TRUTH, LIES, AND ISSUES OF AUTHENTICITY:

A STUDY OF ROUSSEAU, NIETZSCHE, SARTRE AND CAMUS

BY

Mary J. Gennuso

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Vincent Crapanzano

_____ _____
Date Chair of Examining Committee

Andre´ Aciman

_____ _____
Date Executive Officer

John Brenkman_____

William Coleman_____

Supervision Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Vincent Crapanzano

The main focus of this study is an examination of the lie in its various stratifications. No study of the lie can be conducted without some attention to the backdrop of truth, against which the lie is cast. Such an exercise requires careful philosophical inquiry. Therefore, the authors chosen for this endeavor are those whose works are paramount in both philosophy and literature, namely Rousseau, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus. This is thus an interdisciplinary examination. An important aspect of this study, and to our authors, is the shifting idea of truth from absolute and objective to more relative, personal, and subjective, thus raising the issue of authenticity. As truth shifts, so does the lie. The existential dimension of this inquiry also includes a relational and social aspect. Such a setting grounds and mandates its literary aspect. The literary dimension also supplies ample case studies of the application of the authors' thoughts. Each of these authors has his own system of thought, and thus the philosophical concepts and uniqueness of each author are examined as they apply to the inquiry. Contemporary secondary sources and critics are utilized to facilitate this examination. A specific sub-theme of this study is the application of truth and lies as it applies to gender. Thus a feminist inquiry is also undertaken. The analysis also uncovers the tensions and paradoxes of each author's system of thought.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Joseph and Maria

To Truth, wherever it may be found

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM AND SCOPE

What is a lie? According to Webster, to lie is to make an untrue statement with intent to deceive. This is the more common and specific definition. However, Webster also provides a more general definition; to lie is to create a false or misleading impression. In addition, Roget lists various forms of lying such as fibbing, prevaricating, and equivocating. We might add to this list general forms of insincerity and hypocrisy. Thus lying is not as simple as it may seem.

Webster's very short definition leaves us with a spectrum of possibilities and difficulties. For instance, lying, in the first definition, has to be juxtaposed to truth. In addition, intention to deceive implies volition and hence issues of will and culpability follow. But how is intention to be decided or discovered? The added burden of including "statement" implicates language, and wherever there is language there is interpretation of meaning. The second definition, while more general, is no less problematic. It involves acts of creation and impressions. Thus the imagination is also involved in addition to the will and may involve trickery or deceit. (For a more expansive explanation of various definitions and their complications and inadequacies, the work of Shibbles (1985, 1988) is recommended). In addition, impressions are created variously and include many forms of representation, including indirect innuendos and artistic presentations. Also, the various stratifications from white lie to major lie provide further complexity to the problem. All of these various components of the lie make the topic an important one for both the study of philosophy, a discipline directed in

part to the determination of truth, and literature, a genre that is often noted for being untrue in being fictitious. In general, the lie is a topic that captures our imagination.

While many books have been written on the subject of truth in philosophy and deceit in literature, very little attention has been paid to the lie as it crosses both disciplines. There has, however, been an explosion of recent books on the topic of lying, from a wide variety of disciplines and viewpoints. Sisiela Bok's 1978 book, *Lying*, is a more recent example. However, her book tends to be along the lines of popular philosophy and makes very little reference to literature. However, her book does attest to a concern about the growing acceptability of lying in the social, public, and political arena. Bok argues for a near-Kantian view of lying, with some caveats as to why, in extreme cases, it is permissible to lie. Her 1982 book, *Secrets*, details some of these exceptional areas, such as in the interest of national security. Griffiths recent book *Lying*, details the history of the Augustinian view of lies and deception from a theological standpoint, emphasizing, and agreeing with Augustine on the strict adherence against lying and the problems that it causes, taking a view even stronger than Kant in some instances. On a lighter note, there is a popular recent book, *The Philosophy of House: Everybody Lies*, which is based on the television series. The book includes incidents from the series as well as the philosophical view of both the main character, the tough-minded Doctor House, whose philosophy, just like the title, that everybody lies, is central to his solving perplexing diagnostic problems in assisting his patients, along with the views of his other more humane colleagues. Ironically, House's view undoubtedly wins the day in the series. While the book is too popularized for a serious study, it does add credence to the rampant acceptability of lying in contemporary society.

Even on the other more literary side of the study of lying, an author such as Karon, who argues for a certain acceptability and even a sometimes necessity of lying, opens his article "Deception and Transparency: the Case of Writing" with the following short attention-getting sentence: "We Live in Deceptive Times", recognizing our current climate of mendacity. Nyberg's book, *The Varnished Truth*, while taking the problem of lying seriously, takes a middle ground that there are sometimes situations where lying might be necessary and that to tell the entire truth may not always be desirable, or even feasible. Goleman's book *Vital Lies, Simple Truths*, looks at the subject of lying from a psychological perspective, and Ford's book *Lies! Lies!! Lies!!!*, is written from a medical point of view.

There is a plethora of books written from the philosophical side on lying. For example, Galasinski's book, *The Language of Deception*, is a study in the analytic tradition of philosophy. Galasinski's purpose is to study the message of lying itself and its discourse, since he thinks that "it is impossible to find out empirically whether a speaker did or did not attempt to be deceptive" (2000, 114). While his main focus is on the discourse itself, he also includes such statistical studies as estimated rates of lies per person per week, and evolutionary studies that seem to suggest that deception is a necessity for survival. Using complicated logical analysis, Priest, in his book *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, continues with his earlier work and theme of dialetheism (the view that some contradictions are true). While admitting that his position does involve inconsistencies, he argues that this view has other virtues, such as adequacy, simplicity, and explanatory power (2006, 126). Ironically, at the end of all the complicated logical analysis and historical debate on the subject, he returns to the title of the book, and

explains the double ironies and reversals of the passage from Hamlet, and concludes, “If I cannot claim Aristotle on my side, at least I can claim Shakespeare” (2006, 209).

Another strand of philosophical studies incorporates psychological and phenomenological considerations, such as Fingarette’s seminal work, *Self-Deception*, in which he explicates his theory of disavowal in answer to the inherent paradox and takes seriously some of the existential considerations of Sartre on the subject. This body of literature specializes in hair-splitting details in considerations of self-deception, and includes such issues as split selves, partitioned minds, the unconscious, gradations of belief, logical fallacies, irrationality, and the role of epistemology and intention. (For a sample of some of these issues and the various positions, Ester’s book *The Multiple Self*, provides good variety of analyses along the spectrum). This is but a smattering of the recent books on the subject, that support the timeliness and importance of the study of the lie, for it has become not only a matter of interest for academics, but has become a topic in the public consciousness and of high interest to society. Thus, a serious study that crosses the boundary between literature and philosophy, and takes both sides equally seriously, is both in order and timely. This study is an attempt to fill that gap and answer the challenge.

The authors that are chosen for this study are Rousseau, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus. The authors chosen are specifically well known both in philosophical and literary circles, and their works represent the best examples of works on the boundary. Further, these authors are chosen for the particular paradoxes that their philosophies pose, especially when applied to women. Part of the aim of this study is to show that for these authors and those like them, to take only the philosophical or the literary in isolation is to

miss half the importance of their works, and to miss or misrepresent, the subtleties of the interaction, of the two aspects. Each author also opens up an important problem or aspect of lying on this threshold, or boundary. For instance, Chapter 2 is devoted to Rousseau, who wrote novels as well as political and philosophical theory, in addition to autobiography. It is essential to understand how these aspects of his writings intersect. For instance, Rousseau not only writes about lying from a philosophical standpoint, but he also demonstrates with examples from his own life. The personal, biographical examples are thus intimately tied to the philosophical, as the author himself has incorporated them into his writings. Biography is thus "fair game" for analysis, and can inform the reading of both literature and philosophy, especially when pursuing gendered implications. Chapter 3 is devoted to Nietzsche who wrote extensively about truth and lies from a philosophical standpoint. However, he is a most atypical philosopher in that he often wrote in aphoristic style and employed many literary devices, such as the use of irony and rhetoric. In addition, he also wrote a "story" of Zarathustra, using literary narrative to illustrate his philosophy. Thus again, the intersection of philosophy and literature is applicable. In addition, Nietzsche himself used an example from his own life to explicate his controversial saying regarding the whip and women. Again, since the author himself made the connection between his philosophy and his personal life, analysis of this aspect is warranted.

Chapter 4 examines Sartre, an existentialist philosopher who, in addition to writing quite a bit of philosophy, also wrote literary works, often to explicate his philosophy. Again, the intersection of philosophy and literature and the merging of discourses invite the type of approach taken here. In addition, it is with Sartre's famous

idea of bad faith, that his philosophy is tied into a history of philosophical controversy regarding the paradox of self-deception, an enigma that remains unsettled to this day. Chapter 5 concludes this study by looking at Camus, who, while being not quite a traditional philosopher, nonetheless extends the existential debate by bringing out concepts such as that of the absurd in both his essays and his literary works. With Camus, as with the other philosopher-authors in this study, we also expose a blind-spot in the author's analysis of lies and characters where women are concerned.

Another aspect of the method of this paper is first to closely examine the philosophical ideas of the author and then to examine their application to their literary works or styles. Thus issues of internal consistency, or coherence within the author's overall system of thought, will naturally arise. This approach unearths inherent paradoxes in the author's thought. Internal critique also raises the specific issue of women in relation to lying and the problems that arise from the authors thought. Another layer of analysis encompasses the use of secondary sources that are drawn from both the area of contemporary literary studies and philosophy, as well as from feminist studies, thus keeping with the interdisciplinary approach of the project. The study of a lie is a complex endeavor, covering issues such as intentionality, definitions of truth, and types of truths and lies. It thus covers philosophical issues such as epistemology and verification, as well as ethical concerns, as well as literary issues such as linguistic style, narrative, the role of the imagination, and of interpretation. Both aspects, the literary and the philosophical, are essential aspects of the methodology utilized in the analysis for this study.

Lying, in general, is something that we chastise and place a negative valence upon. To tell the truth is considered the morally correct thing to do. Much ink has been spilled on the nature of truth and its importance. For instance, Kant thought that it was an imperative to tell the truth. To do otherwise, he considered, to be a violation of the categorical imperative since one could not will lying to be a universal law. "This means that when you tell a lie, you merely take exception to the general rule that says everyone should always tell the truth" (*Groundwork* 24). Yet, objectively, a universal law cannot permit any exceptions, and a contradiction ensues. Thus, Kant brings out both the excusatory nature we often place on lying as well as highlight the general contradiction it involves. As a major Enlightenment figure, Kant thought that reason could prove to any person the necessity of telling the truth. In spite of Kant's best efforts, human beings continue to lie, and the question is even raised whether it is advisable always to tell the truth. For instance, in response to Kant, Benjamin Constant published an article in the periodical *France* in which he stated that "The moral principle stating that it is a duty to tell the truth would make any society impossible if that principle were taken singly and unconditionally" (*France*, 123 and *Groundwork, 63 Supplement*). Put simply, Constant thought that no society could ever survive on the pure truth. One might consider Moliere's *Misanthrope* as a comic example of a man obsessed with truth to the exclusion of societal mores. Constant, however, was more concerned with serious matters, such as harmful effects that might follow. Kant remained undaunted and answered back Constant in his essay "On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns". In this essay he clearly states his position, "Truthfulness in statements that cannot be avoided is the formal duty of man to everyone, however great the disadvantage that may

arise there from for him or for any other" (64). "This is because truthfulness is a duty that must be regarded as the basis of all duties founded on contract, and the laws of such duties would be rendered uncertain and useless if even the slightest exception to that were admitted" (65). Kant felt so strongly about this position that in his famous debate with Constant, he claimed that even if someone were at your door to murder your friend who was hiding in your house and if asked if he was there, you still had a duty to tell the truth. Constant claimed contrary to this that "To tell the truth is thus a duty, but is a duty only with regard to one who has a right to the truth. But no one has a right to a truth that harms others" (64). Kant disagreed, arguing that whether someone would be harmed is irrelevant. He maintained a strict adherence to principles. Kant replied, "And although by telling a certain lie I in fact do not wrong anyone, I nevertheless violate the principle of right in regard to all unavoidably necessary statements generally (67). In short, "the duty of truthfulness…makes no distinction between persons to whom one has this duty and to whom one can be excused from his duty; it is, rather, an unconditional duty which holds in all circumstances" (66).

The positions of Kant and Constant raise critical questions for our enquiry. On the one hand Kant raises issues of duty and responsibility. The concepts of excuse and contradiction also come into play. On the other hand, Constant asks us to reconsider the absolute obligation to tell the truth and asks us to consider if there might be important reasons why to tell the truth might not be the wisest or best decision. Constant thus raised important questions. Who has a right to truth? Is harm to be considered a factor in determining a need or a right to truth? Are there ever practical considerations that trump truth? These are issues that will come up again for our authors. Needless to say, Kant

never backed down from his position that “to tell the truth is an unconditional duty which holds in all circumstances” (66). The debate still rages today, and has not been settled. With that in mind, we now enter the debate by a careful analysis of our figures, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus.

Rousseau is taken as the starting point because of his detailed explication of the idea of lying and because he provides a philosophical framework to set not only his own work but also those that follow. In addition, Rousseau’s position has many similarities, as well as differences from Kant’s position that will be examined, such as the excusatory response to lying. Also, Rousseau’s analysis has been the subject of much literary debate, particularly by deconstructionists such as de Mann and Derrida. Picking Rousseau as a starting point also defines this work as a study at the crossroads of at least two disciplines, philosophy and literature. Further, Rousseau as a starting point also brings into play specific gender issues, as a major topic for consideration, particularly for a contemporary audience. That is, that the ribbon incident involved a female is precisely at the heart of the incident and why it was so lodged in Rousseau’s mind over the course of his writing. It was by his own admission, an event that he could not forget. Thus the gender issue will be of interest to a contemporary feminist study. It also raises the interesting question why a man so committed to truth ends up lying when it involves women, as it did in the ribbon incident. In addition, Rousseau adds issues of consciousness and intentionality as sub-themes for investigation, thus bringing psychological issues into play. Finally, starting with Rousseau also brings into focus the theme of introspection, so common to contemporary literature and so important to

subsequent existentialist literature that is also a part of this study. In short, starting with Rousseau sets the tone for the interdisciplinary methodology of this study.

