion "Women and Marriage," Nietzsche argues that women are men's natural opponent and thus capable of stimulating men "to constant efficiency" (105). Because women are oftentimes the catalyst which stimulates the "will to power," this power being "responsible for many of the world's great deeds," women served as "the most splendid reward—greater than honors or treasures—that humanity could bestow upon its victors" (Mencken 111). In fact, Mencken explains Nietzsche's belief that "[t]he winning of a beautiful and much-sought woman, indeed, will remain as great an incentive to endeavor as the conquest of a principality" (112). Significantly, Nick tells us that young Gatz was "excited" by the idea "that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes" (156). Nick further reinforces this point by equating

Daisy with the most-sought object in history: Nick tells us that the young Gatz “found that he had committed himself to the following of a grail” (156). But, although Nietzsche envisions women as a great incentive to the “higher man,” Nietzsche also points out that women can work “harm to the higher sort of men” (Mencken 105-106).

For Nietzsche, because women have a limited range of vision, their focus on “the present or the very near future,” it is “dangerous” for a higher man “to love too violently” or “to be loved too much” (Mencken 106-107). Although Mencken’s explication does not provide a clear picture of how women can harm the “higher man,” Mencken suggests that women often thwart the higher man’s aspirations. This view is embodied in Gatsby’s recollections of his early days with Daisy. According to Nick, Gatsby tells him:

“I can’t describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport. I even hoped for a while that she’d throw me over, but she didn’t, because she was in love with me too. She thought I knew a lot because I knew different things from her.... Well, there I was, way off my ambitions, getting deeper in love every minute, and all of a sudden I didn’t care. What was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling her what I was going to do?” (*Gatsby* 157)

Significantly, Gatz’s loss of ambition, the loss of his desire to cultivate and exalt his sense of power, is bound to his intense love for Daisy. We see Gatz’s youthful “yearning” for “glory,” his desire to “increase and exalt” his powers, is replaced by his yearning for Daisy. Gatsby intimates that his love for Daisy is the reason for the loss of his youthful

aspirations, yet Nick's narrative also reveals that after he loses Daisy, Gatsby's ambition eventually returns; it returns because he must win Daisy back.

For Nick, the day James Gatz changes his name to Jay Gatsby not only marks the beginning of Gatsby's career, but marks the day that Gatz's ambitions return. In fact, Nick envisions Gatz's transformation into Gatsby as the moment Gatz, the dreamer who merely talked to Daisy of all the things he could do, who spent the previous year "drifting" here and there and "loafing" on the beach "searching for something to do," becomes a man of action, "who borrowed a row-boat, pulled out to the *Tuolomee* and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour" (104). Significantly, Nick's description of how James Gatz becomes Jay Gatsby also serves as an illustration of what Nietzsche discusses in terms of man's metamorphosis into a higher man. According to Mencken,

[Nietzsche] speaks of three metamorphoses of the race, under the allegorical names of the camel, the lion and the child.... The camel, a hopeless beast of burden, is man. But when the camel goes into the solitary desert, it throws off its burden and becomes a lion. That is to say, the heavy and hampering load of artificial dead-weight called morality is cast aside and the instinct to live—or, as Nietzsche insists upon regarding it, the will to power—is given free reign.... The lion is the 'higher man'—the intermediate stage between man and superman.... In the desert comes the first metamorphosis, and the 'thou shalt' of the camel becomes the "I

will” of the lion. And what is the mission of the lion? “To create for itself a new creating.” (66)

Nick envisions Gatz’s transformation into Gatsby in similar terms. The “thou shalt” of Gatz is embodied in his confession that he had a “better time” talking about what he was going to do rather than actually doing it. The “I will” recalls Jay Gatsby, the man of action, who rows out to the *Tuolomee* and joins Dan Cody. Gatz creates a new self at this specific moment, the moment he is stimulated to “efficiency” and becomes a man of action. He creates a new self by throwing off the burdens of his past and his heritage; in short, he creates a self through which he can give his power free reign and thus create his own destiny.³⁶ In Nick’s view, Gatsby’s time with Cody left Gatsby with a “singularly appropriate education; the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man”—in Nick’s view, a higher man (*Gatsby* 107). But whether one believes that the catalyst for Gatsby’s “becoming” is the result of his “searching for something to do” to forget Daisy *or* to win her back, Gatsby himself reveals that is the thought of Daisy that continues to stimulate him to “efficiency.”

Although Nietzsche, as Mencken reveals, views women as the “natural opponent” of men, who serve the “benevolent purpose” of stimulating a man to “constant efficiency,” Nietzsche does not provide the specifics of how this is actualized (Mencken 105). Nick’s narrative, on the other hand, reveals specific instances of *how* Gatsby keeps

³⁶ Although the details of Gatsby’s days with Cody and his days before reaching West Egg are vague at best, Nick tells us that Gatsby served as “steward, mate, skipper, secretary and even jailor” for Cody who, throughout the years, entrusts more and more of his business to Gatsby (106). We are led to believe that in this time Gatsby continues to increase and exalt his power under Cody’s tutelage; thus, as Gatsby’s power increases, his responsibilities increase as well.

the thought of Daisy before him and thus suggests how women can stimulate men to “constant efficiency” (105). For example, we learn from Nick of the newspaper clippings Gatsby collects of Daisy over the years; we learn that from Gatsby’s West Egg mansion there is a view of Daisy’s green dock light; and we learn that Gatsby’s open-invitation parties have a purpose—he has hopes that Daisy will wander in some evening. For Nick, these details reveal *how* Gatsby keeps the thought of Daisy before him and how this thought stimulates him to “efficiency.” In fact, we see that it is the thought of Daisy that motivates Gatsby to amass great wealth; it is this thought which brings him to West Egg; it is with this thought that Gatsby plans his parties. Yet Nick also reveals how Gatsby, like Nietzsche’s courageous aristocrat, is ever-willing to take risks and face danger in order for his “yearning” to be actualized. As Mencken explains: “It is the mission of the greatest to run risk and danger—to cast dice with death” (62).

The glimpses Nick gives us of the risk and dangers Gatsby faces throughout his “career as Jay Gatsby”—such as his “gonnection” with criminals such as Meyer Wolfshiem, his profitable but illegal drug store trade, and his adulterous affair with Daisy—all reveal Gatsby’s desire to increase and exalt his own power in order to win Daisy at not matter what cost to others and no matter what risk to himself. Yet it is not until Gatsby confronts Tom in the Plaza Hotel that we see Gatsby risk everything he has created—namely, “Jay Gatsby”—in order to win Daisy and thus satisfy his yearning for her. But, in Nick’s eyes, Gatsby fails. He fails because he does not get Daisy to admit she “never loved” Tom (139). He fails because Tom makes Gatsby look like “some kind of cheap sharper” (159). Nick envisions Gatsby’s failure to win Daisy at the Plaza Hotel not

just as the death of Gatsby's aspirations and his dream, but as the death of "Jay Gatsby" himself. "Jay Gatsby," Nick writes, "had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice and the long secret extravaganza was played out" (155). Although Nick envisions Gatsby's failure as the existential death of "Jay Gatsby," Gatsby himself will not admit defeat. Nick envisions Gatsby as risking everything when he refuses to leave town after Myrtle's death. In fact, Nick makes it clear that Gatsby is well aware of the danger of waiting for Daisy to call. Nick recalls telling Gatsby: "You ought to go away," I said. "It's pretty certain they'll trace your car" (155). According to Nick, "He [Gatsby] wouldn't consider it. He couldn't possibly leave until he knew what she was going to do. He was clutching at some last hope and I couldn't bear to shake him free" (155). Although, at the least, Gatsby risks being accused of Myrtle's death by waiting to hear from Daisy, it is Gatsby's willingness to take risks such as this that lies at the source of what Nietzsche envisions as his aristocrat's courage.

For Nietzsche, whether the aristocrat's attempts succeed or fail, whether he is victorious or defeated, what he venerates is his aristocrat's courageous attempt to actualize his yearnings. Mencken explicates:

It is time to die, says Zarathustra, when the purpose of life ceases to be attainable—when the fighter breaks his sword arm or falls into his enemy's hands. And it is time to die, too, when the purpose of life is attained—when the fighter triumphs and sees before him no more worlds to conquer.... The best death is that which comes in battle "at the moment

of victory;” the second best is death in battle in the hour of defeat.

(Mencken 135)

Although Gatsby risks everything he has created—i.e., “Jay Gatsby”—when he confronts Tom in the Plaza Hotel, by waiting for Daisy’s call Gatsby also risks his life. Tragically, Gatsby’s risk does not pay off—he experiences existential death at the hands of Tom, a death punctuated by his literal death at the hands of Wilson. Yet, in Nick’s view, Gatsby dies well; he dies “at the right time” (Mencken 135).

Significantly, Mencken notes that Nietzsche “was unable to give any very definite picture of this proud, heaven-kissing super man”; yet where Nietzsche fails, Nick succeeds in many ways (Mencken 66).³⁷ In fact, Nick not only creates a picture of his aspiring “superman” and shows us the specifics of Jay Gatsby’s “becoming,” but he also shows us the process of his own becoming and provides a first-hand account of his own failures in his aspirations to “efficiency.” Like Gatsby, Nick strives, as he tells us at the beginning of his narrative, to increase his own intelligence and his efficiency by becoming healthy, well-read, and well-rounded. Like Gatsby, Nick creates a scheme for living—to increase his intelligence and “to reserve all judgments”—and rejects man-made notions of morality and truth. He strives to “develop and fortify” his powers, to achieve a heightened perspective of the world, and focuses on what he learns through his own observations and experiences. Yet, when Nick tells us at the end of the novel that “the East was haunted for him,” his eyes “distorted beyond” his “eyes’ power of correction,” he simultaneously calls attention to the “retinas” and the dilemmas of

³⁷ Mencken writes: “It is only in Zarathustra’s preachments to “the higher man,” a sort of bridge between man and superman, that we may discern the philosophy of the latter” (66).

modern vision and signals his own failure to maintain the heightened point of view of the “higher man” (185). Nietzsche, in fact, addresses the difficulty of becoming and remaining a part of the “true aristocracy” in terms that add depth to our understanding of Nick’s choice to move West. Mencken writes: “Nietzsche was well aware that his ‘first caste’ was necessarily small in numbers and that there was a strong tendency for its members to drop out of it and seek ease and peace in the castes lower down” (Mencken 100). We see that because Nick’s vision becomes distorted in the East, because Gatsby’s strivings result in his death, because, as Nick tells us in the beginning of his narrative, after leaving the East he felt that he “wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever,” he has not only failed to become a “superman,” but has chosen the “ease and peace” of the Western middle-class life over a life that Nick perceives as “haunted” by constant conflict and struggle (Fitzgerald 6). Thus, through Nick’s admitted failure to control his perceptions and to reserve his judgments, Nick shows us why proper vision, so to speak, is not only essential to prosper, but is essential to one’s existential and literal survival in the modern, “civilized” world represented by the East.

Nick’s narrative serves, in part, as a survival guide to modern times, and through the creation of his narrative Nick ensures that his generation and the generations to come will benefit from Gatsby’s life and death, as well as what Nick perceives to be Gatsby’s strivings and failures. As Nietzsche’s Zarathustra puts it: “Suppose you have failed? Has not the future gained by your failure?” (qtd. in Mencken 66). What the future generations gain from Nick’s narrative is Gatsby’s sense of power, his courage, his commitment, and his faith. Through Gatsby they will learn how to create a scheme for living in order to

“fortify and develop” their powers; they will learn they must give direction to the vitality of the creative spirit and will learn from Gatsby’s courage that one must take risks in order to create their own destiny. This is why Nick feels “responsible” for Gatsby after his death: because he is the only one who can tell Gatsby’s story. Nick feels a personal and a social responsibility to ensure that future generations will benefit from Gatsby’s life and death and from his aspirations and his courage. But for Nick, what he sees as Gatsby’s failure is similar to his own failure: both are bound to the dilemmas of modern vision. Yet it is Gatsby’s failure and his death that inspires Nick to give direction to his own creative spirit, to create his own life and experiences as a work of art, and thus become an artist. The “art of living” Nick espouses throughout *Gatsby* is set against the background of the current state of American democracy and America’s social structure, what cultural critics such as Mencken and Fitzgerald envision as the incongruous nature of American’s social hierarchy and the uniquely American ideals of freedom, equal opportunity, and social and economic mobility The American Dream promises. In Nietzsche’s vision of the modern, civilized world “There is no wrong in unequal rights!”—it is the natural state of modern civilization. What *is* wrong, according to Nietzsche, “lies in the vain pretension to equal rights!”—a view commensurate with Nick’s sympathetic view towards Gatsby (qtd. in Mencken 97). For Nick and for Fitzgerald, the “vain pretension to equal rights” is the illusion of The Dream, the illusion that drives Gatsby’s belief and hope that the self-made American man can rise to personal and even national significance. Significantly, it is Nick’s narrative that ensures Gatsby’s rise to national significance: it is through Nick that Gatsby becomes what his father

envisioned. He becomes a national figure, the embodiment of the courage, hope, vitality, and creative spirit that is essential for individual growth and development. Yet what is also essential to achieve personal “greatness,” as Nick illustrates through his perceptual struggles, is to break all illusions, to see self and world more accurately and clearly. Thus, what Nick shows us throughout *Gatsby* is that perception is central to the survival and the success of the modern individual whose aspirations are often thwarted by others, but more often thwarted by one’s own clouded vision and blinded by the illusion of The Dream.

Fitzgerald’s Eckleburgian Vision for the Modern Individual

Throughout *Gatsby* Nick shows us modern perception is clouded, thus truth and morality are inevitably uncertain. Perception is not only in conflict between the differing classes, but is further complicated and clouded by the spectacles imposed on all classes by the media of Jazz Age New York. From scantily dressed flappers to jazz musicians, from movie stars at wild parties to dazzling wealth, it becomes our moral responsibility not to be taken in by grandeur. Doctor Eckleburg’s prescriptive spectacles remind us that we need corrective lenses because what we see, like Doctor Eckleburg’s “yellow spectacles,” is colored by our own judgments and notions. His “retinas” remind us that images we receive are inevitably distorted, that we have inherent blind spots, and that we thus naturally fill in the missing gaps to interpret the world around us. He reminds us that *we must*, as Nick connotes with his use of the word “retinas” and his claim that he is

“inclined to reserve all judgements,” strive to widen the range and increase the accuracy of our perceptions; we must break all illusions and strive to see self and world more clearly and truly (5). Yet we must keep in mind that Doctor Eckleburg’s billboard was a latter addition to the novel as Fitzgerald’s subjective correlative for what Fitzgerald had already written into *Gatsby*: Fitzgerald had already made Nick an aspiring Nietzschean striving to achieve a heightened perspective and constructed a New York in which The Wilsons, The Buchanans, and Gatsby play out the roles of their respective Nietzschean castes. And it is through these class tensions—between the ashmen, and the East and West Eggers—that Fitzgerald illustrates what Doctor Eckleburg is added to advertise: our need to correct our own perceptions in order to better understand and overcome the competing perceptions of truth and morality that haunt and complicate modern times. This dilemma is a moral one. It is the dilemma of modern vision, one that emphasizes our personal and social responsibility to see the world around us more clearly for our own progress as well as the progress of the nation, a nation that Fitzgerald envisioned as heading toward the death of individualism, the death of the individual, and thus the death of what is unique to American culture—the vitality of the creative spirit. Thus, we must take responsibility for our own lives and our own perceptions; we must take action and strive to come to a heightened awareness and understanding of self and world. This is Fitzgerald’s Eckleburgian vision of the modern world, his prescriptive vision for the modern individual, a complex vision he shares with his contemporaries with the hope of guiding them through the dilemmas of modernity and the dilemmas inherent in “Being” American.

Chapter 3

Life, Death, and Art: The E(a)rnest Thought of Death and Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*, a Manifesto on the Art of Living E(a)rnestly

*The only place where you could see life and death,
i.e., violent death now that the wars were over, was in the bull ring
and I wanted very much to go to Spain where I could study it.*³⁸

Ernest Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* has been described as experimental, "a matchless guide" to Spain and the Spanish bullfight, a "corrective" for writing and "various guides to Spain," a semi-autobiographical memoir of Hemingway's own traumatic wounding and near-death experiences, and "a work of art" through which Hemingway directly reveals his philosophies on writing, art, and the art of the Spanish bullfight. As apt as these descriptions are, they fail to capture what Hemingway asks us to see as the "whole" of his study in *Death in the Afternoon* (Spilka 132; qtd. in Bredendick 42). Even Hemingway scholars such as John Killinger, Susan Beegel, Philip Young, and Miriam Mandel, who have, in fact, advanced our understanding of the depths and dimensions of what Hemingway espouses throughout *Death in the Afternoon*, have not fully explicated the underlying unifying structure—i.e., the "whole"—of Hemingway's

³⁸ See *Death in the Afternoon* p. 2.

study.³⁹ This “whole,” as Hemingway suggests in the title and tells us in the opening pages of *Death in the Afternoon*, is the study of death, a dark subject Hemingway justifies by his “humble” purpose: “I was trying to learn to write, commencing with...one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental...violent death” (*DIA* 2). Although the role of death in *Death in the Afternoon* seems to be exclusive to the art of the Spanish bullfight—since it is “an art,” as Hemingway tells us, “that deals with death”—death and art per se *are not* merely contingently related to Hemingway’s art through his own, personal correlative (*DIA* 99). In fact, throughout *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway repeatedly suggests that the study of death is not only central to understanding the “whole” of the art of the Spanish bullfight, but is essential to the creation of art as well. Significantly, what Hemingway tells us in the opening pages of *Death in the Afternoon*—that he is working to capture “the feeling of life and death” in his writing, that he intends to learn this from the study of death, that he chooses death as his teacher to assist him in his thinking and writing—is an interesting, but by no means an original approach to creating art (*DIA* 3).

The relationship between death and art—i.e., what the study of death can teach the living about being an “artist”—has been a central subject in the philosophic discourse of existence philosophers for close to two centuries. In fact, the study of death and the creation of art, the art of living and the art of dying authentically are predominate themes in nineteenth and twentieth century philosophies of self and self-actualization. For the Existentialists in particular, the study of death—i.e., facing up to one’s own death—is

³⁹ See John Killinger’s *Hemingway and the Dead Gods*, Susan Beegel’s *Hemingway’s Craft of Omission*, Philip Young’s *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*, and Miriam Mandel’s *Hemingway’s Death in the Afternoon: The Complete Annotations and A Companion to Hemingway’s Death in the Afternoon*.

essential to an individual's actualization of his/her life and work as "art." In fact, the study of one's own death teaches the individual to see life as a "whole," to see what his/her life would mean if it ended today. It teaches the individual to see his/her life as a "whole" and thus reveals the necessity of creating personal meaning and content for his/her own life; it reveals to individuals the importance of "creating their lives as 'works of art'" (Guignon xxxv). Similarly, what Hemingway tells and shows us through the whole of his study of death in *Death in the Afternoon*—that "All art is only done by the individual"—reveals that for Hemingway, as for the Existentialists, it is through the study of death that the individual recognizes the importance of seeing his/her life "clear and as a whole" and comes to understand the necessity, as Hemingway puts it, of making "something of his own," of creating "art" and becoming an "artist" (*DIA* 100, 278, 101).

Decades of Hemingway scholars have, in fact, recognized and discussed the role death plays in Hemingway's own life, in his canon of works, and in what has been called Hemingway's own, self-developed "characteristic philosophy" (de Madariaga 18). Scholarship that focuses on the role of death in Hemingway's works has variously addressed Hemingway's interest in death and violence in general, and the bullfight in particular, as indicative of Hemingway's intense "preoccupation" and morbid obsession with death and violence and as evidence of Hemingway's need to exorcise his own traumatic, near-death experience on the Italian front (Killinger 18).⁴⁰ A number of Hemingway scholars have also accurately identified the role of death and violence in Hemingway's works as integral to Hemingway's "ruling philosophy of life" in which the

⁴⁰ See Philip Young's *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* for Young's assessment of how Hemingway's own experiences with death relate to his life and his canon of works.

Spanish bullfight is a “fixed and indelible” part, “the basis of his elemental philosophy which he would carry with him throughout his life” (Castillo-Puche 236). Yet it was John Killinger who first turned to existential ideology as a point of departure for understanding the role death plays throughout Hemingway’s canon of works, what Killinger insightfully identifies in *Hemingway and the Dead Gods* as “the most immediate key to the interpretation of his [Hemingway’s] work” (Killinger 18). Although Killinger accurately identifies the similarities between Hemingway’s fascination with death and death as a central subject of existential philosophy, he gives relatively scant critical attention to the work in which Hemingway most directly addresses the subject of death: *Death in the Afternoon*. Albeit briefly, Killinger does examine *Death in the Afternoon* and Hemingway’s fascination with the Spanish bullfight in terms of existential notions of facing death: he discusses death as a revealer of truth and of freedom, “the moment of truth” in the bullring as “the moment of existential anguish,” and draws a connection between Hemingway’s protagonists and the “existentialist hero” (Killinger 30, 48). Although Killinger’s treatment of *Death in the Afternoon* leaves much to be said, his work did, in fact, spur a critical trend in which scholars began to re-examine the role of death in *Death in the Afternoon* and throughout Hemingway’s canon of works through the lens of existential philosophy.

Following Killinger’s lead, numerous Hemingway scholars have identified and discussed the underlying philosophies at work in *Death in the Afternoon* as reminiscent of existential notions of death, freedom, and personal meaning, yet critical examination of Hemingway’s discourse on death has been limited, for the most part, to discussions of

the general existential tendencies in Hemingway's works. Kathy Willingham, for example, discusses Hemingway's code hero in *Death in the Afternoon*—the matador-artist—in terms of “existential authenticity” and “existential be-ing in the world” (Willingham 37). Wayne Kvam, who attributes Hemingway's popularity in Germany to the existential ideology that reverberates throughout Hemingway's works, dedicates less than a dozen sentences to *Death in the Afternoon*. Yet aside from Manfred Pütz and Jacqueline Brogan, who attribute the philosophies Hemingway espouses to specific existential philosophers—i.e., Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, respectively—critical examination of the role of death in *Death in the Afternoon* continues to be discussed for its general existential tendencies, tendencies which have been variously attributed to a mixture of existentialisms by Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus.⁴¹

Significantly, the death epistemology Hemingway espouses throughout *Death in the Afternoon* is, in fact, undeniably consistent with the intellectual and philosophic currents of his time. Yet by looking at Hemingway's focus on death in terms of general existential tendencies, critics have neglected to consider the historical moment of *Death in the Afternoon*. Killinger analyzes *Death in the Afternoon* in terms of Sartre's concept of “nausea,” Heidegger's discussion of “being-towards-death,” and Camus' claim that the individual must repeatedly face death, for example, concepts that post-date Hemingway's creation of *Death in the Afternoon* (Killinger 19, 50, 20, 22). In short, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus come too late, but Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, were, in fact, on the American

⁴¹ See Manfred Pütz *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought* and Jacqueline Brogan's “It's only interesting the first time; or Hemingway as Kierkegaard.”

scene—Nietzsche via H.L. Mencken and Kierkegaard via L.M. Hollander and David Swenson.

Although Nietzsche dominated the American scene in the 1910s and 20s, with Mencken’s highly popular explication *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* appearing in three different editions between 1908 and 1913, Kierkegaard’s philosophies of life and death were gaining currency in the German, French, Spanish, and English-speaking worlds during the first quarter of the twentieth century.⁴² Although much of the cultural discourse on Kierkegaard in America preceded English translations of Kierkegaard’s canon of works, the growing interest in Kierkegaard and Kierkegaardian philosophy in America is not only evident in the sheer number of scholarly articles that discuss Kierkegaard in the first quarter of the twentieth century, but is also evident in the early appropriation of Kierkegaardian philosophy by some of the world’s most prolific literary artists.⁴³ In his “Introduction” to *Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard* (1923), one of the first English translations of Kierkegaard’s writings, L.M. Hollander notes that Henrik Ibsen’s poem “Brand” “undeniably owes its fundamental thought to him [Kierkegaard],” although Ibsen himself admitted that he “had read little of Kierkegaard

⁴² For the American critical reception of Nietzsche see Manfred Pütz’s “Nietzsche in America: An Introduction” and Hays Steilberg’s “First Steps in the New World: Early Popular Reception of Nietzsche in America” in *Nietzsche in American Thought and Literature*.

