

A DERRIDEAN-KIERKEGAARDIAN INTERPRETATION OF WRITING:
IMPRISONMENT AND FREEDOM

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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My thesis is an argument that writing is a struggle of imprisonment and freedom. I argue that a text gains a certain level of power, such that it controls the writer, reader, and critic alike. Yet at the same time, the work presents all of these people with a possibility of freedom, seducing them in with the task of sharing the text's 'secret' or deeper meaning via indirect communication. This 'imprisonment' is voluntary if the reader wishes to engage with the text in a way that opens the text for a revelation of a deeper meaning, unique to each reader. The writer offers his text as a 'gift', an idea heavily influenced by Jacques Derrida's writings in *The Gift of Death*. I argue that that the presence and absence of the secret is one element of the author's work, which creates the relationship of confinement and freedom identified with writing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An aspiring writer becomes imprisoned by his desire to produce perfect words that he longs to see on the blankness in front of him, such that whatever he writes is not satisfactory and he will not accept anything that is his own creation. He comes across an old manuscript in an antique briefcase, finding the words of another author, and he cannot help himself: he is compelled to copy the text word for word, yet this act brings him no peace. He longs for the feeling of having such beautiful words emanate from his own mind and hand. As a result of misfortune, he finds himself obliged to present this work as his own and becomes a prisoner: he is imprisoned by his false identity as the work's author, unable to regain control as the work's force outmatches his own. This is the plot of the 2012 film *The Words*, in which Brian Klugman has created a fiction within a fiction. The story of this writer character, named Rory Jansen, is in fact a story "written" by another fictional writer – a character named Clayton Hammond who is the author of Jansen's life. The fictional character Hammond represents the writer in an understanding influenced by Søren Kierkegaard and Jacques Derrida – Hammond is the creator of a story that combines personal, individual experience with the plurality of culture. An analysis of writing informed by this Derridean-Kierkegaardian perspective reveals that a writer's internal struggle of imprisonment and freedom with his or her text is common among impassioned writers. Furthermore, Klugman's character Hammond (as well as his fictional creation, Jansen) represents a bridge between the writer and the world, between

the writer and his readers, between the self and the Other¹. The text as gains such a level of power that it controls the writer, the reader, and the critic alike. Yet at the same time, the work presents all of these people with a possibility of freedom, seducing them in with the task of sharing the text's "secret" or deeper meaning.

The character Rory Jansen, the fictional creation of Klugman's fictional character Clayton Hammond, has an encounter with a character never given a name other than "the old man." This old man is, according to Hammond's narrative, the true writer of the story that brings Jansen's success. The old man, perhaps also representing Hammond (and possibly Klugman as well), represents the sacrifice that a writer makes when he offers the gift of his text to the world, whether willingly or otherwise. My concept of the "gift of text" is heavily influenced by Derrida's writings in *The Gift of Death*. Often, this offering occurs with an expressed resistance, and at other times with some degree of unconscious resentment. Through this offer, the text gains power and thus its force upon its author and its readers increases, such that these personae are, in a sense, imprisoned by the author's work. However, this offer is also voluntary on both ends and is essential for any possibility of freedom, which is possible if one can redirect the force of the work from an imprisonment to a freedom. This is achieved by an understanding of the author's "secret," which occurs only with a communion of text, author and individual reader by way of a deeper understanding. Therefore, the freedom and confinement of writing both lie in opportunity – or, to use Kierkegaardian terminology, in possibility. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes in *The World of Perception* of form and content, which he defines as "what is said and the way in which it is said," (72) that they "cannot exist separately

¹ Capital emphasis on Other as described by Jacques Lacan.

from one another” (ibid). Jacques Derrida writes the same of presence and absence, influenced by Jean Rousset, who writes in *l’Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* that the author is always both present and absent (22)². For Derrida, presence and absence are always together in “pure language” (5), in “consciousness” (28) and in “history” (41). This essay aims to defend the same notion of coexistence in terms of freedom and confinement. As Rousset claims that the author is always present and absent in writing, so I argue that imprisonment and freedom are always both present and absent in writing. Like Rousset, I am particularly concerned with the phenomenon of writing within language. Due to the confining aspect of an essay’s nature, my own thoughts as expressed here are incapable of fully embodying that which I am describing. In her essay “Writing,” Barbara Johnson writes that an essay about writing “is an uncloseable loop,” because “it is an attempt to comprehend that which it is comprehended by” (39). Although this uncloseable loop seems to be a structure of freedom and openness, the risk of a nearly complete absence (though not a complete absence, for presence and absence coexist just as do freedom and imprisonment) of “freedom” offered by my essay is too great if the words are only my own, and it is therefore necessary to “confine” my discussion of writing to a particular understanding as influenced by some of the most profound ideas of others. To add a final disclaimer, any thorough discussion of freedom or of confinement within writing, such as my own, must necessarily, because of their coexistent nature, waver between the two to an unsettling degree: the freedom offered by the text only becomes a possibility through its confinement, for one is truly unable to apprehend the text’s deeper meaning without first becoming confined to the text. The

² from Rousset, page 48.

understanding of the coexistence of imprisonment and freedom in writing (as elsewhere) can be understood as a sort of “twoness” in which the two poles are in fact hidden beneath one another, exactly as Friederich Nietzsche describes in *The Birth of Tragedy* the way in which the Appoline and Dionysian drives appear. Nietzsche describes these two Kunsttriebe (artistic drives) as “in einander gewoben” – they are woven into one another. I argue that that the presence and absence of the secret is one element of the author’s work, which through possibility creates the dialectic of imprisonment and freedom that I identify with writing. The freedom and the confinement of writing, in turn, are hidden beneath one another, are woven together – indeed into one another, and work together while also resisting one another.

CHAPTER II

OWNERSHIP AND AUTHORSHIP

One of the primary ways in which the author finds him or herself struggling with his or her text in a relationship of imprisonment and freedom is in terms of identity. Klugman's film reflects the Kierkegaardian notion of possibility³, and its plot furthermore parallels a Kierkegaardian motif. In the Preface to *Either/Or*, signed by Victor Eremita rather than Kierkegaard himself, this pseudonymous editor writes of having found two manuscripts in a writing desk. Eremita discerns that these documents must have been written by two different authors, noting the separate style and penmanship of each. He provides the following description of his conception of these two sources:

Concerning the first author, the aesthete, the papers yield absolutely nothing. As for the second, the letter writer, it appears that his name is William, and that he was a magistrate, but of what court is not stated. If I were to confine myself strictly to this data, and decide to call him William, I should lack a corresponding designation for the first author, and should have to give him an arbitrary name. Hence I have preferred to call the first author A, the second B (7).

A is the more questionable of the two sources for Eremita, and he describes organizing A's papers as "not so simple" (ibid). The reason for this difficulty lies in Eremita's struggle to reconcile with the identity of the authorship of A's manuscripts, because a part of A's writings include the writings of another writer whose text A found, namely Johannes the Seducer. Like Eremita, A does not directly claim the Johannes' letters as his own. Unlike Klugman's character Rory Jansen, none of the fictional pseudonyms or "characters" of *Either/Or* claim the work of the other as their own. There remains the

³ Though not in attachment to anxiety except in anxiety of identity.

possibility in Kierkegaard's text, and also in the film written and directed by Klugman, that all of the authors are indeed one and the same author behind a mask of pseudonymous characters. Much like Rory Jansen, A becomes possessed by Johannes' diary and finds himself helplessly copying the text, in a sense seduced by *The Diary of a Seducer*. This raises questions of authorial identity and of authority in terms of writing. Who may assume ownership of the production of a written work, and to what extent is this work the author produces a product of the writer himself? The question of authority connects to that of confinement, because the responsibility the writer, which is also confining, is a burden of authority. The task of responding entails guilt, which is the necessary "evil" of responsibility. The compulsions of Jansen and A to copy texts word for word speak allegorically to the question of authorial originality in general. In "Part One" of *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (posthumously published), Kierkegaard examines a particular question of authority in authorship: he addresses "The Ambiguity or Duplicity in the Whole Authorship: As to Whether the Author is an Aesthetic or Religious Author." Here, Kierkegaard admits that this "duplicity," this "ambiguity," is "a conscious one, something the author knows more about than anybody else," (324-325) and that "it is the essential dialectical distinction of the whole authorship, and has therefore a deeper reason" (325).

Here it seems that Kierkegaard wishes to maintain intentionality in the "deeper reason" for his works. "The poet" is a created figure that Kierkegaard allows to reveal more about this intentionality. In the "Conclusion" to *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard selects to allow his own voice to remain "silent," and decides, "in conclusion I will let another speak, my poet" (337). The poet writes of the "dialectical

structure” that Kierkegaard, according to the poet, “brought to completion, of which the several parts are whole works,” but that Kierkegaard could not ascribe this structure “to any man, least of all would he ascribe it to himself” (339). Here the poet casts Kierkegaard away from authority, though in silence Kierkegaard thus creates a poet, whose words speak ironically and yet hold a certain truth. Instead, writes the poet, “if he were to ascribe it to anyone, it would be to Governance, to whom it was in fact ascribed, day after day and year after year, by the author” (339). Kierkegaard writes that this poet’s words are included here to assign him “a place among those who have suffered for the sake of an idea” (337). The poet is a figure who Kierkegaard continually revisits and, in *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, it seems the poet is a figure with whom Kierkegaard himself seems to have a lot in common. In *The Sickness Unto Death* and also in Kierkegaard’s *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air*, the poet is one who longs for eternity but is unable to attain it. As described above by the poet, Kierkegaard was a victim of this longing, a kind of poetic suffering. The “suffering” that Kierkegaard describes was, as we shall see, both the imprisoning and freeing aspect of his life work. “The poet” describes Kierkegaard’s life as one of martyrdom, because he “suffered from being a genius in a provincial town,” (337) and thus his humility was mistaken for pride. The poet laments of Kierkegaard’s peers, “O priceless market town! How inestimable thou art when attired in thy comical dressing-gown and in the way of becoming holy, when abandonment to every disgusting inclination of envy, rudeness, and vulgarity becomes an expression of the worship of God!” (338). Kierkegaard’s martyrdom was his steadfast belief in his own ideas in defiance of those who opposed him, and therein was

also his suffering. The poet explains that this suffering, which I interpret as a kind of imprisonment, was also a type of freedom for the author:

But in eternity it consoles him that he has suffered this, that he had exposed himself voluntarily to it, that he had not bolstered up his cause by any illusion, did not hide behind any illusion, but with God-fearing shrewdness transmuted his sufferings into a treasure for eternity: the memory of sufferings endured, and of fidelity to himself and to his first love, beside whom he has loved only them that have suffered in this world (338).