This chapter on Rousseau begins with an examination of Rousseau's treatise on lying as found in his *Reveries*. The initial philosophical context is set investigating the key terms and discourse on the theme of lying found in the first three walks. The early walks set the tone for the philosophical concepts such as intentionality, judgment (including an anticipated end-of-life religious judgment), and the role of moral sentiment as well as issues of harm. Also, Rousseau adds levels of stratification to the theme by differentiating between such terms as fictions, fables, and lies in relation to terms such as profit, usefulness, and self-interest. The early walks also set the context by revealing the timing and tone of the *Reveries*. This begs the question of motivation and raises the issue of excuse in response to the lie. Rousseau's writing on the subject in this text is a reflection from the latter part of his life. As such the elements of solitude and inwardness are critical to this examination of lying. After completing the initial context the chapter proceeds to examine the specific ribbon incident found both in the *Confessions* and in the *Reveries* in light of his criteria. It is worth noting that Rousseau starts both his *Confessions* and his *Reveries* with an attestation to truthfulness. This raises the interesting twist that he claims to be telling the truth about the lies that he has told, and raises for the reader the problem of whether to trust him in his writings regarding his life. While the focus of this chapter is primarily on the ribbon incident, the incident is set apart and contrasted with other lies told by Rousseau due to two primary factors. One is the repeated mention of this particular lie involving the ribbon incident, and the other is the obvious gender connotation, since the ribbon incident involved women. This rouses both

our interest and our suspicion. For, not only was he lying, but he was lying about women. In addition, the ribbon incident involves several other complications and motifs. For instance, the repeated mention of the ribbon incident highlights the importance of the varied times involved, such as the original theft, the series of lies told, and the various memories and reflections of the incident in his writings. Following an examination of the details of these various stages of the episode, I examine the incident in light of Rousseau's own thesis on lying. This is followed by an examination of the incident in light of a comparison and contrast of two contemporary critics, De Mann and Derrida. The chapter ends with my own views and analysis of the incident and Rousseau's treatise.

Another important aspect of this study is an examination of a shifting idea of truth from absolute and objective to more relative and subjective terms. A prime example in this regard is the work of Nietzsche, the next author taken up in the study. Nietzsche's work particularly highlights issues of paradoxes, contradictions and reversals that are an important feature of this study. In addition, Nietzsche questions, mocks and attacks our traditional notions of truth. Thus Nietzsche's work stands at the crossroads of any contemporary study. Nietzsche provides a bridge from traditional metaphysics to more contemporary issues in philosophy. Nietzsche also, like Rousseau, provides ample opportunity to examine his philosophical ideas with respect to gender applications. As with Rousseau, incidents from his personal life are important aspects in understanding his philosophy, particularly his philosophy of women with respect to truth and lies.

Perhaps no other philosopher has turned our traditional notions of truth and lies on their heads as has Nietzsche. He not only questions, but attacks, mocks and shocks

our general sensibilities regarding such matters. Whereas Rousseau stretched truth in order to be exonerated, Nietzsche defiantly throws the concept into question. Of particular interest for this analysis is Nietzsche's famous "Truth and Lies Essay" as well as *Will to Power* (WP). Nietzsche's writings beg the examination of truth and lies on several levels, metaphysical, epistemological, historical, and perhaps most import, issues of authenticity and subjectivity. In WP, Nietzsche specifically connects truth with his famous concept of a will to power. That is, the idea of truth itself is questioned as being part and parcel with our desire to exercise our will. This has both an individual and collective aspect, in that individuals agree to accept as a society (or as communities) what will constitute truth. In addition, truth takes on the coloration of belief and condition. Thus Nietzsche speaks of such ideas as the fable of knowledge, and the posture of errors. Nietzsche turns a critical gaze to debunk such concepts as cause and effect, the subject, and the law of contradiction. That is, even traditional ideas of logic are questioned, as well as scientific ideas of cause and effect. These same themes appear also in the famous Truth and Lies Essay. The philosophical discussion is expanded to linguistic concerns. That is, truth is linked to metaphor and rhetorical devices and ends in a linguistic legislation for the sake of keeping peace for a herd-like existence. Truth, as the famous quote goes, "is a mobile army of metaphors". Nietzsche's writings move towards an emphasis on the usefulness of the concept of truth. Along with this subjective theme, Nietzsche decries unauthentic or mediocre living. However, Nietzsche's radical philosophy is not without its problems. Many of his writings on these themes reveal problems with contradictions and paradoxes concerning the idea of truth and lies, as for instance in the paradoxes of relativism and perspectivism. An important subset of these

areas is the role of gender in Nietzsche's thought, and the issues raised by his philosophy. For example, if will to power is a basic principle of Nietzsche, then what were we to make of such sayings of Nietzsche that we find, for instance, in the *Gay Science* as: "Will is the manner of men; willingness that of women"? The problem is further complicated by Nietzsche's style of writing, which is often ironic, rhetorical, and aphoristic. How does this complicate the reading on women? For another example, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* we read "Are you visiting women? Don't forget your whip!" Are we to read this ironically and as a condemnation of typical norms or as an enforcement of them? How does the linguistic style impact interpretation? My conclusion is that Nietzsche is neither pure misogynist nor liberator of women; his writings fall between the two and cut both ways. Nietzsche's work, and his philosophy in general, cuts on various levels and pushes the traditional categories past their limits with the intention of provoking thought and action, as well as leaving us with paradoxes and problems to resolve as readers.

Our next author is Jean-Paul Sartre, who provides ample opportunity for examining such an analysis as this that crosses the boundaries between philosophy and literature. This chapter examines Sartre's philosophy and how it is played out in his writings, as well as in his more literary works. Once again, we see how there is particular problems and paradoxes that ensue as well as specific areas of concern for Sartre's treatment of women that result from his philosophy. First, key concepts of Sartre's philosophical writings are explored, as they relate to the main existential categories. In particular, Sartre's famous concept of "bad faith" is explored, along with Sartre's comparison of it with lies. Other important themes such as free will and responsibility and his radical stance of humanity being "condemned to be free", along with his rejection

of the idea of the unconscious are examined. Next the chapter explores Sartre's own illustrative examples such as the young man deciding if he should enter the service and the young woman out on a date, along with the problems that they generate. Both these examples provide paradoxes involved in bad faith, particularly with respect to the case of the woman. A gender bias on Sartre's part is revealed. The examination of these philosophical concepts provides a method for the examination of his literary works.

For the purpose of this study, Sartre's first two plays, *The Flies* and *No Exit*, are explored. *The Flies* is chosen for several reasons. It provides an opportunity to examine Sartre's theory in light of both the individual and group response, for the responses of the crowd are as important as that of the individuals. In addition, issues of politics and government are raised, as the lies told implicate the royal house as well as its citizens. In fact, lies are told by both the major and minor characters, as well as by the God Zeus. Closely tied to the problem of the lie is the problem of remorse, which provides another look at the problem of intentionality as well as harm. Other questions follow. Can persons take upon themselves the "sin" or "guilt" of the many and expiate them? Are some crimes unforgivable? The paradox of freedom is also drawn out in this play, as is the problem of *engagement*. Also, especially important for our study, is the brother sister relationship. *The Flies* provides an exploration of a major female character as well. Thus, at the end of a play like this one must ask, who has lied, who has been in bad faith, how has freedom been exercised, and what is the impact on the people of the city?

No Exit typifies the famous slogan that "hell is other people" and what it means to be locked in the gaze of another. According to Sartre's philosophy, the only limiting factor in one's own freedom is the freedom of other people. The main characters have

made their own hell and now live with the consequences. What is hell for a contemporary audience and is there a way out? *No Exit* also provides a more contemporary example to explore both the behavior of individuals and the relationship between them. Especially important are the lies they tell to one another. The play provides for the exploration of existential themes in a more modern context, as well as providing ample opportunity to examine the behavior of women. Two of the three main characters are women: Estelle cast in a very typical female role and Inez, a very sarcastic lesbian. Neither one are very flattering examples of women.

The final author chosen for study is Albert Camus, a contemporary of Sartre and very closely associated with the existential movement in France, but with a twist. Consideration is first given to Camus' more philosophical writings, particularly focusing on his theme of the absurd, since what it means to lie or be inauthentic is intrinsically tied up with Camus' view of the universe. For Camus, the universe was, in general, an absurd place where random events occurred, sometimes without much rhyme or reason. After this introduction to the philosophical ideas of Camus, the chapter proceeds to apply his ideas in an examination of his literary works *The Stranger*. *The Stranger* is chosen for several reasons. First it illustrates Camus' basic philosophical ideas as well as provides us an avenue to review its tension. Second, contrary to Camus' own view of the main character as a man who is executed because he doesn't play the game and can't lie, we take the position that the character does lie and withholds the truth several times throughout. Further, as with the other chapters, the gender issue with respect to the topic of lying adds another dimension of complex analysis. Sub-themes of isolation, boredom, and carelessness also come into play, particularly as they involve women. For example,

the main character in *The Stranger* admits that he did not have much feeling for his mother and could not cry at her funeral. In addition, while he insists on being honest about his own feelings he thinks nothing of writing lies in a letter that will implicate an innocent woman, in order to placate his friend who is in trouble. Male bonding seems to take precedence over female reputation. Yet, despite the obvious harm done, both to her and to others, (the Arab will later die and Meursault will be executed), he doesn't really regret or think about the terrible lie he told about the woman. With regard to his own girlfriend, he eventually decides to marry her, as a result of her prodding, but he doesn't really care much one way or another. Simply put, he does not really care much about the women in his life. Even after much self-reflection before his execution, and even with the final acceptance of his fate, he never really places much importance on the women in his life. Does honesty or authenticity include carelessness in existential literature when it comes to women? These are questions that a modern audience must ask of existentialism. Why is the lie about the woman somehow acceptable to him? Like Rousseau, Camus' main character espouses truthfulness and honesty yet his thinking does not somehow extend to the practical considerations and applications regarding the women in his life.

The final chapter summarizes the findings of this study, particularly the problematic space posed by issues of gender. All of the authors are similar in that their works reveal tensions and paradoxes with respect to their philosophical ideas on truth, lies, and issues of authenticity. Further, each author runs into particular inconsistencies regarding the application of their theory to women. In addition to explication of these conclusions in their similarities and differences, the study ends by picking up the sub-

themes of the ethical dimension between the individual and society as well as the problem of a plurality of values and discourses and future directions for these issues.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT'S IN A LIE? ROUSSEAU'S REVERIES AND RIBBON INCIDENT

The central concern of this chapter is to explore Rousseau's works from the general standpoint of the question of what is entailed in a lie. To that end, his *Reveries* are the central concern of this chapter, as they contain a virtual treatise on lying. In particular, the celebrated ribbon incident is the main event for analysis. As this incident dates back to *The Confessions*, this work is also used in the exploration set forth in this chapter. In addition, since this incident is also tied to other similar incidents in his life, they will be explored as they pertain to the overarching theme. However, the larger framework for this investigation remains the *Reveries*. This exploration is cast primarily against his fourth walk, since it contains a virtual treatise on lying. However, elements of his other walks will be brought into play, insofar as they add to the general theme and lay the foundation for the analysis. That is, the main method of this analysis is to first explore Rousseau's own philosophical viewpoints on the concept of lying and then to analyze a concrete incident, namely the ribbon incident, according to his own criteria. Thus, the main critique is an internal consistency analysis of Rousseau's own philosophical writings on the subject. As the main philosophical ideas on the subject are found in his *Reveries*, they provide the frame for our investigation. However, before exploring the specific context of the walks and the ribbon incident, a general overview of Rousseau is provided to set the context. For this endeavor the works of Starobinski and Strong are utilized. Starobinski is drawn up for his monumental work on Rousseau and Strong for setting Rousseau within his general philosophical theory, particularly concerning matters of self and other.

In general, though, with respect to time, this analysis takes a backward look. Focusing on Rousseau's *Reveries* entails starting with his mature and last writings as they look back over his life. The *Reveries* were written, he tells us, for himself, and were meant to be a self-reflective analysis and follow-up to the celebrated *Confessions*. The time element is an important point that will be discussed in the analysis, as there are several times to be considered. For example, between the *Confessions* and the *Reveries* ten years have gone by. In addition, the time of the celebrated ribbon incident is early in the life of Rousseau, in his sixteenth year, and the other incidents of stealing that lead up to the lie also occur early in his life. These times are not insignificant as they mark a difference and transition from youth and adolescence to that of adulthood. In particular, they give rise to gender issues as they are played out in the ribbon incident. In addition, the various retelling of the stories introduce the problem of memory. Further, the placement of the various episodes and their retelling is also significant, as they map the terrain of the texts and provide further clues for analysis. Thus the undertaking of such an analysis cuts across several disciplines including philosophy, psychology, and literature, and to the general project of reading. Specifically, the genre of confession is set at the crossroads with philosophical analysis, adding to the challenge of interpretation. To assist in this analysis, this chapter draws upon the works of de Man and Derrida in formulating a critical reading of the text. In addition, comparisons are made with Augustine's *Confessions* as they shed light on the problem of interpreting Rousseau's use of the genre in the contexts of the episodes taken under consideration. Since Derrida makes the most of the Augustinian parallels, discussion of Augustine will be handled in the section on Derrida. The analysis undertaken here is broken down into four main

sections. In Part I, the general background, framework, and context of Rousseau's works are given as well as setting up the specific problem of the lie. In Part II the first three walks of the *Reveries* are summarized and highlighted. In Part III the fourth walk is taken up, including the backwards view of the ribbon incident. Part IV is devoted primarily to the critiques of de Man and Derrida. Derrida's own analysis entails a critique of de Man as well as an analysis of Rousseau.