⁴³ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mention of Kierkegaard in journals such as *The American Journal of Theology*, *The Philosophical Review*, *The Biblical World*, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, *The Philosophical Review*, and *The Harvard Theological Review*, just to name a handful, points to the diverse interest in the applicability of Kierkegaard’s writings to American interests and concerns. In the 1920s in particular, scholars such as L.M. Hollander and David Swenson began to meet the growing demand for English translations and explications of Kierkegaard’s canon. Yet, where Hollander’s 1923 translation of Kierkegaard entitled *Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard* introduced Kierkegaard to the English-speaking world as a literary figure and his writings as “literature within a literature,” David Swenson discussed the philosophical and theological implications of Kierkegaard’s writings throughout the first quarter of the twentieth-century (Hollander 1).

and understood less” (1).⁴⁴ Notable literary figures such as Franz Kafka were integral in introducing Kierkegaard to the literary world, and early literary studies such as Clyde Charles Holler’s Boston University Dissertation *Kierkegaard's Concept of Tragedy in the Context of his Pseudonymous Works* (1900), Einar Wulfsberg Anderson’s Master’s thesis *The Influence of Kierkegaard's Philosophy on the Works of Henrik Ibsen* (1926), and Edwin Muir’s "A Note on Franz Kafka" (1931), do not merely stand as testaments to Kierkegaard’s early influence and importance in the literary and the academic worlds, but also stand as evidence of the English-speaking world’s growing interest in Kierkegaard and Kierkegaardian thought early in the twentieth century (Kraushaar 562).

Kierkegaard’s origins in American thought are most commonly attributed to American scholars David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Marino). In his work *Existential America*, scholar George Cotkin notes Swenson’s interest in Kierkegaard began in 1890 when Swenson first read Kierkegaard’s *Unconcluding Scientific Postscript* in German translation (Cotkin 43). Swenson’s role in the propagation of Kierkegaardian thought in America, like Walter Lowrie’s, is traditionally attributed to their highly popular English translations of Kierkegaard’s canon of works in the 1930s and early 1940s, translations, which by the mid-1940s, made Kierkegaard practically a household name in America (Cotkin 54). Yet, Swenson’s early discourse on Kierkegaard, both in journals and in lectures at the University of Minnesota, L.M. Hollander’s 1923 translation

⁴⁴ Although Gordon D. Marino cites that the first English translation of Kierkegaard’s works appeared in 1908, he provides no citation for this work. See Marino’s Biography “About Søren Kierkegaard” on the Howard V. and Edna H. Hong Kierkegaard Library site or Marino’s “Making Faith Possible” *Atlantic Monthly* 272.1 (July 1993): 109-113.

Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard,⁴⁵ Walter Lowrie's sermons and Princeton lectures on Kierkegaard in the late 1920s and early 1930s,⁴⁶ and the growing consensus that Kierkegaardian philosophy pre-dated what had already come to be known as existential thought,⁴⁷ provides evidence that Kierkegaard was, in fact, becoming an established part of the academic, literary, philosophic, and religious discourses in America at the time Hemingway was writing *Death in the Afternoon*.

In the decades before Kierkegaard translations exploded on the American scene in the 1930s and 1940s, Kierkegaard was being touted as one of the most important thinkers of the nineteenth century. In fact, as early as 1916, David Swenson anticipates that what he calls "Kierkegaard's comprehensive literature of the personality" will assure "Kierkegaard's permanent fame as a thinker" (Swenson, "The Anti-Intellectualism of Kierkegaard" 575). Both Hollander and Swenson recognize Kierkegaard's relevance to modern American thought early in the century and both attribute Kierkegaard's importance, in part, to his emphasis on subjective epistemology and his corresponding philosophies of self and self-actualization. Swenson, for example, notes that "Kierkegaard calls himself a subjective thinker" and appropriately tags Kierkegaard an "artistic thinker" ("The Anti-Intellectualism" 568). His method of "indirect communication," which both Swenson and Hollander address, is a method by which the author—i.e., Kierkegaard or one of his pseudonymous authors—serves only to assist the

⁴⁵ Hollander's translation, published by the University of Texas, includes *Fear and Trembling*, "Diapsalmata" (from *Either-Or*, Part I), "The Banquet" (from *Stages on Life's Road*, Part I), *Preparation for a Christian Life*, and *The Present Moment*.

⁴⁶ In March of 1929 Lowrie began his first sermons on Kierkegaard, and in June of 1930 Lowrie returned to Princeton to begin an "itinerant ministry." In 1930, he began to lecture on Barth and Søren Kierkegaard. See "Walter Lowrie Papers" at <<http://infoshare1.princeton.edu/libraries/firestone/rbsc/aids/lowrie.html>>.

⁴⁷ According to Kierkegaard scholar Charles Guignon, "[m]any of the major themes in secular existentialism were first developed by Kierkegaard" (2).

“disciple” or reader to discover the truth for him/herself (Swenson, “The Anti-Intellectualism” 568; Hollander, “Introduction”). For Hollander, Kierkegaard’s importance to twentieth century thought is not merely bound to Kierkegaard’s turn to subjective epistemology but to his message of “individual responsibility,” a message he clearly addresses to “my only reader, the single individual” (1). For Kierkegaard, the individual, as Swenson explicates, “is a synthesis between the universal and the particular,” and the realization of the structure of one’s own human nature is, according to Hollander, the “outcome of some severe inner conflict engendering infinite passion,” what Swenson calls “experience surcharged with pathos” (Hollander, “Introduction”; Swenson, “Anti-Intellectualism” 574). The realization of the structure of one’s nature, what Kierkegaard discusses in terms of the “temporal and the eternal,” leads the individual to “the realization of his own proper human task”—i.e., the expression of the eternal in one’s nature—the part of human nature Kierkegaard believes most crucially requires expression (Guignon 7). Significantly, the profound emotional experience which accompanies the individual seeing his/her life as a “whole”—as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal—and the individual’s responsibility to create his/her life as “art” by expressing the eternal in his/her nature, are particularly relevant to what Hemingway espouses throughout *Death in the Afternoon* as a “whole” and through his detailing of the Spanish bullfight in particular. In fact, our understanding of the multifarious depths and dimensions of *Death in the Afternoon* as a “whole”—what I see as Hemingway’s philosophical treatise on the impact the thought of death has on life and art—can be advanced through an examination of how Hemingway puts philosophy in motion through

the only living art “that includes death as part of the spectacle”—the art of the Spanish bullfight (Ibáñez 144). Therefore, I will, as Hemingway does in his detailing of the Spanish bullfight, present the bullfight and Hemingway’s philosophy of death “integrally,” since as both Hemingway and Kierkegaard state, each part is only significant as it relates to the “whole” and each part, “if made truly,” as I believe Hemingway does through his detailing of the bullfight, “will represent the whole” of Hemingway’s study of *Death in the Afternoon* (DIA 7; 278).⁴⁸

The Study of Death via the Spanish Bullfight

In the opening pages of *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway tells readers that he chooses “violent death” as the focus of his study because it is “one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental” (DIA 2). Hemingway suggests the simplicity of “violent death” is bound to the fact that “[i]t has none of the emotional complications of death by disease, or so-called natural death, or the death of a friend or some one you have loved or have hated, but it is death nevertheless” (DIA 2).⁴⁹ Hemingway admits that although his own life experiences have made him familiar with death, he has never been able to “study the death of his father or the hanging of some one, say, that he did not know and would not have to write of immediately after for the first edition of an afternoon newspaper”

⁴⁸ See Guignon’s *Existentialism: Basic Writings* p.4 and Swenson’s “The Anti-Intellectualism of Kierkegaard” for explications of Kierkegaard’s view of how the parts of our lives relate to our lives as a whole.

⁴⁹ Although Hemingway does digress from his study of violent death, most notably in the imbedded tales in “The Natural History of the Dead,” his shift of focus to natural death, slow death and the scene of the dead after war, for example, serve to further illustrate how differing life-views—personal, professional, and religious—cloud one’s ability to see death clearly.

without personal, emotional, or professional complications (*DIA* 3).⁵⁰ Since Hemingway himself strives to see death and the bullfight “clearly” and “as a whole”—that is, without emotional or professional interference—he chooses what he sees as the simplest of all deaths to study and understand: violent death. His choice of violent death in the bullring, in particular, is twofold: one, it is “[t]he only place where you could see life and death, i.e., violent death now that the wars were over”; and two, the bullfight is a spectator sport in which death is a “fundamental” part (*DIA* 2).

Hemingway suggests the fundamentality of violent death in the bull ring is due to death being an integral part of the Spanish bullfight, since the bullfight, taken as a “whole,” is a performance that “includes death as part of the spectacle” (Ibáñez 144). Hemingway reinforces the persistence of death in the bull ring as a “fundamental” part of the spectacle when he tells readers that “there is always death” in the bullfight, that “there is danger for the man but certain death for the animal,” that in the bullfight, “the bull is certain to be killed” (*DIA* 1, 16, 20). Significantly, Hemingway not only calls attention to the certainty of death in the Spanish bullfight as a fundamental premise of the spectacle, but he also points to the certainty of death as a fundamental premise of life. Throughout *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway reminds us of what is fundamental and certain in our own lives, that “our bodies all wear out in some way and we die,” that “no man can avoid death by honest effort,” and that “all stories, if continued far enough, end in death” (*DIA* 11, 122). The duality of Hemingway’s vision of the certainty of death in the bullfight and

⁵⁰ Hemingway writes: “It might be argued that I had become callous through having observed war, or through journalism, but this would not explain other people who had never seen war, nor, literally, physical horror of any sort, nor even worked on, say, a morning newspaper, having exactly the same reactions [to what happens to the horses]” (*DIA* 8).

of the certainty of death in life reveals Hemingway's attempt, as John Killinger notes, "to reduce the problem of existence to its lowest common denominator"—i.e., death and the certainty of death for all living things (21-22). But not only does Hemingway simultaneously call attention to death as a fundamental and certain aspect of the bullfight and of life, he also emphasizes the importance of seeing the spectacle of the bullfight and of death subjectively (i.e., individually). In fact, Hemingway's repeated emphasis on the certainty of death in the bullfight and of the bullfight as an "individual experience" simultaneously points to the epistemological shift to subjectivity and to the loss of all certainties—perceptual, moral, emotional, and religious—and reveals that Hemingway chooses to study death since it is the *only certainty* that remains. Death, as Hemingway puts it, is an "unescapable reality," what Beatriz Ibáñez recognizes as "the *only truth* in a world of appearances" (*DIA* 63, 266; Ibáñez 145).⁵¹ And the "truth" is that death, which is "always an individual experience," is a fundamental certainty that all living beings must consider for themselves (*DIA* 63).

Hemingway's Epistemology; or "Hemingway as Kierkegaard"⁵²

The opening pages of *Death in the Afternoon* not only reveal that Hemingway's epistemology and authorial stance reflect that of Kierkegaard and his various pseudonymous authors' emphasis on the importance that individuals become "subjective thinkers," but they also reveal that Hemingway's epistemological stance, like that of

⁵¹ *Emphasis mine.*

⁵² This title is borrowed from Jacqueline Brogan's article entitled, "It's only interesting the first time; or Hemingway as Kierkegaard."

Kierkegaard and his authors, is inevitably intertwined with the study of death as a way to discover “truth”—subjectively.⁵³ As “subjective thinkers,” Hemingway and Kierkegaard reinforce the importance of individuals discovering “truth” for themselves by constructing “authors,” narrative voices who do not claim to be “authorities” but who tell readers that they, themselves, are striving to discover their own truths (i.e., what is true for them and their own lives) through studying death. Hemingway, himself, privileges his own subjective epistemology, and by doing so, he not only stresses the importance of relying on one’s *own* powers of observation, one’s *own* experiences, and one’s *own* feelings, but he also serves to illustrate his epistemological processes—i.e., how he, or one, acquires knowledge subjectively. Although Hemingway tells us he knows some things about the Spanish bullfight and has written of and witnessed death, he also admits he has never studied it before—the Spanish bullfight or death. In fact, Hemingway does not claim himself an authority on the subject of the bullfight or of death: he can only “tell honestly the things” he has “found true” about them (*DIA* 1). Hemingway tells “honestly” what he has found “true” by sharing his own observations, experiences, and feelings on the subject of death and on spectacle, the art, the cruelty, the danger and death in the Spanish bullfight. Although what has been called Hemingway’s “memoir” serves to illustrate how he, or one, comes to see the bullfight and the spectacle of death “clearly”

⁵³ Kierkegaard is well-known for his use of differing pseudonymous authors in order to present his readers with differing individual life-views—some authentic, some not. For the purpose of brevity, I will hereafter simply use “Kierkegaard” rather than engage in distinguishing between Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous authors. For a comprehensive discussion of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authors and their significance to his work, see M. Hartshorne Holmes’ *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver: The Nature and Meaning of his Pseudonymous Writings*, New York, Columbia UP, 1990.

and as a “whole,” Hemingway also emphasizes the importance that his readers do the same; that is, they must privilege their *own* subjectivity. He tells readers they must feel, not as they have been “taught to feel,” but must give credence to their own “reactions,” they must discern for themselves what they feel is “good” and “bad,” both morally and aesthetically, and they must reserve all judgements of the bullfight until “he, or she, has seen the things that are spoken of and knows truly what their reactions to them would be” (*DIA* 1). In short, they must learn to rely on their *own* observations and experience and their *own* feelings and reactions, and they must create their *own* standards—both moral and aesthetic—that have meaning for *their own* lives.

Significantly, Hemingway does not advocate a perspectiveless subjective epistemology; in fact, the opening pages of *Death in the Afternoon* reveal that Hemingway employs and encourages a “phenomenological approach” to the study of death and the Spanish bullfight (Ibáñez 143). Hemingway’s intent, as Anthony Brand accurately notes, is “to teach his readers how to look. His book is not a guide on how to fight a bull; it is, rather, a guide on how to *look* at the bull and the bullfighter who is fighting him” (Brand 169). To help readers achieve this perspective—what Hemingway refers to as seeing “clearly” and as a “whole”—Hemingway does several things to “make” his readers, much in the same way Hemingway suggests the matador must “make the bull” (*DIA* 147).

Hemingway's Perspectivism: The "Individual Experience" of Death in the Bullring

In the opening pages of *Death in the Afternoon* in particular, Hemingway addresses several aspects of the bullfight that could complicate the reader's ability to achieve the perspective Hemingway espouses and illustrates throughout his treatise on death. In order to help readers learn to see the bullfight and the spectacle of death "clearly" and as a "whole," he demands his readers experience the bullfight first-hand and advises they not view the bullfight as a bloodsport, so to speak, but as an "art" in which death is only part, although a certain part, of the spectacle. For example, Hemingway attempts to explain away the emotional interference caused by what happens to the horses in the bullring, and asks readers to withhold from judging parts of the bullfight, except as they relate to the "whole" of the bullfight, not just as a spectacle but as an art (*DIA* 1, 8-9). Hemingway himself employs this perspective, shows readers what *he* sees when he is viewing the bullfight "clearly" and as a "whole" and shares the significance and meaning the bullfight and the persistence of death in the bullring has *for him*. Significantly, Hemingway's death epistemology not only embodies the perspectivism and turn to subjectivity he advocates but reveals that Hemingway's phenomenological and subjective focus on death as a way to discover "truth" is commensurate with Kierkegaardian notions of how and what one can learn from the study of death (de Madariaga 18).

Hemingway's epistemology and perspectivism, like that of Kierkegaard's, is bound to the study of death, not just death via the Spanish bullfight. The significance of Hemingway's epistemology of death, like that of Kierkegaard's, is fourfold. First, Hemingway and Kierkegaard focus on the only universal truth—the certainty of death—as the point of departure for their study. Second, they both stress the importance of the study of death, since it is the only certainty in life and the only truth that remains in modern times. Third, they both repeatedly call attention to the study of death as an *individual* experience. And fourth, they both attempt to make the reader see death “clearly” and as a “whole” by providing examples of authentic and inauthentic perspectives on death. For both Hemingway and Kierkegaard the study of death reveals that death is the *only* certainty, that death *is* a subjective experience, and that one must see death “clearly” and as a “whole” in order for the study of death to have an impact on one's life. Hemingway and Kierkegaard focus on death because there is a universal “Truth” to death—i.e., death is certain for all living beings. But death is an individual experience without universal meaning, feelings, reactions, morality, or ways to die, for example. This is the subjective aspect of the “truth” of death of which nothing is certain. For example, if there was a universal experience of death, death would be consistently the same for everyone. But since there is no equality in death, men can only study ways to temporarily prevent it, ease the coming of it, and learn to identify the physical signs of it; or they can speculate on it, on the best way to die, the worst, the state that is or is not afterlife; or they can moralize on it, on sin, salvation, and the suicide, for example. But as Kierkegaard directly addresses and Hemingway illustrates, these are all merely differing

and inadequate perspectives of death, what Kierkegaard and Hemingway both denounce as inadequate perspectives or life-views of death.⁵⁴ For both Hemingway and Kierkegaard, in order to learn from the study of death, one must have the proper perspective; one must learn to see death “clearly” and as a “whole.” Yet, throughout *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway is not merely showing readers how to see the spectacle of death in the bullfight “clearly” and as part of the “whole”; instead, what Hemingway shows readers throughout his detailing of the Spanish bullfight is the importance of seeing their own deaths “clearly” and their own lives as a “whole”—as towards-death.

In order to see death “clearly,” to have an “earnest thought of death” as Kierkegaard calls it, one must think of his/her own death and resign him/herself to the certainty of death as well as the uncertainty of when death will arrive. Because “[w]hen death comes... meaning is at an end,” seeing own’s own death “clearly” brings an individual to see what his/her life would mean as a “whole” if it ended this very day. Through facing the certainty of death the individual sees his/her end “clearly” and his/her life as a “whole,” but it is the thought of the uncertainty of death that gives the individual’s “life force as nothing else does” (Kierkegaard, “At a Graveside” 83). It is through facing one’s own certain death and uncertain hour that the individual comes to fear the scarcity of time created by the uncertain hour of death; thus death teaches the

⁵⁴ Hemingway specifically calls attention to a variety of modern perspectives that are inadequate for the study of death, including “a Christian point of view,” an “animalarian” or “humanitarian” perspective, and naturalistic or scientific views of death (1; 9; 133). Hemingway’s perspectivism requires that we view the bullfight from varying perspectives (from different seats in the bullring, as a spectacle, and as an art, for example), and he requires us to leave pre-conceived notions, judgments, and world-views out of our assessment of the bullfight so we can come to see the bullfight (and death) clearly, truly, and as a whole.

individual “not to fear those who kill the body but to fear for himself and fear having his life in vanity, in the moment, in imagination” (Kierkegaard, “At a Graveside” 77). The earnest thought of death teaches earnestness in life; because time is both certainly and uncertainly limited, this thought motivates the individual to live life bravely and fully each and every day since every day may be the day death will come. Like Kierkegaard, Hemingway sees facing death—facing the certainty of one’s own death as well as the uncertain moment of death’s arrival—as integral to “see life and death” “clearly” and as a “whole” (*DIA* 3). For Hemingway, the bullring provides the perfect arena in which the impact of facing the certainty and uncertainty of death can be observed, experienced, and studied. In fact, the Spanish bullfight itself not only points to the certainty of death—death only being part of the spectacle of the bullfight—but to the uncertainty of the moment when and circumstances under which death will become part of the spectacle. Yet, it is not just through the Spanish bullfight and the spectacle of death that Hemingway puts his philosophy of death in motion; Hemingway, in fact, provides a living example through his detailing of the matadors of Spain who literally face the certainty and uncertainty of death in the bullring on almost a daily basis.

The Matador-Artist and Artistic Failures:

Pundonor and Cowardice in the Face of Death

Because the Spanish bullfight is the only living art that “includes death as part of the spectacle,” it is also the only art in which the artist’s creation of his art is, in part,

bound to how he faces death in the bullring (Ibáñez 144). Thus, for Hemingway the matadors of Spain do not only serve as a living illustration of how facing death with courage has an impact on the life and art of the matador, but also, and more often, serve to illustrate how matadors fail to create art due to cowardice and fear when facing the bull and possible death in the bullring. In fact, Hemingway describes a number of matadors and their reaction to the danger of death in the bullring, some earnest, some not. Some fear the bull, some fear goring, some fear death, some, Hemingway writes, “started as though they might be good matadors and end in varying degrees of failure and tragedy” (*DIA* 224). Significantly, at the time Hemingway writes *Death in the Afternoon* he feels that the majority of bullfighters in Spain are artistic failures. Hemingway writes: “Of the seven-hundred and sixty-some unsuccessful bullfighters still attempting to practice their art in Spain,” the “brave ones” fail through “lack of talent” and the ones with skill fail because of “fear” (*DIA* 227). Hemingway does briefly note matadors who use “tricks” to compensate for their lack of artistic ability and those who “lack artistic ability” entirely, but he gives much more attention to those who fail artistically due to uncontrollable fear in the face of death.

Although Hemingway, himself, admits that his own nerves—even after a few drinks—failed him in the bullring, the matador, a highly paid professional, is expected to face the bull, possible goring, and possible death in the bull ring with courage and honor; he is expected to have the courage necessary to work closely with the bull and thus create what Hemingway calls “sculptural art” through his performance.⁵⁵ Because in the Spanish bullfight “the degree of brilliance in the performance is left to the fighter’s

⁵⁵ See *DIA* p. 172.

honor,” the matador’s honor, Hemingway tells us, “is as necessary to a bullfight as good bulls” (*DIA* 92). Although a bullfighter, Hemingway writes, “is excused for bad work if the bull is very difficult,” it is a matter of “pundonor,” or honor, for a bullfighter to do the best work he can with every bull (*DIA* 91). In short, this means that the matador’s performance—regardless of the responsiveness of the bull—is judged by how he reacts to the danger of death in the bullring. But because the bullfight is a living art, “the only art in which the artist is in danger of death,” a matador’s performance is also gauged by his effort and ability to create art while facing death. For Hemingway, the matadors of Spain not only provide a living illustration of *pundonor*, but also serve to illustrate what Kierkegaard himself discusses as the connection between the earnest thought of one’s own death and the creation of art; that is, how one faces death determines their ability to create art. Therefore, just as Hemingway emphasizes how facing death in the bullring with *pundonor* is essential to the matador’s creation of art, what Kierkegaard envisions as the earnest thought of death is essential for the individual to create his/her life and work as “art.”

Because of the “constant danger of death” for the matador in the bullring, through his study of the Spanish bullfight and the matadors of Spain, Hemingway not only finds an equivalent for what Kierkegaard characterizes as “earnestness” in the Spaniard’s conception of *pundonor*, but he also finds an equivalent for what Kierkegaard discusses as inauthentic perspectives or “moods” towards death in the various displays of cowardice in the bull ring (*DIA* 166, 91; “At a Graveside” 74-75). Where Hemingway tells us that “it is a matter of pundonor not to show cowardice,” Kierkegaard describes

cowardice as the binding characteristic at the root of most inauthentic *moods* towards the thought of one's own death that are not *earnest*. Of the *moods* towards death Kierkegaard illustrates and describes as not being *earnest*—emotional interference, depression, fear, inclinations toward suicide, viewing death as a relief, refusing to acknowledge death exists—a lack of courage in facing one's own certain death is the most common characteristic. Similarly, Hemingway's detailing of the “fake messiahs” and artistic failures who fail to actualize *pundonor* in the bull ring reveals that a lack of courage in facing the possibility of their own death is the most prevalent reason.