Because he is also consoled by his suffering, Kierkegaard, according to “the poet,” was able to find “here on earth what he sought” (338). The poet writes: “He himself was ‘that individual,’ if no one else was, and he became that more and more. It was the cause of Christianity he served, his life from childhood on being marvelously fitted for such a service” (338). Here, one sees the desire for distinction through individuality as that which drives the author, and the influence of Christianity on Kierkegaardian freedom and imprisonment in writing. In a sense, one regards this authorial ambition as selfishness, though that would be an oversimplification. For the poet continues, “Thus he carried to completion the work of reflection, the task of translating completely into terms of reflection what Christianity is, what it means to become a Christian” (339).

Kierkegaard’s work provided this reflection to his readers, thus sharing, in a sense, his “secret” with his audience, “transmuting” his sufferings “into a treasure for eternity” (338).

In “A First and Last Explanation” found within *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* after Johannes Climacus’s Appendix “An Understanding with the Reader,” Kierkegaard admits that he is the master behind all of the pseudonymous authors of his works. In “A First and Last Explanation,” as in the posthumously published *A Point of*

View for my Work as an Author, Kierkegaard ascribes his works more to Governance than to himself. He writes,

First of all, I want to give thanks to Governance, who in such multitudinous ways has encouraged my endeavor, has encouraged it over four and one-quarter years without perhaps a single day's interruption of effort, has granted me much more than I had ever expected, even though I can truly testify that I staked my life to the utmost of my capacity, more than I at least had expected, even if to others the accomplishment seems to be a complicated triviality (628) ⁴.

Although Kierkegaard "hereby" acknowledges in "A First and Last Explanation" that he is the authors of the works published by his various pseudonymous writer identities ⁵ (625), he paradoxically writes that "in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me" (626). The reconciliation between these two statements is as difficult as is a resolution between the "multitudinous ways" of imprisonment and freedom. In fact, both aspects lend to one another's understanding, for it is by the creations of these pseudonyms that Kierkegaard embodies and expresses the combination of imprisonment and freedom that is inherent in authorial identity. To return to the poet figure, a commentator on intentionality ⁶, Kierkegaard writes that his relation "is even more remote than that of a poet, who poetizes characters and yet in the preface is himself the author" (625).

Kierkegaard, after acknowledging that he is the author of these works, fervently defends his remoteness, describing himself not as an author, but as "a souffleur [prompter] who has poetically produced the authors, whose prefaces in turn are their productions, as their

⁴ Source: *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. Ed. Robert Bretall. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1946.

⁵ Kierkegaard lists "Victor Eremita, Johannes de Silentio, Constantin Constantius, Nicolaus Notabene, Johannes Climacus of *Either Or* (Victor Eremita), Copenhagen, February 1843; *Fear and Trembling* (Johannes de Silentio), 1843; *Repetition* (Constantin Constantius), 1843; *The Concept of Anxiety* (Vigilius Haufniensis), 1844; *Prefaces* (Nicolaus Notabene), 1844; *Philosophical Fragments* (Johannes Climacus), 1844; *Stages on Life's Way* (Hilarius Bookbinder – William Afham, the Judge, Frater Taciturnus), 1845; *Concluding Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Johannes Climacus), 1846; an article in *Fædrelandet*, no. 1168, 1843 (Victor Eremita); two articles in *Fædrelandet*, January 1846 (Frater Taciturnus)"

⁶ See page 4.

names are also” (625-626). As if to remove himself from an imprisonment of responsibility, Kierkegaard continues that he has no opinion about them “except as a third party” (626). Yet, by self-designation as souffleur, Kierkegaard is ironically unable to escape this imprisonment of responsibility. As a souffleur, his relationship is already other than that of a reader, and in further irony he is here writing several words in his own name, although it is doubtful that these words are “guilty of having essentially annihilated the pseudonymous authors” (ibid).

Although Kierkegaard maintains that the texts of his pseudonyms belong to them as authors, and therefore it is they who offer the “gift of text” to their readers, the responsibility belongs legally to Kierkegaard himself (627), and therefore it is Kierkegaard’s wish and prayer that anyone who wishes to quote these texts will do him “the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author’s name, not mine” (ibid). Kierkegaard himself acknowledges the confinement of identity, but he sees his identity as a confinement on his pseudonyms rather than vice versa. He writes that, from the beginning, he has been well aware “that my personal actuality is a constraint,” (627) which “the pseudonymous authors in pathos-filled willfulness might wish removed, the sooner the better, or made as insignificant as possible, and yet in turn, ironically attentive, might wish to have present as the repelling opposition (ibid). Kierkegaard’s absence and his presence both, then, appear as confining and freeing devices for his pseudonyms. To free himself from these pseudonymous identities and to free them from himself in a presence joined with absence, Kierkegaard writes that he is “just as little, precisely just as little, the editor Victor Eremita as I am the Seducer or the Judge” in *Either/Or*, as in *Fear and Trembling* he is “just as little, precisely just as little, Johannes de Silentio as the

knight of faith he depicts, and in turn just as little the author of the preface to the book, which is the individuality-lines of a poetically actual subjective thinker” (626).

Kierkegaard writes that if anyone has “fooled himself” and become “encumbered” with his “personal actuality,” as opposed to “having the light, doubly reflected ideality of a poetically actual author to dance with,” his impression of the pseudonymous works distorted by Kierkegaard’s presence, he cannot be blamed because he has done everything to maintain his absence: “this cannot be truly charged to me, who, properly and in the interest of the purity of the relation, have from my side done everything, as well as I could, to prevent what an inquisitive part of the reading public has done everything to achieve, in whose interest, God knows” (628).

Having looked at Kierkegaard’s relationship to his pseudonyms, I will return to the figure of Victor Eremita, the pseudonymous editor of *Either/Or*. Eremita tells the story of how he came across the works he has compiled as an editor. He considers his acquisition of this desk to be monumental in his life. He writes, “I bought it and paid for it. ‘This is the last time,’ thought I, ‘that you are going to be so prodigal’” (5). He is convinced that this desk, brought to him by a stroke of fortune, will be the “key” – so much so that he tells himself, “it is really lucky that you bought it, for now every time you look at it, you will reflect on how extravagant you were; a new period of your life must begin with acquisition of the secretary” (5). Indeed, a new period in his life has begun, albeit for reasons he does not expect, for within one of the desk’s “many drawers and compartments,” he finds “a mass of papers, which form the content of present work” (6). The last of those written by A, Eremita tells us, “is a story entitled Diary of the Seducer” (9). Eremita explains that it is here that we meet “new difficulties, since A does

not acknowledge himself as author, but only as editor” (9). Interestingly, Eremita writes that this “is an old trick of the novelist” (ibid). Eremita, upon reflection, decides that A’s editorial identity further complicates his own position, “as one author seems to be enclosed in another, like the parts in a Chinese puzzle box” (9). The same Chinese puzzle occurs in Klugman’s *The Words*. Kierkegaard, like Klugman, has created a writer who is introduced by another writer, who may or perhaps may not be the creator of the first: it may well be that Eremita, the editor of Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* is indeed A. “A” may, in turn (though these are both fictional characters), be “Johannes the Seducer avoiding his own identity, which means that he is horrified of himself. Kierkegaard might be, in fact, the editor: “Eremita, the hermit” – yet Kierkegaard’s nominal removal from the narrative voice may also be understood as a mechanism for distancing himself from views, which may not be his own. Eremita might then be A, but he might also be B. Kierkegaard is both present and absent in the voices of A, the aesthete, and B, the magistrate. Klugman might well be his fictional character Clayton Hammond, who dictates to an audience the first part of his book about the fictional “writer” Rory Jansen whose actual creation is replication of the old man’s story word-for-word. Klugman’s film differs from Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* in the next level of the puzzle, however: Rory Jansen is decisively a different character than the old man whose story he finds and steals, and who later confronts him. However, if both Jansen and the old man are indeed a product of Hammond’s (and therefore also Klugman’s) mind, then they do indeed both fit into the Chinese puzzle in terms of its creation of an illusion of authenticity.

Eremita writes about A that it seems as if he “had actually become afraid of his poem, as if it continued to terrify him, like a troubled dream when it is told” (9). Eremita

finds (or perhaps only writes that he finds) in A's preface to Johannes' diary no trace of joy, but rather "a certain horror and trembling, which might well have its cause in his poetical relationship to this idea" (9). A's "affected" reaction to the seducer does not surprise Eremita, however, for he is "twice removed from the original author" (9) and has "sometimes felt quite strange when, in the silence of the night, I have busied myself with these papers" (ibid). The scene that the editor creates at this point is especially haunting:

It was as if the Seducer came like a shadow over the floor, as if he fixed his demoniac eye upon me, and said: "Well, so you are going to publish my papers! It is quite unjustifiable in you; you arouse anxiety in the dear little lassies. Yet obviously, in return you would make me and my kind harmless. There you are mistaken; for I need only change the method, and my circumstances become more favorable than before..." (9)

In an open display of self-doubt, Eremita writes in contemplation, asking whether he has perhaps "already abused my position as editor in burdening the reader with my reflections," (10) and also whether or not he has become "guilty of an indiscretion toward the unknown authors," (12) but the more familiar he becomes with the papers, "the more these scruples disappeared" (12). Eremita writes that he ultimately decided that, "supposing that the unknown authors were still living, that they lived in this town, that they came unexpectedly upon their own papers, still if they themselves kept silent, there would be no consequences following the publication. For, in the strictest sense of the word, these papers do what we sometimes say of printed matter – they keep their own counsel," (ibid) allowing freedom of interpretation. In a way, Hammond's story also remains silent, keeping its own counsel, because he never reveals the ending of his book to his public audience in Klugman's film, and also because within his story the old man never speaks out publicly against Jansen's taking credit for his work, but only confronts Jansen in person. At the film's close, one is left unaware of what becomes of Rory

Jansen and whether or not he ever admits to the world that the story was not his, although Hammond suggests in a conversation to another character that Jansen remains imprisoned by this secret. Here, Hammond betrays his own authorial secret to this “other” character, a young woman, who appears to “seduce” the secret out of him. Much like Hammond, Jansen betrays his own secret to a young woman, his girlfriend, though in his case there is another who is in on his secret – namely the “old man” whose work he has stolen. As a representation of the writer, all three of Klugman’s “writer” characters illustrate how the silence and the secrecy of the text both intimately relate to the text’s dialectical confining and freeing forces.