Part I Background and Contextual Framework

Rousseau was born in 1712 in Geneva. He was not born into an aristocratic family but into "the lower citizenry" (Strong, *The Politics of the Ordinary* (PO) 4). As a writer, his publication of *Julie* in 1761 meets with success, "but the *Social Contract* and the *Emile* in 1762 draws the attention of the political authorities. Rousseau's books are condemned and burned in Paris and Geneva" (PO 7). These simple facts of Rousseau's life already set up Rousseau as a man at odds with society. It will not be peculiar, then, to find in his writings that Rousseau is often in exile from society and senses himself to be misunderstood or misjudged by society. The fact that he was born not into the upper echelon but into a working family, also gives us a clue into the shape of his writings, especially that of *The Confessions*. As Starobinski remarks:

> He proposes to tell the story of his life, but he is neither a bishop (like St. Augustine) nor a nobleman (like Montaigne) and has taken no part in court life or in the army. Hence he has no right to present himself to the public…He is, moreover, a poor man, obliged to work for his daily bread. What right does he have to call attention to his existence? (*Transparency and Obstruction* (TO) 184).

Rousseau's answer, Starobinski highlights, is in fact rooted in his commonness.

> Do not object that, being a man of the people, I have nothing to say that merits the attention of readers. That may be true of the events of my life, but I am writing not the history of those events in themselves but that of my state of mind as they befell me (TO 184).

> Man's value lies entirely in his feelings, hence no social privilege or prerogative matters (TO 185).

These quotes serve to illustrate the importance of the inner state and of feelings to Rousseau. This must be kept in mind in any discussion of truth and lies for Rousseau. For he is not so much writing a history of the external facts of his life, but of an internal account of his life. Starobinski adds to this the social significance of his works. This is because Rousseau writes, and wants to be remembered, not only as a "an exceptional mind or an innocent victim but as a simple man…who is for that very reason capable of producing a portrait of man possessing universal validity" (TO 185). So even in his solitariness and exiles, his writings are presented as linked to the common, thereby linking him to the people. Paradoxically, the man who shunned society in so many ways, or thought that society shunned him, even in his most extreme isolation still writes as a man of the people. In fact, since he has had to work and was able to move about freely in many levels of society, this has afforded him the privilege of better knowing many people and this has added to his experience having universal significance (TO 186). Rousseau flips on its head ordinary convention, by precisely claiming the power of the ordinary.

In this spirit Rousseau writes his *Confessions*. Strong quotes Rousseau's intention in beginning the *Confessions* and emphasizes the singular/universal theme.

Voici le seul portrait d'homme, peint exactement d'apres nature et dans toute sa verite, qui existe et qui probablement existera jamais. (Here, painted exactly from nature and in all its truth, is the only portrait of the human that exists and probably the only one that will ever exist) (PO 13).

Strong points out that Rousseau's claim is not only that this is to be an honest or truthful account of himself, but of man in general, for it is not a portrait of "a" man but of "man" (PO 13). Paradoxically, his singularities are "to be a portrait of that which is human" (PO 13). "What has been prescribed…is therefore the human understood as sociable" (PO 14). Starobinski draws attention to the model that Rousseau intends for his *Confessions*. "I want to try so that anyone who wishes to know himself can have at least one specimen of comparison; so that anyone can know himself and one other person, and that other person will be me. Yes me. Me alone" (TO 187). Rousseau's self-portrait is thus meant to be a model of comparison. Thus, however introspective Rousseau's work appears, and a work of this nature must be introspective, lurking in the background is the Other. Even in the background of his *Reveries*, where the isolation from society is more pronounced, Strong still finds the Other, despite the opening, or even because of it. The *Reveries* start by saying "Thus I am here alone on earth, with no more brother, no one near to me, no friend, no society but myself" (PO 63). Strong's contention is that Rousseau is his own society.

> We can always be beside ourselves, and whatever Rousseau would have done as a citizen of Geneva, he can do as a citizen with himself. Being able to be beside oneself, to be in ecstasy, is the prerequisite and quality of the political life. The experience of others is the experience of myself. It is our grammar and thus our freedom (PO 65).

Strong points out that in *Emile*, the book that the tutor proposes for Emile to read is *Robinson Crusoe*, "a book about how to be of society by oneself" (PO 119). Strong further states that "Reverie is an important way of making contact for those who have no (other) human present" (PO 148), Still, toward the end of Strong's book the question is reiterated, "Is living besides yourself the same as living with another?" (PO 149). We

may question to what extent Rousseau was ever with others, but the main thrust of Strong's book is that lurking in the background of Rousseau's writings is always the Other, and that Rousseau's very politics, as well as his writings, illustrate this point, in spite of all the solitary experiences and all the pronouncements of "writing for oneself." As the epigraph to the *Confessions* states "*Ego te intus et in cute novi*" ("Myself interiorly to you and in a new skin" (PO 14). To sum up Strong's thinking, "Rousseau would have preferred, I think, to find other human beings (the you), but he could always find himself" (PO 14).

Returning to the *Confessions* for a moment, note that Rousseau does not name this a book, but a portrait, and one that is painted, as Starobinski says, in the fashion of the "camera obscura", in that Rousseau will shift styles as his mood shifts so as to present "the memory of my past memory impressions" (TO 194). This is the realm of truth that Rousseau is after. Yet, there is a problem, as Starobinski points out. No sooner does Rousseau state that "no one can write a man's life other than himself", than he adds that "in writing, however, he disguises himself" (TO 187). Thus the very act of writing in trying to be transparent will result in some degree of obscuration. Yet again in reverse he says, "My decision to write and to hide myself was perfectly suited to me. With me present, no one would ever have known what I was worth" (TO 125). Some of the difficulty can attributed to the fact that for Rousseau, it is the intention, and the man behind the words, and his character, and not the words themselves, that are paramount. Starobinski illustrates from one of Rousseau's letter. "Will you never learn that what a man says must be explained by his character and not his character by what he says" (TO 142). In addition, he writes with the hope that someday "words will cease to be

necessary" and that "someday he will have only to show himself to be received" (TO 137). Thus, for Starobinski,

> The *Confessions* is intended to correct other people's errors, not to remember things past…He is forced to resort to autobiography, to write an *apologia pro vita sua*, because it is not enough to understand himself; that understanding must be reflected through the eyes of the world (TO 182).

Starobinski not only adds another dimension of the account of Rousseau's picture, namely that of correcting wrong views about himself, but also emphasizes the importance of the world in Rousseau's eyes, that is, of the importance of the Other.

Since Rousseau is often writing about "memories of memories", the question naturally arises, how accurate are those memories? It has already been pointed out that Rousseau is not writing an external history, but rather an interior reflection. Still, one asks, how accurate are his own internal reflections, about his memories? For Rousseau, once again, the core of his memories is his feelings.

> I may omit or transpose facts, or make mistakes in dates; but I cannot go wrong about what I have felt or about what my feelings have led me to do; and these are the chief subjects of my story. The true object of my confession is to reveal my inner thoughts exactly in all the situations of my life. It is the history of my soul that I have promised to recount, and to write it truthfully I have need of no other memories; it is enough if I enter again into my inner self, as I have done till now (TO 197).

Thus, the truth to which Rousseau consecrates his life is "<u>his</u> truth; his pact with truth is a pact with himself" (TO 199). As with Strong, we may ask if this is enough for discernment. Or, as Starobinski quotes Diderot, "I know that whatever you do, the testimony of your conscience will be in your favor. But is this testimony by itself enough, and is it legitimate beyond a certain point to neglect that of other men?" (TO 251).

One more element must be added to the difficulty of discerning the extent that Rousseau tells the "truth" about himself. We must consider that for Rousseau the individual is complex and ever-changing. For instance, Strong quotes from the *Emile* "we are not precisely double but composite" (PO 15). Both Strong and Starobinski quote the same passage in Rousseau. "Nothing is more unlike me than myself, hence it is pointless to try to define me except as a person of singular variety" (TO 50 and PO 143). Rousseau considered himself to be an enigma. This also poses a difficulty in the analysis of truth and lies, for how are we to determine the truthfulness of such a changing person? In addition, it highlights the paradox, that Rousseau thought of himself as both totally unique and yet the universal common person.

Having set the stage for Rousseau, we are ready to explore the main subject of our inquiry, namely the *Reveries*, and in particular, his exposition of lying. The specific concrete even that is explored in depth is the ribbon incident, which Rousseau mentioned earlier in the *Confessions*, with an attitude of never speaking of it again, and yet brings up again in the *Reveries*. The incident involved a woman named Marion. It is here that Rousseau gets particularly interesting. The question arises, how does a man so committed to truth end up getting embroiled in a lie when it involves this particular woman. First, however, we must explore Rousseau's views on lying, as set up in the walks of the *Reveries*.

Part II Rousseau's First Three Walks

In the first walk Rousseau sets the tone for his reflections.

> Alone for the rest of my life—since I find consolation, hope, and peace only in myself—I no longer ought nor want to concern myself with anything but me. It is in this state that I again take up the sequel to the severe and sincere examination I formerly called my *Confessions*. I consecrate my last days to studying myself and

> to preparing in advance the account I will give of myself before long. Let me give myself up entirely to the sweetness of conversing with my soul, since that is the only thing men cannot take away from me (5-6).

In the second walk Rousseau continues in the same vein.

> These hours of solitude and meditation are the only ones in the day during which I am fully myself and for myself, without diversion, without obstacle, and during which I can truly claim to be what nature willed (12).

The setting is one of isolated reflection. Rousseau does not turn to others but inward. If we take him at face value, his concern is with end of life issues, such as the account he will give of himself to his maker. To this end, he makes the following claim.

> At least it has not been my fault: I will carry to the author of my being, if not the good works which I have not been permitted to perform, at least a tribute of frustrated good intentions, of healthy feelings rendered ineffectual, and of a patience impervious to the scorn of men (14).

Why is it that he does not think he has been able to perform good works is not said, but the emphasis here is on the inner disposition, especially that of good intentions. This is what he intends to offer on judgment day in lieu of outward actions. In addition, he thinks that he will be vindicated. "God is just; he wills that I suffer, and He knows that I am innocent…In the end, everything must return to order, and my turn will come sooner or later" (21). With this theological conviction Rousseau ends his second walk.

In the third walk Rousseau ponders more philosophical problems, such as what study is appropriate for old age. His answer is that "it is solely to learn to die and this is precisely what we study least at my age" (28). This is connected to epistemological problems, since one often comes to question and doubt in a life review process. Unlike Descartes, Rousseau puts emphasis on feeling and sentiment in judgments.

It is important to have one's own feeling and to choose it with all the maturity of judgment one can put into it. If we fall into error in spite of that, we could not justly

suffer the penalty, since we would not be at fault. That is the unshakeable principle which serves as the basis of my security (34).

This third walk is important to set the context for the treatise on lying that is to follow, since it deals with criteria for judgment and epistemological concerns. In addition, the earlier walks set the tone and the importance on the role of intention that will figure prominently into the discussion on lying.

> I felt that to put the same points I had previously settled into question all over again presupposed that I had new insights, a more formed judgment, or more zeal for the truth than at the time of my seeking. Since none of these is or can apply to my case, there could be no solid reason for me to prefer opinions which tempted me in a moment of overwhelming despair but which would only augment my misery to feelings adopted in the vigor of age, in complete maturity of mind, after the most reflective examination, and in times when the calm of my life left me no other dominant interest than of knowing the truth (37).

Rousseau closes his third walk again with an eye towards an eternal judgment:

> But patience, sweetness, resignation, integrity, and impartial justice are goods we carry away with ourselves and with which we can perpetually endow ourselves, not fearing that even in death they would lose their worth for us. It is to this unique and useful study that I devote the rest of my old age. I will be happy if by the progress I make with myself I learn to leave life not better, for that is not possible, but more virtuous than I entered it! (40).

Part III The Fourth Walk

This brings us now to the celebrated fourth walk and the treatise on lying. The fourth walk begins with a reference to Plutarch. "To profit from the lessons of the good Plutarch, I resolved to devote the walk of the following day to examining myself on lying…" (43). Rousseau's reference to Plutarch is one of the reasons for the reflection on lying. The other is a journal by a certain Father Rosier that was signed with a Latin inscription for Rousseau. It reads "*vitam vero impendenti*" and translates as "to the one who consecrates his life to the truth" (59). This is a slight twist on a verse from Juvenal

that was a favorite of Rousseau—"*vitam impendere vero"*, that is, "to consecrate one's life to truth". (59) With this in mind, Rousseau begins his examination.

The event that Rousseau turns to is "a dreadful lie I told in my early youth, the memory of which has troubled me all my life and even comes in my old age to sadden my heart" (43-44). Rousseau calls it more than simply dreadful: he refers to it as "a great crime" and that he felt "remorse" for it (44). So far we have Rousseau admitting the lie and to a certain degree, its severity, since he called it a crime. In addition, he felt remorse for the consequences. However, no sooner does he make this confession than he begins to exonerate himself with reasons for his actions. He states that the lie was "simply an effect of mortification" (44). That is, he lied to save face due to embarrassment. However, when he reflects on other lies he told, he recalls that he "felt no repentance for them" (44). Something was clearly different about the character of this lie, so much so that its memory has plagued him all the while.

In examining Rousseau's response, his own analysis is mixed with remorse and explanation, so that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the elements. However, this is exactly what must be attempted to render a fruitful judgment and to evaluate the responses of his critics. One of the most important elements to consider is that of intentionality, the criterion that he made one of the most important in beginning these reflections. Regarding the incident in question, he states "far from originating from an intention to harm her who was the victim of it, I can swear by Heaven that in the very instant this invincible shame tore it from me, I would joyfully have shed all my blood to turn the consequences on myself alone" (44). That is, he had no intention to harm and he

regretted the consequences. What his intentions really were remain to be explored, but he does exonerate himself from malicious intentions.

Next, Rousseau considers a textbook definition. “To lie is to conceal a truth we ought to make manifest” (45). Concealment is part of lying, but “to withhold a truth we have no obligation to declare is not to lie” (45). One lies, then, only when one conceals what ought to be revealed. What criteria should be used to make this judgment? Further, Rousseau himself asks if there are “cases in which we may innocently deceive” (45). Here is where important philosophical gradations are made, gradations that may be interpreted as making excuses. However, before judging Rousseau too severely, a careful philosophical scrutiny is warranted. Rousseau examines the issue of when truth is owed and comes to the following conclusion.