Throughout *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway exposes and denounces matadorian tricks and nerved-up courage in the bull ring and presents individual portraits of failed matadors and “fake messiahs,” matadors whose cowardice and fear in the face of death is, for Hemingway, a disgrace. Matadors such as Rafael El Gallo who “never admitted the idea of death and... would not even go in to look at Joselito in the chapel after he was killed” is among those whose fear of death is so pronounced that they refuse to think about death at all; they, as Kierkegaard advises against, completely ignore the existence of death (*DIA* 159). Matadors such as Chicuelo and La Rosa, who witnessed and could never “completely forget the death of Joselito and of Granero,” became even more frightened of the bull, of goring, and of death, what Kierkegaard describes as a “fear of those who kill the body,” which is not an *earnest* fear of death (*DIA* 74, 243; “At a Graveside” 77).⁵⁶ Although Kierkegaard does not explicitly address physical displays of cowardice in his distinctions between *earnestness* and *moods*, Hemingway discusses

⁵⁶ Significantly, for Kierkegaard, “to witness the death of another” and not think of one's own death is a *mood* (75).

matadors whose fear of death is so pronounced that it is visible in the bull ring. He writes of Domingo Hernandorena, a matador who “could not control the nervousness of his feet” and describes one bullfight in particular in which Hernandorena, in an effort to control his feet, “dropped to both knees” and was gored severely (*DIA* 17- 18). Although Hemingway tells us that “[t]o be gored” is “honorable,” Hernandorena received no sympathy from the spectators because everyone knows, Hemingway writes, “[t]he knees are for cowards” (*DIA* 19). Hemingway also writes of Cagancho, a matador who is “subject to fits of cowardice, altogether without integrity, who violates all the rules, written, and unwritten, for the conduct of a matador” (*DIA* 13). According to Hemingway, Cagancho’s “cynical cowardice” at the moment of killing is “the most disgusting negation of bullfighting that can be seen; worse even than the panic of Nino de la Palma,” whose panic, Hemingway writes, is “cowardice in its least attractive form” (*DIA* 88, 250). On the other hand, when Cagancho is confident, Hemingway writes, he “could serve as a model and illustration of perfection in artistic bullfighting” (*DIA* 250). But, Hemingway continues, Cagancho “only performs...if he is certain that there is no danger....He does not take chances. He must be certain in his own mind that danger,” or death, “does not exist” (*DIA* 250). In short, he avoids danger and death, as well as the thought of his own death, a cowardly *mood* Kierkegaard describes as fear that prevents one from living life fully.

As Hemingway himself admits, courage when facing possible death is difficult enough, but what further complicates facing death in the bullring is the “necessity of physical courage to face wounding and possible death after the wounding has become a

reality through its first experience” (*DIA* 88).⁵⁷ Thus Hemingway describes matadors who, after their first goring, regardless of their previous displays of courage in the bullring, were unable to continue to create their “art” in the face of death due to a fear of that which “kills the body”—the bull (“At a Graveside” 77). Hemingway writes of matadors such as Julian Saiz who, after his first goring, became “the embodiment of caution and safety before all things” (*DIA* 75). Juan Luis de la Rosa, for example, “was gored once, frightened forever, and quickly disappeared from circulation” and Manuel Jimenez aka Chicuelo, Hemingway writes, “was wonderful until he was first touched by a bull” but then was “utterly cowardly if the bull offered any difficulties” (*DIA* 75-76).⁵⁸ Since “[a]ll matadors,” Hemingway tells us, “are gored dangerously, painfully, and very close to fatally, sooner or later, in their careers,” it is not “until a matador has undergone this first severe wound” that one can discern whether a matador is truly brave and thus be able to determine “what his permanent value” as a bullfighter will be (*DIA* 166). Such is the case, Hemingway tells us, with Nino de la Palma aka Cayetano Ordonez, who “in his first season as a matador... looked like the messiah who had come to save bullfighting if ever any one did” (*DIA* 88). But then “he was gored severely and painfully in the thigh very near the femoral artery” (*DIA* 88-89). Because of this near-death experience,

That was the end of him.... He could hardly look at a bull. His fright as he had to go in to kill was painful to see and he spent the whole season assassinating bulls in the way that offered him least danger.... It was the

⁵⁷ See *DIA* p. 172 for Hemingway’s discussion of his own attempts at bullfighting.

⁵⁸ Although Chicuelo, according to Hemingway, could occasionally nerve himself up to perform close to the bull, his performances became one “of the saddest exhibitions of cowardice and shamelessness it would be possible to see” (*DIA* 76).

most shameful season any matador had ever had up until that year in bullfighting. What had happened was that the horn wound, the first real goring, had taken all his valor. He never got it back. He had too much imagination. (*DIA* 89-90)

Significantly, Hemingway's descriptions of Ordóñez as having "too much imagination" is illuminated by Kierkegaard's view that "death is indeed not a monster except for the imagination" ("At a Graveside" 94). Kierkegaard explains that by practicing the earnest thought of death, one

learned not to shudder at phantoms and human inventions but at the responsibility of death, now learned not to fear those who kill the body but to fear for himself and fear having his life in vanity, in the moment, in imagination. ("At a Graveside" 77)

Throughout his portraits of failed matadors, Hemingway simultaneously explains what is considered to be improper conduct in the bullring and illustrates what Kierkegaard characterizes and explicates as inauthentic *moods* towards the thought of death. Like Kierkegaard, Hemingway presents his readers with a variety of inauthentic perspectives or *moods* towards death to help readers discern what *pundonor*—or *earnestness*—is by showing what it is not. Significantly, what these matadors serve to illustrate is how a lack of courage in facing the certainty and uncertainty of one's own death has an impact on an individual's ability to create art. Conversely, through Hemingway's portraits of matadors such as Belmonte, Joselito, and Maera, Hemingway not only illustrates the importance of courage to the creation of art in the bullring, but through these matadors he

simultaneously describes and illustrates the importance of *pundonor*, what Kierkegaard discusses as *earnestness*, in the face of death.

“In Spain,” Hemingway tells us, “honor is a very real thing. Called *pundonor*, it means honor, probity, courage, self-respect and pride in one word” (*DIA* 91).

Significantly, Hemingway shows us throughout *Death in the Afternoon* that courage in the bull ring is essential to *pundonor* as a “whole” and essential to each “part” that comprises the concept of *pundonor*. For example, Hemingway suggests that courage is an essential part of pride: “Pride,” Hemingway writes, “is the strongest characteristic of the race and it is a matter of *pundonor* not to show cowardice” (*DIA* 91).⁵⁹ In the name of pride and self-respect, a matador, Hemingway tells us, should never run from the bull like El Gallo does; he should control his nerves, especially his feet, something Nino de la Palma and Domingo Hernanando are unable to do (*DIA* 157, 250, 18-19). Hemingway also suggests that courage is essential to the matador’s probity in the bull ring. It takes courage for a matador to adhere to the highest principles and ideals of the bullfight: he should not use “tricks” to make it appear that he works close to the bull as Hemingway tell us Alfred Corrachano is known to do (*DIA* 230). In fact, it is a lack of courage that precipitates a matador’s use of “tricks” in the bull ring. Courage is necessary for a

⁵⁹ It is important to distinguish between Hemingway’s conception of the term “pride” and Kierkegaard’s conception of “pride” as man’s greatest sin. Even though the Spanish bullfight (and San Fermin, in particular) has religious significance in Spain, Hemingway presents a secularized version of the experience of the bullfight and of the experience of seeing one’s own death. For Hemingway, the bullfight has an “emotional and spiritual intensity” and is “*as profound as any religious ecstasy*,” although it does not hold any religious value for Hemingway (*emphasis mine*; *DIA* 207, 68). Further, Hemingway’s use of the word “pride” suggests a “consciousness of what befits, is due to, or is worthy of oneself or one’s position”; it is self-respect or self-esteem “of a legitimate or healthy kind or degree” (OED). Hemingway’s use of “pride” could refer to “vitality, mettle, or spirit,” although this now rare use of the term refers to animals (OED). In the context of the bullfight and Hemingway’s discussion of death, it seems that “pride” refers to a respect for one’s own life: to have pride in oneself is to cherish or value one’s life, one’s vitality, and one’s creative spirit. This is quite different from the sense of the word in Kierkegaard’s canon of works.

matador to give an honest, true, and sincere performance, one without faked or tricked passes that make him appear to work close to the bull or make a bad kill look clean as Hemingway tells us Vicente Barrera does (*DIA* 248-249). Courage is essential for a matador to be able to kill cleanly and properly, going in over the bull's horns as a matador is expected to do. Further, Hemingway suggests that courage is essential to honor when he writes: "Once it [cowardice] has been shown, truly and unmistakably shown, honor is gone" (*DIA* 91). In order to have honor in the bullring, a matador should conduct himself in the manner befitting a matador and observe the rules of the bullfight. In short, a matador must have courage in the face of death to observe those rules, unlike Bienvenida and Cagancho, who, Hemingway tells us, "make no pretense of observing the rules of killing" (*DIA* 249). In terms of respect for oneself, a lack of courage reveals a lack of confidence in one's own abilities. It is a matter of self-respect and pride for a matador to attempt to perform his best every time, but this also takes courage.

Because, as Hemingway tells us, "the function of bravery in the bullfight... should be a quality whose presence permits the fighter to perform all acts he chooses to attempt unhampered by apprehension," we see that courage in the bullring is as necessary as *pundonor*, or honor, in the bull ring (*DIA* 94). To have the courage to perform without apprehension, this means that the matador does not fear the bull, goring, or the possibility of death. He does not use "tricks" because he has the courage to perform close to danger. His pride, his honor, and his self-respect demand that he maintain his courage through every moment and every fight. Because one must have courage to actualize *pundonor* in the bullring, *pundonor*, like *earnestness*, is actualized through how one faces death—with

pundonor, honor, and courage, or as a coward. In fact, Hemingway tells us that once “a bullfighter can no longer be calm and put danger away after the fight once starts, can no longer see the bull come calmly, without having to nerve himself, then he is through as a successful bullfighter” (*DIA* 167). Thus we not only see what the function of bravery or courage is in the bullfight, but also see that courage is the binding characteristic of *pundonor*, and what Hemingway describes as the parts of *pundonor*, are all represented by the “whole” of the concept, the “whole” bound together by the necessity of the matador’s courage in the face of death.

Hemingway shows us through his portraits of failed matadors that cowardice in the face of death is often quite visible in the bull ring, but Hemingway also presents matadors who have faced death with *pundonor* and have thus allowed the thought of death “to penetrate” their lives, “transform it,” and have a positive impact on their lives and art, something that Hemingway both tells and shows us is visible in the bullring (Kierkegaard, “At a Graveside” 98). Joselito, Belmonte, and Maera, who are all known to work closely with the bull and to kill cleanly and properly without apprehension, even after repeated goring, serve as living illustrations of how facing death with *pundonor* has a positive impact on one’s life and art.

In terms of the actualization of *pundonor* in the bull ring, Hemingway presents Belmonte and Joselito, who according to Hemingway’s standards were two of the greatest bullfighters in the history of bullfighting. Both worked closely with the bull, so close that they mark the transition from the original bullfight to the modern one;⁶⁰ both

⁶⁰ Because Belmonte and Joselito worked so closely to the bull, bulls were bred down in size. They could do more and “finer things with these smaller, easier bulls” (*DIA* 69-70).

always attempted to kill cleanly and honestly; both were repeatedly gored, but their performances were not effected negatively; both continued to produce emotion and both continued to create their “art” in the face of death.⁶¹ But both Belmonte and Joselito embody what Hemingway defines as *pundonor*. Belmonte, Hemingway writes, “was a genius,” who could “break the rules of bullfighting” (*DIA* 68-69). “The way Belmonte worked,” Hemingway writes, “was not a heritage, nor a development; it was a revolution” (*DIA* 69). Joselito was a “genius” who “lived for bullfighting” and because all of the bulls Joselito fought were easy for him, his pride, his *pundonor*, required that he “make his own difficulties” (*DIA* 69-70). Although Hemingway lauds Belmonte and Joselito as great artists who have gone “beyond what has been done or known” to make something of their own and who repeatedly prove their commitment to their art by always doing their best, Hemingway dedicates much more space to the evolution of Maera from banderillero to matador, a description through which Hemingway most directly illustrates what it means to have *pundonor* or *earnestness* in the face of death (*DIA* 99-100; Kierkegaard, “At a Graveside” 83).

Through Hemingway’s description of Maera, in particular, Hemingway provides a living illustration of how facing death with *pundonor* or *earnestness* has an impact on the life and art of the individual. Like Belmonte and Joselito, Maera’s performances in the bull ring reveal that he embodies what Hemingway discusses as *pundonor*.

Hemingway tells us that Maera was intelligent, “naturally brave,” and “very proud... the proudest man” Hemingway claims he had ever seen (*DIA* 77-78). He had “a valor that

⁶¹ Belmonte was known to be gored numerous times a year, yet “none of his wounds had any effect on his courage, his passion for bullfighting, nor his reflexes” (*DIA* 167). Joselito, Hemingway tells us, “was only gored badly three times and killed fifteen hundred and fifty-seven bulls” (*DIA* 167).

was so absolute” that it was “solid part of him” (*DIA* 78). Significantly, Hemingway tells us that not only was Maera one of the best banderillos Hemingway had ever seen, but he became one of the best matadors, as well. Even after being gored severely in the neck, Maera, Hemingway tells us, was back in the bull ring fighting the next day (*DIA* 79).⁶² During another performance in which Maera broke his wrist attempting to kill cleanly and properly, Maera, Hemingway notes, continued to attempt the kill numerous times because “his honor demanded” he finish the fight and kill his bull “high up between the shoulders” as a matador should; and he did (*DIA* 81).

Through Hemingway’s description of Maera, Hemingway suggests that Maera’s embodiment of *pundonor* was evident in his work as a banderillo and after a few years as a matador—after correcting his flaws and improving his style—Maera became “an artist” (*DIA* 79). Maera, Hemingway writes, “went to the bulls” without apprehension: “arrogant, dominating and disregarding danger” and thus always “gave emotion” to the spectators (*DIA* 79). In fact, Hemingway writes that Maera

was so brave that he shamed those stylists who were not and bullfighting was so important and so wonderful to him that, in his last year, his presence in the ring raised the whole thing from the least effort, get-rich-quick, wait-for-the-mechanical bull basis it had fallen to, and, while he was in the ring, it again had dignity and passion.

...

⁶² The wound in Maera’s neck, Hemingway tells us, “was closed with eight stitches...[h]is neck was stiff and he was furious. He was furious at the stiffness he could do nothing about and the fact that he had to wear a bandage that showed above his collar” (*DIA* 79).

But all the last year he fought you could see he was going to die...but he paid no attention to the pain. He acted as though it were not there...he ignored it. He was a long way beyond pain. I never saw a man to whom time seemed so short as it did to him that season. (*DIA* 78-79)

Hemingway adds, "I thought that year he hoped for death in the ring but he would not cheat by looking for it" (*DIA* 82). He would not "cheat," as Hemingway puts it, because to long for death, to think death is a relief from suffering, from pain, from life, this is not *earnestness*—this is a *mood*. As Kierkegaard puts it, "it is an indulgent lethargy that wants to go to bed—that is, indulgently wants to sleep itself into consolation, indulgently wants to sleep itself away from suffering" ("At a Gravside" 81). Even though during his "last six months of life he was very bitter" because "he knew he had tuberculosis," Hemingway tells us that in these last six months Maera "lived with much passion and enjoyment" because "bullfighting was so important and so wonderful to him" and because "[h]e loved to kill bulls" (*DIA* 82). Although Maera "took absolutely no care of himself" after being diagnosed with tuberculosis, Hemingway attributes this to the fact that Maera had "no fear of death"; "he preferred to burn out, not as an act of bravado, but from choice" (*DIA* 82-83). Significantly, Maera's commitment to living his life with passion and intensity, his commitment to the bullfight and to his "art," and his decision to create his "art" until death comes for him, reveals how his *pundonor* or *earnestness* in the face of death had an impact on and transformed his life as well as his ability to create "art." In fact, Maera illustrates what Kierkegaard describes as the impact the earnest thought of death has on an individual's life and art. As Kierkegaard puts it:

Death in earnest gives life force as nothing else does; it makes one alert as nothing else does....the thought of death gives the earnest person the right momentum in life and the right goal toward which he directs his momentum.... Then earnestness grasps the present this very day, disdains no task as too insignificant, rejects no time as too short, works with all its might... (Kierkegaard, "At a Graveside" 83)

Through Hemingway's depiction of Maera, we see a matador who, through facing death *earnestly* or with *pundonor*, experiences a constant renewal of his urgency to live life fully each and every day. Through Maera Hemingway suggests what one can learn from the study of death: how the *earnest* thought of death can come to transform the life and art of the *earnest* individual. Like *pundonor*, it takes courage for an individual to see his/her death clearly and to think of one's own certain death and uncertain hour. It takes courage to recognize the possible scarcity of time the individual has to make a commitment to his/her life, work, and art and to do his/her very best every day. And it takes courage to face one's own death again and again and renew one's commitment to life and art on almost a daily basis. Significantly, it is through the study of death the *earnest* individual learns that the "art of dying" is inevitably intertwined with the "art of living" Kierkegaard and Hemingway espouse. As Kierkegaard puts it, "To die is indeed the lot of every human being and thus is a very mediocre art, but to be able to die well is indeed the highest wisdom of life" ("At a Graveside" 76). To die well is to anticipate one's own death, to see one's own death "clearly" and one's own life as a "whole," and to allow the thought and experience of one's own death to have a positive impact on how

one lives life; it motivates the individual to create his/her life and work as “art” each and every day.

It is through Hemingway’s detailing of the matadors of Spain that Hemingway shows us that it is *how* a matador faces the possibility of death in the bull ring that determines whether or not he will be able to create “art.” If he faces the certainty and uncertainty of death *earnestly* or with *pundonor*, he not only experiences what Hemingway refers to as “the feeling of life and death,” but by working close to the bull he gives this feeling to his audience. Significantly, the profound emotional experience produced by a man, a bull, and a piece of cloth, what Hemingway describes as being “as profound as any religious ecstasy,” recalls the emotional and spiritual intensity Kierkegaard describes as accompanying the *earnest* thought of death. For Hemingway, the bullfight, taken as a “whole,” is not merely a “living art” but a living illustration of the process of “becoming” in which a matador faces the certainty and the uncertainty of death and strives to capture and convey the profound emotional experience that accompanies facing death *earnestly* or with *pundonor*, a “performance” he attempts to repeat on almost a daily basis.

The “feeling of life and death and mortality and immortality,”
and the “moment of truth” in the Spanish Bullfight⁶³

How a matador faces death in the bull ring determines the emotional experience of the bullfight: if he faces death with *pundonor* or earnestness, the matador-artist goes

⁶³ See *DIA* p. 1 and p. 68

beyond the individual emotional experience and gives this emotion to his audience. This emotional experience, what Kierkegaard describes as accompanying the *earnest* thought of death, is bound to the earnest individual's realization that a "self," as Charles Guignon puts it, "is a tension between the finite and the infinite...the temporal and the eternal," what Hemingway translates as "the feeling of life and death" of "mortality and immortality" that the matador-artist produces when he works closely with the bull. Kierkegaard's description of what it means to face death *earnestly* suggests the individual's realization that his/her "self" is a tension between life and death. Kierkegaard writes: "Earnestness is that you think death, and that you are thinking it as your lot, and that you are then doing what death is indeed unable to do—namely, that you are and death also is" ("At a Graveside" 75). It is through facing the certainty and uncertainty of one's own death an individual comes to realize his/her nature as a synthesis of life *and* death, of the finite *and* the infinite, of the temporal *and* the eternal. Kierkegaard explains the temporal aspect of an individual's life as signifying the separate moments of his/her life, what Hemingway discusses in terms of the "parts" of the bullfight experience; the eternal, on the other hand, "signifies the overarching unity" or "whole," which "has the potential of providing the separate moments of our lives with the kind of meaning and significance they lack without this unity" (Guignon 4). Because there is always tension between the temporal and eternal in an individual's life, the expression of the eternal in one's nature is not only difficult but "it comes only with a struggle" (Guignon 7). In the bullfight, this struggle, this tension, is literal, the bullfight serving as a living illustration of individuals who are caught up in this tension and who

attempt to express the eternal through their commitment to the creation of their “art.” Thus, for Hemingway, the expression of the eternal, the expression of this unity, is found in the emotional experience of the bullfight at the “moment of truth,” the moment when life and death, mortality and immortality, the temporal and eternal exist simultaneously for the audience to see.

What Hemingway refers to as the emotional experience of the bullfight, an “ecstasy,” Hemingway writes, that is “as profound as any religious ecstasy,” recalls the emotional and spiritual intensity Kierkegaard discusses as accompanying the “earnest thought of death,” an emotional experience Hemingway describes as occurring at “the moment of truth” (*DIA* 68). Although Hemingway does distinguish between the “original moment of truth”—the moment of “the final sword thrust, the actual encounter between the man and the animal”—and “the modern moment of truth”—the *faena*—his descriptions of the emotional intensity produced at these moments are consistent. In both instances, it is the “feeling of life and death and mortality and immortality” that the matador experiences and then gives to the crowd (*DIA* 4).

In the original moment of truth, “the beauty of the moment of killing,” Hemingway tells us, “is that flash when man and bull form one figure as the sword goes all the way in, the man leaning after it, *death uniting the two figures* in the emotional, aesthetic and artistic climax of the fight. That flash never comes in the skillful administering of a half a blade to the bull” (*DIA* 247).⁶⁴ Although Hemingway suggests the union or synthesis of the two figures—and of the temporal and the eternal—many critics continue to focus on the kill in the bullfight not as a combination of “mortality and

⁶⁴ *Emphasis mine.*

immortality,” of creation coming from destruction, of life being motivated by the *earnest* thought and experience of death but as lacking any value beyond cruelty and violence. Although critics persist in interpreting Hemingway intense interest in the art of killing in the bullfight in terms of senseless violence, destruction, defiance against death, and a display of man’s power over death—as an “art” it is necessarily creative, as well. Facing death is creative for the matador just as facing death *earnestly* is a creative force in the individual’s life in terms of motivation, meaning, and purpose. What Hemingway attempts to convey is not a rebellion against death—that is antithetical to his philosophy—but a oneness with death, one that is found in the emotional intensity of the bullfight.

The modern “moment of truth,” on the other hand, although it occurs before the moment of killing, evokes the same emotional experience from the matador and the audience. In fact, Hemingway tell us, that “It is impossible to believe the emotional and spiritual intensity and pure, classic beauty that can be produced by a man, an animal and a piece of scarlet serge draper over a stick” (*DIA* 207). The modern “moment of truth”—the *faena*—Hemingway writes, “takes a man out of himself and makes him feel immortal while it is proceeding...gives him an ecstasy, that is, while momentary, as profound as any religious ecstasy, moving all the people in the ring together and increasing in emotional intensity as it proceeds” (*DIA* 206).⁶⁵ Through this description, Hemingway suggest that during the *faena*, just as during the moment of killing, the emotional

⁶⁵ Hemingway also writes the following of the *faena*: “Now the essence of the greatest emotional appeal of bullfighting is the feeling of immortality that the bullfighter feels in the middle of a great *faena* and that he gives to the spectators” (*DIA* 213).

experience is bound to the matador's expression of the eternal through his "art." Further, Hemingway writes:

He is performing a work of art and he is playing with death, bringing it closer, closer, closer, to himself, a death that you know is in the horns because you have the canvas-covered bodies of the horses on the sand to prove it. He gives the feeling of his immortality, and, as you watch it, it becomes yours. Then when it belongs to both of you, he proves it with the sword. (*DIA* 213)

To think death and think of it as your own—this is *earnestness* ("At a Graveside" 75). This is what Hemingway suggests when he writes that "the feeling of immortality" the matador creates "becomes yours" (*DIA* 213). Thus we see that what Hemingway not only attempts to show his readers how to see the bullfight, but like Kierkegaard, he attempts to show readers how to come to see their own death *earnestly*. Hemingway attempts to actualize what Kierkegaard requests of his readers when he writes:

...if you, my listener, will fix your attention on this thought [of death] and concern yourself in no other way with the consideration than to think about yourself, then this unauthorized discourse will become an earnest matter also with you. To think of oneself as dead is earnestness; to be a witness to the death of another is mood. ("At a Graveside" 75)

Hemingway intends for his reader to come to understand the nature of *pundonor* and *earnestness* for their own lives, and it is through Hemingway's description of how a matador gives "the feeling of immortality"—i.e. expresses the eternal in his nature

though his creation of art—that Hemingway not only illustrates what *earnestness* in the face of death is, but shows how the *earnest* thought of death “motivates” one’s life. What Hemingway’s descriptions of the Spanish bullfight reveal is Hemingway’s conscious merging of image (the bullfight) and philosophy (of life and death), a complex philosophic subjective correlative that shares the necessity of repetition of one’s commitment to one’s life, one’s work, and to one’s art. This philosophy focuses on the individual emotional experience that accompanies the “earnest thought of death,” an emotion the matador produces, gives to his spectators, and proves his *earnestness* (i.e., proves his commitment to his art) by working close to the bull, by controlling his nervousness, his feet, and his fear, and by repeating his performance in *earnest* on almost a daily basis.