Eremita removes himself from a significant degree of the responsibility for *Either/Or* in his preface, writing, “If the reader has not already, because of my complete ineptitude, assured himself that I am neither an author nor a professional literary man who makes publishing his profession, then the naiveté of this reasoning must establish it indisputably” (13). He directs authorship away from himself, but still desires to mark the work as a product of his authority: “In selecting a title I have therefore allowed myself a liberty, a deception, for which I shall try to make an accounting. During my constant occupation with the papers, it dawned upon me that they might be looked at from a new point of view, by considering all of them as the work of one man” (13). He continues, “I know very well everything that can be urged against this view, that it is unhistorical, improbable, unreasonable, that one man should be the author of both parts, although the reader might easily be tempted to the play on words, that he who says A must also say B” (13). Eremita imagines “a man who had lived through both of these phases,” (13) writing as A and as B at different times in his life. Eremita explains further that his choice of title

reflects this ambiguity of authorial identity. Eremita's movement is both towards and away from authority. He claims to merely organize other people's thoughts, yet indirectly communicates otherwise. This plurality of movement has several implications for the understanding of writing as freedom and imprisonment. The movement serves as a commentary on the performativity of writing as a whole as the organization of thoughts, and brings into question the extent of authorial creation in contrast to "Governance". "Governance" as described by both "the poet" in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, and by Kierkegaard in "A First and Last Explanation," symbolizes the work's control, indeed imprisonment of the author. This confining aspect of the work is that which "controls" Eremita's "guiding the pen" (14) as well as Kierkegaard's when he writes about himself from the point of view of the poet. Although confining in its control, the authority of the work also offers the writer a freedom. Eremita seems to convey a sense of freedom in placing the work under his authority. On the other hand, he is on another level "releasing" the writings from all authority and authorship in general, emphasizing an offering of the gift of the text to the reader. Eremita expresses his belief that the reader has nothing to lose from his choice of a title and that also, "when he has read the book, he may perhaps reflect upon the title. This will free him from all finite questions as to whether A was really convinced of his error and repented, whether B conquered, or if it perhaps ended by B's going over to A's opinion" (13-14).

One aspect of guilt that Eremita has is that "an author's royalty would be too much" (12) for him, and that he does not deserve any more profit than "a small honorarium for my editorial services" (12). In a sort of ruse, Eremita offers the authors a stipend if they will come forward and identify themselves, describing how he invested his

profits, “so that when the authors turned up, I could give them the whole amount with compound interest” (13). Eremita’s guilt extends from these “scruples” that were “more easily overcome because in Denmark an author’s royalty is by no means a country estate” to any involvement with the work at all. One senses an imprisonment on Eremita’s part, and it is one that he appears to attempt to free himself from, albeit seemingly without success. Eremita concludes in his editorial note that he has “nothing further to say,” except that it is possible that the honored authors (or author, although here Eremita identifies them in plural) might wish to provide a word to the reader. Eremita decides that he “shall therefore add a few words with them holding and guiding the pen” (14). However, understood as a Kierkegaardian gesture, it is this editorial provision of a “guiding the pen” that allows him to express the thoughts of the original authors as an ironic commentary on pseudonymity. Moreover, Kierkegaard also admits in “A First and Last Explanation” that “there is no one more willing to make an apology than I, who bear the responsibility for the use of the guided pen” (629).

CHAPTER III

THE IMPRISONMENT AND FREEDOM OF TEXTUAL SECRETS:

CONCEALMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

Ordinary communication, objective thinking, has no secrets; only doubly reflected subjective thinking has secrets; that is, all its essential content is essentially a secret, because it cannot be communicated directly. This is the significance of the secrecy.

– Johannes Climacus ⁷

Kierkegaard's notion of "indirect communication," which always has an air of secrecy to it, is the subject of extensive discursive scholarship. In "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication" (1961), Harry S. Broudy notes that Kierkegaard argues for human existence as "a mode of being in which subjectivity is the truth and that such truth cannot be communicated directly" in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (225). Broudy ponders,

How does one communicate this subjective truth? To communicate it directly would involve objectification of that truth into concepts that translate the experience into common meanings. But, asks Kierkegaard, is it not a self-contradiction to objectify what is essentially, not accidentally, subjective? Is it not as self-contradictory as sharing a secret? What happens when we try to communicate subjective truth directly? (227)

Indeed, sharing a secret is equally as self-contradictory. The author often communicates indirectly to the reader, sometimes even when communicating directly, hidden behind the most obvious meaning. In this sense, Kierkegaard's resemble Sigmund Freud's understanding of dreams. In the seventh of Sigmund Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916-17) presented in Vienna, Freud argues that there are important

⁷ from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, page 78.

rules to follow in order to interpret dreams in a way that discovers unconscious material. In “The Manifest Content of Dreams and the Latent Dream-thoughts,” Freud describes, “We must not concern ourselves with what the dream appears to tell us,” (62) but instead, “We must restrict our work to calling up the substitutive ideas for each element” (62). Much like Kierkegaard’s indirect communication, in which the “secret” is substituted by something obvious, such that there are two levels of meaning, Freud believes that the obvious elements of the dream also have a deeper level of meaning. However, in a resemblance to the Kierkegaardian notion of silence, Freud recommends a sort of passive patience that will lead to discovery: “We must wait till the concealed unconscious material we are in search of emerges of its own accord, exactly as the forgotten word ‘Monaco’ did in the experiment I have described” (63). The reference to “Monaco” pertains to Freud’s sixth lecture, in which he considers the hidden, forgotten meaning of words (and thus of language proper). Thus, Freud writes that, as we interpret dreams, “We will describe what the dream actually tells us as the manifest dream-content, and the concealed material, which we hope to reach by pursuing the ideas that occur to the dreamer, as the latent dream-thoughts” (66).

In Kierkegaard, silence and indirect communication are always connected. Behind this silence lies the “secret” of his work. Jacques Lacan, as described by Lodge and Wood, “was a notoriously, willfully difficult writer” (184). Lacan’s willful difficulty represents the extent of concealment of his writing’s “secret,” purposefully obscured from the reader’s understanding. This concealment is necessary if any deeper understanding of the work is to occur, and such a deeper understanding would provide a reader, I argue, with an individual realization of freedom. Nonetheless, the task of

revealing a concealed secret becomes imprisoning for the reader. Similarly, the author is “imprisoned” by the concealment of his secret, which drives him, as Freud describes, into isolation. In their introductory note to the sixth and seventh lectures from Sigmund Freud’s *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916-17)⁸, editors David Lodge and Nigel Wood quote Freud, who expresses the belief that the artist is “in rudiments an introvert, not far from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win honour, power, love, wealth, fame, and the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these satisfactions” (52). Freud’s description of the artist, I argue, is universally applicable, although in order to maintain the current trajectory of my argument I evaluate his statement in terms of the writer as an artist. Freud’s description of the artist shows not simply an imprisonment by his or her work. Instead, Freud conceives of the author’s near neurosis in introversion as a self-imprisonment. It is truly the same for Kierkegaard, who expresses himself and whose pseudonyms often express the isolation of the author or poet. Isolation, of course, is both a freedom and an imprisonment.

Lacan’s essay “The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious” explores, as its title suggests, the unconscious within language. Lodge and Wood describe that “Lacan questions Saussure’s assumption that there is nothing problematic in the bond between the signified and the signifier in the verbal sign,” (184) and that his other “principal borrowing from modern linguistics was Jakobson’s distinction between metaphor and metonymy, which Lacan identified with Freud’s categories of condensation and displacement” (185). Lacan does not wish to imprison the reader in his “willfully

⁸ presented by Freud in Vienna.

difficult” writings, however. He writes of a possibility left open – a possibility for “the kind of tightening up that I like in order to leave the reader no other way out than the way in, which I prefer to be difficult” (186). By allowing the reader a way in, Lacan is offering “the gift of the text.” Nonetheless, because Lacan offers “no way out other than the way in,” the “secret” of his text becomes an imprisonment, with freedom realized only through a deeper understanding of the text. Lacan opens his essay with a quote from Leonardo da Vinci’s *Of Children in Swaddling Clothes*:

O cities of the sea, I behold in you your citizens, women as well as men tightly bound with stout bonds around their arms and legs by folk who will have no understanding of our speech; and you will only be able to give vent to your grief’s and sense of loss of liberty by making tearful complaints, and sighs, and lamentations one to another; for those who bind you will not have understanding of your speech nor will you understand them (186).

It seems that the lack of understanding of language was, in fact, the imprisonment of these children in swaddling clothes: the people who bind them are those who have no understanding of their speech. Without directly saying anything, Lacan associates imprisonment with a lack of understanding of language. Lacan believes that psychoanalysis “discovers in the unconscious the whole structure of language” (187). To summarize Lacan’s search for “meaning of meaning” (189) and to relate his ideas more to those of Freud, one might describe Lacan’s essay as an argument for a latency of meaning behind the manifest content of words. In Kierkegaard’s texts, both his writings and his pseudonyms’, the latent meaning of words is silent. Ironically, there is, to borrow the name of a song from Simon and Garfunkel, a “Sound of Silence” (189). Kierkegaard’s silence is ‘audible’ if, and only if, there is a moment of understanding on the part of the reader of what is indirectly communicated. In this instant, there is a

momentary sharing of the secret – of a deeper meaning that is only derived by confinement to the text.