> Nothing of that which is good for nothing can be owed; for a thing to be owed, it is necessary that it be, or that is may be, useful. Thus, the truth owed is that which concerns justice…Truth stripped of every kind of possible usefulness cannot therefore be a thing owed, and consequently he who suppresses it or disguises it does not lie at all (46).

Rousseau’s definition takes usefulness as the determining factor and connects it with the issues of justice. The conclusion is that when there is no use, truth is not owed. Or, as he says, “How could we be unjust when we harm no one, since injustice consists only in the wrong done to someone else?” (46). He had no intention to harm, as he has already stated. In order to establish harm, and the usefulness criteria, however, a closer scrutiny is in order. Rousseau himself finds many complications in the application of such a measure, as the following illustrates.

> For if the obligation to tell the truth is founded on its usefulness, how will I make myself the judge of this usefulness? Very often what is to one person's advantage is to another person's prejudice… Must the truth which profits one person while harming another be kept quiet or uttered? … And am I confident of understanding all the relationships of the matter well enough so as to apply the insights I possess only according to rules of equity? Moreover, in examining what we owe others have I sufficiently examined what we owe ourselves and what we owe truth for its own sake? If I do no harm to another in deceiving him, does it follow that I do none to myself, and is it sufficient to be never unjust in order to be always innocent? (47)

The above reflection contains a barrage of entangled questions and issues. The harmlessness criterion extends not only to others but now includes the self. In addition, the virtue of truth is somewhat anthropomorphized in that a debt is owed to "truth for its own sake" (47). He tries to find a method to distinguish these variances. In the end, he finds no easy answer to the problem and comes full circle back to himself.

> I have always found myself better off answering them in accordance to the dictates of my conscience than according to the insights of my reason. Moral instinct has never deceived me: until now, it has remained sufficiently pure in m heart that I can trust it; and if in my conduct it sometimes remains silent in the face of my passions, it soon regains its dominion over them in my memories. It is there that I judged myself with perhaps as much severity as I will be judged by the sovereign judge after this life (47-48).

Again he mentions a divine judgment and the importance of moral sentiment above reason. Also, in addition to the difficulties mentioned in discerning criteria for lying, he realizes that "consequences are not always perceptible or easy to recognize" (48). Therefore, he concludes that the only element that should really be examined is the intention.

> Only the intention of the speaker gives them their worth and determines their degree of malice or goodness. To say what is false is to lie only when there is an intent to deceive; and even when there is an intent to deceive, far from always being joined to an intent to harm, sometimes has an entirely different goal (48).

Recalling that Rousseau earlier stated he had no intention to harm, this would seem to absolve him from at least some of the culpability involved, at least technically speaking. However, Rousseau adds an element of consequentialism to the mix. The consequence of harm comes into play.

> Still, to make a lie innocent it is not enough that there be no express intent to harm; there must, in addition, be certainty that the error into which those spoken are thrown can harm neither them nor anyone in any way whatever (48).

It appears that far from trying to get out of a difficult situation, Rousseau is adding an even more difficult criterion into the definition, one that puts an impossible burden on the accused. For not only must the intention be free from harm, but there must be a guarantee of harmlessness as a consequence in order to make it an "innocent lie." Rousseau seems to be taking responsibility on this count and is far from painting himself out to be innocent.

In addition to issues of his own culpability, we also have to look at Rousseau the philosopher, working with gradations of lying. He names several types of lies, including deceit, fraud, and slander. To these he adds another category: "To lie without profit or prejudice to ourselves or another is not to lie: it is not a lie, it is a fiction" (48). The idea of profit and prejudice is added to that of usefulness and harm. Rousseau realized that these distinctions are confusing and restates the matter more plainly.

> Now everything which, contrary to the truth, hurts justice in any way whatsoever is a lie. That is the exact limit: but everything which, though contrary to truth, in no way concerns justice is only fiction; and I confess that anyone who blames himself for a pure fiction as if it were a lie has a more delicate conscience than I (49-50).

Although this definition is more succinct, it is not unproblematic. From his previous reflections, we know that the issue of justice turns on the concepts of usefulness and what

is owed, so we are back again in the same complicated loop. Rousseau does seem to vacillate a little, but he is also making finer distinctions each time he comes around the bend. He also makes clear the distinction between a real and an imagined person. "Whoever praises or criticizes contrary to the truth lies whenever a real person is involved", and that even "white lies are real lies" (50). So he is imputing some blame to himself since the person he lied to was a real person from his past. However, he has also said that when justice is not an issue it is not a lie but a fiction. Rousseau is using more than one criterion for distinguishing a fiction from a lie.

> I have never lied for my self-interest, but I have frequently lied out of shame in order to extricate myself from an embarrassing situation with respect to things which were indifferent or which at the most concerned me alone when, having to keep up a discussion, the slowness of my ideas and the aridity of my conversation forced me to resort to fictions so as to have something to say…I take as much care as I can that they not be lies, that is to say, that they hurt neither the truth nor the justice owed and that they be only fictions indifferent to everyone and to me (52).
>
> It is still by this first, irresistible impulse of temperament that, in unforeseen and rapid moments, shame and timidity often wrest from me lies in which my will has no part at all, but which somehow rush ahead of it because of the need to reply at the moment (52-53).

Rousseau is exploring different thoughts and perhaps different episodes. The first quote contains a statement that he never lied because of self-interest, perhaps extricating himself from any accusation of profit that is an element in his definitions. He quickly adds that he lied out of embarrassment and shame. In short he was looking out for himself. Might this be self-interest since he was concerned for his own reputation? While he did not gain any goods, he may have gained in reputation by his clever responses. The judgment would turn on how one defines terms such as gain, profit and self-interest.

In this same argument Rousseau also speaks of matters of indifference with respect to others. This is clearly a reference to the issue of withholding information when there is no harm or when the concern does not entail another individual. In such a situation, according to Rousseau, technically there is no lie involved. These arguments are meant to persuade one that such actions are not lies but rather fictions. Notice what Rousseau has accomplished. He began by speaking of a crime, a crime that involved a woman named Marion from his earlier days. He felt remorse and regretted the consequences. He then shifts gears to speak of other lies he told based on a sense of embarrassment. This can have the effect of considering the lies, including the Marion lie, to be not so bad, or perhaps even a fiction. Rousseau never calls the Marion episode a fiction, and by at least one of his criteria he cannot since the event involved a real person. He is, however, setting the reader up to viewing his actions in a more favorable light since he has stated that he never intentionally lies. In fact, he goes so far as to call his lies of embarrassment "lies in which my will has no part at all" (53). This raises the question of whether someone can lie against his own will. Rousseau is trying to eliminate a premeditated lie and ends up on the side of a lie told in a spontaneous moment.

Regarding the Marion incident, he comes to the conclusion that he does in fact repent, but that he is not able to remedy the situation.

> I swear to heaven that if in the following instant I could withdraw the lie which exculpates me and tell the truth which burdens me without bringing a new insult on my head by my retraction, I would wholeheartedly do it. But the shame of thus catching myself at fault still holds some back, and I repent of my fault very sincerely without, however, daring to remedy it (53).

Whereas earlier Rousseau said he would gladly have taken the consequences upon himself if he could change things, this sentiment apparently did not include the

consequence of Rousseau suffering in his reputation at all. His remorse and repentance have limits in that he is not really willing to make amends. In this regard, his confession is somewhat suspect, or at best, partial, since it does not include the final step of setting things right. Perhaps this is why his conscience still bothers him.

Rousseau splits hairs and vacillates, thus making it more difficult to judge, at least in so far as judgment now has to include finer gradations of different types of lies and many other criteria, such as intention and harm. In addition, he not only sets this episode in context with other lies he has told, but also in the context of his life in general. In this regard he judges himself to be on the plus side of the equation.

> From all these reflections, it follows that the commitment made to truthfulness is founded more on feelings of uprightness and equity than on the reality of things, and that in practice I have more readily followed the dictates of my conscience than abstract notions of the true and false. I have frequently concocted fables, but very rarely lied…But I have wronged no one at all (57).

Rousseau is again appealing to a moral sensibility or feeling, as well as reiterating the distinction between fables and lies, even though he admits to having told some lies. In addition, he emphatically states that he has wronged no one. This last point is debatable since Rousseau himself alludes to the possibility that there were consequences for Marion, even if these were perhaps the result of an unintentional action. Rousseau himself seems to exhibit doubt. "I do not however, feel my heart to be sufficiently satisfied with these distinctions as to believe myself entirely irreprehensible" (58). Rousseau has undertaken a detailed reflection and made many reasonable distinctions in lying and these may be said to comprise a mini-treatise on the subject. However, he still does not feel right about it. The role of feelings and moral sentiment is important, since feelings and moral sentiment play an important role in judgment. They also serve to

point him inward, towards self. In this turn to self he reexamines the issue of what is owed to self, and this includes a debt to truth. He comes to the conclusion that though he may not have hurt others, he erred and degraded himself by making up "innocent fictions" and he adorned the truth with fables, thereby disfiguring it (58). So in the end he concludes that there is something owed to truth and to self. This debt to truth and self is heightened due to the early maxim he took up.

> This motto obligated me more than any other man to a strict commitment to the truth, and it was not enough for me to sacrifice my interest and my inclinations to it in all things; I should also have sacrificed my weakness and my timid natural temperament to it. I should have had the courage and the strength to be truthful always, on every occasion, and never to let fictions or fables come out of a mouth and a pen which had been specifically dedicated to the truth (58).

Rousseau is clearly holding himself up to a very high standard on principle of personal honor. It is a freely chosen maxim and hence the freely accepted measuring rod for his action. He sums up this walk by reiterating familiar phrases and adding a new one. "Never has falseness dictated my lies to me; they have all come from weakness; <u>but that excuses me very little</u> (emphasis mine) (58). Here he particularly uses the language of excuse and finds himself lacking.

In order to draw any further conclusions or judgments, it is necessary to look closer at the incident in question. It is presented here in his walks, but also was acknowledged in his earlier *Confessions*. The incident is found at the end of Book II. At that time he was in the service of Mme de Vercellis. The time frame is right after her death. He clearly states the burden the incident has placed on his conscience. An outburst of feelings follows in his description of the state of his heart at the time. It is best to let Rousseau speak in his own words here.

> I did not leave her house as I had entered it. I carried away from it the long remembrances of crime and the unbearable weight of remorse with which my conscience is still burdened after forty years, and the bitter feeling of which, far from growing weaker, becomes inflamed as I grow older. Who could believe that the fault of a child could have such cruel consequences? My heart does not know how to console itself over these more than probable consequences. I have perhaps caused a lovable, decent, estimable girl, who was surely worth much more than I was, to die in disgrace and misery (70).

Again Rousseau speaks of remorse and memory and of consequences. The consequences are both to himself in that he has suffered in memory all these years due to this event, and the probable consequence to the victim, Marion. He imagines her disgrace as a result of this incident. That is, the issue of reputation again comes up. One can say that he injured the reputation of another. That fact that he describes her as innocent imputes more guilt to his action.

What was the exact crime? It appears that after the death of Mme de Vercellis, something was found missing in the inventory. "Only Mlle Pontal lost a little pink and silver colored ribbon that was already old" (70). The first crime that occurred was theft. The item missing was a very old, pink and silver ribbon that belonged to an unmarried woman. What stands out is that the item lost belonged to a woman and was a feminine object namely a ribbon. Even the colors were typically feminine, pink and silver (as opposed to blue and gold for example). Rousseau apparently was not a very good thief for he soon was caught. "Many other better things were within my reach; only this ribbon tempted me, I stole it, and since I scarcely hid it they soon found it on me" (70). It was not for lack of finery that he stole the ribbon, for far better things were within his reach. This old ribbon was the only thing that tempted him. The fact that it was a ribbon, and an old one at that, makes its value appear worthless. Rousseau is appealing to the

criterion of use, a major element in his definition. There has been no mention of a lie up until now. However, he soon was caught after stealing the ribbon, perhaps because he did not hide it well. That it was not hidden well may be due to carelessness or some psychological motivation for wishing to be uncovered. When caught, however, Rousseau lies, just as in other embarrassing moments. "I faltered, I stammered, and finally, blushing, I said that it was Marion who gave it to me" (70). Marion was the cook in the house who was young, reliable, pretty, modest, likable, and good. Accusing her seems all the more wrong.

In recapping the incident, it is worth noting that the initial crime was theft and this was followed by a lie. Rousseau implicates an innocent woman out of shame. This is consistent with his lying only when embarrassed. However, it does not remove blame as easily as he might wish, for after a brief interlude of stammering, he does indeed implicate her. Perhaps this was not done in a premeditative fashion. How culpable is his will is debatable at this point. However, this is not the end of the story. When the group assembles to verify the truth, Rousseau tells another lie. "She arrives, they show her the ribbon, I charge her brazenly…" (71). So Rousseau had another chance to tell the truth and lies again. The act now does not seem so spontaneous, especially since it was done brazenly. This implies that there is an element of willfulness involved. In addition, in her shock Marion protests and asks Rousseau to come clean. What does he do? "I confirm my declaration with an infernal impudence and maintain in front of her that she gave me the ribbon" (71). This is now the third time Rousseau lies. The argument for spontaneity and against willfulness is quickly declining, though the issue of embarrassment still persists.

Not knowing whom to believe, the count dismisses them both and makes a prophecy that proves true. "The conscience of the guilty one would sufficiently avenge the innocent" (71). In addition to the loss of reputation, the girl suffers the consequences of losing a job and the further consequences of making her future employment difficult. Rousseau was also dismissed, but the affair seems not to have hurt him too much except in conscience and perhaps some reputation. There appears to be consequences that harmed both self and other.