The Ritual and Repetition of the Bullfight

The significance of the ritual and repetition of the bullfight in terms of the matador’s actualization of *pundonor* or *earnestness* in the bullring is two-fold. First, Hemingway tells us that it is repetition within the bullfight that makes a bullfighter and an artist when he writes of a pass called “the natural” (*DIA* 208). The natural, Hemingway writes, is “the most dangerous to make and the most beautiful to see” (*DIA* 208). Hemingway tells us that it takes courage, serenity, and great ability to perform this pass and that “repeating this [pass] three or four or five times takes a bullfighter and an artist” (*DIA* 209). Second, Hemingway tells us that it is the repetition of the matadors’

performance—on an almost daily basis—that shows a matador’s repeated and renewed commitment to his art when he writes of the matador’s “detachment” (*DIA* 56).

Hemingway writes:

The matador, from living every day with death, becomes very detached, the measure of his detachment of course is the measure of his imagination and always of the day of the fight and finally during the whole end of the season, there is a detached something in their minds that you can almost see. What is there is death and you cannot deal in it each day and know each day there is a chance of receiving it without having it make a very plain mark. It makes this mark on everyone. (*DIA* 56)

This “detached something in their minds,” Hemingway tells us, is “death.” The “detached something” Hemingway “can almost see” in the matador comes from the matador’s knowledge that “each day there is a chance of receiving it [death]” (*DIA* 56).

Significantly, what Kierkegaard discusses as faith or repetition “combines psychological detachment with acceptance” (Guignon 16). This means that an individual recognizes and accepts the paradox of existence—that is, his/her existence as a unity of the temporal and the eternal—and understands that he/she must repeatedly face death, must repeatedly commit him/herself to life, work, and/or art for death to have an impact on life each day.

Although the matador proves his *earnestness* and his art, for example, at “the moment of truth,” to actualize *earnestness* or *pundonor* for one’s “whole” life requires repetition. The matador’s life and art “acquire retroactive power” through repetition, through a repeated commitment to his work, his art (“At a Graveside” 97). Significantly,

the ritual and repetition of the bullfight requires that the matador literally repeat his performance on almost a daily basis; he must repeatedly face his own death. John Killinger reveals his own recognition of the significance of repetition in terms of the bullfight when he writes: “For both Hemingway and the existentialists, the choice is never made finally, but must be made again and again, as if it had never been made before” (98). Hemingway’s description of Maera’s repeated attempt to kill his bull with a broken wrist, for example, suggests that it is through repetition that an individual actualizes the “whole” of his/her life by repeating his/her commitment to life and art, living and trying one’s best “This very day!” and everyday (“At a Graveside” 83).

Hemingway’s Manifesto on the “Art of Living” *Earnestly*

Although decades of Hemingway critics agree that the bullfight is Hemingway’s correlative for art, writing, and how to live life, that is just the tip of the ice-berg. Just below the surface, the characteristics Hemingway finds most admirable in the matador reveals that what has been called Hemingway’s “ruling philosophy” of how we should live in this world is akin to that of Kierkegaard’s (Broer, *Spanish Tragedy* 55). In fact, even Hemingway’s method of dissemination, like that of Kierkegaard’s, forces readers to wade through examples of cowardly behavior, tricked emotion, and false posturings toward the thought of death, which forces the reader to search the text and him/herself to more accurately discern the nature of *earnestness* for his/her own life. In fact, throughout *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway, as Anthony Brand aptly notes, “gives us

representative images of both good and bad bullfighting to support, illustrate, and expand his exposition,” yet what Brand refers to as Hemingway’s “exposition” on the Spanish bullfight serves as more than a “guide on how to *look* at the bull and the bullfighter who is fighting him” (169). It serves as a guide on how to distinguish between *earnestness* and cowardice in the face of death, between real emotion and “tricks,” between artists and “fake messiahs” (*DIA* 86). Under the guise of a guide to Spain and the Spanish bullfight, Hemingway serves as guide for his generation beyond how Wayne Kvam envisions Hemingway “as a guide...for writing, bullfighting, boxing, a job ethic, or simply achieving a sense of humor” (29). Although Hemingway does, in fact, serve as a guide for his generation in all of these capacities, in *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway serves as a guide on how and what one can learn about actualizing one’s life and art from the study of death via the Spanish bullfight. In fact, Hemingway’s emphasis on the individual experience of the bullfight is reinforced by Kierkegaard’s view that “earnest instruction is recognized precisely by its leaving to the single individual the task of searching himself so it can then teach him earnestness as it can be learned only by the person himself” (“At a Graveside” 76). As Kierkegaard claims, Hemingway is “merely letting you witness just as he himself is doing, how a person seeks to learn something from the thought of death” (“At a Graveside” 102).

Lawrence Broer suggests that as early as “The Undefeated” (1925), Hemingway “introduces not another embodiment of the passive hero, but a man who will teach the hero how to live in a world of death and destruction—who will pass on to him the necessary rules for survival” (*Spanish Tragedy* 46). Although Broer argues that the

Spanish matador, for Hemingway, is this “new embodiment” of heroism without abstraction, Hemingway, himself, is also this hero, this guide, the matador serving as another living illustration through which Hemingway puts his philosophy of life, death and art in motion. Although Hemingway acts as student of death—he tells the reader he has never had the opportunity to “study” death before, thus he can only record his observations of what he finds to be “true”—this is just an act, a way Hemingway can present his philosophy of life, death, and art without cramming it down his reader’s throats (*DIA* 1-3). His passion for the bullfight is obvious enough, but his passion for life and art—how to live life and how to create art—and his need to share this knowledge is veiled by Hemingway’s consciously constructed, controlled narrative stance. Thus, it is not only through Hemingway’s detailing of the Spanish bullfight and the matadors of Spain that Hemingway finds a living illustration of what earnestness is, but it is through his stated aspirations as a writer and the actualization of his own art that Hemingway provides another living example of what one can learn from the study of death.

It is not surprising that “Hemingway was dismayed that many reviewers found *Death in the Afternoon* marred by a morbid ‘preoccupation with fatality’ and a tendency to ‘he-manish posturing’” (Baker 243). In fact, what has been consistently glossed over in criticism, if given a mention at all, is that Hemingway’s continual attempt to redefine and adapt the values of bravery, courage, and dignity, for example, is not indicative of what many critics believe to be Hemingway’s espousal of exclusively masculine values; instead, in *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway shows us the actuality that these “abstractions” can only be discovered individually—i.e., subjectively (Fuchs 437). Thus

Hemingway's philosophical treatise on how *pundonor* in the bull ring and how *earnestness* in the face of death are essential to the creation of art and to the expression of the eternal in one's nature not only deserves the moniker of "art," but deserves to be reread, again and again, for its relevance to its historic moment, as well as its enduring relevance to the bullfight, to life, and art today.

Chapter 4

A “Professor” of Existential Psychology:

Mailer’s Existential Psycho-Therapist and the American Existential Experience

Although Mailer scholars have relentlessly probed Mailer’s canon of works in an effort to discern the roots of what Mailer himself calls his own brand of American existentialism, they have consistently failed to recognize *An American Dream* as a work essential to our understanding of the specific philosophical basis from which Mailer’s vision of a uniquely American brand of existentialism grows.⁶⁶ In fact, because Mailer has repeatedly claimed that his existentialism is not the existentialism of his European philosophic predecessors,⁶⁷ critical investigation of the philosophy that drives *An American Dream* has been limited to discussions of existentialism in general terms.⁶⁸ The problem with reducing Mailer’s appropriation of existentialism to a general existential trend is that this reduction fails to take into account the historic moments of *An American Dream* and existential philosophy in America, a moment when Mailer’s own demand for a “new psychology” to understand American experience was met by the growing

⁶⁶ See Laura Adams *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*, p. 38, 52-55, Stanley T. Gutman’s *Mankind in Barbary: The Individual and Society in the Novels of Norman Mailer*, p. 102 and 211, Michael Glenday’s *Modern Novelists: Norman Mailer* p. 2, and Mailer’s *Advertisements for Myself* p. 292-293 in which Mailer explicates his early form of American existentialism.

⁶⁷ See George Cotkin’s chapter on Mailer in his book *Existential America*, specifically p. 184-187 and Mailer’s essay “Existentialism: Does It Have a Future?” collected in *The Big Empty*.

⁶⁸ See Laura Adams’ *Existential Battles*, Stanley T. Gutman’s *Mankind in Barbary*, and George Cotkin’s *Existentialism and American Literature* for differing critical discussions of Mailer’s existentialism.

popularity and practice of a European-based existential-oriented psychotherapy (Glenday 120; Lennon 300).

What the historic moment of *An American Dream* reveals is that Mailer's philosophic contemporaries were successfully developing and teaching existential-oriented approaches to psychotherapy in America and world-wide. At this time, two main schools of thought—one based on Martin Heidegger's 1927 *Being and Time*, and one based on Jean-Paul Sartre's 1943 *Being and Nothingness*—had been translated into psychologies and had begun to replace the more traditional, instituted Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic approaches. Significantly, Heideggerian-based existential psychology was “the first model of an existentially oriented therapy,” decades ahead of Sartre's own development of *psychoanalyse existentielle* (Cohen xviii).⁶⁹ Although Mailer criticizes both Heideggerian and Sartrean existentialism because they do not explore the possibilities for the self after death, he explicitly denies an allegiance to Sartrean existentialism; in fact, Mailer contends that Sartre is the one responsible for derailing existentialism (Mailer, “Existentialism—Does It Have a Future” 203).

Yet Mailer was not only critical of his philosophic contemporaries, he was also critical of the prevailing psychoanalytic approaches to understanding the human psyche. In his 1959 *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer denounces psychoanalysis—Freudian and Jungian approaches in particular—for promoting what Laura Adams refers to as

⁶⁹ In the years 1959-1969, Heidegger became personally and actively involved with Swiss therapists Medard Boss, Ludwig Binswanger, and Gion Condrau, who had been actively developing, teaching, and practicing Heideggerian-based psychotherapy for almost three decades. Although Boss, Binswanger, and Condrau began working from a Heideggerian model in the late 1920s, their psychology was not dubbed *Daseinsanalyse* until 1941. *Psychoanalyse existentielle*, on the other hand, was based on Sartre's 1943 work *Being and Nothingness* (translated into English in 1956), in which Sartre first introduced the tenants of what would become his version of existential psychology,

“socialization-along-acceptable-lines” (31). Existential psychology, on the other hand, offered a psychology of “Being” in which social conformity is not only discouraged, but is considered a threat to the “self.” In existential psychology Mailer found a *psychotherapy*—not a *psychoanalysis*—that promoted growth and individual expression, not social conformity and behavior modification along socially acceptable lines. In fact, Mailer’s distinction between the aims of the novelist and the aims of the psychoanalyst in his 1959 *Advertisements for Myself* reveals Mailer’s aims as a novelist as commensurate with the aims of an existentially-oriented psychotherapy. That is, where Mailer sees the psychoanalyst as “a regulator concerned with Being,” he sees the novelist as “a rebel concerned with Becoming” (qtd. in Adams 31; Mailer, *Advertisements* 282). What this distinction reveals is that Mailer’s concerns are, in fact, the concerns of existential psychology: both Mailer and the existential psychotherapies are concerned with an individual’s tendency toward “falling” into the roles and behaviors endorsed by the “they” of society and, more importantly, both are concerned with the individual’s growth and the process of “Becoming” one’s “true” or authentic self,” which is achieved, in part, through the individual’s recognition of the structures of society that shape identity and thwart individual development (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 298).

Significantly, throughout Mailer’s early canon of works, Mailer repeatedly voices an existentialist view of the threat society poses to the *authentic* development of the individual with particular reference to Americans and American culture. In fact, in Mailer’s recent claim that, “The modern form of oppression is nuanced; it gets into your psyche; it makes you think there’s something wrong with you if you’re not on the big

capitalist team,” Mailer simultaneously voices his concern with the psychological climate of America and points a finger at American capitalism, a sentiment that echoes Mailer’s subtle critique of American culture in *An American Dream* (Mailer, *The Big Empty* 128). Yet Mailer does not merely critique what he sees as oppressive in American culture; he seeks to do something about it. What Mailer admittedly sets out to do is create “a new psychology, a new consciousness” (qtd. in Glenday 120). His goal: to make “a revolution in the consciousness” of his time, one which would meet the demands of the historic moment and address what Mailer envisioned to be the unique, psychological experience of “Being” American (Mailer, *Advertisements* 15). This “revolution,” Michael Glenday notes, “was to involve him [Mailer] in a mighty assault upon the American psyche” (Glenday 16).

For Mailer, existential-based philosophical and psychological perspectives provided him with the tools for this “assault” on American culture and America’s mass consciousness. Because Mailer believes that American culture “gets into your psyche” and is thus psychologically oppressive, his goal in writing *An American Dream* was to “clarify a nation’s vision of itself” (Mailer, *The Big Empty* 128; *Cannibals and Christians* 98).⁷⁰ What Mailer sought to “clarify” was what mass culture endorsed as “Being” American was devoid of significant meaning for the individual. What Mailer sought to clarify was the oppressive nature of American culture and its tendency toward mediocrity and conformity. What he sought to clarify was *how* American culture absorbs the individual and thus hinders growth and progress. In short, Mailer sought to “clarify” the

⁷⁰ Significantly, Mailer believes that “to clarify a nation’s vision of itself” is the highest purpose of literature. See Mailer’s *Cannibals and Christians* p. 98 and Laura Adams *Existential Battles* p. 31.

“nation’s vision of itself” by exposing what American culture offered was not superior but oppressive and false.

Whether Mailer succeeded in making a “revolution in the consciousness” of his time with *An American Dream* is questionable, especially in light of accusations that Mailer was no more than an American pornographer, socially irresponsible, and acutely immoral (Wenke 98; Harwick 146). Yet what Mailer does accomplish through *An American Dream* is a response to his historic moment, what Michael Glenday aptly recognizes as the “first extraordinary response by an American writer to the national sickening,” a successful dramatization of “the national mood” (Glenday 91, 88). It is *how* Mailer expresses this mood throughout *An American Dream* that is the concern of this study. In fact, what Mailer views as “the national sickening” and how he seeks to remedy it through purging America’s psyche are not only essential to our understanding of Mailer’s message and his goals in the 1950s and 1960s, but essential to our understanding of Mailer’s goal for *An American Dream* in particular.

In light of Mailer’s intense concern for the psychological well-being of the nation, a natural point of departure for understanding Mailer’s *An American Dream* is an investigation of the psychological perspectives from which Mailer launches his “assault” on American culture. Yet, Mailers call for a “new psychology” and a “new consciousness” coincide with his development of his own brand of existentialism. Thus, an exploration of the specific foundations from which Mailer’s psychology and his existentialism grow will illuminate what Mailer views as “the national sickening” he

seeks to remedy and provide a basis understanding Mailer's psychological and philosophical vision of America in *An American Dream*.

The Philosophy and the Psychology:

An American Dream and the Basis of Mailer's Vision

Mailer's depiction of *An American Dream*'s narrator Stephen Richards Rojack as a Professor of existential psychology not only reflects Mailer's own rejection of psychoanalysis and his admitted preference for self-analysis, but also reflects Mailer's call for a "new psychology" that addresses the concerns of Mailer's historic moment (qtd. in Glenday 120). Because existential psychology is concerned with an individual's awareness of the ways in which he/she is shaped by the social world, Mailer gives Rojack the ability to deconstruct the culture in which he is absorbed. Rojack's heightened awareness of self and world, for Mailer, serves as his vehicle to raise the nation's awareness of itself, and, more importantly, it is through Rojack's practice of self-analysis that Mailer provides readers with the tool for their own self-analysis. But not only does Rojack, by example, serve to bring readers to an awareness of their own blind absorption in American culture, he also serves to illustrate the process through which one frees oneself from absorption in "the everyday social world" and attempts to discover one's "true" or authentic "self" (Guignon 197). The depth of Mailer's vision—call it genius—is evident in his choice to publish *An American Dream* in eight installments in *Esquire* Magazine, a choice that made *An American Dream* an "ongoing 'event'" reflective of

Rojack's process of "Becoming" and provided the perfect medium through which Mailer could speak to his intended audience—"that horde of the mediocre and the mad" who were absorbed in American culture (Glenday 86; *AAD* 2).⁷¹ What Mailer presents in his first installment of *An American Dream*—namely Rojack's recognition of the cultural conspiracy of mediocrity and conformity and his recognition of the distance between his "public" persona and his "true self"—not only serves as the basis of Mailer's attack on the psychologically oppressive nature of American culture, but also serves to introduce the philosophic perspective from which Mailer launches his attack (*AAD* 7).

The Philosophic Foundations of Existential Psychology

Like Mailer's *An American Dream*, Martin Heidegger's discussion of an individual's "being-in-the-world" in his work *Being and Time* not only serves as a commentary on and a critique of modern society's tendency to thwart individual development, but also serves as critique of the individual's tendency to become absorbed in the mediocre, "everyday social world" (Guignon 197). According to Heidegger, by "falling" into socially approved roles, following social norms and engaging in the idle chit chat of the "they" of society, an individual becomes absorbed in the corrupted, public "everydayness" of Being (Heidegger 307). For an individual to become aware of his/her "fallenness" or "lostness in *das Man*" is one of the goals of existential psychotherapy. That is, an individual must become aware of how he/she is absorbed in and shaped by the public world of the "they." As existential psychotherapy is concerned with the

⁷¹ The original publication of *An American Dream* ran in *Esquire* from January to August of 1964.

individual's "Becoming" a "true" or authentic "self," the patient must first come to recognize his/her tendency toward "falling" into the roles and behaviors society endorses and see more authentic possibilities for the "self" (Heidegger 298). By "falling" in step with society, the individual becomes alienated from his/her "true" or authentic "self" because the individual's absorption in the everyday mediocrity and conformity of the social world conceals the individual's "basic situation in life" and thus conceals the individual's "true" or authentic "self" (Yalom 207). According to Heideggerian-based existentialism, what can free us from "this complacent drifting through life is the mood of anxiety (*Angst*)" (Guignon 197). Because anxiety brings an individual to the recognition that the socially approved roles of the "they" do not guarantee meaning for his/her life, this leads an individual to confront his/her "basic situation in life," what existential psychotherapist Dr. Irvin Yalom refers to as the individual's confrontation with the "givens" or "ultimate concerns" of existence (Yalom 8, 207). These "givens" of existence—the certainty of our deaths, our inherent aloneness and isolation in the world, the lack of meaning in our lives, and our ultimate freedom to choose how we will live our lives—are concealed from the individual who is absorbed in the corrupted, public "everydayness" of Being (Heidegger 307). Society conceals these "givens" from the individual through its consensus of what views, acts, thoughts, and feelings are socially acceptable and within social norms, what Mailer sees as views endorsed by the social world and reaffirmed by the psychoanalyst. In "falling," our absorption in society conceals these "ultimate concerns" from the individual by endorsing certain social roles,

views, and acts as socially acceptable and by punishing those—socially, legally, economically, and/or psychologically—who choose other possibilities for themselves.

Because existential psychotherapy is a dynamic psychotherapy—that is, it is based on the belief “that there are forces in conflict within the individual”—existential psychotherapy focuses on the existential conflicts within the individual, conflicts that Dr. Irvin Yalom notes flow “from the individual’s confrontation with the givens of existence” (8). According to Dr. Yalom, an “individual’s confrontation with each of these facts of life”—death, meaninglessness, isolation, and freedom—“constitutes the context of the existential dynamic conflict” (8). Existential-oriented therapy thus focuses on an individual’s awareness of the “givens” or “ultimate concerns” of existence and the anxiety the individual experiences over his/her “basic situation in life” (Yalom 8, 207).

Dr. Yalom explicates the bases of the individual’s existential conflicts with death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness as “core” conflicts that are the source of an individual’s anxiety over his/her “basic situation in life” (Yalom 207). Facing the certainty of one’s own death, according to Yalom, is “a core existential conflict,” one in which the “tension between the awareness of the inevitability of death and the wish to continue to be” is the source of an individual’s anxiety in the face of death (8). The “existential conflict” inherent in an individual’s certain aloneness and isolation in this world, according to Dr. Yalom, is “the tension between our awareness of our absolute isolation and our wish for contact, for protection, our wish to be part of a larger whole” (Yalom 9). Yet, if we realize “there is no preordained design for us,” that “each of us must construct our own meaning in life,” then the “existential conflict” inherent in the

lack of meaning in this world “stems from the dilemma of a meaning-seeking creature who is thrown into a universe that has no meaning” (Yalom 9). In existential terms, freedom, according to Dr. Yalom, “refers to the absence of external structure.... the human being does not enter (and leave) a well-structured universe that has inherent design” (Yalom 8-9). What this means is that the individual is wholly “responsible for—that is, is the author of—his or her own world, life design, choices, and actions” (Yalom 8-9). Yalom notes that freedom in the existential sense “has a terrifying implication: it means that beneath us there is no ground—nothing, a void, an abyss” (Yalom 9). Thus, an individual’s anxiety in the face of his/her freedom is due to the “clash between our confrontation with groundlessness and our wish for ground and structure” (Yalom 9). It is through a probing of a patient’s anxiety and his/her conflict with these “givens” of existence that serves as the point of departure for existential psychotherapy (Yalom 8).

Existential psychotherapy focuses on the anxiety of the individual and his/her “being-in-the-world” because anxiety, Charles Guignon writes, “can make us realize that our normal tendency to throw ourselves into publically approved roles is actually a form of *fleeing* or *evasion*” (Guignon 198). What we are running from is the fact of our finitude, a fleeing from the certainty of our own death. Yet, if we face our own death, if “we face up to our ‘being-toward-death,’ we are forced to confront the fact that it is up to us to make something of our lives as a whole” (Guignon 198-199). Thus, what anxiety brings us face to face with is the fact that “our social roles are really anonymous, ‘anyone-roles’”; we see that in “playing our normal public roles, we are not really *ourselves*” and that we are ultimately “responsible for making something of our own

lives” (Guignon 198). In anxiety, an individual confronts his/her own “naked Dasein” as being-towards-death, free, alone, and without ground or meaning (Heidegger 394).⁷² For Heidegger, recognizing that we are finite beings—which reveals we are alone, free, meaning-making creatures—and accepting our responsibility for making something of our lives as a whole, “can bring about a transformation in our way of living”—i.e., authentically (Guignon 198). Charles Guignon explains:

To become authentic, we must first accept the fact that we are ultimately *responsible* for what our lives are adding up to. If you face up to your finitude and take responsibility for your own existence, Heidegger thinks, you will achieve a level of clear-sightedness and intensity that was lacking in inauthentic everydayness. (199)

What this means is that facing up to one’s own finite existence (facing up to one’s “being-towards-death”) reveals to the individual that he/she is responsible for creating ground and meaning for his/her own life. It also reveals to the individual that his/her everyday modes of being absorbed in the world are inauthentic, a false basis for personal meaning. Thus, through facing up to one’s “being-towards-death,” an individual confronts his/her own “naked Dasein” as groundless, alone, meaningless, and free; and it reveals the freedom and possibilities for the “self” beyond what “they” offer in “everydayness” (Heidegger 307, 394).