Above, I have conceived of the “secret” as that which is indirectly, and never directly, communicated by the author. Nonetheless, the text itself can communicate directly (and indirectly) with the reader as well, the writing itself obtaining its own freedom. Broudy writes, “The work of art can, of course, communicate directly,” achievable “by the use of iconic signs and conventionalized symbols convey information” (231). J. Kellenberger adds to Broudy’s examination of Kierkegaardian secrecy, writing in “Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Religious Truth” (1984) that “Kierkegaard distinguishes between what is accidentally a secret and what is essentially a secret” (154). For Kellenberger, Kierkegaard’s treatment of secrecy is misleading, because “When Kierkegaard contrasts direct and indirect communication in terms of their conveying accidental and essential secrets, he makes it sound as though indirect communication communicates a mere proposition” (ibid). For Kierkegaard, however, indirect communication is never a mere proposition, but conveys subjective truth. The indirectly communicated, subjective truth is in fact also dependent upon the reader, or as Kellenberger describes, “in the subjectivity of an individual’s response” (154). Here, as elsewhere, we see that the structure of secrecy of the text which creates imprisonment and freedom for the author and the readers is dependent upon individuality, and thus the singularity of each relationship leads to a different understanding of the “secret” for each reader – a kind of personally unique freedom.

Kellenberger refers to Walter Lowrie, who suggests that Kierkegaard “enounced the use of indirect communication” (158) in the subtitle of *The Point of View for My Work as an*

Author – namely, *A Direct Communication: A Report to History*. Kellenberger points out, however, that in this work Kierkegaard “also defends the ‘indirect method’” (ibid).

Roger Poole’s reception of Kierkegaardian indirect communication has become the subject of its own meta-discourse of reception, which ironically comments on the confining nature of authorial identity. It becomes difficult, despite citations, to determine the originality of material and to separate the ideas of Kierkegaard from Poole’s ideas in *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (1993), both of which must be separated from original ideas in the reviews of C. Stephen Evans (1994), Eric Ziolkowski (1995), Peter Fenves (1995), and Robert L. Perkins (1995), among other commentators. Poole sees indirect communication as a Kierkegaardian contribution and as “one of the most fascinating problems in modern philosophy” (1). “Indeed,” writes Poole, “it is Kierkegaard, a century ahead of Derrida, who demonstrates that a meaning can be so long deferred that it would finally be naive to ask for it” (2). Evans attacks Poole, “who is evidently a disciple of Derrida (though not an uncritical one)” (531). Evans is critical because Poole “gives ‘deconstructive’ readings of a large number of Kierkegaard’s works,” (531) and because Poole believes Kierkegaard “sets up literary machines that, like those of the Dadaists, actually work but carry out no function at all” (7). Thus, Evans takes issue not with Poole’s relating of Kierkegaard to Derrida, which, in fact, is “one of a large number of new treatments of Kierkegaard that read the Danish writer as an early precursor of ‘post modernism’” (ibid). Instead, Evans sees Poole’s mistake in his claim that “Kierkegaard writes text after text whose aim is not to state a truth, not to clarify an issue, not to propose a definite doctrine, not to offer some ‘meaning’ that could be directly appropriated” (7). Evans would agree that the meaning cannot always – and

with Kierkegaard, seldom – be directly appropriated. He disagrees, however, with Poole because Poole “never considers the possibility that Kierkegaard could have communicated serious content and meaning through ironical and humorous literary form, failing to notice the Kierkegaardian dictum that ‘only assistant professors assume that where irony is present, seriousness is excluded’” (531). Poole’s mistake is, according to Evans, in his contextualization: “When Poole does descend to the concreteness of the text, themes are ruthlessly ripped from their context, and a Derridean Procrustean bed imposed” (532). Ziolkowski’s criticism of Poole, which quite is similar to that of Evans, is that Poole, in his focus on Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms as a form of indirect communication, forgets that there still is a “something” that is being indirectly communicated. According to Ziolkowski, Poole “leaves the impression that their medium (indirect communication) is their message” (892).

Poole’s mistake, then, lies in his absolutist understanding of obscurity. He writes that Kierkegaard’s “texts demonstrate to a nicety the Lacanian perception that all we are ever offered in a text is an endless succession of signifiers, whose place or context in a matrix of sense can never be finally established” (9). In one sense, the impossibility of establishing the “secret” of Kierkegaard’s text is necessary. If there was one single, universal secret rather than an individual understanding of what is indirectly communicated by each reader, it would not offer the same relationship of sharing between author and reader. The author and reader are both dependent, in an ironic sense, upon the imprisonment by the force of the text in order to achieve the freedom of individual meaning. Poole’s understanding of Lacan seems to imply that there is no possibility of grasping the latent meaning of a text behind its manifest content. Because

he draws so heavily from Freud, it is inaccurate to argue that Lacan would, despite his advocacy of what Poole deems “an endless succession of signifiers,” (9) argue that this infinity of signification would somehow obliterate the presence of latent meaning. Unlike Poole, Kellenberger has a feeling that, although Kierkegaard “offers only ‘the play of signifiers’” in place of “a determinate meaning,” this play “evidently has a serious purpose” (531). Perkins is equally as critical of Poole as is Evans, arguing that Poole’s mistake is a misunderstanding of Derrida, “to the effect that his effort is a ‘wager’ and that his program must assume what it denies, a world of ordinary intentionality (116). All of this is very significant to a Kierkegaardian-Derridean understanding of writing as freedom. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida connects language to presence and absence as well as to freedom and imprisonment in “Force and Signification,” in terms of the unconscious and meaning.

It is interesting that Victor Eremita writes of “guiding the pen,” when his own pen indeed seems guided by external forces. Who is doing this guiding? Perhaps the pen is guided by the “Governance” referred to by the poet in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and by Kierkegaard in “A First and Last Explanation”. In the Christian sense, this “Governance” is God, and in another sense, it is fate; fate can be left to the force of the work. In the beginning of *Diary of the Seducer*, the anonymous figure named ‘A’ finds and copies the diary of Johannes the seducer. “I cannot conceal from myself,” (200) writes A – or is it the editor who writes this, with his guided pen? ‘A’ continues that he can scarcely master his anxiety, and admits that the text that follows is not his own work (ibid). A’s intent in reading this document is much like that of Klugman’s character Jansen: he is compelled to continue reading: “In vain I have tried, however, to

make myself believe that had that side of the book not been turned up, and had the strange title not tempted me, I should not have succumbed to the temptation, or at least would have attempted to resist it” (ibid). Drawn in not only by the title, ‘Commentarius perpetuus No. 4’, but even more by an inexplicable urge, A recalls that Johannes’ Diary makes an impression upon him similar to the reaction of a “police officer when he enters the room of a forger, opens his repositories and finds in a drawer a pile of loose papers, handwriting samples; on one there is part of a foliage motif, on another a signature, on a third a line of reversed writing. It shows him clearly that he is on the right track, and his joy over this is mingled with a certain admiration for the study and industry here clearly in evidence” (1-2). Klugman’s character Jansen, like A, feels as though he is “on the right track” to something as he reads the old man’s story, but he is actually further and further from the right track in terms of writing a story of his own. “On this occasion,” writes A, “as usually happens, I was no less at a loss for thoughts than for words” (2). Such is the case also for Klugman’s character Jansen. The reason, according to A, that this text has such a profound effect on him is its secrecy.

A writes of Johannes the seducer and his diary, “He has spread the deepest secrecy over everything, and yet there is an even deeper secret, and that is the fact that I am privy to and that I became such in a reprehensible manner” (8). Here we see that there has been some form of “sharing” of Johannes the Seducer’s secret with A, the secret being physically embodied by the diary. The concept of the secret weighs heavily for Jacques Derrida in terms of the self’s relation to the other. The secret as imprisoning via its seduction is an entirely Kierkegaardian motif: in the “Introduction” to *Either/Or*, Victor Eremita states that hearing is his favorite sense, “for just as the voice is the

revelation of an inwardness incommensurable with the other, so the ear is the instrument by which this inwardness is apprehended, hearing the sense by which it is appropriated” (4). For, writes A in agreement, in his introduction to *Diary of the Seducer*, “There is really nothing else which involves so much seduction and so great a curse as a secret” (306). Kierkegaard’s appreciation of the imprisoning seduction of the secret is reflected in his engagement with the historical figure of Socrates and on the “Socratic secret” in his works. Johannes Climacus writes about Socrates in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that, “on account of his daimon,” he “isolated himself from any and every relation” and that “such a life-view would essentially become a secret or an essential secret, because it could not be communicated directly” (80). In “Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Ambiguity,” Jamie Turnbull finds that there are three “not evidently consistent” claims about indirect communication in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: “that indirect communication relates what is essentially private; that indirect communication has a determinate content; and that indirect communication is necessary to communicating some thing or performing some function in terms of either literary form or method” (15). Climacus writes, “Inwardness cannot be communicated directly, because expressing it directly is externality (oriented outwardly, not inwardly), and expressing inwardness directly is no proof at all that one has it, but the tension of the contrastive form is the dynamometer of inwardness), and the reception intrinsic to inwardness is not a direct reproduction of what was communicated, since that is an echo” (260). One way that indirect communication is voiced in Kierkegaard’s writings is through irony, which Derrida describes in *The Gift of Death* as “Speaking in order not to say anything or to say something other than what one thinks, speaking in such a way as to intrigue, disconcert,

question, or have someone or something else speak (the law, the lawyer)” (74). Socratic irony, in particular, is related to secrecy. Derrida writes that Socratic irony “consists in not saying anything, in not stating any knowledge, but it means doing that in order to interrogate, to have someone or something speak or think” (74-75). Derrida differentiates between Socratic irony and Abraham, writing, “the author of *The Concept of Irony* uncovers irony in the response without response that translates Abraham’s responsibility” (77). According to Derrida, because “Abraham doesn’t speak in figures, fables, parables, metaphors, ellipses, or enigmas,” his irony is “metarhetorical” (77). Abraham is truly silent, and does not allow someone to speak for him.