Yet, no sooner does Rousseau's guilt seem certain than he throws into the mix another reason, or excuse. "Never has wickedness been farther from me than in that cruel moment", and he adds, "my friendship for her was the cause" (72). Rousseau is reiterating that the most important element, intent, was missing from the lie. He harbored no ill intent for the girl. In fact, he reveals that he liked the girl! How then does she get the blame? She popped into his mind at the time because "my intention was to give it to her" (72). In some sense, Marion was the root cause. He stole the ribbon in order to give it to her, but when caught he reversed the situation, making a quick substitution to escape humiliation. By this odd sequence, he ends up blaming her. Afterwards he reflects that if the count, and others, had only the good sense to take him aside he would have never implicated Marion. The public scene was what pressed him to lie repeatedly. Instead, "they only intimidated me when it was necessary to give me courage" (72). Had the others the good sense to know his personality the unfortunate outcomes could have been avoided. The contention is that his lying is the result of embarrassment and shame. The end result is that he attributes this fault not to malice but to "only weakness" (72).

Having made this confession, he ends Book II with the following sentence. "May I be permitted never to speak of it again" (73). He wants to forget the incident, or so it appears. Clearly, this is not what happens since he returns to it again in his *Reveries*. Why is this incident so incessant and arched in his memory? To answer this it is useful to turn to some contemporary interpretations of the episode to further the analysis.

Part IV Critical Readings

A. de Man's Reading

Paul de Man's reading takes into account psychological and literary considerations. He calls into question the confessional aspect of the texts. As mentioned previously, Rousseau does not seem to meet all the typical criteria for a confession. For, "to confess is to overcome guilt and shame in the name of truth: it is an epistemological use of language…By stating things as they are, the economy of ethical balance is restored and redemption can start in the clarified atmosphere of a truth that does not hesitate to reveal crime in all its horror" (279). While Rousseau does have a sense of remorse, the guilt is never overcome. The ethical balance does not seem to be restored. For de Man this requires a more honest account and more responsibility on Rousseau's part rather than the excuses that he makes for himself. What de Man does not mention, that has been stated earlier, is that amends were never made to Marion. This seems to be a more critical and pragmatic aspect than the evaluative judgment that he is making excuses for himself. However, de Man rightly points out that there is an epistemological problem.

> The distinction between the confession stated in the mode of revealed truth and the confession stated in the mode of excuse is that the evidence for the former is referential (the ribbon); whereas the evidence for the latter can only be verbal. Rousseau can convey his "inner feeling" to us only if we take, as we say, his *word* for it, whereas the evidence for his theft is, at least in theory, literally available (281).

> The difference between the verbal excuse and the referential crime is not a simple opposition between an action and a mere utterance about an action. To confess is discursive, but the discourse is governed by principal of referential verification that includes an extra verbal moment: even if we confess that we *said* something (as opposed to *did*), the verification of this verbal event…is not verbal but factual, the knowledge that the utterance actually took place. No such possibility of verification exists for the excuse, for the excuse, which is verbal in its utterance…its purpose is not to state but to convince, itself an "inner" process to which only words can bear witness (281).

The argument here centers on the problem of epistemological verification. The contention is that confessions are more verifiable than excuses whose purpose is persuasion. The concern is also linked to Rousseau's emphasis on a "*sentiment interieur*". How can one ever verify an inner state or thought or feeling? In addition, there are several layers and matters for interpretation. There is the difference between a physical object and nonphysical utterances or even thoughts and feelings. There is also the matter of events that take place in the outer world and events that take place interior to a person. These are important distinctions that, to be sure, complicate the verification. However, this is not sufficient to prove de Man's case. In addition to the epistemological, one must consider the ontological or ontic side of the coin. That is, it is one thing to determine whether events are verifiable and another whether they actually happened. Rousseau either had those thoughts and feelings or he did not. These are just as much matters of fact as is the concrete ribbon. Whether we can verify them, or want to believe him, is another story. In addition, motive, intention, and psychological states often come into play in questions of law, so these are not uncommon elements for consideration in rendering a judgment.

Timing also adds to the complexity of the text. There are many different time periods that come into play. There is the time of the theft, the time of each of the lies, the

time of the feelings and thoughts and afterthoughts, as well as the time of the writings. Some of these times may even overlap and memory is being extended in many cases. For example, in the *Reveries* he is thinking of events early in his life as well as what he wrote in the *Confessions*. This includes more thoughts and sentiments. Each retelling adds another level of confession and broadens or adds the possibility of a genre of excuse as well. In addition, it is important to note that there is also a philosophical genre to consider and de Man is somewhat negligent to omit this possibility. Rousseau is a philosopher and finding a philosophical treatise amidst a confession is not out of order. However, de Man is correct that Rousseau is seeking a degree of justification. He quotes Marcel Raymond as saying "it appears that after having stigmatized his misdeed he gradually begins to justify it" (282). These two sides must be kept in mind regardless of the tension they create. The issues of excuses and justifications do not cancel out confessional aspects and any true remorse. The ribbon episode, and Rousseau's retelling of it, is not of one easy piece to understand. Many genres cross and many elements complicate the reading and the analysis. It need not be all or nothing. He may be innocent or less culpable in some regards than others. Like life itself, we are not given a clean and well-defined example. We are given, and are part of, a complicated web.

De Man introduces further psychological elements and links them to the linguistic elements. The element of desire becomes a key to him for a deeper reading.

> Once it is removed from its legitimate owner, the ribbon, being in itself devoid of meaning and function, can circulate symbolically as a pure signifier and becomes the articulating hinge in a chain of exchanges and possessions. As the ribbon changes hands it traces a circuit leading to the exposure of a hidden, censored desire (283).

Whether or not the ribbon can be said to be devoid of meaning in itself is debatable. It is obviously feminine in color and basic use. However, what is important is that there is a series of interchanges and they involve women. Rousseau stole the ribbon from a woman for another woman. The ribbon, far from being useless, becomes quite useful, if one accepts this as a valid mode for the concept of use. As the value and use increases Rousseau's defense decreases since he cannot fully escape his own criteria.

According to de Man, the ribbon, as the symbol of desire, functions as an excuse that includes the "confession" of Rousseau's desire for Marion (284). Whereas this author views this reading as diminishing Rousseau's case on certain philosophical points, de Man sees it as making the theft "understandable and easy to forgive", and thereby excuses himself more (284). That is, de Man sees Rousseau as claiming sympathy based on his feelings for the girl. Further, de Man adds another level of interpretation that complicates matters. Why did Rousseau get caught? Why was he so careless in hiding the ribbon? Utilizing Freudian psychology, de Man comes to the conclusion that "what Rousseau really wanted is neither the ribbon nor Marion, but the public scene of exposure" (285). The element of shame is now shifted to the shame of the exposure.

> This desire is truly shameful, for it suggests that Marion was destroyed not for the sake of Rousseau's saving face, nor for the sake of his desire for her, but merely in order to provide him with a stage on which to parade his disgrace or, what amounts to the same thing, to furnish him with a good ending for Book II of his *Confessions*. This structure is self-perpetuating…for each new stage in the unveiling suggests a deeper shame, a greater impossibility to reveal, and a greater satisfaction in outwitting this impossibility (286).

This reading of de Man is as harsh as it is innovative. If true, it makes Rousseau culpable of much more than a lie and his motivation is now thrown deep into question. Innocence is lost at this point. However, his analysis also implies an extreme reductionism. This

author is not prepared to take that route. The complexity of the genre issues warrants more careful deliberation. At best, perhaps there is an element of exhibitionism at work. This possibility does not exclude the possibility of real remorse for hurting Marion, nor does it eliminate the philosophical import of the text. It does not exclude multiple and complicated intentionality. It also raises the issue of whether such exhibitionism is compulsive. In addition, whenever intentionality, motive, and inner states are brought up, the question of the unconscious must be raised in any kind of contemporary discussion. How guilty or innocent is someone if some, or even most, of our actions are due to unconscious factors? Once unconscious motivation becomes admissible, however, Pandora's box is opened.

B. Derrida's Reading

Derrida begins his analysis by comparing Augustine and Rousseau. He also finds fault in de Man's analysis that leaves out the connection between the two. To this regard Derrida has made some valuable comparisons. They are elaborated upon here as they pertain to the issue of lying. For instance, both men wrote confessions, and in Derrida's mind, both "speak the language of excuse more often than that of pardon or forgiveness" (80). However, Augustine centers more on the inexcusable whereas Rousseau tends more to be excusing himself. In addition, both confess thefts in book two of their confessions. Similarly, for each of them the theft is presented as "useless". That is, "they both insist on the fact that the use value was null or secondary" (81). For Augustine it was the stealing of the pears and for Rousseau it was the theft of the ribbon. Actually, another similarity is that both had stolen fruit in their lives, Augustine the pears and Rousseau some apples. That is, both had stolen forbidden fruit (83). The issue of desire

comes into play. Derrida reminds us that in Book 2 chapter 4 of Augustine's work he says: "For I stole a thing of which I had plenty of my own and of much better quality" and that he wished "to enjoy the actual theft and the sin of theft" (Derrida 81). What is here being highlighted is the enjoyment of the original act as well as the value-less and needless occurrence of the object stolen. Rousseau will speak similarly of the ribbon as something old and of not much value. That is, the object itself is somehow meaningless, but what it represents, may not be. This is important in circling yet again around the use value criteria that Rousseau had originally set up in his walks. As Derrida sees it, in the broad spectrum, these seemingly trifling acts had "the greatest psychic repercussions on their whole lives" (80). That is, it seems to have propelled a driving desire and to make some kind of lasting mark on the authors, the experience of which also led to "the repeated access to the experience of guilt and to the writing of the confessions" (82).

There is still one more important parallel between the two authors and that is that both committed the thefts in question when they were sixteen years old (82). Augustine mentions it specifically and Rousseau refers to being "no more than a child" at the time, and that his "age also should be taken into account" (81). Derrida points out the calculation of Rousseau's age by piecing together other incidents. Namely, he was "just sixteen years old when, in 1728, …he spent three months…in the house of Mme de Vercellis, where the affair of the ribbon took place" (82).

These similarities have led some, like de Man, to wonder if Rousseau has just copied Augustine and if perhaps the episodes were a lie. This raises the question as to whether the confession itself is a lie. Here I think Derrida takes a sound middle ground. There is no evidence to verify the ribbon incident, yet there is none to condemn the tale

as false, as never occurring. However, the similarities, at least the structural similarities are interesting from a literary point of view. As the major author of a confessional work, it would have only been natural for Rousseau to model his work on Augustine's. There may have also been genuine similarities in their experiences, and this would have been a natural stepping-stone for Rousseau. More importantly, the similarities do no detract from the level of measure and philosophical rigor to be used, namely, Rousseau's own categories and definitions.

While there are some similarities between the two, such as a common age at the time of theft and a pained conscience, there are several differences. Rousseau wrote not only of the theft of the ribbon but of several thefts prior including the theft of asparagus, apples, and tools. "He steals more and more, and not only things to eat but also tools, which confirm him in his feeling of innocence" (83). In addition, as mentioned, the theft involved in the ribbon incident has a particular sexual overtone to it. Of course, Augustine's Confessions are not devoid of sexual content, but the connection between theft, lie and gender is especially pronounced in the ribbon incident. In addition, for Augustine the confession appears to be more standard. Augustine admits guilt and begs pardon, whereas Rousseau, as far as Derrida is concerned, excuses himself, at least at first glance. Derrida tends to agree with de Man on this point but for some different reasons and they also differ somewhat in their linguistic analysis. Derrida does not think that the ribbon is a free signifier. He also places more emphasis on the chain of female acquaintances and their placement in the narrative. Derrida reminds us of the role of Maman and Mme de Warens in addition to Mme de Vercellis. In addition, he highlights the Catholic connection and conversion. Speaking of Mme de Vercellis, Derrida reminds

us that Rousseau tells us "I may say that she made the Catholic religion seem beautiful to me by the serenity of heart with which she fulfilled its instructions, without either carelessness or affectation" (95). Derrida sees in these women a Marial chain (97). However, both Derrida and de Man have left out an important connection, and that is that Rousseau says "she died like a philosopher" (95). This connection is perhaps also another substitution, for by the time we get to the *Reveries* Rousseau will want to spend his last years peacefully in self-reflection, like a philosopher and/or like Mme de Vercellis. The religious aspect fuses with the psychological at this point.

At times, Derrida's interpretation does not so much differ from de Man's, as it is a setting of it in his own deconstructive context. For example, Derrida clarifies that de Man himself calls upon a "logic of *supplementarity* at work between excuse and guilt" (101). That is, the persistent use of excuses only adds to the guilt. In addition, "the *written* excuse produces guilt" (101). Thus, Derrida explains de Man as moving the fault to the writing itself, and more than the writing to "the pleasure taken in inscribing this memory, in archiving it, setting it down in ink on paper" (102). Writing itself is held culpable. It is worthwhile to keep in mind Derrida's own view of the supplement in Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* (OG). In that work Derrida advocates taking "Rousseau's experience and his theory of writing together, the accord and the discord"…and "the word *supplement* seems to account for the strange unity of these two gestures" (144). Derrida emphasizes the dangerous aspect of writing for Rousseau. "When speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary" (144). Writing is something additional and not natural. Derrida quotes Rousseau, "Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech" (144). Derrida also links the supplement to a perversion

of nature in another sense in Rousseau. He connects Rousseau's reference to masturbation as a dangerous supplement and dangerous habit, *"dangereux supplement"*, with references both to the *Pleiade* and *Emile* (150). In this sense the supplement cheats nature. Derrida also reminds us that there is a connection between nature and the maternal for Rousseau. Quoting *Emile*, he emphasizes that for Rousseau, like nature's love "there is no substitute for a mother's love" (145). One cannot really substitute for nature. Since for Rousseau evil is exterior to nature, "the negativity of evil will always have the form of supplementarity" (145). This helps explain Rousseau's view in the *Emile* that Derrida reiterates, namely, that all evil comes from the fact that women have ceased to be mothers, they do not and will not return to their duty" (152). Once again, the interruption of the natural causes a dangerous supplement, this time by women. It is therefore not surprising that Rousseau will have ambivalent feelings and relationships about women, both wanting to draw near, and yet keeping his distance. Derrida refers to the "play of maternal presence or absence", as in when he describes Rousseau's feelings for *Mamma,* while living in the house of Madame de Warens (152-153). He was close enough, yet far enough, that "the extreme sweetness of the feelings with which she inspired me did not allow my senses time to awake for others, and protected me against her and all her sex" (153). So Rousseau wants to be protected from women, even though he wants to draw close to them. Derrida reminds us that Rousseau will find yet another mother substitute. "In a word, I needed a successor to mamma…I found in Therese the substitute [*supplement*] that I needed" (157). Starobinski both agrees with this supplemental role of Therese and pushes further the autoerotic element that she provided. In addition, Starobinski highlights that she is never really confronted as another.