⁷² “Dasein” is the word Heidegger uses for human being. The word itself is not complex, what is complex is what Heidegger envisions as what makes up a human being. See Charles Guignon and Derk Pereboom’s *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, specifically the introduction to the selections of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, p. 175-202.

In terms of the individual psyche, this process is a journey of self-discovery, a quest for one's "true" or authentic "self," a process in which the "self" vacillates between its authentic and inauthentic modes of being in what Jon Mills calls "the endless search" for one's "true self" (Mills). To discover one's "self," to become an authentic "self," is a struggle, a "violent process" which requires an individual wrench him/her "self" free from the corrupted, public "everydayness" of Being and thus free one's "self" to see beyond the limited possibilities society offers for the "self" (Mills). This is why authenticity is often envisioned as being profoundly immoral—because authenticity calls for an awareness of the forces of one's society that thwart individual growth and development, forces which seek to smother the individual in conformity. Thus the authentic individual, in theory, is often interpreted as immoral, self-indulgent, irresponsible, deviant, and is often times considered either "mad" or at minimum psychologically "disturbed" or "unsound." This view of authenticity is echoed in Mailer's claim that "if you're not on the big capitalist team" *they* make "you think there is something wrong with you" (Mailer, "Courage" 128). Significantly, what both Mailer and Heidegger highlight is the tempting and corrupting nature of modern society and the individual's need to see through the trappings of society in order to free one's "self" from "complacent drifting through life" (Guignon 197).

Significantly, in *An American Dream* we see that the concerns of our Professor of existential psychology—Stephen Richards Rojack—are the concerns of existential psychotherapy; in short, his recognition of his absorption in society leads him to a confrontation with the "givens" of existence society has concealed from him. According

to Dr. Irvin Yalom, a probing of a patient's anxiety over these "givens" or certainties of existence—death, aloneness, freedom, and meaninglessness—"contain the seed to wisdom and redemption" (Yalom 5). We thus see Rojack repeatedly face his anxiety towards death, his aloneness, his freedom, and the lack of significant meaning in his life in an effort to find his "true self." What Mailer sets up in the first installment is the notion that one must save one's "self" from annihilation first by recognizing one's inauthentic modes of everyday being and move toward more authentic possibilities for the self. Thus, what Mailer presents in his first installment reveals both Mailer and Rojack's view of society as the enemy of the individual. It oppresses the individual and stifles individuality by endorsing certain roles and punishing individuals who choose other possibilities for themselves. Yet Mailer's focus on what in American culture is psychologically oppressive—the imperative to strive for fame, power, prestige, and immense wealth, for example—leads Mailer to an assault on the oppressive nature of one of our most cherished cultural myths: The American Dream. Through Rojack Mailer shows us that this myth is imbedded in our psyches, a myth which is part of our identities as Americans—singularly and collectively—and which, for Mailer, limits possibilities for every American. In fact, for Mailer, the freedom associated with The Dream is the antithesis of the authentic existential cry, "Freedom!"

Mailer's Appropriation of the Psychology and the Philosophy
"Falling" into the Myth of The American Dream

Heideggerian philosophy and psychology finds expression in what Mailer claims as his own American brand of existentialism through Mailer's invocation of the *The American Dream* and his presentation of the effect of that illusory Dream on the individual and the culture at large. The title—*An American Dream*—points to the disparity between *The* collective American Dream and *An* individual American Dream. Like Heidegger, Mailer not only shows how the individual gets lost in the collective "they-self" of society, but shows how an individual American Dream is lost in and inseparable from the collective American Dream. Americans' insistence that The American Dream is real, that America offers limitless possibilities for the self is, for Mailer, the binding myth of American experience. In fact, throughout the opening chapters of *An American Dream*, Mailer reveals his belief that this myth is imbedded in the American psyche, and he thus calls for a psychology not only to explain how this myth shapes American experience, but how it corrupts the American psyche. Mailer's social-mindedness—although few of his contemporary critics may agree—is evident in his concern that his fellow Americans need a psychology through which they can come to recognize America's myths of itself and move toward a more authentic American experience, a sentiment that lies at the heart of the novel.

Rojack's "Failure," His "Fall," and His "Freedom":

An American Existential Perspective

For Mailer's American readers, Mailer seems to infuse a sense of irony in Rojack's perception that despite his status as a war hero and recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross, his PhD in psychology, his term as a Congressman, and his popularity as a television personality, he "had come to decide" that he "was finally a failure" (AAD 8). In terms of American cultural conceptions of success, Rojack has achieved more than most individuals dream of—he is a famous war hero and intellectual who has political power and wealth. Yet this "dream" is just that: it is a mythic dream endorsed by the "they" of society. This "dream" is not Rojack's dream; it is the inauthentic dream of others, a general consensus of success and happiness advanced and reinforced by the society in which Rojack is absorbed. This collective "dream" turns individual selves into "actors" in "anyone-roles," like Rojack who confesses that he had looked into the "abyss" of meaninglessness and realized that his "personality was built upon a void" (Guignon 198; AAD 7). By "falling" into this myth, by buying into this Dream—that money, fame, and power are inextricable bound to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—one conceals his/her "true self" in favor of The Dream. In Rojack's view, he is "a failure" because he has failed to become an "authentic" self; that is, he realizes his lostness in socially approved roles and thus recognizes his inauthentic modes

of Being. With this realization comes Rojack's departure from politics, a departure necessitated by his feeling that if he did not quit, he would be "separated from" his authentic self "forever" (7). Significantly, Rojack does not simply quit politics; instead, he runs on the Progressive ticket and loses. In short, Rojack shifts allegiance from mass society, representative of his process of pulling away from what he refers to as "that horde of the mediocre and the mad" (AAD 2). Critical studies by American scholars that address Rojack's perception of American culture oftentimes use psychoanalysis as a lens for understanding Rojack's departure from mass American culture and his persistent struggle against forces that oppress him, a critical oversight that has led critics to conclude that Rojack is simply mad, insane, an American psychopath on a violent rampage. Yet, critic John Whalen-Bridge aptly notes that Rojack's "self-knowledge indicates, however, that he is relatively sane, and the novel is full of suggestions that *society* has gone mad" (80). In Rojack's and Mailer's existentialist view, society has gone "mad"—"they" blindly follow the paths and dreams of the collective self and strive to conform to what society prescribes as the formulas for happiness and success. In fact, it is through Mailer's appropriation of existential-oriented psychology and philosophy to American interests and concerns, that Mailer exposes The Dream as one of the myths through which society conceals the certainties of existence from the individual and thus alienates the individual from his/her "true" self. For Rojack and Mailer, this is madness, especially coming from a nation that prides itself on *individual* freedoms and the *individual's* actualization of his/her own freedoms and dreams. Significantly, the disparity between the myth and the reality of The American Dream is that although the

freedom The American Dream connotes is existential and authentic—that is, it promises individual freedom, liberty, life, limitless possibilities, and the pursuit of one’s own idea of happiness, in reality, The Dream is a myth that stands in conflict with the existential notions of freedom the myth purports to embody. For Mailer, this is the “core existential conflict” of “Being” American (Yalom 8).

As the point of departure for Rojack’s recognition of his inauthentic modes of “Being” American, Rojack’s discovery of the myth of the Dream, embodied in his realization that he was a “failure,” brings Rojack to the realization that if he did not quit politics, he would be separated from his “true self” forever. This fear of the annihilation of the “self” brings Rojack to confront the certainties of his own existence, “givens,” “ultimate concerns” that society’s endorsement of the *reality* of The Dream has kept concealed from him (Yalom 8). Thus, throughout the opening chapters of *An American Dream*, we not only see Rojack’s recognition of his absorption in the myth of The Dream as an inauthentic mode of Being, but we also see his attempt to navigate between his “true” or authentic “self” and his “false,” inauthentic modes of being absorbed in the public, social world. In fact, in the opening chapter of *An American Dream* Rojack shares his recognition of his inauthentic modes of being—such as his secret ambition to return to politics, his role as a husband in a marriage that reads like a five-act play, and his realization that he was an “actor” whose “personality was built on a void”—modes that brings Rojack to conclude he “was finally a failure” (*AAD* 7-8).

Rojack’s rejection of his manufactured, public “self” and his search for more authentic possibilities for the “self” outside of the roles and contexts offered by American

culture are at the root of Rojack's crisis. This crisis is, in fact, an existential one, one in which Rojack suggests his "failure" is bound to his realization that his "personality was built upon a void," on nothingness, on a Dream which promises, but does not deliver, fulfillment and happiness (*AAD* 7). This realization brings Rojack to a confrontation with the "givens" or certainties of existence, "core existential conflicts" that existential psychotherapy addresses as both the source of a patient's anxiety and the cure. In fact, as a Professor of existential psychology, Rojack's perspective and his epistemology are bound to his belief that "the seeds of wisdom and redemption" are found within (Yalom 5). That is, through an exploration of his own anxieties over the certainties of existence—death, aloneness, freedom, and meaninglessness—Rojack believes he will not only be able to resolve the tension between his authentic and inauthentic modes of being, but will also discover his "true self" and thus be able to create authentic meaning and content for his life as a whole. Yet Rojack's rejection of American culture as a false basis for personal meaning, his internal and external struggles to free himself from the pervasive force of America's myth of freedom and limitless possibilities, and his repeated need to face up to his own death, has led decades of critics to conclude that Rojack's perspective is bound to his World War II experience, an experience that leaves him death-obsessed and traumatized. In fact, critics continually cite Rojack's admission of his "frightened romance with the phases of the moon" and his conversation with the moon in particular, as indicative of Rojack's descent into madness (*AAD* 7). Yet Rojack's "frightened romance with the phases of the moon" not only reveals that Rojack's perspective and epistemology are bound to Heideggerian notions of self and society, but it also reveals

that his “romance” is inevitably intertwined with his quest to discover his “true” or authentic “self.”

Rojack’s Romance with the Moon:
“Being-towards-death” and “Becoming” Whole

Rojack’s admission, “I wanted to depart politics before I was separated from *myself* forever” is, in part, due to what he calls his “secret frightened romance with the phases of the moon” (*AAD* 7).⁷³ By distinguishing his “public” self from the “self” who is involved in a “frightened romance” with the moon, Rojack simultaneously distinguishes his “false,” corrupted, inauthentic “self” from his “true,” “lost in a private kalaidoscope of death” “self” (*AAD* 7). For Rojack, his romance with the moon—“frightened” because the full moon seems to be the catalyst for Rojack’s anxiety and fear over his own death—a “romance” because the full moon also reminds Rojack of the “wholeness” he lacks in his inauthentic modes of Being—embodies Rojack’s “core existential conflict” (Yalom 8). Through Rojack’s narrative we learn that this conflict is retrospectively rooted in Rojack’s World War II experience, an experience in which he faced death alone and without fear under the “fine stain” of a full moon (*AAD* 3).

Rojack’s narrative of his World War II experience is retrospectively colored by his current perspective as a Professor of existential psychology, but it is that perspective that gives current significance and meaning to what Rojack experienced when he was threatened with annihilation under the light of the full moon. What is most prominent in

⁷³ *Emphasis mine*

Rojack's memory of his combat experience—the “perfectly blue and mad” eyes of the fourth German soldier, which Rojack describes as eyes that go “deep into celestial vaults of sky”—suggests that, for Rojack, there is a correlation between what he sees in the soldier's eyes and what he sees in the full moon. Rojack tells us that those eyes “contained all of it”—the war, the struggle, death, and destruction—a description that simultaneously suggests that what Rojack saw in those eyes was his own “basic situation in life” as a war, a struggle (Yalom 207). Rojack suggests that what he saw in those eyes that caused him to falter “before that stare, clear as ice in the moonlight” was a glimpse of “the abyss” of meaninglessness and groundlessness (AAD 2, 5). The fact that Rojack “faltered,” “not knowing” if he could continue to fight, signifies the fleeting nature of authenticity (AAD 5). Rojack tells us, “suddenly it was all gone, the clean presence of *it*, the grace, *it* had deserted me in the instant I hesitated, and now I had no stomach to go, I could charge his bayonet no more” (AAD 5). Rojack hesitates because in those eyes he sees “that death is a creation more dangerous than life”; he sees death is not “everyone's emptiness” (AAD 7). What Rojack suggests throughout his experience with the fourth German soldier is that through facing up to his own death with courage, Rojack gets a glimpse of “the abyss” and sees that Being has a “null basis”; that is, he suggests that what he sees is that his own existence is groundless and meaningless, that he is alone in this world and free to form his own basis for Being (AAD 2; Heidegger 333). Rojack suggests that what facing death authentically reveals is not “zero,” death is not “everyone's emptiness”; it is a glimpse of an individual's possibilities for his/her own life outside of the “they” (AAD 7).

What is significant about Rojack's description of what he sees to be his first authentic experience is that the setting for this experience is a literal war, one that recalls the "violent process" through which an individual "self" attempts to wrench his/her "true self" free from the "false" everyday "self" and from the forces that oppress and thwart an individual's realization of and development of a "true" or authentic "self." Rojack also espouses the view that facing one's own death authentically and thus facing the facts of our existence in this world requires unfaltering courage. In particular, what Rojack's retrospective account of his combat experience reveals is that for Rojack, what he sees in the eyes of the fourth German soldier that makes him falter is what he later sees "in those caverns of the moon" that makes him falter—"the abyss" (AAD 2, 11). In fact, the glimpse Rojack gives us of his "secret frightened romance" with the moon reveals that what Rojack sees in the soldier's eyes he later comes to *understand* through his romance with the moon.

Rojack's description of his "frightened romance" with the moon, an experience Rojack describes as occurring on a balcony on the night of a full moon, serves to illustrate Rojack's process of "Becoming" authentic. Rojack's description of this process—of facing up to his "being-towards-death" through which he gains an understanding of the moon and is brought face-to-face with his own "raw Being"—recalls the process Heidegger discusses throughout *Being and Time* in terms of finding and Becoming one's "true" or authentic "self" (AAD 11-12). In particular, what this scene illustrates is what Heidegger discusses as "the call of conscience," a call which calls the individual hearer back to his/her "true" or authentic "self" (Heidegger 312).

What Rojack experiences in his perceived conversation with the moon not only illuminates Rojack's understanding of his own "basic situation in life," but is central to our understanding of Rojack's fascination with the full moon (Yalom 207). In fact, Rojack's description of the night he stared at the full moon, alone on a balcony, and heard a "voice" from the moon recalls the process through which Heidegger believes one discovers his/her own "true self" (AAD 11). Rojack writes:

I had a moment then. For the moon spoke back to me. By which I do not mean that I heard voices, or Luna and I indulged in the whimsy of a dialogue, no, truly it was worse than that. Something in the deep of that full moon, some tender and not so innocent radiance traveled fast as the thought of lightning across our night sky, out from the depth of the dead in those cavern of the moon, out and a leap though space and into me. And suddenly I understood the moon. (11)

Rojack's description of what he experiences when the moon speaks to him recalls Heidegger's description of "the call of conscience" (Heidegger 312).⁷⁴ In fact, Rojack's admission that although he did not actually hear "voices" in the literal sense, he gained an *understanding* of the moon, serves to illustrate what "the call of conscience" reveals to the individual "self" who hears the call.

Embodied in Rojack's perception that the "voice" he hears is the voice of the moon is Heidegger's notion that the "voice" one hears when being called "is unfamiliar to the everyday they-self; it is something like an *alien* voice" (Heidegger 321). Rojack attributes this "voice" to the moon not only because the "voice" is alien, but because the

⁷⁴ See Heidegger's *Being and Time* p. 312-348 for his complete discussion of "the call of conscience."

“voice” comes “from afar unto afar”; it comes “from me and beyond me” (Heidegger 316, 320). According to Heidegger the “voice” comes from the “true self,” the “self” that has been covered-up and alienated through absorption in the “they.” What is of particular significance is that Rojack makes the distinction that he does not actually hear a “voice”; he does not “indulge in the whimsy of a dialogue” with the moon (AAD 11). Rojack’s admission that the “voice” said nothing recalls Heidegger’s explication of what “the call of conscience” says. “The call,” according to Heidegger, “does not report events; it calls without uttering anything. The call discourses in the uncanny mode of *keeping silent*” (322). “Uncanniness” or not feeling at home in the world, Heidegger writes, “is the basic kind of Being-in-the-world, even though in an everyday way it has been covered up. Out of the depths of this kind of Being, Dasein itself, as conscience, calls. The ‘it calls me’... is a distinctive kind of discourse for Dasein” (322). Again, although Rojack notes that he did not actually hear a voice, he suggests that what leaped “through space and into” him—the voice—brings him to “understand” the moon, an “understanding” Heidegger distinguishes as well (AAD 11). Heidegger writes:

We take calling as a mode of discourse. Discourse articulates intelligibility.... Vocal utterance, however, is not essential for discourse, and therefore not for the call either; this must not be overlooked... the ‘voice’ is taken rather as a giving-to-understand... (316)

For Heidegger, an “authentic understanding... ‘follows’ the call” (324). The voice, Heidegger writes, “calls Dasein back to its thrownness so as to understand this thrownness as the null basis which it has to take up in to existence” (333). As a “giving-

to-understand,” what the call reveals to the hearer is that he/she is “thrown” into a world not of his/her own making, that he/she is groundless, alone, free, and responsible for creating her/her own ground and meaning (Heidegger 316). What Rojack suggests he understands of the moon is that the moon is the same “kind of Being” Rojack sees himself to be. The moon, like Rojack, is not at home in this world. In the moon’s literal groundlessness, its “dead” caverns, which go deep into “the abyss of meaninglessness,” the phases through which the moon must pass to become “whole,” Rojack finds a kindred Being. “The only true journey of knowledge,” Rojack writes of the knowledge that leaped into him from the moon, “is from the depth of one being to the heart of another” (AAD 11). Rojack’s understanding of the moon as the same “kind of Being” as he is, brings Rojack face to face with his own naked *Dasein*, what Rojack calls his “raw Being” (AAD 11-12).

Rojack suggests that he authentically hears the call and the result is an authentic understanding, not just of the moon, but of his own “self.” Rojack tells us that after he gained an understanding of the moon, he “was nothing but open raw depths at that instant alone on the balcony, looking down on Sutton Place, the spirits of the food and drink I had ingested wrenched out of my belly and upper gut, leaving me in raw Being” (AAD 11-12). He tells us at this moment he “could feel” his “Being” (12). Rojack then “looked into” his “Being,” and saw “lovely light and rotting nerve and proceeded to listen” (12). What Rojack tells us he sees when he looks into the depths of his “raw Being” is the “lovely light” of possibilities for the “self” and the “rotting nerve” of his certain physical demise, of his “being-towards-death” (AAD 11). What is of particular significance is that

Rojack notes he “looked into” his “Being” and “proceeded to listen” to his “raw Being,” to his “true self” (12). This suggests that Rojack not only hears the call, but he listens, understands the call as coming from his “true self” and understands his “true self” is calling him back from his absorption in the “they.”⁷⁵ Jon Mills explains:

Dasein comes to find itself through the disclosure of conscience as an inner voice. The receptivity of the voice calls Dasein to a “giving-to-understand” the authentic self in which the call “passes over” the they-self and finds its true home in its enlightened understanding of itself. (12)

This “enlightened understanding” of the “self” is embodied in what Rojack understands when he looks into and listens to his “Being”—he understands his “Being” as a “null basis,” as groundless, alone, towards death, and free to form his own basis for Being.

Rojack goes on to distinguish between “the part” of him “which spoke and thought and had its glimpses of the landscape of” his “Being” and his physical body. The “voice” which calls “Come to me” is Rojack’s “true self” calling him back to his “self” (AAD 12). Thus, Rojack believes his physical body would drop from the balcony, but his “true self,” would transcend his thrownness in this world, “would soar, would rise, would leap the miles of darkness to that moon.... I knew I would fly” (12). In this moment, Rojack faces his “being-towards-death”; that is, he faces the certainty of his own death, sees open possibilities, feels the freedom that accompanies the recognition that one can

⁷⁵ According to Heidegger, the “authentic understanding which ‘follows’ the call” is an understanding of one’s “lostness in the ‘they,’” a recognition that one’s false, public “self” is distanced from one’s “true self” (333). This understanding reveals Dasein as a “null basis for its null projection” of future possibilities for the “self” (333). In short, one understands the “self” as “Being-towards-the-end”—“something which in the depths of its Being, every Dasein is” (365). The call summons Dasein’s self from its lostness in the “they” and calls the “self” to its “ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self”; the call brings the “self” out of its “hiding-place” in the “they” and “gets brought” to its “Self” by the call (320).

form his own, meaningful basis for “Being.”⁷⁶ Yet, Rojack’s authenticity is fleeting; when faced with the moment of choice, Rojack stands face to face with his “core existential conflict”; that is, he faces the conflict between his recognition that he can’t “die yet” because he has not “done his work” to become an authentic “self” and his recognition that he has thus far lived his life inauthentically and is thus “dead with it” (13). In short, what Rojack understands is that the life he has been living is inauthentic, that he has been corrupted by and absorbed in the “they,” that his existence is meaningless and groundless, and that he cannot die until he has “done his work” of wrenching himself free from his “lostness” in the “they” (13). Rojack tells us he then “slipped back over the rail” and slips back into anxiety, which Rojack describes as an “illness” (13). Rojack’s describes his anxiety in the face of his realization of his inauthentic modes of being absorbed in the “they” as a “tension” between his authentic and inauthentic modes of being, one “which develops in your body” and “makes you sicken over a period” (AAD 8). For Rojack, the “illness” is his tendency to be lost in the “they”; the “false self” is ill, sick, corrupted by its “fallenness.” Rojack describes “[t]his illness” as “an extinction,” a perception that reveals what Rojack’s “soul” told him, so to speak, was that he must wrench his “self” free from the “they” or his “true self” will be annihilated, will be consumed by the cancer of the “they-self” (AAD 13). Rojack describes how this “tension” and this “illness” return to him when he loses his courage to remain on the balcony, poised over “the abyss” of meaninglessness. Rojack tells us that his “courage,” as it did during his combat experience, leaves him; he tells us that his

⁷⁶ For Heidegger, the call reveals the “self” as “being-towards-the-end”—with limited time to embrace one’s authentic possibilities for the “self” and limited time to live a meaningful, authentic life (365).

“ambition,” his striving for authenticity and wholeness, and his “hope” for the possibilities for the future leave him and rise up to the moon beyond his grasp. In contrast to the “illness” Rojack speaks of, Rojack sees his authentic “courage,” “ambition and hope” as what is good or “noble” in him (*AAD* 13). Rojack suggests that without the “courage” to face his death, without the courage to accept the “self” as a “null basis,” nothing “noble” in him remains. That is, once Rojack feels what is “noble” in him leave, the tension inherent in his “core existential conflicts” over being-towards-death, alone, groundless, and free, are illustrated through his compulsion to call Deborah, the one thing that continues to impose meaning and provide a basis for Rojack’s life.

Existential and Physical Violence: Rojack’s Struggle for Freedom

Rojack’s need to call his estranged wife Deborah illustrates Rojack’s fleeing in the face of his aloneness, yet his need to see her after his experience on the balcony also reveals that for Rojack, Deborah is his “whole.” “Without Deborah,” Rojack tells us, his “parts” “did not add to any more than another name for the bars and gossip columns of New York...probably I did not have the strength to stand alone” (*AAD* 18). Rojack describes how all of a sudden “all of my substance fell out of me and I had to see her. I had a physical need to see her as direct as an addict’s panic waiting for his drug” (*AAD* 19). Yet, when Rojack goes to see Deborah, the tension between his “self” as a “null basis” and Deborah’s oppressive and thwarting presence returns. This is illustrated through Rojack’s response to Deborah’s statement that she did not love him anymore.