CHAPTER IV
POTENTIALITIES OF FREEDOM IN WRITING

In Barbara Johnson's chapter "Writing" found in the volume *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (1995), Johnson presents two perspectives about writing that she feels "should be juxtaposed" (48). The first of the two perspectives is that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose "suggestion" in *Tristes Tropiques* is "that the function of writing is to enslave" (ibid). The other perspective comes from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, in which Douglass writes of the decisive moment in his life when he "understood the pathway to freedom," (ibid) in reference to the act of writing. It is not literacy alone, but his writing that truly paves this pathway to freedom. Johnson's proposal that one juxtapose these two perspectives, if actually followed up on, reveals that most often, it is either one or the other of these views on the phenomenon of writing which has permeated its various understandings in human terms: writing has been understood historically by some as a form of freedom, and by others as imprisonment – the prohibition of literacy prevented the possibility of freedom offered by writing. However, one must consider the perspective of 'writing as freedom' and that of 'writing as confinement' side by side – if one considers both of these at once, one comes to an understanding of writing that is truly profound. The ironic result of considering these two aspects of writing as necessarily connected, rather than juxtaposing them as two opposites, is that one in fact sees that neither can exist without the other: neither one nor the other may be entirely absent, even if hidden. As Johnson herself points out, Douglass agrees, "in a sense," (ibid) with the position taken by Lévi-

Strauss, because in the absence of literacy for himself and his fellow slaves, the function of writing's lack of presence was indeed to enslave him. Johnson's exploration in "Writing", however, determines the following: "What enslaves is not writing per se but control of writing, and writing as control," (48) such that "the very structure of authority itself" (ibid) is at work. Douglass's view of writing as his source of freedom is particularly significant, therefore, because within itself it recognizes that writing also has a restrictive function for those whom it is denied. Douglass recounts that Mr. Auld, his master, told his wife that teaching the slave to write would not only make him recalcitrant, but also that "to himself it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy" (ibid). One may easily observe such sentiments of discontent and unhappiness described by Douglass' master as present for most great writers, and these emotional expressions are outward manifestations of the confining, restricting, and imprisoning aspects of writing. Although Auld's explanation to his wife indicates that he feels that his slaves are at a more simple level than he himself, his words confined by the racist perspective that dominated his historical time and place, the distinction he makes between the unhappiness of the literate and the happiness of the illiterate amounts to the saying that ignorance is bliss. Auld appears to speak against writing, emphasizing the harm that literacy causes; yet at the same time, Auld also acknowledges to his wife (with Douglass present) his concern that Douglass would "at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master." Here, he appears to be unwittingly encouraging Douglass to learn by emphasizing this difference which the ability to read and write creates. This difference between the presence and the absence of writing (for, writing is necessarily more absent than present for the illiterate) for a human

with the capacity to be both a reader and a writer further reveals the nature of writing as both freeing and imprisoning.

“If you’re frightened of dying, and you’re holding on, you’ll see devils tearing your life away. If you’ve made your peace, then the devils are really angels, freeing you from the Earth.” The above quote, expressed by the character Louis in the film *Jacob’s Ladder* (1990), illustrates the inherent connectivity between freedom and its opposite, with Hell serving as the ultimate human manifestation of the concept of imprisonment. It is therefore a matter of perspective, or, if one looks to Maurice Merleau-Ponty as an authority, a matter of perception, that decides whether something is freeing or confining. This is true even, say, if one were locked in a room, where one might presumably be without distraction and thus have a mental form of freedom (of thought). In his introduction to Merleau-Ponty’s lecture series *The World of Perception* (Causeries, 1948), Thomas Baldwin explains Merleau-Ponty’s world-view as “a detached, ‘sideways’ look at ordinary experience” that “modern art and phenomenological philosophy make possible” (11). Merleau-Ponty explains that he intends “to show that the world of perception is, to a great extent, unknown territory as long as we remain in the practical or utilitarian attitude” (31). A utilitarian stance towards writing might perhaps place a value in its qualities of freedom, but certainly would not associate anything positive with the imprisoning aspects of writing – for the freeing aspects of writing are those which would generate happiness, while the confining aspects would be those that cause displeasure in association with writing, generally speaking. There are, of course, situations in which the freeing aspects of writing are brought about through displeasure, but, in alignment with my argument, any displeasure which leads to freedom is a form of that confinement

which leads to freedom. A practical stance towards writing would not accept this notion that the freedom and imprisonment are in fact one within the other, because practicality finds its truth in differentiation. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida acknowledges the extent of the role of difference in human intelligence and sanity (the ultimate measure of human reason), providing a basis for reason and the Cogito. Derrida, however, also depicts difference as a creation of the possibility of impracticality, quoting Kierkegaard in the opening his chapter “Cogito and the History of Madness”: “The instant of decision is madness” (*Writing and Difference*, 31). Derrida quotes Joyce in addition to Kierkegaard, who wrote about his work *Ulysses*, “In any event this book was terribly daring. A transparent sheet separates it from madness” (*ibid*). A decision is a choice between two differentiated possibilities. Difference is typically understood as that which creates logic, yet here it is difference itself that creates anxiety of unreason. “The Decision,” writes Derrida, “through a single act, links and separates reason and madness, and it must be understood that at once both as the original act of an order, a fiat, a decree, and as a schism, a caesura, a separation, a dissection” (38). Derrida’s idea of decision in writing is as the struggle of selecting meaning in text, but this meaning is dependent upon perception. Therefore, we can proceed into the “world of perception” that Merleau-Ponty attempts to initiate within us

Merleau-Ponty describes Paul Cézanne’s notion that “as soon as you paint you draw,” (39) by which, according to Merleau-Ponty, “he [Cézanne] meant that neither in the world as we perceive it nor in the picture which is an expression of that world can we distinguish absolutely between, on the one hand, the outline or shape of the object and, on the other, the point where colours end or fade, that play of colour which must necessarily

encompass all that there is: the object's shape, its particular colour, its physiognomy and its relation to neighboring objects" (39). So it is also with a text and the world it depicts. One is unable to distinguish, on a certain level, between a text as an outline of reality and its applicability to reality itself, which perhaps part of the reason that Derrida argues for the universality of "the Book". It is as though a text offers us an outline of the shapes of reality, and experience offers the color with which to fill in these outlines. It is up to us, however, to re-experience and rediscover these outlines, such that we can never be certain of the world's true 'shape' or character. In this way, the text's offering of an outline of the world is a sort of imprisonment, but the possibility to discover alternative shapings and colors and 'colours' within that text presents the opportunity of freedom. Merleau-Ponty credits Malebranche with the noting of a famous optical illusion: "when the moon is still on the horizon, it appears to be much larger than at its zenith" (42). When one aspect of writing or a specific text is focused on, that aspect will as a result be in a much clearer perspectival focus than will others. If the imprisoning aspect of writing is at its zenith, it will become significant to reaching the text's freeing aspect, and of the two aspects it will be the one which exerts a greater force. Merleau-Ponty writes that the work of art resembles "the object of perception" (71). To me, then, it seems that the "zenith" of writing is whatever secret a reader wishes to pull from a text, for the "secret" of the text, though the author intends to define its identity, finds its identity in the text as the author's authority gives way to the text's. Thus, a text can have a different "secret" for each of its readers. Merleau-Ponty explains that no attempt to define or analyze the art can ever stand in the place of "a direct perceptual experience" (ibid). Likewise, no secondary reading, despite whatever amount of benefit it may contribute, can ever stand

in the place of the reading of an original text⁹. As is beginning to become clear at this point, the aspects of freedom and confinement that are associated with writing concern the roles of everyone and everything involved with any particular writing, including the author, the text, the critic and the critic's text, and the readers. My emphasis on the plurality of readers eliminates the notion that a writer is in a dualistic relationship with only one 'other', but more importantly emphasizes the multiplicity of the "gift" of the author's secret, distinguished from an overarching "secret" once it is received by any particular reader. In the German language, the reader is, most often, even further restricted by a masculine identity as "der Leser". I argue that an author writes, generally, not to one male (ein Leser) or one female (eine Leserin), but to a plurality of ambiguous readers (viele Leser). More correctly, the author writes not to these readers but for them, offering "the gift of text". The distinctions made here – that of the plurality of readers and of their ambiguity, in the sense that they are 'unknown' to the author, are essential to a complete understanding of the freeing and confining functions of writing. The distinction between 'the reader' and 'the Reader', although it acknowledges the universality of the writer's audience, does not emphasize the plurality of the absent-yet-present audience as does 'readers'. Furthermore, this distinction implies that there is a "secret" that any particular reader holds from the author in terms of his or her interpretation of the original text.

⁹ For this reason, a critic's response to a text, though it may offer the freedom of new insights, is always confined and limited, and thus imprisoning.

CHAPTER V
THE GIFT OF TEXT

A bird flew by the author's window and he wanted to escape his writing. He reflected on the notion that he wanted to escape his escape, and felt as though injected by some ironic concoction of disturbing of emotions, in both delight and despair at once. He recalled a bird that had once been trapped in the vent above his stove, which he had managed to free from this deathtrap in an endeavor of perseverance and ingenuity. The writer wondered whether it would be possible also to free himself – and whether he could do so, and whether it was will or faith or courage that was necessary.

By way of inclusion of this small narrative of my own in this essay, I aspire contribute to my argument that which theorizing alone cannot accomplish. One of the most obvious ways in which writing becomes a coexistence of freedom and imprisonment¹⁰ is for the writer personally. This conflict within the writer cannot be comprehended in the most thorough sense, however, without first looking at another modality of writing as freedom and imprisonment: another of the most obvious manifestations of this dialectic of writing can be seen in the relationship between the author and the readers. Once the author's text is shared with an audience, the reception of his text is all but beyond his control. He has given up the singularity of meaning of his words, for his own personal interpretation is no longer the only particularity, and he has shared the "secret" as described by Victor Eremita¹¹ in the "Preface" to *Either/Or* I.

In *The Gift of Death*, Jacques Derrida explores the relationship that occurs upon the sharing of a "secret". Recalling attention to the significance of the secret for both

¹⁰ As argued in the previous pages.