> And Therese? She allows Jean-Jacques to stay within himself. She brings him the "supplement" he needs…What Rousseau saw in Therese: someone he could easily identify with his own flesh and who never raised the problem of the Other. There is not a partner in dialogue but an auxiliary to Rousseau's physical existence (*Transparency and Obstruction* (TO) 179).

In this light the solitariness of the Solitary Walker becomes more apparent. For even when there are women in his life, Jean-Jacques still sees only Jean-Jacques. In this respect, another comment of Starobinski also makes sense. "Jean-Jacques is incapable of desiring an actual woman or seeking to possess her…Jean-Jacques was happy to enjoy the anxious pleasure of being in a constant state of desire" (TO 167). Also, Starobinski refers to Rousseau's pleasure at a distance, as for instance in the presence of his "mamma", that is, Mme de Warrens, as being able to find that "perfect pleasure is possible without sexual intimacy" (170). This is not to say that there were no sexual relationships at all in his life, but to emphasize the self-absorption of the man and the auto-erotic function that women often played in his life. This Derrida links to the role of the supplement, which also includes writing.

> And sexual auto-affection, that is auto-affection in general, neither begins nor ends with what one thinks can be circumscribed by the name of masturbation. The supplement has not only the power of *procuring* an absent presence through its image…it also holds it at a distance and masters it. The supplement transgresses and at the same time respects the interdict. This is also what permits writing as the supplement of speech (OG 154-155).

> It is from a certain determined representation of "cohabitation with women" that Rousseau had to have recourse throughout his life to that type of dangerous supplement that is called masturbation, and that cannot be separated from his activity as a writer (OG 155).

Returning to our comparison of de Man and Derrida, there is another important area that must be highlighted. Whereas de Man wants to clearly distinguish confession from excuse, Derrida is suspicious of the entire enterprise. "Every confessional text is

already apologetic. Every avowal begins by offering apologies or by excusing itself" (WA 110). This point of difference arises from a close reading of de Man regarding the performative nature of Rousseau's text. Derrida quotes de Man on this point.

> The interest of Rousseau's text is that it explicitly functions performatively as well as cognitively and thus gives indications about the structure of performative rhetoric; this is already established in this text when the confession fails to close off a discourse which feels compelled to modulate from the confessional into the apologetic mode (WA 110, (282).

Performative, as the name implies, functions on the power of the performative and not necessary on ordinary predicate truth values. Its truth value relies on whether the performance works. Thus, at least in its performative aspect, de Man finds a problem with verification as it is typically applied. As Derrida sees it, the difference for de Man is between "the truth to be known, revealed, or asserted" in its confessional aspect, and "the truth of the pure performative of the excuse", namely, the apologetic" (WA 111). For Derrida, the constative and performative are more closely related. For him, "every constative is rooted in the presupposition of an at least implicit performative" (WA 111). By this is meant that behind any cognitive utterance lies "a testimonial form" such as "I myself think" and this implies a relation to self to which the other does not have immediate access (WA 111). This means that the other must rely on taking me at my word. Again, we are back at the issues of truth regarding one's inner state to a certain degree. This is not the layer of truth regarding external facts, but the level of one's belief about matters, whether one believes this way or that way. The result is that "no-one will ever be able to point to properly theoretical proof that someone has lied, that is, did not believe, in good faith, what he was saying" (111). This seems, however, to augment de Man's point that there is a problem of verification. In fact, if Derrida is correct, the

problem of verification is all the more acute. However, as we have stated previously, the problem of verification is mostly an epistemological one. This does not mean that there is no truth-value to whether Rousseau actually thought or felt a certain way, only that we may never know it.

Returning to the ribbon itself, Derrida reiterates that the ribbon is not such a free signifier and that "it has at least the sexualizable signification of ornament and fetish…" (115). In addition, Derrida emphasizes the value of the ribbon in that "its exchange value is caught up in the logic of substitution…" (115). This also supports the criterion of usefulness and makes Rousseau less convincing regarding matters of his innocence.

One last point by Derrida is worth consideration. He brings up de Man's omission of Rousseau's description of the ribbon as being "quite old", *deja vieux* (116). For Rousseau, the emphasis was on its uselessness, a point that already been questioned if not refuted. However, neither commentator explores this phrase fully. While Derrida opens the door to a substitution of loss, the loss motif should be taken further, including connections to death. That which is very old may be connected to the actual death of Mme de Vercellis, and the later memory in the *Reveries* might, in part, be triggered by a connection to Rousseau writing later in his life, his last two years, in fact. He himself says in the introductory walks that he is already thinking about a final judgment and the end of his own life. With regard to Mme de Vercellis, both the ribbon and Mme de Vercellis are "lost", in the sense of gone. Or still, "very old" can connote "very used". The ribbon is used and Rousseau will use Marion. More suspiciously, why is Rousseau giving something very old, very used, to someone he describes as young and innocent? The desire motif that was brought up may have another connection here. Rousseau is

giving something used, or with experience, to someone innocent, perhaps wanting to corrupt her. As Derrida reminds us, the addition of the French "*deja vieux*", is important (WA 116-117). Perhaps there is a further slant on possible meaning. That which is very old, symbolized by the ribbon, is said to be already there, as opposed to the anticipation of something young and yet to come, symbolized by Marion. To take it further, the already there may have connections to the constant judgments to which Rousseau thought he was unjustly subject by his contemporaries. This may be set in contract to Rousseau's eschatological hope for a more accurate, and redeeming, anticipatory future judgment in the eschaton. Does the remembrance of Marion as the possible "not yet" connect to Rousseau's "not yet" vindication that he believes he will receive in the afterlife for his overall innocence, just as Marion was innocent? Marion's innocence may well be a substitution for his innocence or his wish fulfillment of innocence. Derrida sums up the ribbon incident with a generalization that is memorable; one that connects many of the ideas that have been discussed thus far.

> An event is traumatic or it does not happen, does not arrive. It injures desire, whether or not desire desires or does not desire what happens. It is that which, within desire, constitutes it as the impossible: some outside, irreducibly, as some non desire, some death, and something inorganic, the becoming possible of the impossible as im-possible. Inappropriability of the other (159-60).

Derrida's language here alludes to trauma, which is charged with connotation for a contemporary audience. His emphasis highlights for us that at least as far as Rousseau is concerned, the Marion incident remained lodged in his memory. Events such as this leave the mark of a wound, or open up a wound. For Rousseau, this wound is intimately linked to the subject of the lie, and specifically to this particular lie. The links lead us to such issues on the personal sides as desire, gender issues, personal reputation, character

insights, and judgments, and on the more philosophical side, to gradations of meanings of lie, the role of verification, intention, harm, and use, and of course the general hermeneutical problem of interpretation.

Summary and Conclusions

In summing up, this inquiry has led us to appreciate the complexity of the web of issues that involved in an analysis of truth and lies, particularly with a character as complex and enigmatic as Rousseau. For when we ask, what is the truth or did someone lie, we must immediately add to that, about what, in what sense, and most of all, according to what definition? As this study has shown, there are various layers and types of lies. For instance, we must deal with issues of internal versus external truth and lies, differences between fact, fable and fiction, and issues of verification. We are also naturally drawn into the question of motivation for a character such as Rousseau, which raises psychological issues as well, as Starobinski's study shows. In addition, when we differentiate layers of truth a contemporary analysis becomes more complex, as we may be led to wonder about unconscious as well as conscious motivation. How shall we judge these issues that the person may not even know? What meaning does truth and lies hold in this context? When we differentiate between internal and external truth and lies, we are already in the realm of the issue of authenticity. Subjective truth or internal truth, as one sees a situation, that is, is necessarily coupled with issues of authenticity. Yet, when the subject is one that is as complex, changing, and versatile as Rousseau, a man who is both a writer and a philosophers, and one for whom the role of feeling plays such a pivotal role, we are hard pressed to know how to render a verdict of veracity. Judging the external events is difficult enough, for as Derrida reminds us, we have neither proof of,

nor evidence against, in this case. Judging the more subtle issues of the internal truth or authenticity of a person is far more complex. For, how shall we judge or verify his feelings about an event, and at what point in time?

We will never know for sure the reasons for which this episode with Marion remained lodged in Rousseau's mind, or even the degree of its veracity. We are left with accounts whose complete verification escapes us. We are left with an epistemic gap. We are not, however, left empty-handed. We are left with writings that bear the trace of a wound, for whatever reason, and perhaps haunted memories. We also know the writings give witness to a philosophical inquiry into the nature of lying. We know he also inter-mingled his own example, real or imagined, into the treatise. In addition, excuses, apologies, and confessions as well as remorse and responsibility link the treatise to personal consideration. Rousseau asks us to take him at his word, yet his word is convoluted. That does not mean that there is nothing that we can say about truth and lies with regard to Rousseau. Since Rousseau has been kind enough to elaborate his own treatise on lying, in very limited, narrow respect we can make some judgments. Within the criteria that he himself sets up, we can see that at times he admits to lying, both in his *Confessions* and in the *Reveries*. In the Marion incident particularly, with all the gradations of lying that he brings up, he insists that he did not lie in the hard sense of wanting to harm another human being. Yet, he is guilty, by his own standards, of using someone else for the sake of his own reputation, and since the incident resulted in harm to another person, he is guilty of lying. Further, Rousseau himself sets up a very high standard for himself in taking on the various maxims of truth that are to be a guidepost

for his life, such as that of Juvenal. He is to be committed to truth. He admits that in this regard, he falls short.

Rousseau also asks us for leniency by giving us insight into his character, into the embarrassment felt at being exposed in front of others. He points to this weakness in his character to being the root cause for the lies, and not deliberate intention. We may want to excuse, or grant pardon on this regard, but that does not change the initial verdict, that in certain instances, Rousseau lies. In addition, it is hard to grant him much clemency regarding "malicious intent" in the Marion incident, since he lied not once, but several times about it. Once may be a spontaneous episode of embarrassment, but with several repeated times, the plea for spontaneity wanes. Of course, Rousseau will say that each time he lied about it in near succession he was in front of others and embarrassed. We may at best, grant him very limited clemency for a consistent character flaw.

As another aspect of spontaneity, Rousseau asks us to consider his feelings for Marion as somehow, in the moment, being the cause of the mix-up and lie that wrongfully blamed her for stealing the ribbon. Since feelings are so important to Rousseau's philosophy, he is indeed justified to ask us to consider them with regard to issues of lies. However, in considering his feelings, we must keep in mind the problem of gender issues for Rousseau that has been elaborated. Indeed, regarding his feelings about women, and specifically to Marion, "mix-up" may be a very apt way to describe them. That is, that he liked Marion may be true, but is it the whole truth? As has been pointed out, Rousseau has an attraction/repulsion issue with women. He can tolerate them best, at a distance, or as a supplement to himself. How much the other is really an Other for Rousseau is questionable, particularly regarding women. Is lying about women

something that Rousseau can even take seriously if women are not really Other for him, or if they are so much Other that perhaps they are not considered as part of the universal human? Rousseau, as much of a rebel as he was for his time, did hold very conventional views on women. Yet, regarding this incident, Rousseau does seem to acknowledge that he harmed her reputation and possible future employment. Of this much he is able to differentiate self from other. This much limited-scope judgment we can make. In addition, Rousseau does acknowledge the incident and the lie, if not to others directly, to us his readers, in both his *Confessions* and in his *Reveries*. So though he lied about it, he later tells the truth about it, or so he contends. While the full veracity of the incident is something we do not, and perhaps, cannot know, we still are able to render some judgments regarding it. Even if we take the extreme skeptical position and do not believe the incident ever happened, we can still judge the story itself by the criteria Rousseau has set forth. We can do this precisely because Rousseau has inter-mingled his philosophy and his literature, particularly in the *Reveries*. We are therefore justified to make limited assessments of how well he met his own criteria.

There is one more important criteria regarding truth and harm that must be mentioned. Rousseau also leaves us with a somewhat anthropomorphic notion of truth. Harm done is also to be considered regarding truth itself. Rousseau asks us to consider the very large question of whether truth itself has been harmed in the telling of lies, and therefore by his lies. His own verdict, by his own standards, is that yes, truth is harmed. For all his “excuses” and “explanations”, and even given the role of inner state and feelings with all their ambiguities with respect to truth, Rousseau still holds to some type of absolute value, in the strict sense, of truth. That is, Rousseau may admit that he falls

short, but he falls short precisely because there is something to fall short of, namely, the high bar of truth, that deserves recognition. Perhaps lurking behind this anthropomorphized image of truth stands the only one to whom he will submit to judgment, God. In the end, as the Reveries started, he anticipates a judgment from the only one who can render it accurately and justly. He may have given up on the judgment of others, or perhaps it is best to say he has near-given up. He has learned through time that people can misinterpret him. Writing is a dubious task and may not render the judgment he desires from his readers. However, he still hopes for some possible vindication in that he still writes. As has been pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Rousseau, even in his isolation, has the Other in mind. We may ask with Diderot if Rousseau considers the Other sufficiently, and find him lacking. Yet, we must also, if we take the *Reveries* seriously, consider that Rousseau has more than other people in mind, he has a big Other in mind. We may also wonder if he has an undue confidence in his innocence to stand a future judgment. Yet, the point is that for Rousseau, the final point of all judgment, and specifically for issues of truth and lies, and its verification, for all its complexities and ambiguities, and subjectivity, is not in the hands of fallible humans, but with God. Thus, when Rousseau says that he is writing for himself now, this aspect must be given its due. The "for himself" aspect, and the "standing alone" aspect that he refers to can be interpreted in the context of not only standing apart from society at large, but also as standing alone and by himself in light of a divine judgment. In this additional respect, it is not enough to ask if Truth is harmed by his lies, but if Rousseau himself is harmed. Thus, when Rousseau repeatedly says that his lies have "harmed no one" we already know that they harmed Marion, and that they harmed Truth. What

Rousseau never mentions is that lying harms character, especially when perpetuated habitually and not corrected. At least some attempt must be made to improve character. Thus, it can be concluded that Rousseau did harm to his own character.