Rojack writes: “I thought again of the moon and the promise of extinction which had descended on me. I had opened a void—I was now without center. Can you understand? I did not belong to myself any longer. Deborah had occupied my center” (27). The void Rojack opened—that is, his understanding of his existence as a “null basis”—brings Rojack to recognize his inauthentic modes of being and brings him to an understanding that he must wrench his “self” free from the forces that corrupt and distance him from his “true self.” What Rojack suggests in his response is that Deborah—the embodiment of the corrupt, oppressive force of American culture—is “fused” at the “center” of his being (AAD 28). What Rojack understands is that with Deborah as his “center,” life is merely “a series of means-end strategies”; that is, Deborah serves and has served as the means to Rojack’s dreams (Guignon 196). “I thought the road to President,” Rojack writes, “might begin at the entrance to her Irish heart” (2). As his “center,” at the “center” of Rojack’s dreams and aspirations in life, Deborah, like the culture Rojack rejects, threatens annihilation of Rojack’s “self.”⁷⁷ Rojack couples this fear of annihilation of his “self” with his literal fear of Deborah. She “was violent,” Rojack tells us, “I was afraid of her. She was not incapable of murdering me” (23, 25). When Rojack’s thoughts return to “the moon and the promise of extinction,” Rojack not only suggests a connection between Deborah and the moon, but also between Deborah and the Nazi soldiers. In fact, for Rojack, Deborah, like the Nazi soldiers Rojack faced, presents a double threat, one that is both literal and existential. He fears literal death in that she, like the Nazi soldiers, is

⁷⁷ Deborah threatens Rojack’s sense of “self” by suggesting he is a coward, an easily replaceable lover, and that without her, he is nothing. See pages 23-25.

capable of killing him; existentially, Deborah, like Nazi culture, threatens to and is capable of annihilating Rojack's "true self."

Significantly, not only do the Nazi-soldiers literally threaten Rojack's physical "being," but the Nazis also represent the most corrupt and oppressive of cultures, a culture, if victorious in the war, would threaten to annihilate Rojack's "self"—his "self" in the eyes of the Nazis, nothing more than a mixed-race Jew. Like the Nazis, "Deborah had prejudices.... Her detestation of Jewish Protestants and Gentile Jews was complete" (AAD 34). Thus Rojack's crisis over Deborah occupying his "center" is an existential crisis, a fear of existential annihilation of the "self," as well as a literal one. Because Deborah threatens Rojack's "self" literally and existentially, he violently struggles with her in order to transcend this "thrownness"; that is, he struggles to wrench himself free from the world in which he has been "thrown," he struggles to free himself from his absorption in the "they"—which Deborah represents—and free himself from her oppressive, corrupting, and pervasive force. According to Jon Mills, when the authentic self "finds itself in its lostness," it recovers "its authenticity in its freedom" (Mills). Rojack not only illustrates this process, but during his literal physical struggle with Deborah he sees he must kill her to achieve his freedom.

Throughout Rojack's description of his physical struggle with Deborah, what Rojack experiences is a struggle for his freedom. He describes the mental picture he sees as his arm tightens around her neck: "I had the mental image I was pushing with my shoulder against an enormous door which would give inch by inch to the effort" (31). Rojack writes:

I released the pressure on her throat, and the door I had been opening began to close. But what I had had a view of what was on the other side of the door, and heaven was there...and I thrust against the door...and *crack* the door flew open and the wire tore in her throat, and I was through the door, hatred passing from me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts. I was floating. I was as far into myself as I had ever been and universes wheeled in a dream. (31)

What Rojack sees on the other side of the “door”—“heaven”—is his freedom from the “they-self” within the “self”; he sees his freedom from Deborah who stands at the center of his Being (AAD 31). What he catches a glimpse of is his freedom from his lostness in the “they”; what he sees is “heaven”—his freedom from early forces and constraints—and the authentic possibilities for the “self” that transcends its thrownness in this world.

Rojack describes his “transcendence”—his freedom from his lostness in the “they”—in terms of illness leaving him; his “transcendence” feels like “floating” (AAD 31). Since Rojack has wrenched his “self” free from the “they” by killing Deborah, Rojack feels as he did on the balcony: groundless, free, as if he could “fly” (12). He tells us he was “as far into” himself as he “had ever been” and his “flesh seemed new,” since by freeing himself free from the “they,” he transcends his “thrownness” and frees himself to form his own basis for Being (31-32). Further, after he frees himself from Deborah, Rojack is progressively freed from his public roles as her husband, a t.v. personality, a professor, a psychologist, and a socialite. Significantly, we must see “selfhood,” according to Jon Mills, “as a development on a continuum of authenticity, in a state of

becoming, as emerging freedom” (12). This view of the authentic development of the “self” is what Mailer illustrates throughout the opening chapters of *An American Dream*. Yet what is of particular significance is that what Rojack struggles to achieve—his freedom—stands in direct opposition to the myth of “freedom” embodied in the idea of The American Dream.

Authentic American Freedom: Mailer’s View

Because Mailer sees the pervasiveness of The American Dream as a form of psychological oppression, one that is uniquely American, his goal to “clarify a nation’s vision of itself” is achieved, in part, through Mailer’s exposure of the nation and its vision of itself as inauthentic (Wenke 3; Mailer, *Cannibals* 90).⁷⁸ Significantly, what Mailer emphasizes is that the nation see itself from a different light, more clearly, both as individuals and as individuals within American culture. Specifically, what Mailer intends to clarify is that the idea of the Dream is rooted in the history of American political and social life as American democracy. What Mailer sets up in the first chapter in particular—Rojack’s struggle for authentic freedom—serves to illustrate the pervasive force of the myth of The Dream and to show that to wrench one’s self free from one’s “lostness in das Man,” which oppresses and thwarts the development of one’s authentic

⁷⁸ Joseph Wenke writes in his “Introduction” to *Mailer’s America*:

For Mailer’s subject is preeminently America: throughout his work he is involved in trying to discover our identity as a nation by relating the promise and the basement of the millennial idea of America to the complexities of the contemporary American scene. In doing so, he has pursued through his writing what he believes to be the highest purpose of literature, which is to “clarify a nation’s vision of itself. (3)

personality, identity, and values, involves a violent struggle. Significantly, Rojack's struggle for authentic freedom recalls the founding ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of one's own idea of happiness. In fact, what Mailer shows us is that Rojack's struggle for authentic freedom does not differ from the "revolutionary" ideals America was founded upon; his violent struggle for his freedom is intertwined with America's historical consciousness. Rojack, like our Founding Fathers who violently struggled to free themselves from the oppressive constraints of the British system, reenacts this war—The Revolutionary War—in order to achieve what he sees to be the *authentic* freedom of our Forefathers.

Mailer returns to the founding ideals of America as a nation and exposes the hypocrisy of The Dream. Significantly, Mailer's recovery of the founding ideals of the country reflects Heidegger's notion that authenticity is "a mode of existence that brings about a transformed understanding of one's historical context" in which an individual "grasps the past of one's community as a 'heritage' or 'legacy'" (Guignon 202). Guignon explains: "According to Heidegger, the lucid awareness of one's complicity in the 'co-happening' of one's community can lead to a way of existing he calls 'authentic historicity'" (202). Guignon cites Martin Luther King's attempt to "recover an appreciation of the biblical ideals central to American culture in order to achieve equality for all humans" as an example of what Heidegger means by "authentic historicity" (202). Thus, Mailer's attack on the myth of The American Dream is not merely a critique of The Dream at his present, historic moment. In fact, in order to make a "revolution in the consciousness" of his time, Mailer must himself understand and address the historical

consciousness of “Being” American and expose Americans’ “complicity in the ‘co-happening’” of American culture. Yet what Mailer sees as an inseparable part of America’s historical consciousness—the ideal of The American Dream—is itself founded on the democratic foundations of America as a sovereign nation. Thus, for Mailer, the foundation from which The Dream is born is not only bound to the struggle, the war our Founding Father’s fought to achieve the ideals of freedom and democracy, but is also rooted in the American religious experience which is historically prior, yet inextricably bound to America’s vision of itself and to the formation of the myth of The Dream.

Exposing the Myth of America’s Vision of Itself

For Mailer, just as The American Dream embodies the historical consciousness of America to his present day and beyond, America’s religious history persists in his present American culture. Our money, for example, claims “In God we trust.” We pledge our allegiance to nation and God as we are “one nation under God,” but indivisible, “with liberty and justice for all” (The Pledge of Alligence). Our democracy is one with and endorsed by God; our economic viability is entrusted to God; our nation, our collective and individual identities as Americans are “indivisible” from God. Thus, not only is the Dream inseparable from God, but what is significant is that America’s religious consciousness, although historically prior to our democracy and thus prior to the American myth of The Dream, is that it is based on another myth which dates back to the Christian world’s “discovery” of America. This myth, which is central to America’s

vision of itself as a land of opportunity and limitless possibilities, and which Mailer sees as inseparable from the myth of The Dream and from America's historical and psychological consciousness, is our nation's vision of ourselves as American Adams in the "New World garden" of "limitless possibilities" (Wenke 70).

Rojack's "Fall" and the "Fall" of Adam:
Temptation, Evil, and the Allure of The Dream

Although Mailer makes a clear connection between the loss of self that results from an individual's absorption in the myth of The American Dream and Heidegger's notion of blindly "falling" into the culturally endorsed roles of the "they," Mailer simultaneously imbues Heidegger's notion of "falling" with religious significance through his invocation of the Judeo-Christian myth of the "Fall" of Adam.⁷⁹ Mailer brings this Christian myth to the forefront of modern American experience by invoking The American Dream and presenting its allure as a temptation even Adam could not withstand. In doing so, Mailer also engages with America's unique view of themselves as American Adams, what Laura Adams aptly notes as the central myth of the American novel. This myth, Adams writes,

is that of Adam in the New World Garden and his expulsion after the Fall,
the reenactment of man's encounter with an innocent land and the evil

⁷⁹ See Laura Adams *Existential Battles* and Joseph Wenke's *Mailer's America* for differing interpretations of the Adamic myth in Mailer's works.

within himself; its characteristic theme that of the American Dream, its virtues, its flaws, and its effect on the American character. (Adams 23)

But for Mailer, Americans' vision of themselves as new world Adams is not only a central myth of the American novel; he sees this myth as American's cultural "heritage," a "legacy" for modern Americans (Guignon 202).

Through Mailer's recovery of the Adamic myth, Mailer reenacts this myth by connecting Rojack's recognition of his "fallenness" to a recognition of his own inauthentic modes of being, yet he also connects Rojack's recognition of his "fallenness" to a recognition of "evil" within himself. Rojack suggests that this evil is a cancer, a cancer which consumes and annihilates the "true" self. In fact, Rojack's belief that "as your soul died, cancer began," reveals that Rojack connects the death of soul to the death of the "true self" (AAD 68). The evil within, for Rojack, is discovered through his recognition of his inauthentic modes of being-in-the-world; that is, Rojack associates evil with the false, inauthentic "they-self" which consumes and threatens to annihilate what Rojack sees as what is good in him—his soul, his "true self." Thus, not only do Mailer and Rojack connect authenticity to "goodness"—to the "true self" and the soul—they also connect inauthenticity to the "evil" within—to the "false self" and the corruption of the soul. Through Rojack Mailer suggests that an individual must recognize his/her "fallenness" and thus see the evil within his/her self in order to expel the evil within. As Rojack shows us, this is an ongoing struggle, a violent process, a process Rojack envisions as a war between his authentic and inauthentic modes of being, between what is "good" and "evil" within his "self." Mailer translates Rojack's personal war into an

external struggle against what is evil, oppressive, and corrupt in American culture, a struggle against the forces that threaten to annihilate Rojack's "self" and his soul. For Rojack, this evil on earth not only manifests itself in the form of an oppressive American culture, but is also manifest in the form of Deborah, the temptress, the embodiment of The Dream and its empty promise of happiness.

Through Mailer's recovery of the Adamic myth, Mailer presents Deborah as the American Eve who tempts Rojack with the promise of power, money, status, and fame; she tempts him with the promise of The Dream: "the road to President" (*AAD* 2). In doing so, Mailer associates Rojack's temptation and his "fall" with his blind absorption in American culture and with the corruption of his "self" and his "soul," a corruption Rojack associates with Deborah, who tempted him with a lie.⁸⁰ This lie—of The American Dream—is the lie of the serpent: the apple does not transfer the infinite knowledge of God to Adam or Eve, nor does The Dream provide infinite opportunities and possibilities for the individual "self"; in fact, both corrupt those who believe the lie. Yet Rojack's "loss of innocence" occurs when he comes to an awareness of the lie of The Dream and of his "failure" in life. Mailer and Rojack envision "innocence" as an existential "innocence," which has a negative connotation: "innocence" suggests blind absorption in the social world, the covering-up and hiding of one's "true" self. In existential and religious terms, after his "fall," Rojack acquires knowledge of the evil within and of free will, and he comes face to face with his existential situation in life: he

⁸⁰ In fact, Mailer not only presents Deborah as an American Eve, the temptress who is rife with the promise of power and possibilities, he also presents Kelley as the serpent-father who, through his incest with Eve, devours the innocence of the child-Eve—an image that appears on Kelly's self-created coat of arms. Further, Kelly suggests to Rojack that Deborah's corruption has been passed on to Rojack, just as Eve passes her corruption onto Adam. See p. 232-238.

must choose his own basis for “Being”; he must choose whether his life will be lived for good or for evil. Mailer suggests through Rojack that Adam became aware of his own existential situation in life after eating the apple: Adam became aware of his freedom, his free-will, his ability to make choices for his own life. Mailer suggests the knowledge both Adam and Rojack acquire—of the evil within and of their freedom—is a loss of innocence that is necessary to become self-aware and to come to a heightened awareness of the world and of others. Through Mailer’s merging of philosophy with his recovery and translation of the Adamic myth, Mailer positions Adam as the first human being to come to an existential awareness of self and world. For Mailer, Adam is the first “Being” to lose his innocence and gain self-awareness that innocence is ignorance; he is the first “Being” to become aware of his freedom to choose how he will live his life. Thus, Mailer not only recovers, but re-envisioned the Adamic myth in *An American Dream* as existential and as a literal and existential war on earth between the forces of good and evil within and without. By bringing the Christian myth of the “fall” of Adam to the forefront of American experience, Mailer not only suggests that as Americans this war between good and evil, between God and the Devil, is our “legacy,” but that our “legacy” is existential (qtd. in Guignon 202). As our “legacy,” like Adam and Eve we are “thrown,” as Heidegger puts it, into a world and a war not of our own making; but our choices and actions, as Mailer envisions, not only contribute to, but could end this war within ourselves and end this war on earth.

Mailer's Vision of an American Existentialism of and for America

Mailer's vision of the existential foundations of America builds on and departs from Heideggerian existentialism through his views that 1) there is a God, and 2) that God depends on human action (Adams 38). It is at this point that Mailer's existentialism departs from Heidegger's and takes on religious significance. Although Heidegger's existentialism is consistently secular, Mailer builds from Heidegger's view that "whether God is God is determined from within the constellation of Being"; that is, the existence of God depends on the individual (qtd. in Henry 4). Mailer builds from Heidegger's notion that God depends on the individual and "enlarges the meaning" of Heideggerian existentialism through his view "that God depends on the outcome of human action" (qtd. in Adams 38; qtd. in Glenday 111-112). Ultimately, Mailer's view is an outgrowth of Heideggerian existentialism. Mailer connects Heidegger's view of "falling" to the "fall" of Adam and envisions the tension between authenticity and inauthenticity as a war between good and evil in the individual. Further, because authenticity depends on an individual's thoughts (i.e., his/her recognition of his/her inauthentic modes of being "fallen" or "lost") and depends on individual action (i.e., how the individual chooses to live his/her life and how the individual actualizes his/her authentic possibilities for "Being"), Mailer's view "that God depends on the outcome of human action" *could* read, "God depends on the outcome of human thought and action" (qtd. in Adams 38; qtd. in

Glenday 111-112). Further, Mailer couples his view that there is a war between good and evil on earth with the view that God is engaged in a war with the Devil here on earth, a war for souls that began in The Garden of Eden. Throughout *An American Dream*, Rojack engages in this war on varying levels. This war exists internally and externally, existentially and literally. It involves expelling evil from within the self and expelling evil from the world, an evil on earth Rojack believes is embodied in the form of Nazi soldiers and in the form of “the Devil’s daughter,” Deborah (AAD 204). It is a religious war and a personal war for existential and literal freedom. It is a national and cultural war in which the individual struggles for freedom from an oppressive government and social structure, a struggle against the increasingly totalitarian values of America that breed, nay demand, conformity and submission. On a nationalistic level, Mailer envisions this war as a Revolutionary War, one in which Rojack, like his forefathers, struggles to free himself from an oppressive political, legal, and social system, another American “legacy” Mailer recovers and shows is as part of the experience of “Being” American in his present historic moment.

The American Existential Experience and Mailer’s Vision of America

For Mailer, our “legacy” as children of a Revolutionary War is existential, a “legacy” Mailer suggests we must recover in order to fully understand how we arrived and the present, historic moment, not just as individuals, but as a culture. Significantly, this legacy is and once was a revolution in the consciousness of its time, a revolution

which became a war—a Revolutionary War—to achieve freedom from an oppressive British system. Yet not only was this freedom achieved through war, but the physical and spiritual characteristics of America itself provided the place and the context for the foundations of America and American’s new found existential freedom.

Before America’s founding as a nation, America was a void, and abyss, a “null basis” from which individuals could make a new start. Early Americans were free—infinite possibilities stood before them in this New World. They were free to form their own basis for “Being” as individuals and for “Being” American. From this foundation, American democracy was born. The existential vision of our forefathers is evident in our founding mottos—“Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” and “Freedom and Justice for All”—and in their vision of America as an uncorrupted and fertile land of opportunity. Mailer recovers these possibilities from our collective American past and reinforces the idea that we must understand where we were, are, and could be in order to take authentic action in the present and thus project new possibilities for the future, a future Mailer sees at his historic moment as moving toward the total annihilation of the individual.

Through Mailer’s complex vision of the existential foundations of “Being” American, Mailer suggests that America and Americans need to recover the existential possibilities the individual and the nation were founded on—before it is too late. This is the vision Mailer presents throughout *An American Dream*: he shows us what America once was, what it is in his present moment, and through Rojack’s extreme and violent response, Mailer shows us what could soon come to be. Mailer, in fact, does not promote

violence as many critics believe: he merely shows us the possibilities for our future if Americans and America, itself, continues to smother individuals in conformity. It is through Rojack that Mailer expresses his view that “If society stifles an individual, smothers him in conformity, then he cannot act in any moral way” (PP 270). This is the morality and the philosophy of *An American Dream*—that we, as individuals, are responsible for facing-up to our own lives before we are so submerged in our inauthentic modes of “Being” American that our struggle for freedom becomes a violent retaliation against the world in which we are absorbed. For Mailer, the increasing violence and oppression visited upon the individual by the culture at large in his historic moment will either lead to the complete annihilation of the individual, of individualism, and the vitality of the human spirit, or, as he shows us through Rojack, it will lead to a violent response from the individual. Through Rojack Mailer shows us how urgent our need to reform ourselves and our culture is. As individuals, we must accept our responsibility to strive to discover a more authentic way of living for our own futures as well as for the future of our nation. For Mailer there is much at stake. On a nationalistic level, what is at stake is the future possibilities of and for the individual American as well as the nation as a whole; on a spiritual and religious level, what is at stake is the soul of humanity and the existence of God, all of which Mailer envisions—past, present, and future—as bound to the existential experience that is unique to “Being” American. We must, Mailer suggests, recover the existential possibilities for ourselves and our nation and we must strive to discover a more authentic way of living for ourselves and our culture. This is Mailer’s “American Dream,” if he has one: that authentic individuals will contribute to the

formation of an authentic community, an authentic culture, and an authentic American experience that will free us from the collective and individual violence of the past and present. In Mailer's view, the future of the individual, the nation, and God depend on it.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The American Existential Tradition: Tracing the Influence of Fitzgerald and Hemingway on Mailer's Philosophy and Art

In a 1964 interview published in the *Paris Review*, Norman Mailer cites the authors from whom he has “learned the most from, technically,” as the interviewer puts it, as E.M. Forester, James Farrell, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Thomas Wolfe (18). Yet the influence of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway on Mailer's works goes beyond the realm of technique; in fact, their philosophic visions of modernity, their translation of existentialisms to American interests and concerns, and their existential concerns with the effects of an increasingly oppressive American system on the individual and the culture at large, reverberate throughout Mailer's cultural criticism and his literary works. Although Hemingway is often cited as the literary artist who influenced Mailer the most—in part, due to the fact that Mailer repeatedly cites Hemingway in his works—in terms of Mailer's philosophic vision of America, both Fitzgerald and Hemingway are central to Mailer's vision of America and the American existential experience of his life and times. In fact, in *An American Dream* Mailer reveals his development of “a coherent view of life” in the form of his own American brand of existentialism, a vision of the unique psychological

experience of “Being” American that grows from the American existential foundations laid by Fitzgerald and Hemingway in the first half of the 20th century (*Paris Review* 18; Foster 220).

Significantly, critical studies of Fitzgerald and Hemingway continually refer to these authors as innocents of philosophy even though evidence such as reading lists, letters, library collections, and the author’s works themselves reveal that Fitzgerald and Hemingway were, at least, minimally versed in the philosophic discourse of their time.⁸¹ Critics repeatedly discount works of philosophy in Hemingway’s reading collection, claiming that Hemingway most likely never read them; and, Fitzgerald’s copy of H.L. Mencken’s *The Philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche*, a work his letters and interviews reveal he highly valued as well as his admission that Nietzschean ideology had a profound influence on his thought and writing in his early to mid twenties, are rarely considered in critical studies of Fitzgerald’s canon of works (Brucoli, *Conversations* 44, 83).⁸² Yet, as Ronald Berman notes, because “the decade of the twenties was philosophically explosive,” it is hard to image that Fitzgerald and Hemingway, who were both known to emphasize their reading of a range and variety of works as essential to their art, would have overlooked the main intellectual currents of their time—the

⁸¹ Richard Foster and Manfred Putz are among the scholars who discuss Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s existentialism, yet they both argue that Fitzgerald and Hemingway were not versed in philosophy. Specifically, see Foster’s article “Mailer and the Fitzgerald Tradition,” p. 229 and Putz’s *Nietzsche in American Thought and Literature*, p. 7.

⁸² Works of philosophy found in Hemingway’s reading collection such as *The Twilight of the Gods* (1911), *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1926), *Problems of Philosophy* (1926), *Time and Man* (1928), *Nietzsche en Italie* (1929), *Philosophy 4* (1929), as well as philosophically founded texts such as the works of Andre Gide and Fyodor Dostoevsky, just to name a few, reveal that Hemingway was, in fact, interested in the philosophic currents of his time from the teens into the thirties. See Michael Reynold’s *Hemingway’s Reading, 1910-1940*. As for Fitzgerald studies, David Ullrich is one of the few scholars who investigates the specific influence of Nietzschean ideology on Fitzgerald’s works. Specifically, see his article on Fitzgerald’s short story “The Ice Palace” entitled “Memorials and Monuments...”

explosion of European philosophy on the American scene. If Fitzgerald and Hemingway had not commented on every facet of culture in both their fiction and their non-fiction—from history, politics, and social issues to literature, art, and prevailing ideologies of their historic moments—their innocence of the philosophic currents of their time would be more likely, even a reasonable assumption. Yet, European philosophies were being translated, explicated, and appropriated to American interests and concerns, not only in the highest intellectual circles, but in academia, in social criticism, in cultural commentary, in journals and on the pages of some of America's most popular magazines. Significantly, the two American authors whom I find to have the most developed and articulate existential visions of modern times and who take responsibility through their art for working out the philosophical dilemmas of modernity—Fitzgerald and Hemingway—have yet to be fully understood as two of the most important early literary voices who get to the core of the existential experience of “Being” American, voices whose reverberations are felt by Mailer in his younger years and are still felt today.