¹¹ And thus as described by Kierkegaard? Can one be certain that the words of the Editor reflect Kierkegaard's own perspective? If one compares the Editor's description of the secret to the Abrahamic parable in *Fear and Trembling*, then one determines that this "secret" is a Kierkegaardian motif.

freedom and imprisonment as previously discussed, it is through the learning of the author's "secret" that one achieves freedom as a reader¹². Derrida's conception of the "secret" is inspired by Czech writer Jan Patočka's *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*. Derrida derives influence in his elaboration of Patočka's ideas from Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of "contractual relationships" (*The Gift of Death*, 104) between creditors (*Gläubiger*) and debtors (*Schuldner*) in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Derrida analyses Nietzsche's work as a "genealogy of responsibility" (ibid). The "responsibility," as interpreted by Derrida, is the sharing of a secret. If a writer is successfully able to 'share' this secret, though not directly but through a series of signifiers and signifieds as would be described by Jacques Lacan¹³, then the writer, too, is achieving an aspect of freedom through writing in addition to any perceived form of "imprisonment" that may result from the gift of the text. The writer's imprisonment is, in part, internalized. Derrida writes that the "genealogy of responsibility" is "marked by an internalization" (13). He equates the sharing of the secret in such a manner to genius, for he writes that, if there were such a thing as a stroke of genius, "it comes about only at the instant of the infinite sharing of the secret" (116). For Derrida, an author will only truly be considered to be a genius in the moment of a reader's infinite understanding of the text's "secret". The problem, however, is that such a moment of infinite understanding is extremely rare or perhaps does not exist at all, except as a possibility.

¹² And also, necessarily, imprisonment (i.e., the reader's freedom of possibilities of meaning – the secret – are restricted), for the two are never wholly separate.

¹³ Jacques Lacan credits Ferdinand de Saussure in "The insistence of the letter in the unconscious" with the equation of signifier over signified, which Saussure wrote of in *Cours de linguistique générale*. Lacan inverts this equation, insisting that the signifier is the one that is articulated on the surface of language.

Because Jacques Derrida's *Gift of Death* and his *Literature in Secret* focus on the secrecy and responsibility of writing, the aspects of freedom and confinement of writing are here most readily identifiable in the relationship between the writer and any readers. For, the secret is a notion of difference, and difference acts in establishing a self and Other, and authorial responsibility, more than just a responsibility for the work, implies a responsibility to someone. Derrida writes of Patočka, "Somewhat in the manner of Lévinas he warns against an experience of the sacred as an enthusiasm or fervor for fusion, cautioning in particular against a form of demonic rapture that has as its effect, and often as its first intention, the removal of responsibility, the loss of the sense or consciousness of responsibility" (3). Patočka's examination is of religion, whereas Derrida relates this presumed "access to the responsibility of a free self" (4) with language¹⁴. "Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all" (5). If one considers writing as a parallel, then it is authorship which is "responsibility or it is nothing at all". Derrida also writes that religion's history "derives its sense entirely from the idea of a passage to responsibility" (ibid).

One notices the way in which the freedom and imprisonment of the author can become a passage to freedom and imprisonment for the reader. Furthermore, we have seen that there is a passage not to, but of responsibility in both Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* and Klugman's *The Words*. It may seem that I am extending Derrida's analysis of Patočka's religious interpretation in the application to my own argument about writing, but I am in fact going no further than does Derrida. He explains, "The genesis of responsibility that Patočka proposes will not simply describe a history of religion or

¹⁴ And any discussion of language readily includes the concept of writing.

religiousness” (ibid). Rather, responsibility will also “overlap with a genealogy of the subject who says ‘myself,’ the subject’s relation to itself as an instance of liberty, singularity, and responsibility, the relation to the self as being before the other: the other in its infinite alterity, one who regards without being seen but also whose infinite goodness gives in an experience that amounts to a gift of death [donner la mort]” (ibid). In writing, one may ascribe the role of the subject who says ‘myself’ to the author, in which case the author relates to the ‘self’ as ‘being before’ the reader as ‘the other’ – and, something which is perhaps equally important, vice versa. The gift is that of the text’s secret, which is given unwillingly although it is willed. Nonetheless the “self” of the author is in question, even in competition with varying degrees of identification and with the text itself.

In *The Gift of Death*, Jacques Derrida writes that responsibility and faith go together, “however paradoxical that might seem to some” (8). According to Derrida, “The gift of death would be this marriage of responsibility and faith. History depends on such an excessive beginning” (ibid). The act of writing, in a sense, is also a marriage of responsibility and faith. The responsibility of writing becomes an imprisoning burden, while a certain courage which one may choose to call ‘faith’¹⁵ allows the writer to remember the possibility of freedom. In this sense, faith in connection with writing is Kierkegaardian, and the circle is completed again as Derrida’s discussion of responsibility appeals to Kierkegaard’s depiction of Abrahamic faith, which is silent in *Fear and Trembling*. He writes of a kind of “becoming-responsible” which is a “becoming-historical of humankind,” which “seems to be intimately tied to the properly Christian

¹⁵ Or ‘resolve’, or even ‘heart’.

event of another secret, or more precisely of a mystery, the *mysterium tremendum*: the terrifying mystery, the dread, fear, and trembling of the Christian in the experience of the sacrificial gift” (8). Responsibility is the commonality between the Christian “the gift of death” and what I call the writer’s “gift of text.” Responsibility is a sort of “keeping within oneself,” (Derrida, 11) and therefore responsibility is connected to silence and the secret. Derrida speaks of the history of secrecy as the combined history of responsibility and of the gift. The history of secrecy is for Derrida therefore the combination of the history of responsibility and the history of responsibility’s marriage to faith. The importance of the word “secret” in Derrida’s text is matched by the secret’s importance to the author. Derrida writes about the secret’s history, “One could compare it to a history of revolutions, even to history as revolution” (10). For that matter, one could compare it to Kierkegaard’s *Repetition* or Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal return of the same.

In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Donald Pease offers an examination of the idea of “Author.” He writes that the history of this term carried certain questions that, “no matter whether they were asked by politicians, economists, theologians, philosophers, or artists, remained constant” (105). His list of questions that have remained constant are all indeterminates of the imprisonment and freedom of authorship which are explored in this essay. He asks, “Is an individual self-determined by material and historical circumstances? Is the human self infinite or finite? Can an individual ground political authority on individual creativity? What is the basis for human freedom? Can any artist claim absolute originality?” (105). Here, Pease establishes that “author” induces notions of freedom as well as finitude and originality. According to Pease, these questions “as well as different cultures’ responses to them have accompanied the term

from its inception,” (105) such that the “variety of these responses constitutes the meaning of the term” (105). Pease believes that, since the fifteenth century, authors have maintained an “affiliation with cultural freedom,” achieved “through the creation of alternative worlds wherein individual human subjects could experience the autonomy denied them in their cultural world” (108). This affiliation with freedom, however, was only possible to realize because of the existence of the cultural imprisonment in the first place – for the author, imprisonment is a necessary precursor to freedom such that the two are never wholly apart. Pease helps to illuminate the immense impact that the discourse on the “death of the author” has on the author’s struggle with the text for freedom of authorial identity. As Pease describes, in “The Death of the Author” Roland Barthes asks if and confirms that an author is indeed dead (106). Nonetheless, Michel Foucault disagreed with this answer in “What is an Author?” (ibid). As outlined by Pease, Barthes’ text proposes “a new definition of literature: a discursive game always arriving at the limits of its own rule, without any author other than the reader (or ‘scriptor’ as Barthes refers to him), who is defined as an effect of the writing game he activates” (112). Nonetheless, the text that Barthes’ author produces is “not without an author” (ibid). Barthes’ author returns but, in Pease’s words, “in the displaced form of Barthes’ metatextual account of the writing activity. In this view, then, the critic is the real beneficiary of the separation of an author from a text” (ibid). Thus, according to Pease’s interpretation of Barthes, “It is the critic rather than the author or the reader who can render an authoritative account of the structure of the work, the internal relationships among the various textual strands and levels, and the shift from author to what Barthes names ‘scriptor’” (ibid). Pease reveals the way in which Barthes argues that, without the

author's demand for "resolution of contradictory textual lines into an intended unity," the critic thus possesses a freedom that confines the author's identity: "the critic is free to reconstitute the text according to his own terms" (112-113).

Pease provides an alternative to Barthes with his description of Foucault's understanding of the critics' effects on an author. Foucault differentiates himself from Barthes because in "What is an Author?" he argues that the author still functions within the commentary of critics, his authority over the work influencing critics' interpretations, and thus that he still maintains some authority over the work (Pease, 113). Pease writes, "For Foucault, the author is finally neither an individual existing apart from a discursive practice, nor a subject acting within any specific practice, but what might be called a 'subjecting' function" (113). In this existence of the author that is neither apart nor within discourse, one sees how the author is both "absent" and "present" to the critic at once, in the Derridean sense. The same idea of absence and presence occurs with the reader: the author exists both apart from and within the reader's reading. The author is both absent and present in the reader's understanding of his "secret", and in a certain way he is freed by his presence reader's understanding of his secret and confined by his absence from the reader's understanding (though the reverse may also be true, in another way). Foucault writes of a fundamental author at the close of his essay – a figure who, according to Pease, "Foucault gives his readers the appropriate way to understand his own authorship" (113). Pease declares that the fundamental author in Foucault's text does "what the genius had earlier done in the genealogy of the term 'author'; that is, he claims a power to determine (in the form of a willed discontinuity from his practice) what otherwise would determine him (116). We can see how, for Foucault, an author's

possibility consists in the movement from a state of imprisonment as determined to a state of freedom to determine. Pease decides that the author “replicates the difficulties of the cultural subject who feels as much ruled by as ruler of the writing activity in which he is situated” (114). Thus, the freedom and imprisonment of the author is a replication of the freedom and imprisonment of any “cultural subject,” any member of a society. An author’s imprisonment and his freedom, as determined by the rule of the text or his or her rule over the text, necessarily resembles the relationships of freedom and imprisonment inherent in the agreement to enter into society.