In the end our verdict on Rousseau is a mixed one. In some aspects he does lie, and according to other definitions that he uses, perhaps not with malicious intent, at least not with conscious malicious intent. In addition, he sometimes fabricates tales and takes to flights of fantasy. Further, Rousseau has given us insight into various aspects of his personality, which also come into play, as well as his philosophical theory.

In sum then, this chapter has tried to make a case for the complexity and depth of Rousseau's writing on the lie, a depth that includes philosophical, literary, and psychological elements. It has surely raised many more questions than it answers. Yet, we have shown that some assessments and judgments can be made, even if only in a limited and modest sense. Rousseau, and his contemporary interpreters have left us with much to consider regarding lying. On this subject, literary criticism, philosophy, and psychology meet. What's in a lie? A lot more than previously thought. We end our discussion with greater respect and appreciation for the problem.

CHAPTER 3

NIETZSCHE ON TRUTH AND LIES:

PHILOSOPHY IN THE SERVICE OF LIFE

Perhaps no other philosopher has undercut, overturned, and resisted our traditional concepts as has Friedrich Nietzsche. This is especially true for our cherished views on truth and lies. Therefore, we should expect to find a very unique handling of the terms by Nietzsche. Added to this complexity is the fact that Nietzsche uses the terms in several veins and is not always speaking of truth and lies on the same level. Therefore, part of the project of this analysis is to articulate what those different levels are and how they interact. For example, at times, particularly in Nietzsche's earlier writings, truth and lies refers to metaphysical issues, or worldviews in a grand scale. At other times Nietzsche speaks of the physical world and what can be known about it. Still, at other times Nietzsche uses truth and lies in reference to language usage. There is also a social function of the language of truth and lies, namely, that the categorization is a means of survival and communication within the group. From this perspective, truth and lies are defined according to conventional purposes, but the possibility of a metaphysical truth is considered to be untrue, or perhaps even has no truth value, in the grand picture of the world. Further, there is a creative aspect in Nietzsche's writings where truth and lies refers to the individual and self-making, or determination. Truth here can be something akin to authentic self making. In this sense, sterile truth, or traditional normative truth, is not helpful or even wanted. In fact, lies and deception, so far as they are artistically employed, have a positive valence when used to enhance life, by facilitating a break from what Nietzsche terms the herd mentality. In addition, the

dynamic teeter-tottering aspect of life means that there is a becoming aspect to life that will make something taken to be cast in stone to be a lie, in the big picture sense. While it is not the purpose of this study to give an in-depth account of each of these levels, or to solve metaphysical problems, it is the goal of this study to sketch out the complexities of the usage of the terms and their interaction. That is, something can be true on one level for Nietzsche and false on another. This helps explain some of the variation in his thought. In so doing, we will also examine Nietzsche's rhetorical discourse, irony, and figuration.

While it often appears that Nietzsche is shifting from one definition or level to another, and thereby muddying the waters or confusing the reader, part of what must be kept in mind as the goal or task that he set for himself in analysis, is that philosophy should be used in the service of life. It is this element that is consistent in Nietzsche's philosophy and the purpose of all his undercutting. That is, Nietzsche has a somewhat instrumental or pragmatic goal in mind in his philosophizing. In addition, Nietzsche will employ any means necessary to accomplish this goal of serviceability to life, and sometimes even resorts to outlandish comments. His goal of philosophy in the service of life also includes an aspect of augmenting life. That is, it is not only Nietzsche's project to show how previous philosophy served life, but to show that some of the modes of the past philosophy are no longer useful. So with regards to his debunking of the metaphysical philosophy he inherited, he both explains how it was useful and how it is now outdated, or no longer useful. Instead, he aims to offer a new dynamic slant on philosophy. That is, he offers his particular philosophy or philosophical method, as a means to serve life <u>better</u> than the past ones. Since this is his general view and purpose,

any analysis of truth and lies must be set in the context of this goal. Questions that must be kept in mind when reading Nietzsche, then, are questions such as what type of life he has in mind, if and how life is being served better and by what means, and perhaps even, whose life does he thinks is being enhanced by it? That is, sometimes Nietzsche speaks organically and generally of life, and at other times he refers to individual lives.

As with our other authors, there is a core set of concepts that are intrinsic to his philosophy. Therefore, any understanding of truth and lies must be contextualized in the framework of these concepts, as well as the levels mentioned above. To facilitate this undertaking, the main concepts that Nietzsche explores to highlight this serviceable aspect of life will be explored, such as will to power, perspectivism and the role of interpretation, as well as his view of dynamic flux. These concepts are interlinked and intrinsic to understanding his ideas of truth and lies at any given point. They help explain the fluidity of his thought. Will to power is one of his most known and basic concepts. However, it is not as simple as may seem. Will to power, in some sense, is the creative life force wanting to actualize itself and is always acting with other will points that exist both within a single person and throughout the universe. This concept will be explored in some depth in our analysis as it provides a thread through all levels of our analysis, including the issues of gender and truth and lies. For now it suffices to say that will to power or will points are not static objects. Recalling that dynamism, for example, is built into his system, one would expect things to change. Thus, as things shift, what is true and what is false will also shift. Similarly, if perspectivism is important, then we would expect different truths depending on the perspective explicated. In addition, Nietzsche's view of perspectivism is more than just the ordinary benign sense of different

perspectives on one and the thing, for Nietzsche abandons early on the idea of "thingness", or at least does not see that type of discussion as very fruitful. Instead, he tends to view life and the world more in the vein of Heraclitus; that is, life is in a state of constant dynamic flux. Therefore, perspectives and interpretations must come right from the midst of this flux. In addition, truth and falsity would also always be a shifting perspective. Further, there will be many truths and lies and these are more correctly used in their plural in Nietzsche's philosophy. It would therefore be somewhat of a misread to speak of "The Truth" for Nietzsche. That is, it is not so important for Nietzsche to try and nail down what is true and false, for in fact, from his view, this would be an impossible or futile task. In fact, the dynamic teeter-tottering aspect of life means that there is always a becoming aspect of life that will render any attempt to cast truth and lies in stone, a lie in the big-picture sense. But this kind of logical bantering can be dizzying, and even deconstruct itself. Fortunately it is not the end of the road for Nietzsche. Rather, where he wants to end up, what is most important for Nietzsche is how truth and lies are used to either enhance or stifle life.

In addition to the foregoing, there are still more ideas that must be added to the mix in decoding Nietzsche. As with our other authors, Nietzsche also wrote both as a philosopher and a writer, and often incorporated many different styles in his texts. His philosophy is one of the most atypical and non-traditional styles of philosophical writings. He often wrote in aphoristic style and incorporated irony, rhetoric and biting sarcasm into his texts. That is, literary devices are employed in the middle of his philosophy. Similarly, his philosophy is strewn through in some of his more literary exercises, such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For Nietzsche, especially, the literary informs

the philosophical and vice versa. To read Nietzsche only one way, is to miss the boat, especially if one would want to read his writings as one would more traditional philosophical writings. This is because the literary aspects give a peculiar aspect, or spin, to the concepts and levels of his philosophical discourse. In addition, they add to the interpretive problems and generate more paradoxes for the reader. This is especially true for the project of truth and lies. That is, the use of irony itself very often is employed to mean the opposite of what is said. Therefore, a literal read will be false and the opposite will be the truth. However, since the message is not directly stated, there is always the question of whether or not one has got it right. Of course, another difficulty is which passages are to be read ironically, for if it is all irony and reversal, the effect is lost. Also, does irony ever remove totally the nagging possibility of the literal truth? This coupled with Nietzsche's biting sarcasm often results in shocking the reader. However, this is exactly what Nietzsche wants, to destabilize his readers and get them to think, and perhaps act, differently.

We must drill down one more level deeper and arrive at the more specific task of what happens when all these concepts and levels are applied to a gender analysis. We asked earlier whose life is meant to be enhanced by Nietzsche's new philosophy. Does it apply equally to men and women? How are Nietzsche's concepts applied to women? Is he consistent, to the extent that one can even use the term consistent with Nietzsche, with his own philosophical premises? Are there special categories that he reserves for men and women? How are we to read Nietzsche? The answers to these questions will play into any determination of issues of truth and lies. For example, will to power is a key concept in Nietzsche's philosophy. Does this apply equally to men and women or are

there gendered biases? What does it mean, or can we say, that a woman even wills in Nietzsche's system of thought? Similarly, when Nietzsche encourages people to break out of herd-like mentalities and creatively define themselves, does he mean this autonomous authenticity to apply to women also? If not, has he rendered women false or unauthentic, by definition? Does woman even get a chance to name her truths as Nietzsche has named his truths? What are the conundrums that Nietzsche gets himself, and his readers, into when he discusses women? In addition to the philosophical conceptual problems regarding women, there is the literary aspect as wells. In addition, Nietzsche often wrote what appear to be very misogynist sayings on women, such as the famous passage on women and the whip in Zarathustra. How are we to read these passages? Are they to be read ironically or literally? That is, he often spoke with forked tongue veiling his intentions. The outcome of this analysis is that Nietzsche's philosophy cuts as a double-edged sword when applied to women. Like the other authors in this study, Nietzsche has a blind-spot when it came to writing about women. His writings are both problematic in that he sometimes undercuts feminist views, while at the same time there are liberating aspects that at least provide certain keys and ciphers to unearth creative possibilities that will be more serviceable to life, including the lives of women. In sum, though some take Nietzsche to be a misogynist and others find him to be a liberator, my own position is that the interlacing of the philosophical and literary leads one to a more careful middle position. Sometimes he is less ironic and more misogynist and other times more challenging of the traditional structures. When has he told us the truth, when has he lied? Are these his truths, or are these meant to be <u>the</u> truths about women? In the end, even though Nietzsche's writings sometimes give us misogynist

saying regarding women, as Lynne Tierrell says, “they also contain the seeds of a deconstruction of that misogyny” (“Sexual Dualism and Woman’s Self-Creation” (SDWS) in *Feminist Interpretations of Freidrich Nietzsche* (FIFN) 200).

Since this analysis is a highly complex one, in the first part we look at a few of the main concepts of Nietzsche and explore their meaning and inter-connection, and in the second we analyze these concepts, both from a more philosophical as well as in a literary fashion to arrive at our goal, which includes how his philosophy and literary style applies to the problem of truth and lies with respect to women. This analysis also takes the approach of building blocks, that is, of laying one concept and level on top of the other and seeing these connections as part of scaffolding that upholds a complex philosophical house.

PART 1 Conceptual Framework

In beginning this analysis, let us review some of Nietzsche’s basic concepts and sayings. Since the will to power is one of the overarching and most important concepts for Nietzsche, we begin our study we some of these saying from Nietzsche taken from *The Will to Power* (WP). “[Truth] It is a word for the "will to power"” (WP 552 298). In this very short sentence Nietzsche has linked truth directly with will and especially as a will to power. This adds even more to the general outline provided in the introductory paragraphs, for now we have truth in the generic sense as a will that pushes to gain power, as well as specific truths about whose wills will dominate at any given time. In addition, in WP Nietzsche links the idea of a lie, or here what he refers to as a fable, with the idea of knowledge. “The biggest fable of all is the fable of knowledge…” (WP 555 301). Yet, of all our beliefs with respect to knowledge, none is as central to the general

notion of truth as is the belief in ourselves. Nietzsche debunks even this cherished notion. That is, the idea of a subject. This is one of the most radical and devastating of Nietzsche's attacks.

> The fundamental false observation is that I believe it is I who do something, suffer something, "have" something, "have" a quality (WP 549 294).
>
> Is this belief in the concept of subject and attribute not a great stupidity? (WP 550 295).
>
> ...the "subject" is not something that creates, but only a fiction... (WP 552 297).

Yet, there seems to be some basic contradiction or conundrum encountered. He says that there is no subject. Who then is doing the perceiving in the first place to have these false experiences, or at least humanly interpreted experiences? Nietzsche foresaw that question and answers:

> One may not ask: "who then interprets?" for the interpretation itself is a form of the will to power...exists as an effect (556 302).

This answer is not totally satisfying, yet it does make some sense in that one cannot escape the hermeneutical circle and step outside of it. There is no way to let go of our humanness. So part of the circular logic is actually grounded in the “truth” of the enterprise that he proposes, namely, that there is no “Truth” in and of itself. Still, no matter how we view it, it seems we run up against a logical problem, yet Nietzsche calls logic itself into question.

> All our organs of knowledge and our senses are developed only with regard to conditions of preservations and growth. Truth in reason and its categories, in dialectic, therefore the valuation of logic, proves only their usefulness for life, proved by experience--not that something is true (WP 507 275-6).

Thus, it is not only traditional metaphysics that Nietzsche debunks, or deconstructs, but he also dismisses one of its most useful tools, namely reason and logic. What he does admit, however, is that these beliefs served a utilitarian function, namely, that they helped us live better in that they helped us to survive and grow. Therefore, what Nietzsche argues for is a recognition that belief does not imply truth and knowledge.

> The aberration of philosophy is that, instead of seeing in logic and the categories of reason means toward the adjustment of the world for utilitarian end...one believed one possessed in them the criterion of truth and reality (WP 584 314-315).

> The law of contradiction provided the schema: the true world ... cannot contradict itself...This is the greatest error that has ever been committed, the essential fatality of error on earth…(WP 584 315).