Fitzgerald's Philosophic Vision of America

Hailed “as the interpreter of the youth of the Jazz age,” the “spokesman” of “the dancing, flirting, frivolling, lightly philosophizing young America” and as the “delineator” and liberator of “the American girl,” by the close of 1922, Fitzgerald was the authoritative voice of an age and a generation (Brucoli, *Conversations* 82, 75). He not only names and defines his age—the Jazz Age—but also captures the vitality of this age

like no other author of his time. Although the vision of modernity Fitzgerald presents in his early short stories and novels earns Fitzgerald instant renown as of one of the most important chroniclers of Jazz Age America, critics who have recognized the existentialist impulse in Fitzgerald's work see Fitzgerald not only as a chronicler, but more importantly as a thoughtful and insightful social critic who is working out the "dilemmas of philosophy" in his art. (Berman, *World* 9).⁸³

Significantly, only a handful of scholars have examined the depth to which Fitzgerald's thought and writing is influenced by the philosophic currents of his time. Fitzgerald scholar David Ullrich, for example, identifies the existentialist impulse in Fitzgerald's early works in Fitzgerald's focus on identity and cultural memory as socially constructed. Ullrich argues that this existentialist impulse is embodied in Fitzgerald's existentialist critique of America's tendency to erect "memorials and monuments" as a way of shaping cultural memory, regional and personal identity, and thus "assuring conformity and thwarting the possibility of envisioning 'individuality'" (Ullrich, "Memorials" 2). Fitzgerald's early concern with America's creation of mythologies through which the identities of the individual, communities, regions, and the nation are shaped, and what Richard Foster identifies as Fitzgerald's characters' "search for selfhood" in a culture which threatens to annihilate the individual, forms the basis of Fitzgerald's early "'existential' vision" of modern, American experience (228). Foster, in

⁸³ In *The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas*, Ronald Berman argues that the characters in *The Great Gatsby* "are working out a dilemma of American philosophy" (36). Although Berman does discuss the influence of Nietzschean philosophy on Fitzgerald's art and thought, he attributes this influence to American cultural critic H.L. Mencken and his translation of Nietzschean philosophy to an American context.

fact, implies that Fitzgerald's "'existential' vision" of modernity positions Fitzgerald as the first modern American author to interpret American experience existentially.⁸⁴ In fact, Fitzgerald is heralded as "the first author to chronicle the younger generation at the moment when youth was becoming supreme and defiant," an assessment that not only points to Fitzgerald's extreme sense of contemporaneity and his keen social eye but also points to Fitzgerald's historic moment, the moment when the modern sensibility was born, when the Victorian public conscience is replaced by the modern epistemological shift to subjectivity, the moment when the American youth rebelled against the values of the increasingly conformist modern society in which they lived (Brucoli, *Conversations* 60; Berman, *Fitzgerald* 53).

Fitzgerald's complex vision positions him as a chronicler *and* an existentialist, the philosophy he explores and espouses inseparable from the historic moment he puts in motion through his art. In fact, throughout his early short stories and novels, Fitzgerald addresses and captures the existential center of his times by showing how the individualist values of Americans conflict with the increasingly oppressive and conformist values of the culture at large. Fitzgerald's "The Ice Palace," for example, serves as critique of the American political and social structures that seek to ensure individuals' loyalty to regional and national values and thus ensure individuals' conformity (Ullrich, "Memorials" 2). In "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," Fitzgerald presents a stark picture of the implications of America's emphasis on the value of wealth:

⁸⁴ Although Foster claims Fitzgerald's existentialism is a recovery of the American existentialism critic Martin Green attributes to Ralph Waldo Emerson—who Green calls "the classical voice of a curiously American 'existentialism'"—Fitzgerald's existential vision, which grows in depth and dimension in the early to mid 1920s, is a Nietzschean-inspired existential-philosophic vision of the Jazz Age and the Jazz Age scene (Foster 219; Green 53).

wealth and the protection of one's wealth, Fitzgerald suggests, had become the most important individualist endeavor, more important than human life. Although Fitzgerald critiques different aspects of American culture in these stories, they both reveal Fitzgerald's existentialist view that the values American culture espouses are antithetical to the individual; in fact, he suggests that the direction American culture is heading is not only toward the death of the individual, but to the eventual death of American culture. Fitzgerald repeats this sentiment in his early novels *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) through presenting characters who are lost, who are broken both physically and spiritually and thus unable, impotent to act, what Fitzgerald envisions as the implications of his culture's desire for conformity: the death of the creative spirit and vitality of the individual. Yet Fitzgerald's vision of modernity, as pessimistic as it may seem, does retain a sense of hope for the individual and for American culture. For Fitzgerald, the first step is to come to a heightened awareness and understanding of self and world. At the end of Fitzgerald's "The Ice Palace," for example, Sally Carrol Happer comes to what David Ullrich identifies as an "existential awareness" of self—"that real growth is inevitable and painful" (Ullrich 9). *This Side of Paradise* closes with Armory Blaine's admission that he knows himself, nothing more, suggestive of Armory's growth and his existential awareness of self. "Diamond" ends with Kismine and John who escape the island to avoid "execution" for their knowledge of the secret diamond at the source of Kismine's family wealth. Fitzgerald suggests that Kismine and John come to an awareness that love and human connection are more fulfilling than wealth; they also come to an awareness of the implications of revering wealth—the death of the

individual—a sentiment Fitzgerald punctuates by the deaths of those who visit and inhabit the island. And although *The Beautiful and Damned* ends with a sentiment similar to “Diamond”—the perception that that wealth is more important than human life—it also ends by lauding courage and an individualist ethic through Anthony Patch’s proud vision of himself. He does not “submit to mediocrity”—“ I didn't give up,” Anthony says to himself, “and I came through!” (*BD* 795). For Ullrich, the importance of Fitzgerald’s early short stories and his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, is that they reveal Fitzgerald’s formation of a “complex philosophy of culture,” a philosophy Ullrich claims Fitzgerald had already developed by 1919-1920, a philosophy Ullrich argues informs Fitzgerald’s critique of American culture in his later works. Although I agree that the philosophy of culture Fitzgerald espouses in his early works recurs throughout his canon, Fitzgerald’s own admissions that Nietzsche’s works, as well as Mencken’s Nietzschean-inspired social commentary of the 1920s, had a profound influence on his thought and writing in the first half of the 1920s, suggests that Fitzgerald was still formulating—or refining—his existentialist philosophy of culture and the individual in the years leading up to *The Great Gatsby*. In fact, Fitzgerald’s 1922 claim to Maxwell Perkins that he wants “to write something *new*” suggests Fitzgerald thinks he has something new to write, something that is not only different from his own works, but something different from the artistic endeavors of his contemporaries (qtd. in Lehan, *Limits* 28).

Critics such as Richard Lehan argue that the new novel Fitzgerald had already begun to envision in 1922, what would become *The Great Gatsby*, “was to be consciously different” (*Limits* 28). In fact, in a 1924 interview Fitzgerald reveals one of

the ways in which *Gatsby* was to be different from current trends in American literature. In this interview Fitzgerald claims a shift in the intellectual and literary climate of his time and presents his observation that, “five years ago the new American novels needed comment by the author.... But now that there is a intelligent body of opinion guided by such men as Mencken, Edmund Wilson, and Van Wyck Brooks, comment should be unnecessary” (qtd. in Bruccoli, *Conversations* 68). What Fitzgerald suggests in this interview is that not only was he well-versed in the American cultural discourse of his time—much of which was Nietzsche-inspired—but that this discourse was not limited to intellectual and literary circles; it dominated American public discourse. Berman cites a series of essays Mencken wrote in the years 1920-1927 in which Mencken questioned “the nature of democracy” and offered his view of “some of its current problems” (Berman, *World* 9). Ronald Berman writes that in these essays Mencken captures “the sense of opposition between individuals and groups of the early twenties” and formulates “one issue” Berman sees as “central to Fitzgerald’s writing”—the inadequacy of the “legal aristocracy” as the ruling class in America.⁸⁵ Critic Robert Emmett Long attributes Mencken’s influence on Fitzgerald’s vision in *Gatsby* to Mencken’s “concern with the illusion of national myth” and the “worship of ‘success,’” as well as his written attacks on “our great national myth of ‘success’” and the optimism that stood behind it (*Achieving* 38). Mencken repeatedly expresses themes Berman and Long see as part of the fabric of

⁸⁵ I have discussed what Nietzsche refers to as the “legal aristocracy” at length in Chapter 2. In short, in Nietzsche’s class system, the “legal aristocracy” is the class of inherited wealth, prestige, and power, and is also the class Nietzsche despises the most since they reinforce and perpetuate the forces in society that thwart individual growth, development, and expression.

Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*. In fact, Long claims that it is through Fitzgerald's writing of *Gatsby* that Fitzgerald "finds his vision" (Long, *Achieving* 180).

Fitzgerald's vision in *Gatsby*, what I see as a complex mixture of history, politics, religion, social issues, and philosophy, not only embodies the cultural and philosophic dilemmas of his time, but separates Fitzgerald from the literary-artistic endeavors of his contemporaries. For example, where postwar writers—as a whole—tended to write pessimistically about the state of American democracy and American culture, content to expose and criticize America's myths of success, equality, and unhindered individual freedom, Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* departs from this body of opinion and shows Fitzgerald views American culture as capable of reconstructing itself more authentically. In fact, Fitzgerald's pessimism toward American culture is evident in his early works, a pessimism retained in Nick Carraway's disdain for the blind masses and the "legal aristocracy," yet in *Gatsby*, as critics such as Martin Green and Wright Morris argue, Fitzgerald's philosophy is positivistic, optimistic, affirmative in nature (Foster 219). Further, what is also distinctive about Fitzgerald's philosophic vision in *Gatsby*, as Ronald Berman aptly notes, is found in Fitzgerald's presentation of "the dilemmas of philosophy in anecdotes of social life," philosophies that Berman argues are inspired by the philosophic discourse of Fitzgerald's time (*World* 9). These philosophies, which "seemed simple to Mencken and to other editorialists," Berman writes, "became more complex" in the "novelistic form" of *Gatsby* (*World* 9). The complexity of Fitzgerald's existential-philosophic vision of modernity, according to Wright Morris, is found in Fitzgerald's optimistic-absurdist vision of contemporary experience. This vision, Morris

claims, positions Fitzgerald as “the first American to formulate his own philosophy of the absurd,” a philosophy that takes shape during Fitzgerald’s conscious attempt to write something new, something different from the works of his contemporaries and from his own early artistic endeavors, something contemporary that also captures the “dilemmas of philosophy” and presents a remedy for living in Jazz Age modernity (Berman *World 9*; Morris, “The Function of Nostalgia” 26-27).

Although Fitzgerald’s philosophic vision, as I have traced thus far, is existentially Nietzschean in origin, a vision that radically Americanizes and adds depth to the existing American-oriented Nietzschean musings of fellow chroniclers such as H.L. Mencken, we can not fully understand Fitzgerald’s absurdist vision by relying exclusively on a Nietzschean frame. In fact, Nietzsche is only part of Nick’s story and Fitzgerald’s complex philosophy. Yes, Nick is an aspiring Nietzschean, yet Nick never suggests that Gatsby’s sees as he does. In fact, as Nick comes to see more of how Gatsby sees, Nick comes to realize that Gatsby’s faith—like that of Søren Kierkegaard’s “young swain who falls in love with a princess,” yet knows the impossibility of this love—is a faith in the absurd. It is Gatsby’s vision, his commitment to Daisy, his faith, hope, and courage in the face of impossibility that not only reinvigorates Nick’s faith, but forms the basis of the absurdist vision Fitzgerald presents in *Gatsby*.

To understand Fitzgerald’s—what becomes Nick’s—absurdist vision of contemporaneity is to understand Gatsby as an outsider to the Nietzschean civilization Nick envisions as his own. He is “exempt from” Nick’s usual “scorn” because Nick comes to see that Gatsby, unlike Myrtle and George Wilson, is not blind or deluded;

instead, he is aware from the outset that he was in Daisy's house by "colossal accident" (156). Because of his fear, that his "invisible cloak of a uniform" might fall off at any moment and Daisy may find out that he was not "a person from much the same strata as herself," Gatsby "made the most of his time" with Daisy, an admission that suggests the "penniless young man without a past" is aware of the impossibility of winning Daisy (156). Gatsby's quest—to amass great wealth and create a past for himself in order to win Daisy—is, in part, achieved. He risks everything—his life and his creation of "Jay Gatsby"—for the possibility of achieving what was once, and may still be, the impossible. For Nick, it is Gatsby's infinite hope, his faith that the absurd is possible, that makes Gatsby's vision different from his own. I have discussed Nick's admiration for Gatsby's absurdist vision in length in the *Fitzgerald Review* in terms of Gatsby as Kierkegaard's "great" knight of faith. As my understanding of both Kierkegaard and Fitzgerald has continued to grow, there are, of course, points in the article I would explicate more precisely, but my message—Fitzgerald's message—is the same: Fitzgerald's view—that "hope keeps the world beautifully alive"—forms the basis of Fitzgerald's absurdist vision (qtd. in Lehan 72).⁸⁶ It is this element of Gatsby's character that Nick describes as his "romantic readiness," his "extraordinary gift for hope," and his "sensitivity to the promises of life" (6). It is Gatsby's striving, his "extraordinary gift for

⁸⁶ What is seen to be Fitzgerald's absurdist philosophy is bound to the fact that we live in a world absent of absolute "Truths" and absolute objectivity, thus our choices, commitments, beliefs, values, and standards are not based on any rational, clearly demarcated foundations. We must make choices in spite of the irrationality of life; we must make commitments in spite of the impossibility of achieving our ends; we must decide meaning and purpose for our lives in spite of the absence of meaning and direction in this world. In short, we must commit ourselves to our choices, we must choose what we think is best for our lives, and we must have faith that our choices, our commitments, and our values will prove to be the right ones. The absurdity of life is that we must make choices and commitments without knowing whether we have made the right choices.

hope” and his courage in the face of his adversaries (i.e., Tom and the social forces that block the upward mobility of the American self-made man) that Nick admires (6). It is Gatsby’s hope and the authentic vitality of his creative spirit, not a “flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the ‘creative temperament’” that Nick suggests separates Gatsby from the majority of men (6). Yet, what is unique about Gatsby, what separates him from “the herd” is that Gatsby embraces his creative spirit and gives direction to his vitality through his commitment to Daisy.⁸⁷ In fact, Gatsby embodies the American spirit Fitzgerald sees as part of the American character that can save the individual and culture from the direction it is heading: toward the death of the individual and the creative spirit, and thus the death of what Fitzgerald sees to be uniquely American.

Thus, Gatsby embodies Fitzgerald’s hopeful vision for the individual: that hope, faith, commitment, and courage will keep the world “beautifully alive” (qtd. in Lehan 72). This is what Nick memorializes through writing *The Great Gatsby*: he memorializes the one uniquely American characteristic that has survived the times—the vitality of the American spirit—and shows his generation that there are authentic possibilities for the individual who gives authentic direction to this vitality of spirit. It is this uniquely American spirit that Nick sees in Gatsby and that he feels “responsible” for sharing with his generation, a spirit whose physical embodiment is destroyed by the “careless” and

⁸⁷ Although Gatsby’s commitment to Daisy is often discussed in terms of Gatsby’s tragic failure to see Daisy’s corruption—i.e., her valuing of wealth, aristocratic status and power—what Nick venerates is Gatsby’s absurdist faith that he can overcome the forces of society that thwart individuals who pursue interests outside their class of birth. What makes Gatsby “great” is his vitality, his courage, his faith, and his commitment, even though the direction he gives to his creative spirit is often regarded by critics as a tragically misplaced direction.

irresponsible, but a spirit Nick suggests—nay, ensures—will live on in the hearts and minds of his fellow and future Americans.

Through Fitzgerald's creation of his own coherent view of American culture and the individual's place in culture, Fitzgerald puts his philosophy in motion through *Gatsby* with the intention of clarifying "a nation's vision of itself" (Mailer, *Cannibals and Christians* 98).⁸⁸ What Fitzgerald seeks to clarify is that the direction American culture is heading is toward the death of the individual. What can save us, Fitzgerald suggests, is to see more clearly, to retain a sense of hope, to grow, to be responsible, not "careless." For Nick, *Gatsby* both serves as an example and a warning to modern Americans: his hope, faith, courage, and commitment are laudable, but his vision lacks the hardy skepticism Nick practices in his pursuit of "truth." *Gatsby*, as Nick envisions him, has an absurdist faith in the impossible; but, for Nick, what *Gatsby* sets his sights on—Daisy—is not worthy of his love, his hope, and commitment. Although Fitzgerald's own belief "that hope keeps the world beautifully alive" is illustrated through *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald also shows us that we must break all illusions and come to see the world more clearly and truly; we must take responsibility for developing and refining our own vision. In fact, it is *Gatsby*'s hope, his vitality, his creative spirit, as well as what Nick sees as *Gatsby*'s inability to see self and world clearly, that stirs Nick's creative spirit and inspires him to take responsibility for *Gatsby* and for sharing his own heightened awareness and understanding of the world with his fellow Americans. It is *Gatsby*'s vitality and hope that inspires Nick to give direction to his own creative spirit, a commitment to the

⁸⁸ For Mailer, the highest purpose of literature is "to clarify a nation's vision of itself," a vision Mailer consciously strove to achieve through *An American Dream* (CC 98; Adams 31; Wenke 3). I see Fitzgerald's vision in *Gatsby* to have the same purpose.

memory of Gatsby through which he simultaneously creates art, becomes an artist, and espouses an “art of living” for modern times.

Hemingway’s Philosophic Vision of America

Hemingway’s vision of modernity is commonly attributed to the formation of his own philosophies of life, death, and art in what has come to be known as Hemingway’s “characteristic philosophy”—the “Hemingway Code” and Hemingway’s “Code Heroes” (de Madariaga 18).⁸⁹ Decades of critics have explored Hemingway’s development of his “Code Hero” in his early works—from Nick Adams, Jake Barnes, and Fredric Henry to his early portraits of the Spanish matador—and have described both Hemingway’s philosophy and that of his characters as existential-oriented. Wayne Kvam, who explores the popularity of Hemingway’s early works in Germany in the twenties, notes that “existentialist critics naturally felt immediate kinship with a writer who recognized death as the only absolute,” a sentiment Kvam interprets as a major theme of Hemingway’s early works (Kvam 154). John Killinger attributes Hemingway’s early “literary popularity” to his “extreme sense of contemporaneity,” which Killinger notes reflected the “rigorous philosophical movement” of his time—existentialism—and like Kvam, Killinger recognizes Hemingway’s repeated exploration of death in his early canon of works as Hemingway’s attempt to “reduce the problem of existence to its lowest common denominator” (21-22). Jose Castillo-Puche claims the Spanish bullfight as essential to

⁸⁹ See Philip Young’s 1959 *Ernest Hemingway* and his 1963 *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* for the first discussions of Hemingway’s “Code” and “Code Heroes.”

Hemingway's formation of a coherent philosophy; he claims that after Hemingway saw his first bullfight in 1923, the bullfight "was to remain fixed in him and indelible, the basis of his elemental philosophy which he would carry with him throughout his life" (qtd. in Broer, *Spanish Tragedy* 55). In fact, Castillo-Puche writes, "From the very first moment" Hemingway "tended to see in the matador a superhuman power that was more than religious—something almost divine" (206). Lawrence Broer insightfully notes that "in the image of the matador" Hemingway "found a symbol of the best a man can be in a violent and irrational world—a model of manhood and integrity after which he would pattern his major fictional heroes" (Broer, *Spanish Tragedy* vii). This pattern began in embryonic form in 1923 when Hemingway saw his first bullfight and immediately recognized the "transcendental value of the bullfight" (Broer, *Spanish Tragedy* 55).

In the nine years between Hemingway's first bullfight and his publication of his Spanish bullfight manifesto, *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway writes of the Spanish bullfight in articles and in essays, in prose and poetry form. Yet, Miriam Mandel notes that Hemingway's first piece on the Spanish bullfight was written *before* he saw his first bullfight. Mandel writes: "When Mike Strater, Gertrude Stein, and Alice B. Toklas spoke to him about the bullfight, he immediately recognized its literary possibilities" and wrote "The First Matador Got the Horn," which Mandel notes "reads like an objective, journalistic eyewitness account, but it is a mix of hearsay, imagination, and reading, a crafted exercise in voice and point of view" (*Companion* 7-8). After Hemingway saw his first bullfight on March 27, 1923, he immediately began sharing his first-hand experiences and his insights into the Spanish bullfight with his American readers

(Mandel, “The Birth of Hemingway’s *Afición*” 142-143). In 1923 Hemingway published three essays on the bullfight: “Bullfighting, Sport, and Industry,” “World Series of Bull Fighting a Mad, Whirling Carnival,” and “Tancredo is Dead.” In the same year, Hemingway writes poetry and prose on the bullfight: “Maera Lay Still” was published in *In Our Time*, and his poetry, “The Soul of Spain with McAlmon and Bird the Publishers” and “Part Two of the Soul of Spain with McAlmon and Bird the Publishers” were published the following year. In 1924 Hemingway produced more bullfight poetry—“The Poem is by Maera” and “[Some day when you are picked up...]”—and in 1926 he writes “To a Tragic Poetess.” The bullfight in Hemingway’s fiction includes “The Undefeated” (1925), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), “Banal Story” (1927), which is another tribute to Maera, and “The Mother of a Queen,” which was composed in 1931-1932 and published in *Winner Take Nothing* in 1933 (Mandel, *Companion* 13).

In these years—1923-1932—not only does Hemingway bring the bullfight to Americans and serve as his readers’ guide to Spain and Spanish culture, he also guides them through “Trout Fishing in Europe,” through fishing expeditions between Key West and Havana; he brings them the American expatriate experience in Paris and repeatedly brings them back to the war on the Italian front using all genres of writing available to him. But what Hemingway finds in Spain greatly differs from what he finds in other cultures of the world—Paris included. What Hemingway finds is a country, a people, and a national spirit, untouched by the First World War and free from the overcrowding and modernization that Hemingway saw spoiling his own native land as well as some of his favorite cultures of the world. Spain serves as a contrast to America where the “values”

of courage, bravery, honor, and patriotism hold little or no significant meaning for the individual. What Hemingway grasps to be the dilemmas inherent in “Being” American—his is a generation rendered impotent by war directionless, disillusioned, a “lost generation” smothered by the conformist values of American culture—he finds the answers to in Spain. What Hemingway finds in Spain is esteem for the individual. In fact, it is the rebel, the individualist, the artist, who is celebrated in Spain and celebrated through the national art of the Spanish bullfight. It is a country which encourages the growth of the individual and cherishes what is uniquely their own—their culture, their view toward life and death, the sculptural art of the Spanish bullfight. It is in this context—Spain—that Hemingway, by contrast, comes to see what is universal in the particulars of Spanish culture. They, like Hemingway’s post-war generation, live with the thought of death everyday.

By the time Hemingway starts writing *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway’s distrust of his own culture—which he sees as espousing abstract material values that distort identity and thwart the individual by smothering him/her in conformity—has brought Hemingway to a deep appreciation of the spiritual superiority of Spain. It had all the essential characteristics of an authentic, individualistic culture that America did not. Its values, firmly set and visibly performed through the Spanish bullfight, Hemingway tells us, are embodied in one word—“pundonor” (*DIA* 91).⁹⁰ It was a culture that faced death everyday with a vitality of spirit Hemingway saw as essential to the life of the

⁹⁰ “Pundonor,” Hemingway tells us, “means honor, probity, courage, self-respect and pride in one word” (91). In terms of the matador, Hemingway emphasizes the fact that he “is not always expected to be good, only to do his best” by adhering to the highest standards of bullfighting, by working closely with the bull, and by performing honorably in the bull ring.

individual and to the life of a nation. The philosophy that grows from what Hemingway sees to be the superior qualities of Spanish culture is a philosophy through which Hemingway attempts to clarify the vision of his nation, of his fellow Americans. This philosophy calls for a new awareness, a new understanding of self and world; it calls for a new consciousness for the individual American and for the nation as a whole. The basis of this philosophy, that we must, as Susan Beegel puts it, “look realistically at war and death, and...abandon all romantic notions of them,” concentrates on individual experience and feeling and on what Sidney Finkelstein refers to as the “essential question” of individual “existence” (Beegel, “That Always Absent” 75; Finkelstein 294). In the act of writing *Death in the Afternoon*, the voice of an American adventurer and a chronicler of American experience becomes the cultivated voice of a spokesman-philosopher for modern times whose focus is not merely American existence, but human existence.