If one wishes to deepen our understanding of the dialectic of imprisonment and freedom that pertains, not only to the author, but to all of writing, one may therefore examine “contractarian” theories within political philosophy. In a decisive moment within this discourse, Jean-Jacques Rousseau published *Of The Social Contract, Or Principles of Political Right (Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique)* (1762). Rousseau is known here for saying, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (Barker 169). This famous idea is made even more profound upon its elaboration: Rousseau continues, “Many a man believes himself to be the master of others who is, no less than they, a slave. How did this change take place? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? To this question I hope to be able to furnish an answer” (169). As to the first question which Rousseau states that he does not know, one may select to look to Derrida’s *Writing and Difference*, which, here and there, traces a history of ideas of the Other, for one possible answer. It is interesting that, in his preface, Rousseau assumes a sort of Kierkegaardian stance towards his work. He writes, “This short treatise has been abstracted from a more extended work, undertaken without due consideration of my

powers, and long since abandoned. Of such scraps as could be salvaged from what was then completed, this is the most considerable, and, in my opinion, the least unworthy of being presented to the public” (Barker 167). The motif of insufficiency and unworthiness of the author, also popular with Kierkegaard, demonstrates a feeling of imprisonment or confinement on the author’s part that is also one on the part of an individual in society. Rousseau’s conclusion to *The Social Contract* is in fact more of a contemplation than a conclusion: he states that he has “laid down the true principles of political right” and has “striven to establish the State on a durable foundation,” but does not have anything further to say on the matter. Instead, he proposes that he “strengthen it on the side of its relations with other powers, a subject which would include such matters as the Law of Nations, Commerce, the Right of War and Conquest, Public Right, Leagues, Negotiations and Treaties, etc. But all this forms a new field which is too vast for my limited vision” (307). Confined by his “limited” authorial vision, Rousseau depicts, on the one hand, the author’s imprisonment to the text. He concludes, “It is better that I confine myself to things nearer at hand” (307). The irony in the author’s imprisonment, as in Rousseau’s “self-confinement,” is that it is the author’s decision what he shall keep “near at hand.” The author chooses the subject of his text – he determines his text, moreover, and this choice is, of course, a form of freedom. Here, we see that the freedom of writing can also exist within confinement. Indeed, freedom’s full possibility depends upon the absence and presence of imprisonment, and vice versa.

CHAPTER VI

TO WRITE!

In my introduction, I referred to Maurice-Merleau Ponty's conception of form and content, in which the two cannot exist without one another¹⁶. In "Force and Signification," Derrida writes that imagination, which he defines as "the power of mediation or synthesis between meaning and literality, the common root of the universal and the particular," (7) is the origin of "the empathy between 'form and content' which makes possible both the work and the access to its unity" (ibid). Derrida shows us that imagination, or in other words, the imagination of the author, is the origin for the "empathy" between the work's form and content. Because it is the common root of the universal and the particular, the imagination allows the artist a freedom of expression of this unity. "For Kant," writes Derrida, "the imagination was already in itself an 'art', was art itself, which originally did not distinguish between truth and beauty; and despite all differences, Kant speaks of the same imagination in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment* as does Rousset" (7). Because at this point nothing is revealed, Derrida writes of the imagination, "It is art, certainly, but a 'hidden art' that cannot be 'revealed to the eyes'" (7). Through the gift of text (or painting, etc) an author's (or artist's) work is freed from the confinement of individuality. That which is hidden is brought out into the open. At this point, however, the work, no longer only a product of

¹⁶ See page 2.

the imagination, has gained its force to the risk of imprisonment of both the author and the readers.

No representation of that which is imagined could possibly be perfect, and thus the author may feel always as a result a degree of discontent with his work. Rousset writes, “since the reduction of a representation of the imagination to the concepts is equivalent to giving its exponents, the aesthetic idea may be called an inexponible representation of the imagination (in its free play)” (Derrida 7). Rousset expresses that an aesthetic idea is an inexponible representation of imagination, yet an aesthetic idea, expressed as an idea, is confined to the expression as an idea whereas in the imagination it had been limitless. Derrida seems to agree with Rousset that the transition from imagination to the work itself is a movement of freedom. He writes, “Imagination is the freedom that reveals itself only in its works. These works do not exist within nature, but neither do they inhabit a world other than ours” (7). Indeed, it only seems that Derrida agrees with Rousset that the movement to a work is a freedom. For, as the imagination is the freedom which reveals itself in a work of art or any other of its “works,” understood as any expression of the imagination, this freedom is still a freedom before it is revealed. So, imagination is a freedom, which offers a freedom upon its revelation because it is no longer confined to the mind, but, I argue, this freedom engages with a new sort of confinement when it “becomes” the work, when that which was seemingly absent becomes present. For, writes Rousset, “the freedom of the imagination consists precisely in the fact that it schematizes without a concept” (Derrida 7). The imagination is the origin of the work as a structure, which, Derrida points out, is, according to Kant (and also Rousset) “the first thing to which we must pay attention” (7). Perhaps it is for this

reason that Johannes Climacus declares in “An Understanding with the Reader,” the appendix to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, “In the isolation of the imaginary construction, the whole book is about myself, simply and solely about myself” (617).

Derrida writes, “To grasp the operation of creative imagination at the greatest possible proximity to it, one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom. One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness” (8). Thus, we return to the figure of the poet, who, as in Kierkegaard, must have a form of isolation, of self-confinement, to achieve poetic freedom. Derrida, even more than Kierkegaard, feels that one must also be “separated from oneself,” and that only by this “experience of conversion” involving separation and exile can one find “the literary act (writing or reading)” (8). Like Kierkegaard and Derrida, Freud also recognized the necessity of separation for the artist – as indicated earlier, Freud felt that the author was oppressed by his own instinctual needs. The author’s instinctive needs that oppress him are a form of self-imprisonment or self-confinement on the part of the author. Nonetheless, it is these instinctive needs, which are as Freud would have it unachievable, which allow the author to separate not only in isolation from others, but also to be, as Derrida describes, “separated from oneself.” Thereby the author achieves not “these satisfactions” described by Freud for which he lacks the means, but instead he or she achieves the poetic freedom described by Derrida. Derrida writes that writing “cannot directly manifest the experience” (8) of making one’s way within the world, but that writing “can only indicate it through a metaphor whose genealogy itself would deserve all our efforts” (ibid). This metaphor is equivalent to the text’s “secret,” or to Kierkegaard’s “indirect communication.” Johannes Climacus writes

on his own isolation in “An Understanding with the Reader”: “Yes, our age is an age for speculative thinkers and great men with matchless discoveries,” speculates Climacus, “and yet I think that none of those honorable gentlemen can be as well off as a private humorist is in secret, whether, isolated, he beats his breast or laughs quite heartily” (617). Climacus, though speaking ironically when he refers to “great men with matchless discoveries,” is quite serious when he says that a private humorist is, in a way, better off. Kierkegaard, despite his preference to *Clouds* by Aristophanes over Plato’s *Symposium*, could not have ignored Socrates’s remark in *The Symposium* that the best comedians must also know tragedy. An understanding of tragedy allows for the best comedian because such a figure is in the position to truly understand irony. Climacus continues that that such an honorable, great man can be an author only if “he sees to it that it is for his own enjoyment, that he remains in isolation, that he does not take up with the crowd, does not become lost in the importance of the age, as an inquisitive spectator at a fire be assigned to pump, or merely be disconcerted by the thought that he might stand in the way of the various distinguished people who have and ought to have and must have and insist upon having importance” (617). A great author depends on this isolation as a source of inspiration, although, ironically, it is also what confines him, and more ironically yet, this confinement is also that which provides possibility for the creation of deeper meaning of the text, which, by the possibility of its apprehension, provides an opportunity for what I define as “freedom.”

The imagination of the author as well as his experience within the world both contribute to the dialectic of authorial presence and absence within the work. Kierkegaard’s employment of pseudonyms allows him a freedom in his texts to

manipulate the structure of presence and absence, such that his presence and absence becomes a commentary on authorial absence and presence in general. Derrida quotes Antonin Artaud, a French playwright: “I made my debut in literature by writing books in order to say that I could write nothing at all. My thoughts, when I had something to say or write, were that which was furthest from me. I never had any ideas, and the two short books, each seventy pages long, are about this profound, inveterate, endemic absence of any idea” (8). Here, Artaud’s gesture of avoidance is similar to that of Kierkegaard in “A First and Last Explanation” and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, placing an emphasis on his own absence and a lack of his own ideas. This would favor, then, the “Governance” of the work over the authority of the author, the work eventually replacing the author’s ideas as that which guides his pen. Derrida considers Artaud’s lament as one about the “anguish of writing,” which is an anguish because it is “the responsibility of angustia: the necessarily restricted passageway of speech against which all possible meanings push each other, preventing each other’s emergence” (9). From this, one can determine that the possibilities of meaning, existing as a plurality, prevent one meaning from being solitary. In this way, one can see how there is a difference in the work’s meaning or “secret” for each reader. Furthermore, one can understand from this the reason that this secret must be communicated indirectly, for, if it were directly communicated, the other meanings would not push against it and one meaning would emerge and, indeed, be directly communicated. For this reason, Derrida is able to continue thus: “Preventing, but calling upon each other, provoking each other too, unforeseeably and as if despite oneself, in a kind of autonomous overassemblage of meanings, a power of pure equivocality that makes the creativity of the classical God

appear all too poor” (9). An absence of meaning in the objective allows an indirect communication of the meanings that are present in the subjective. Absence of the meaning in the objective allows for freedom of meaning of the subjective, and the freedom is of a possibility of plurality. “Speaking frightens me,” writes Derrida, “because, by never saying enough, I also say too much. And if the necessity of becoming breath or speech restricts meaning – and our responsibility for it – writing restricts and constrains speech further still” (9). In this way, writing nonetheless remains a restriction in that it is a decision, in that it eliminates other possibilities. Silence, then, has a certain freedom that speech or writing does not, because possibility is still left open.

Decision, then, is perhaps the nature of the author’s struggle between imprisonment and freedom. “Writing,” writes Derrida, “is the anguish of the Hebraic ruah, experienced in solitude by human responsibility; experienced by Jeremiah subjected to God’s dictation (‘Take the a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee’)” (9). The nature of suffering involved in decision consists in its nature as responsibility. Derrida writes that writing “is the moment at which we must decide whether we will engrave what we hear” (9). The problem here is that there is a certain impossibility to this, as one cannot truly bring reality into one’s work, but only represent or express it. Therefore, Derrida may claim that “To write is not only to conceive the Leibnizian book as an impossible possibility. Impossible possibility, the limit explicitly named by Mallarmé. To Verlaine: ‘I will go even further and say: the Book, for I am convinced that there is only One, and that it has [unwittingly] been attempted by every writer, even by Geniuses’” (10). In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida mentions that Heidegger considers the apprehension of death to be “relating to the

possibility of an impossibility” (12). Derrida’s reference in *Writing and Difference* of “the Book,” that there “there is only one Book, and this same Book is distributed throughout all books,” (9) is to the God of Leibniz, for which “And each existence continues to ‘express’ the totality of the Universe” (10). It seems paradoxical that a particularity can “express” the totality of the Universe, except perhaps by way of a dialectic of presence and absence of imprisonment and freedom. Derrida quotes Paul Verlaine, a French poet:

I will go even further and say: the Book, for I am convinced that there is only One, and that it has [unwittingly] been attempted by every writer, even by Geniuses...revealing that, in general, all books contain the amalgamation of a certain number of age-old truths; that actually there is only one book on earth, that it is the law of the earth, the earth’s true Bible. The difference between individual works is simply the difference between individual interpretations of one true and established text, which are proposed in a mighty gathering of those ages we call civilized or literary.

Verlaine’s sentiment has a certain resonance when one considers the commonality of the struggle to create a text by combining imagination with experience, by combining individuality with the totality of the Universe – in short, the struggle to create meaning.

The “anguish” of writing corresponds to the “madness” of decision, and decision is that which sets each work apart in its individuality. Therefore, Derrida disagrees with Verlaine, writing, “To write is not only to know that the Book does not exist and that forever there are books, against which the meaning of a world not conceived by an absolute subject is shattered, before it has even become a unique meaning; nor is it only to know that the non-written and the non-read cannot be relegated to the status of having no basis by the obliging negativity of some dialectic, making us deplore the absence of the Book from under the burden of ‘too many texts!’ (10). Furthermore, he writes, “To write is to know that what has not yet been produced within literality has no other

dwelling place, does not await us as prescription in some *topos ouranios*, or some divine understanding. Meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning. This is what Husserl teaches us to think in *The Origin of Geometry*” (11). Derrida writes that, if the “anguish of writing” is not a pathos, it is because it is “the responsibility of *angustia*: the necessarily restricted passageway of speech against which all possible meanings push each other, preventing each other’s emergence” (9). In this way, meaning remains hidden, pushed back by its plurality. Derrida continues, however, “Preventing, but calling upon each other, provoking each other too, unforeseeably and as if despite oneself, in a kind of autonomous *overassemblage* of meanings, a power of pure equivocality that makes the creativity of the classical God appear all too poor” (9). Derrida writes that speaking frightens him, because, by never saying enough, he already says too much. “And if the necessity of becoming breath or speech restricts meaning – and our responsibility for it – writing restricts and constrains speech further still” (9). To write, then, is “to know that what has not yet been produced within literality has no other dwelling place, does not await us as prescription in some *topos ouranios*, or some divine understanding” (11). Meaning “must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning” (ibid). In a fragment of a book he intended to devote to *The Origin of Truth*, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

Communication in literature is not the simple appeal on the part of the writer to meanings which would be part of an *a priori* of the mind; rather, communication arouses these meanings in the mind through enticement and a kind of oblique action. The writer’s thought does not control his language from without; the writer is himself a kind of new idiom, constructing itself... My own words take me by surprise and teach me what I think,” he said elsewhere (Derrida 11).

Derrida feels that it is because writing is “inaugural, in the fresh sense of the word, that it is dangerous and anguishing” (11). By this, he means that writing does not know its own direction, its own trajectory, its own future. For this reason, there is “no insurance against the risk of writing” (11).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

“Meaning,” Derrida tells us, “is neither before nor after the act” (11). If writing is inaugural, explains Derrida, “it is not so because it creates, but because of a certain absolute freedom of speech, because of the freedom to bring forth the already-there as a sign of the freedom to augur” (12). Writing brings forward something which is already there; it is present although it is absent, for it is hidden. In Derrida’s view, writing is “A freedom of response which acknowledges as its only horizon the world as history and the speech which can only say: Being has always already begun” (12). Rousset claims that to create is to reveal, yet he “does not turn his back on classical criticism (Derrida 12). Instead, writes Derrida, he “comprehends it, rather, and enters into dialogue with it: ‘Prerequisite secret and unmasking of this secret by the work: a reconciliation of ancient and modern aesthetics can be observed, in a certain way, in the possible correspondence of the preexisting secret to the Idea of the Renaissance thinkers stripped of all Neo-Platonism” (12). As Derrida points out, it is paradoxically “inscription alone” that “has the power of poetry, in other words the power to arouse speech from its slumber as sign” (12). Inscription, or writing, because it enregisters speech, “has as its essential objective, and indeed takes this fatal risk, the emancipation of meaning – as concerns any field of perception – from the natural predicament in which everything refers to the disposition of a contingent situation” (12). Writing, then, is a freedom of meaning, and perhaps this is why writing will never be simple “voice-painting” as Voltaire describes (*ibid*). “That it can always fail,” writes Derrida, “is the mark of its pure finitude and historicity. If the

play of meaning can overflow signification (signalization), which is always enveloped within the regional limits of nature, life and the soul, this overflow is the moment of the attempt-to-write” (12). The apprehension of the secret means that the writer is responsible for “responding” to his idealized reader, in a sense. Derrida writes that the paradoxical experience of secrecy, among other Kierkegaardian motifs, is connected “to a responsibility that consists, according to the most convinced and convincing doxa, in responding, hence in answering to the other” (28). He notes that the relation between responsibility and responding “is not common to all languages, but it does exist in Czech (*odpovednost*)” (ibid). Responding, Derrida argues, means in terms of responsibility a “dissymmetry of the gaze” (29). It is a “disproportion that me, to a gaze that I don’t see and that remains secret from me although it commands me, is the terrifying, dreadful, tremendous mystery that, according to Patočka, is manifested in Christian mystery” (29). However, Derrida writes in a Kierkegaardian fashion that “Christianity has not yet come to Christianity,” because its fulfillment within history, “and in political history, and first and foremost in European politics, of the new responsibility announced by the *mysterium tremendum*,” (30) is incomplete. A *Mysterium tremendum* is a “frightful mystery, a secret to make you tremble” (54). Derrida explains that this has not been apprehended by Christianity as such. He feels there has not been an “authentically Christian politics” because “there remains this residue of Platonic polis (30). “By means of the passage to death,” writes Derrida, “the soul accedes to its own freedom” (41). I would argue that by a passage to the text, the writer accedes to his own freedom. Abraham “betrays ethics” in the favor of the absolute, and does so by keeping silent. Derrida assesses Kierkegaard’s treatment of Abraham. Because Abraham is silent in this way, “silence takes over his

whole discourse. So he speaks and doesn't speak. He responds without responding. He responds and doesn't respond. He responds indirectly. He speaks in order not to say anything about the essential thing that he must keep secret" (60). So, too, it is with Kierkegaard, in that he "responds" indirectly to his reader.

In "An Understanding with the Reader," Johannes Climacus envisions both an ideal writer and an ideal reader. He wishes that there was "just one person" who would "dare to write as a solitary person" or "to set oneself up as an author in the name of humanity, of the century, of our age, of the public, of the many, of the majority, or what must be regarded as an even rarer favor, to dare as a solitary human being to write against the public in the name of the many" (620). This writer would, writing as against the majority, begin to own "up to belonging to the minority, to write in the name of the many, and then as a solitary person simultaneously to have polemical elasticity by being in the minority and recognition in the eyes of the world by being in the majority" (ibid). Such is the imagined ideal writer, and, as for the ideal reader, if it is not "considered one of life's innocent and permissible joys, which neither disturbs the Sunday-observance of law nor any other precepts of duty and propriety, to imagine a reader with whom one now and then becomes involved in the book, if one does not, please note, in the remotest manner make an attempt or a gesture of wanting to oblige one single actual person to be the reader" (620). Climacus believes that for an author to have such an "imagined reader" as a "secret fiction and altogether private enjoyment" is "of no concern to any third party" (621). He provides a "civic apology and defense for something that needs no defense," namely having such an imaginary reader. If an author is to have the "pleasure of having an imagined reader," it will be "an infinite delight, the purest expression of

freedom of thought, simply because it renounces freedom of speech” (621). Climacus writes that it is “the innocent and permissible, but nevertheless perhaps both disdained and misunderstood, pleasure of having an imagined reader,” and that “by its secrecy it avoids attack” (621). Climacus feels that he is incapable and unworthy of speaking to “the honor and praise of such a reader” (621). The motif of unworthiness occurs throughout the writings of Kierkegaard and those of his pseudonyms. Derrida feels that this motif is more universal, writing in *Literature in Secret*, “There is no literature that does not, from its very first word, ask for its forgiveness” (175). Climacus’ ideal reader is one who “can understand that the understanding is a revocation – the understanding with him as the sole reader is indeed the revocation of the book” (621). Climacus feels that such a reader will understand the author’s task. He or she will “understand that to write a book and to revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it, that to write a book that does not demand to be important for anyone is still not the same as letting it be unwritten” (621). Climacus also wishes for an ideal teacher, “one who offers just what I am seeking” (623). However, this desire for a teacher is as a learner in existing, who then cannot want to teach others (and far be it from me, the vain and empty thought of wanting to be such a teacher)” (ibid). Such a learner “knows neither more nor less than what just about everyone knows, except that he knows something about it more definitely and, on the other hand, with regard to much that everyone knows or thinks he knows, definitely knows that he does not know it” (623). Climacus writes that, in saying this, “I perhaps would not even be believed if I were to say this to anyone else but you, my dear reader” (623). In *Literature in Secret*, Derrida writes that his ideal reader is “an infinite reader, the reader of infinity” (140). This reader “is wondering whether this secret concerning

secrecy is not avowing something like literature itself” (140). Derrida examines in *The Gift of Death* the “will to write,” which is not “an ulterior determination of a primal will,” but is instead “freedom, break with the domain of empirical history, a break whose aim is reconciliation with the hidden essence of the empirical, with pure historicity” (13). The will to write is not an ulterior determination of a primal will. On the contrary, Derrida writes in *The Gift of Death* that it is “indeed a matter of care, a ‘keeping-vigil-for,’ a solicitude for death that constitutes the relation to the self of that which, in existence, relates to oneself” (16). So, too, it is with writing and the relation to the self. The writer must, in this sense, confine himself within himself in order to initiate a “keeping-vigil-for” which will allow the gift of text. “Such a caring for death,” writes Derrida, “an awakening that keeps vigil over death, a conscience that looks death in the face, is another name for freedom” (17).

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