In *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway’s existentialism and his coherent view of life as a whole takes shape. Hemingway shows that individuals must renounce capitalistic values and concentrate on their own individual existence. He presents a “philosophy of life in the lap of death” and illustrates this philosophy through the matador, an individual Lawrence Broer sees as the new “embodiment” of Hemingway’s “Code Hero,” a hero Kathy Willingham sees as “grounded in the existential be-ing in the world” and who strives for “existential authenticity” through his creation of the art of the Spanish bullfight (Reynolds 41; Broer, *Spanish Tragedy* 46; Willingham 34, 37). For Hemingway’s American audience, because the bullfight and correlatively the philosophy

Hemingway had been formulating, was radically foreign to the American mind, to understand the bullfight Hemingway calls for a new awareness and a new understanding, not just of the bullfight, but of self and world. Hemingway tells readers they must learn to “see clearly and as a whole”; they must reserve all judgments until they have seen the things he has spoken of for themselves; they must create their own standards, decide what is “good” and “bad” and let nothing confuse these standards; and they must allow themselves to feel, not what they have been “taught to feel,” but must see their own feelings and emotional reactions as epistemologically valid (*DIA* 2). In short, he emphasizes that readers must take responsibility for their own perceptions, feelings, and morality and for their own thoughts and actions. Through teaching readers how to see, judge, and feel the Spanish bullfight, Hemingway attempts to bring readers to a heightened awareness and understanding of their own existential situation in life—as towards death. For Hemingway, this situation requires that we break all illusions and face the stark realities of life, that every individual be brave in his/her own way, that every individual take responsibility for creating meaning and content for his/her own life as a “whole,” and that every individual face his/her own death in order to live life with clarity, integrity, purpose, and meaning; in short, one must face the reality of death with *earnestness* or *pundonor* in order to live life *earnestly*.

What American critics often consider a fatalistic philosophy, a death-haunted, morbid fascination with the darker side of life, existentialist critics see as a prophetic optimism and an absurdist vision that places Hemingway in the ranks of a “guide for his generation,” a “prophet of those who are without faith” (Kvam 29; Fadiman 64).

Hemingway's is a philosophy of the absurd, a philosophy in which one must "think death" and think of "it as your lot," and do "what death is indeed unable to do—namely, that you are and death is also," a philosophy that calls for a union of the temporal and the eternal, of life and death, a philosophy through which the individual recognizes that life must be lived with passion and intensity and with clarity and purpose since death may come at any moment (Kierkegaard, "At a Graveside" 75). For Hemingway, to unite the temporal and the eternal is to choose an overarching meaning for one's life as a whole and to live with and renew this commitment every day. Like the matador, who faces death on an almost daily basis, who makes a commitment to his work and his art and strives to unite the temporal and eternal in his art, Hemingway is also committed to unite the temporal and the eternal in his art. Like the matador, and like Hemingway, we must have courage and faith in the face of death to commit to an overarching purpose for our lives as a "whole." The basis for Hemingway's absurdist philosophy of life—that we must unite life and death, the temporal and the eternal, in order to express the eternal in our lives—finds its most articulate expression in the greatest of the matador-artists' union of "life and death" through their art, a living illustration of the necessity of *pundonor* and *earnestness* at a time when the faith and courage of Hemingway's generation faltered.

Fitzgerald and Hemingway: American Existentialists

Like the existentialists who “rose in revulsion against the corruption of values in capitalist society” and whose “basic conviction was that the evils it perceived were to be ascribed to the very concept and existence of society,” Fitzgerald and Hemingway recognize the inadequacy of American democracy in an increasingly commercial and consumer culture and reject the capitalistic values, identities, and norms prescribed by and reinforced through the increasingly oppressive social and political structures of American culture. For Fitzgerald and Hemingway what is at stake is the individual, the creative spirit, and the life of the nation. This sentiment echoes throughout both authors’ early works, a sentiment manifest in their portraits of lost, directionless, impotent, and emotionally unfulfilled characters. Significantly, both Fitzgerald and Hemingway expatriated themselves in 1924 and 1921 respectively since they felt America no longer provided an environment for the authentic growth of the individual or for the cultivation of the creative spirit, something Europe, and Paris in particular, not only offered, but encouraged and held in high esteem.

Although Fitzgerald and Hemingway sought an environment that encouraged artistic experimentation and had a vital intellectual and artistic scene in which they could cultivate their own art, they never abandoned America or their hopes for America entirely. In fact, both Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s repeated explorations into the

dilemmas of American modernity and their attempts to find an authentic remedy for the individual—i.e., how to live in modernity—reveals that their concern with the inadequacy of American democracy and American culture goes beyond their own personal concern of finding an environment that encourages individual growth and expression. Although Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s concern for the individual American and for the nation as a whole is evident in their early portraits of wounded, directionless, and impotent Americans who are smothered in conformity and lost in a value system that speaks for them, not to them, by the time Fitzgerald is writing *The Great Gatsby* and Hemingway is writing *Death in the Afternoon*, they have each developed a philosophy, a coherent view of life through which the individual and the nation can be revitalized and given authentic direction. Their philosophies, which embody an individualistic ethic and an existential-artistic vision of the creative spirit and of life and art, are only part of what distinguishes *The Great Gatsby* and *Death in the Afternoon* from Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s earlier works. In fact, Fitzgerald and Hemingway both admittedly set out to create something new in *The Great Gatsby* and *Death in the Afternoon* and do so by responding to—and also by subtly defying—the literary currents of their time. They defy the Eliot cult’s cry “Art for Art’s Sake!” in favor of creating art that is social-minded, didactic, and useful. Importantly, Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s “art” is not subordinate to their subtle and indirect didacticism; the existential “art of living” they espouse in *The Great Gatsby* and *Death in the Afternoon* comprise part of the artistic genius of these authors. In fact, in *The Great Gatsby* and *Death in the Afternoon*, Fitzgerald and Hemingway not only focus in on the universal, existential-philosophic concerns of

existence, but the perspective they espouse is that of the “artist,” of the creative spirit who breathes life into art and makes art out of life. Understanding and engaging their perspective is so essential to Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s philosophies that they *both* begin their narratives by introducing readers to their narrative points of view; they give their readers a direction from which they can begin to refine and cultivate their own, personal vision and their own “art of living” for modern times. But the philosophies Fitzgerald and Hemingway espouse throughout *The Great Gatsby* and *Death in the Afternoon* are not merely existential-oriented; in fact, the philosophies they espouse are absurdist, philosophies that require the individual to have the courage to risk everything in the face of impossibility to win back life and love.

Where Fitzgerald puts his absurdist philosophy in motion through Gatsby’s commitment to what he knows to be an impossible love affair—he knew he was in Daisy’s house by “colossal accident”—Hemingway puts his absurdist philosophy in motion through the Spanish matador’s commitment to creating art in the face of death, an absurdist vision in which the matador must have the courage to do the impossible—unite life and death. For Fitzgerald and Hemingway, courage, commitment, hope, and faith are the materials for the impossible to become possible, an absurdist and optimistic vision for modernity through which they simultaneously get to the core of the existential experience of existence and espouse an “art of living” in the face of absurdity. This requires, as Fitzgerald and Hemingway emphasize, a new vision, a new awareness, and a new understanding of our existential predicament in life, a vision through which Fitzgerald

and Hemingway address the universal human dilemmas of modernity and show us they are our own.

Fitzgerald and Hemingway's conscious striving to find solutions to the dilemmas of modernity for themselves and for their fellow and future Americans position Fitzgerald and Hemingway as guides for their generation. Yet, they do not only provide existentialist critiques of their American moments, nor do they merely capture the texture and feel of these moments; instead, *The Great Gatsby* and *Death in the Afternoon* serve as responses to and offer remedies for the existential predicament of "Being" American in their time. They guide their generation not just through the particulars of American experience with a sense of contemporaneity often considered unmatched in their time, but they guide their generation through the process through which one negotiates their own existence and creates significance and meaning for their own lives as "a whole." In *The Great Gatsby* and *Death in the Afternoon*, both Nick and Hemingway offer themselves as explorers, pioneers of places foreign to them and to most Americans, not just geographically, but philosophically, psychologically, and spiritually. They are explorers of the human psyche, of the materials of existence, of the authentic possibilities for themselves, for their contemporaries, and for their nation. But first and foremost they are "artists," in the literal and the existential sense. In fact, it is through their merging of philosophy and art that Fitzgerald and Hemingway add depth and dimension and give a meaningful direction to their art.

Mailer and the Fitzgerald-Hemingway Tradition

Like Fitzgerald and Hemingway, Mailer repeatedly voices his concern for the psychological and existential well-being of his fellow Americans throughout his canon of works. His concerns are Fitzgerald and Hemingway's: they are concerned with the annihilation of the creative spirit, in part due to the rising power of the totalitarian power structures of society that thwart development, growth, and creative, artistic, and individualistic expression. Like Fitzgerald and Hemingway, Mailer believes that cultural reform begins with the individual, and he believes in the possibility of an authentic American experience supported by an authentic American culture.⁹¹ It is this existential and absurdist impulse in Mailer's canon of works that brings Richard Foster to the insight that "Mailer's work constitutes an imaginative advancing of Fitzgerald's"—and we must add Hemingway's—"kind of vision" (Foster 224). Nowhere is this more evident than in Mailer's *An American Dream* where Fitzgerald and Hemingway are referenced, invoked, and literally woven into the fabric of Mailer's novel.

In the opening paragraph of *An American Dream*, Rojack's invocation of Fitzgerald's short story, "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," simultaneously brings Fitzgerald's critique of America's cult of success and his preoccupation with the illusion that wealth, status, and prestige bring happiness to the forefront of the narrative. By

⁹¹ Mailer has even drawn up plans for constructing cities that would contribute to the authentic development of individuals and the culture as a whole. See Mailer's "Rebuilding the Cities," which is collected in John P. Rasmussen's *The New American Revolution; the Dawning of the Technetronic Era*.

invoking “Diamond,” Rojack not only points to his own early obsession with status and wealth, but he also suggests that in his own cultural moment the materialistic values Fitzgerald sought to expose and denounce in the 1920s still have a hold on the American consciousness in his time. Significantly, Rojack invokes “Diamond” in reference to Deborah—“a girl,” Rojack writes, “who would have been bored by a diamond as big as the Ritz” (AAD 1). In this context, Rojack’s reference to “Diamond” not only points to *Gatsby*’s Daisy Faye, a perpetually bored young aristocrat who once tossed a \$100,000 string of pearls into the trash, but it also suggests that Deborah, like Daisy, is a member of the American aristocracy with the social, political, and economic power and connections to provide access to “The Dream.” Through this reference, Rojack thus positions himself as a post-modern Gatsby whose pursuit of “The Dream”—“the road to President”—is entangled with his pursuit of an American heiress (AAD 1-2). Richard Foster identifies the correlation between Gatsby’s Daisy and Rojack’s Deborah: both serve “as promissory images of value and possibility,” an assessment punctuated by Gatsby’s description of Daisy’s voice as “full of money” and Rojack’s description that Deborah “smelled like a bank” (*Gatsby* 127; AAD 34). Yet where Mailer’s critique of American culture and Rojack’s vision of Deborah as his access to “The Dream” are Fitzgeraldian, Rojack’s recollection of his World War II experience and his death-haunted point of view are Hemingwayesque.

Rojack’s reference to “a particular hill in Italy” echoes Hemingway’s own war experience on the Italian front, as well as Hemingway characters Jake Barnes and

Frederic Henry's near-death experiences and woundings on the Italian front.⁹² Rojack's wounds—to his thigh and pelvis—are the wounds Hemingway and Jake Barnes received in Italy. Yet, unlike Barnes' wound, Rojack's wound does not leave him physically impotent, although Rojack suggests that he experiences temporary psychological and existential impotence. Rojack writes: "where any other young athlete or hero might have had a vast and continuing recreation with sex, I was lost in a private kaleidoscope of death" (AAD 7). Significantly, Rojack's pelvis is split, which is not only suggestive of Rojack's split selves—what he distinguishes as "the distance between" his "public" self and his "lost in a private kaleidoscope of death" self—but it is a wound that will heal (AAD 7). Like Hemingway, the death-haunted Rojack not only studies his own near-death experience and repeatedly faces-up to the possibility of his own death, he also publishes a study of death. This study—"The Psychology of the Hangman"—"a psychological study of the styles of execution," like Hemingway's study of death in *Death in the Afternoon*, is a study of "violent death," the forum of the executioner, the only place Rojack can study death in America (DIA 2). Significantly, Rojack's claim that his study of death would "turn Freud on his head," echoes what Susan Beegel identifies as Hemingway's rejection of Freudian interpretations of the Spanish bullfight in *Death in the Afternoon* in favor of an existential interpretation of the experience of death and of the Spanish bullfight (AAD 17; Beegel *Hemingway's Craft of Omission* 61).⁹³

⁹² See Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*.

⁹³ Susan Beegel writes of Hemingway's dislike for Waldo Frank's "infatuation with the works of Sigmund Freud, manifested in passages like this description of a bullfight":

And now another change in the beauty of their locked encounter. The man becomes the woman. This dance of human will and brutish power is the dance of death no longer. It is the dance of life. It is a searching symbol of the sexual act. The bull is

In the opening pages of *An American Dream*, Mailer presents Rojack's Fitzgeraldian awareness of the myth of The American Dream through Rojack's realization that he is a "failure," and he presents Rojack's view toward death, the study of violent death, and his own death, as Hemingwayesque. Yet the focus of the first few pages of Rojack's narrative is under the guise of explaining his "frightened romance with the phases of the moon," which Rojack tells us was full the night he met Deborah and full the night he killed four German soldiers. The symbolic value of the moon for Rojack is both Fitzgeraldian and Hemingwayesque; it is Rojack's own personal correlative and catalyst for his heightened awareness and understanding of his existential situation in life. Like Doctor Eckleburg, who looms large over a vast wasteland and reminds Nick of the need to break all illusions and see more clearly, the full moon not only watches over what Rojack envisions to be an American wasteland, but the moon's light, like Doctor Eckleburg's corrective spectacles, illuminates Rojack's vision. Yet the full moon does not merely clarify Rojack's vision of self and world; it is the catalyst for Rojack's understanding of the need to transcend his existential situation in life as towards death. For Rojack, the full moon also functions much as the Spanish bullfight does for Hemingway: it reminds him he must see "clearly" and, like the full moon, "as a whole"; it reminds him of the need to face-up to his own death, since the full moon, which is "towards-the-end" of being full, reminds Rojack of his own existential situation in life (*DIA* 278; Heidegger 299). In fact, he recognizes the full moon as a kindred being, one

male; the exquisite torero, stirring and unstimmed, with hidden ecstasy controlling the plunges of the bull, is female. (qtd. in Beegel, *Hemingway's Craft of Omission* 61). See also Waldo Frank's *Virgin Spain*, p. 235.

that is groundless, alone in this world, and heading “towards-the-end” of “Being-a-whole” (Heidegger 299, 280).⁹⁴ What Rojack understands is that he needs to see his “self” “clearly and as a whole,” and he must create structure and meaning for his life “as a whole,” both of which are embodied in Hemingway’s vision of the Spanish bullfight (*DIA* 278).⁹⁵ Thus, the full moon functions much as Hemingway suggests the bullfight does for him—it reminds him of the need to face his own death and to see his life and the life of the world “clearly,” truly, and as “a whole” (*DIA* 278). Further, Rojack’s description of his World War II experience suggests that he knows, like the matador, that transcendence comes with facing one’s own death with *pundonor*, and like Hemingway’s matador, Rojack experiences this transcendence when Deborah charges him “like a bull” (*AAD* 30).

The most direct, and I think most obvious, reference to Hemingway in *An American Dream* is the scene in which Deborah’s admits to Rojack of a bullfighter lover in her past. Deborah’s “admission,” that she was once in love with a bullfighter—“No... someone far better than a bullfighter, far greater”—comes at the end of Deborah’s almost methodical attempt to psychologically emasculate Rojack (28). She calls him a “bloody whimperer,” questions his courage and status as a war hero, “confesses” to sexual acts with other lovers, and mentions her affair with a great man—a bullfighter or greater (23,

⁹⁴ See Heidegger’s discussion of “Being-towards-the-end,” “Being-towards-death,” and “Being-a-whole” in *Being and Time*, Division Two, Section I (p. 279-304).

⁹⁵ Although the full moon is Rojack’s personal correlative for facing death and reminds him of his need to transcend his thrownness in this world, Mailer points to the full moon as a complex cultural configuration, as well. For example, it evokes superstitions, full moon lore, magic, witchcraft, the feminine, and suggests it has healing qualities, as well as the power to inspire madness, just to name a few of the cultural conceptions of the full moon in Mailer’s time. Further, Rojack’s “romance” with the moon is historically pertinent in the wake of Kennedy’s “Man on the Moon” Address in 1961. Rojack, like America and the recently assassinated John F. Kennedy, aspires to understand the moon (*AAD* 11).

28-30). Those familiar with Hemingway's canon of works will recall Brett Ashley's affair with bullfighter Pedro Romero and Jake Barnes' physical emasculation. Rojack, unlike Barnes, suggests he can not "take it" and slaps Deborah in the face. Faced with existential death, he lashes out at Deborah. Her response: she charges him "like a bull" (AAD 30). Yet Deborah's psychological emasculation of Rojack escalates to a physical threat when Deborah tries, as Rojack puts it, to "mangle" his "root" (AAD 30). Faced with existential and literal emasculation, threatened with the end of creative possibilities for the self, Rojack, like the matador, delivers "a cold chop" to "the back of the neck," which drops Deborah "to a knee" (30). Rojack then hooks his arm around her neck; yet Deborah, Rojack tells us, "had almost the strength to force herself up to her feet and lift me in the air" (30). At this moment Rojack kills Deborah like a bull: he cracks her neck like the bull's spinal column is severed in a clean kill. This clean kill brings Rojack, like the matador, to transcend his thrownness in this world, which Rojack suggests through his vision of "heaven," the feeling of "new grace," and the "honorable fatigue" he describes (31-32). Rojack's struggle with Deborah is the life and death struggle of the matador and the bull. He knows the matador's transcendence and the courage it takes to face the bull, but Rojack also comes to understand—as Hemingway's Catherine Barkley, Frederic Henry, and Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway understand, that courage is also required in love; that love is a commitment, a vow; a commitment Rojack hopes and envisions he can make to Cherry.

What Rojack envisions on the balcony at Kelley's is that he must make a commitment to Cherry; he must risk everything—i.e., his life—for Cherry. The full moon

takes on Fitzgeraldian and Kierkegaardian significance when Kelly invokes Kierkegaard and then Rojack attempts to walk the parapet for love. Like Gatsby, who Nick suggests continually reaffirms his vow and commitment to Daisy, Rojack knows he, too, must have the courage to risk everything to win Cherry. He must walk the parapet, he must choose while “poised over the abyss of meaninglessness,” and at this moment create and overarching meaning—as a “good husband” and a “good father”—and structure—a marriage, a family—for his life. Like Gatsby, Rojack must risk everything for love. But Rojack also understands that he must walk the parapet twice, he must make Kierkegaard’s double movement of faith, once to give up Cherry and once to win Cherry back. But Rojack, like Gatsby, is thwarted: Gatsby by Tom and Wilson and Rojack by Kelly, who tries to push Rojack off the parapet with Shago’s umbrella. Because Rojack fails at the moment of choice, because he is thwarted in his attempt to walk the parapet twice, he loses Cherry, a loss Mailer punctuates with Cherry’s violent death. Left without a viable base for meaning or structure in his life, Rojack leaves America, what he envisions to be both the vast wasteland of the desert and the glittering and alluring, but corrupt American city of Las Vegas. Rojack envisions that the only environments in America that exist now that the frontier is closed—the barren wasteland and the corrupt cities—are not environments that nurture, nor contribute to, the authentic growth and development of the individual. Rojack’s rejection of American culture is due, in part, to Rojack’s desire to be free and brave, something he can not do in a place that is no longer “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” Thus, *An American Dream* ends with Rojack heading for an environment capable of nurturing the growth and expression of the

creative spirit, a place where he can embrace his freedom and cultivate his courage: he heads for the “green breast” of Guatemala and the Yucatan (*Gatsby* 189). Like Hemingway, who favors Spain and Spanish culture, its national art of the Spanish bullfight, and its virgin lands to the overcrowded, modernized face of America and American culture, Rojack heads for Guatemala—another home of the bullfight—and toward “virgin land”—the unspoiled jungles of the Yucatan.

The “Art of Living” Existentially: Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer’s
Call for an Authentic American Experience

Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer’s emphasis on subjective epistemology are similarly embodied in their perspective that we need to break all illusions and come to see self and world more clearly and as a whole. They call for a heightened awareness of self and world through which individuals can begin to create their own meaning and structure, their own “art of living” in their times. They show us the importance of living artistically, of creating life as art, of becoming an artist, a sentiment punctuated by their narrators’ process of creating art and “Becoming” artists.⁹⁶ We must, as Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer suggest, strive not to conform, but to create. For these authors, the authentic growth and development of the individual, the need to give direction to the

⁹⁶ Significantly, both Nick and Rojack’s narratives serve to illustrate the process through which one becomes an artist. Although their paths highly differ, what is consistent is that their experiences, their awareness and understanding of self and world, inspire both Nick and Rojack to create literary art in the form of their narratives. Hemingway, on the other hand, is a literary artist, but one who strives to become a superior artist. Hemingway strives not just to create art, but to create enduring art, a striving for immortality in a world without an afterlife.

vitality of the human spirit, and the need for the expression of the creative spirit, should be the common goal of humankind. In fact, the most important thing they ask readers to do is to take responsibility for what their own lives are amounting to; they urge readers to take responsibility for themselves as artists and to see their lives as works of art. But as artist, voices of their own generations, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer do not only take responsibility for their own lives as artist, they also feel a sense of responsibility to their readers and their nation.

Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer present their readers with an “art of living” for their times, for their readers’ own, undeniably subjective lives. They show us that we must, as Nietzsche advises, break from “the herd” and create our own morality and our own scheme for living. We must, as Kierkegaard advises, stand for from “the crowd”; we must come to understand ourselves, commit to an overarching purpose for our lives, and live life “This very day!” (“At a Graveside” 83). We must, as Heidegger advises, free ourselves from the “they,” we must strive for a more authentic existence for ourselves, for others, for the formation of an authentic community, and correlatively, for an authentic American experience. We must, as Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer espouse and illustrate, make a commitment to and for our lives and thus give direction to the vitality of our creative spirits. We must take responsibility for our own lives and continually strive to see self and world more clearly, truly, authentically and as a whole.

Importantly, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer’s messages position them as more than mere chroniclers of America and American experience: they serve as prophets, healers, and guides for their generations, for Americans then and now. In Fitzgerald’s

Gatsby, Fitzgerald guides us through the Jazz Age, through modern New York and through the dilemmas of modern vision. In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway guides us through his study of death, through Spain and Spanish culture, and attempts to show his readers how to experience the spiritual and transcendental value of the Spanish bullfight for themselves. In *An American Dream*, Mailer guides us through the philosophical and psychological experience of “Being” American, just as Fitzgerald and Hemingway accomplished in their time. Mailer guides readers through the “psychological frontier”—the only frontier in America, Mailer claims, that has not been used up, that has yet to be explored (qtd. in Adams 71). Yet Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer not only explore and guide us through the existential center of their times; they do so by merging philosophy and art and capture the depth and dimensions of the dilemmas of human existence for their times. In fact, the depth in which Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer capture the texture and feel of their respective historic human moments is not only what gives their art its enduring quality, but is the genius of their art. Their art not only serves to provide existentialist critiques of their American moments, but also, and more importantly, serve as responses to and offer remedies for the existential predicament of “Being” American in their time. By doing so, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Mailer become more than chroniclers who capture the psychological and philosophic experiences of “Being” American in their times; they become the prophets of their generations, healers for “those who are without faith” (Fadiman 64).

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