What these sayings highlight is that our belief in truth and its related concepts have a purpose, namely, that it is to serve life, to enable us to function in the world. What Nietzsche will do along with this deconstruction, is to somehow show that there is a need for a different way to live and that these old beliefs no longer serve life. In fact, he will point to a different way of being that serves life better. He is already beginning this construction as early as his famous essay on truth and lies where he implicates languages in the process of utility, and also, speaks not only of logic, but of more creative uses of language, such as metaphor and rhetoric. We use our words to describe relations that also affect life. This is part of the creative and more poetic aspect that is the other side of Nietzsche's writings that is aptly summed up in the famous "Truth and Lies" (TL) essay.

> What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms--in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and

> now matter only as metal, no longer as coins (TL 46-47).
>
> ...to be truthful means using the customary metaphors--in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all (TL 47).

Since our language is a convention, it is a lie in some sense. Even if there were things in themselves, our language cannot directly give us access to them, so that in this sense, our truths are also metaphoric lies. They are false in so far as we consider them to be the deepest truth of things. This is one sense in which Nietzsche uses the terms truth and lies. They merely speak to us of relations as we human beings see them. They are a convention to us. Yet, we have forgotten that they are so, and built an entire system out of these lies. Now, once the convention was set, we all agreed to use these words accordingly, and this became "truth". Anyone (or thing) that went against this convention was termed a liar. This is lying in a second sense, against the convention.

And why does man require this principal, or foundation lie in the first place? Nietzsche, of course, gives us an answer. It is one that amounts to a social, psychological reason. In short, humanity lied for existential reasons.

> But because man, out of need and boredom, wants to exist socially, herd-fashion, he requires a peace pact and he endeavors to banish at least the very crudest *bellum omnium contra omnes* (war of all against all) from his world. This peace pact brings with it something that looks like the first step towards the attainment of this enigmatic urge for truth. For now that is fixed which henceforth shall be "truth" that is, a regularly valid and obligatory designation of things is invented, and this linguistic legislation also furnishes the first laws of truth: for it is here that the contrast between truth and lie first originates. The liar uses the valid designation, the words, to make the unreal appear as real: ... He abuses the fixed conventions by arbitrary changes or even by reversals of the names... (TL 44-45).

Thus, out of a social necessity, humanity contrives a system of truth, which Nietzsche terms a "linguistic legislation", and this is how we all come to get along in the

world, in so far as we see the world the same way. Otherwise, utter chaos would ensue, as the designation of terms is quite arbitrary and unrelated to things as they really are. This is the basic answer that Nietzsche provides. It is important to note that the linguistic answer follows suit with the prior sketch of the world. That is, the attributes that we think are in things, only serve to point out relations from a human perspective. When we speak, we speak from ourselves, and even perhaps, of ourselves. Language becomes the conventional vehicle for this communication. However, language can be used both conventionally and creatively. The sword can cut both ways. There is a sense in which all language lies, however, not all senses of lying are negative for Nietzsche. When they are used creatively to help us live better, more authentically, even more powerfully, then they take on a positive valence for Nietzsche.

PART II Readings of Nietzsche

In this section we explore various secondary literature on Nietzsche as it relates to the concepts of our inquiry, and in particular as they connect to truth and lies. Again, the main concepts that are explored are those of perspectivism, interpretation, and flux, and from the literary perspective, rhetoric and irony, and finally, their conjoined implications for women. It is important to emphasize that both from the more traditionally philosophical and analytical side, as well as from the more literary side, Nietzsche's writings and use of concepts exhibit certain paradoxes and conundrums. How we use these aporias will be of prime interest as we lead up to the case for creative possibility and especially as it pertains to women.

Perspectivsm is one of the most important of Nietzsche's concepts. Arthur Danto succinctly highlights both its centrality to Nietzsche and to the conundrum that it poses.

> Does perspectivism entail that Perspectivism itself is but a perspective, so that the truth of this doctrine entails that it is false? Would this be what he spoke of in The *Birth of Tragedy* as logic turning round on itself and biting its own tail? (Danto 80)

That is, is perspectivism to be taken as truth, or is it itself just one of many perspectives? If it is absolutely true then it becomes an absolute universal and no longer, in a certain sense, perspectival. Yet, such a conclusion can only be reached through its own perspectivism. On the other hand, if perspectivism is just one perspective among many, then it opens the door to other perspectives that may not be perspectival, but that may be universal. Either way a conundrum is encountered. Nietzsche might be laughing at us and asking why, if we debunked the idea of logic and the laws of non-contradiction, are we spending so much time worrying about them instead of getting on with the business of living? Perhaps the truth, after all, is that uncertainty is the only truth there is in life, and we have to live with it, even to the extent that we have to create our lives.

Either way, Nietzsche reminds us that our very concept of world is enclosed in our own perspectival views.

> As though there would be a world left over once we subtracted the perspectival! (Unpublished Notes 705 Danto 76).

This brings us to the long famous passage by Nietzsche, that Danto comments upon, where one by one, all of our typical concepts and beliefs about reality fall.

> If we no longer believe in the effecting subject, the belief in the effecting thing collapses, as well as the reciprocal action of cause and effect between those phenomena that we call things...The Ding an Sich also collapses: for this is basically the conception of the Subject-in-itself. Once we understand that the subject is an invention, the opposition between Ding an sich and appearance becomes untenable--so the concept of appearance collapses. When the subject is given up, so is the object it works upon...If we give up the belief in subject and object, then the concept of substance goes too--and, as a consequence, all those other modifications, e.g. material, "mental", hypothetical entities, the eternity and

> immutability of substance [Stoff], etc. We are free from substantialism (Nachloss 540-541 Danto 108).

But where does this freedom from substantialism leave us? We are now left in a world where, as Nietzsche says, "we never hit upon facts" (NL 673 Danto 127). So what do we do? We live, and live all the more fully would be Nietzsche's answer. Despite the tragedy of knowledge, we must live more vitally. We must make it so.

Danto is not the only one who has pointed out the problem of Nietzsche's perspectivism. Among the list are those such as Ceneth. In his article "Nietzsche, Relativism, and Truth" (NRT), Ceneth examines the conundrum and links it to Nietzsche's view of interpretation and of the general flux of life.

> The problem faced by any perspectival theory of truth is that it is liable to criticism that it commits a version of the fallacy of relativism—that, in claiming that all truth is perspectival, the claimant implicitly evokes a universal theory of truth, in that, in order for this theory itself to be true, it must establish at least one universally true proposition that all truth is perspectival. Such a theory, therefore, by its own measure, cannot be regarded as true, since either it establishes this one universal truth or the theory itself may also only be a perspective (NRT 35).

This is backed by Nietzsche's persistent statements that human beings bring interpretation to the world and that Nietzsche denies the possibility of "correct perception" (NRT 37). Further, according to Ceneth: "Nietzsche's recognition of this ontological chaos or flux is the essential element of his theory of truth" (39). By this emphasis on flux, Ceneth adds a more Heraclitan reading of Nietzsche. In addition, he emphasizes the role of drives in Nietzsche's theory and how they relate to perspectives.

> It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all other drives to accept as a norm ($481, p267, 41).

> There are no facts, everything is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive, what is relatively most enduring is—our opinions (327 42).

If Nietzsche can be said to hold that the world is constant flux and that this is the correct view of it, then in some sense he would be positing a metaphysical position, although he would be closer to Heraclitus than to standard metaphysicians with their view of essences and stable things. In addition, it would imply that this is the correct perspective, the true one, even if not much more can be said, as yet, about it. In addition, it would imply that somehow human reason can transcend perspectives in order to grasp or intuit, or at least reason, the flux of ultimate reality. Such a position seems very anti-Nietzschean even though it is the logical outcome of this type of thought. Or, if we take Nietzsche at his word, that there is no true or correct perspective and all is interpretation, then his own view, namely perspectivism, might be incorrect. Another conundrum would arise if we take ultimate flux seriously, then flux might at some point stabilize and allow for the traditional metaphysical view of stability, at least for a time. In either of these cases the problem of perspectivism is not solved. But then again, any metaphysical system will have its flaws. It is a question of which one seems the most accurate and which flaws can be best tolerated. Or, once again, we may be ensnaring ourselves in logical traps and be reminded that Nietzsche quite forcefully saw logic itself as an error, as a fable. Nietzsche might ask us, if he debunked the idea of logic and the laws of non-contradiction, then why are we spending so much time worrying about them instead of getting on with the business of living? Perhaps the truth, after all, is that uncertainty is the only truth there is in life, and we have to live with it, to create with it.

Similar to Ceneth, Cox comments on the importance of perspectivism for Nietzsche, however, he adds the concept of interpretation as being closely connected to the role of perspective. In his book *Nietzsche: Naturalism And Interpretation* (NNI) Cox

turns to many of Nietzsche's works, as for instance *The Genealogy of Morals* to point out Nietzsche's basic position "that there is only a perspective seeing…only a perspective knowing...and that the result of various perspectives is that it opens up to particular "affective interpretations" (NNI 112). Cox cites many passages that attest to the fact that in addition, "the language of perspective is closely associated with the language of interpretation" in Nietzsche. (For example GS 357, 374; WP 5, 556, 565, 590, 616, 617, 678, 804). And Cox also cites from a Nietzsche Note from 1885-88 that "previous interpretations have been evaluations by virtue of which we can survive in life" (WP 616). Again, Cox emphasizes that the main reason, or function that these perspectival interpretations serve, is that they are used in the service of life. Here it is survival that is at stake and in other places interpretation broaches into aesthetic dimensions to enhance life. Since there are always interpretations and reworking of interpretations, or a revaluing, there is the possibility that interpretation is endless in that it is an ongoing process and never reaches a complete and final *telos* of absolute truth. Since the role of interpretation is so prevalent in Nietzsche's writings, and so coupled with the idea of value and meaning, Cox proposes that we should read Nietzsche's "perspective' language within the broader bounds of a general theory of interpretation (NNI 114). He goes on to add that interpretation is also implicated in one of Nietzsche's key concepts, that of will to power.

> He [Nietzsche]goes on to propose that the world in which we find ourselves is a world of struggle and that this struggle is among interpretations, each of which seeks to overwhelm [*uberwaltigen, ie berwindern*] others by incorporating their terms into its own and articulating these terms according to its own system (NNI 15).
>
> Nietzsche goes so far as to identify "interpretation" with "the essence of life, its will to power…the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, form-giving

> forces that give new interpretations and direction… (cf BGE 259, WP 643, in NNI 116).

The desired outcome of this struggle for each interpretation is to expand and seek to increase power and control over its environment (NNI 117). That we see from a human perspective is not something new that Nietzsche invented. What Nietzsche adds, however, is an interpretive theory that cuts both within the human species, and even, in each individual. Rather than a unified human viewpoint,

> Nietzsche argued that the human species itself does not have a unified world view but rather is divided into a host of antagonistic "perspectives" or "interpretations" eg a master slave, Dionysian and Christian…they designate significantly different modes of perception, desire, cognition, evaluation, and action that compos different forms of life (NNI 119-120).

In addition to thinking that human beings have different interpretations and perspectives on life and the world, Nietzsche also thought that individuals can change their perspectives. What is more radical, as we have seen, is that he debunked the traditional notion of the subject, so that it is an improper question, in some sense, to ask who is doing the interpreting. One reason for this deconstruction or de-centering of the subject is precisely due to this struggle and plurality of interpretations and perspectives. That is, the struggle of power over various interpretations and perspectives also occurs within the subject, or more accurately is the subject. The human subject, then, is not an atomic unity, but rather "an amalgamation of competing impulses and drives" (NNI 125). The unity that we think is so solid as to make up a subject is in fact only a very loose and relative unity.

> The unity of the subject is that of a disposition, merely a probability that groups together a range of more or less similar and more or less connected activities for the purpose of simplification and calculation … (NNI 126).

> The disposition that compose them is itself made up of micro dispositions- what Nietzsche variously calls “drives’ (Triebs), “desires” (Begierden), “instinct” (Instinkte), “powers” (Machte), “forces” (Krafe), “impulses” (Reize), “passions” (Leidenschaftern) , “feelings” (Gefuhlen), “affects” (Affekete), “pathos” (Pathos) and so on. (NNI 126-127).

If we still press on to ask who interprets, then we must answer that “It is our needs that interpret the world: our drives and their For and Against” (WP 481; cf BGE 6), or again, “our affects” (WP 254, D119, BGE 187, 556) (NNI 127-128). However, even here we must be careful and not think of drives and affects as static substances, but rather as force points. Nietzsche borrowed from the new science of his day the idea of dynamic quanta, which fit nicely with his more Heraclitan view of the flux or becoming aspect of the world. Thus it can be said that these interpretive affects function more like “dynamic quanta in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quantas.” (NNI 129). Therefore what we have in various interpretations and perspectives are “aggregates of affects in which some dominate and others are subordinate” (NNI 129). Still, a fundamental question arises since there is no soul or substantial subject in this view.

> But what is it that unifies a particular system and that makes a particular set of needs dominant? Every interpretation and perspective is oriented toward the preservation and enhancement of a specific level of organization in life from the individual to the group, the species, and life as a whole…Thus, on the one hand we always encounter perspectives within individual subjects, while, on the other hand, individual subjects are aggregates of these perspectives and their forms of life (NNI 130).

> The unity of the self is the result of the ordering, organizing, and subordinating power of the dominant affective interpretation (NNI 132).

That is, what we call a subject or the self is the result of such a process at any given time. While this process is somewhat antagonistic, and Nietzsche often describes it in aggressive terms, he also describes it artistically to give another slant as to how these drives are held together to constitute a subject and how the ordering process takes place.

It is not so much a methodology that Nietzsche employs, but rather through the use of aesthetic metaphors the idea is conveyed.

> To "give style" to one's character…a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye (GS 290, NNI 134).

Thus, the process is not simply a battle of wills but has a creative aspect, as an artist figures out how to creatively fit together pieces or even to invent. Through this creativity the person is also given flesh in order to enhance the organism in a life process. As important as this aspect is, however, it must be mentioned that the problem does not instantly go away with an artistic read. For, one can still ask, who is it that does the fitting and decides what is more important? Again, Nietzsche would say we are on the wrong track since "the subject does not have these various perspectives and interpretations; rather, they are what the subject is"(NNI 137). Yet, this in itself is not sufficient. The various aspects within must somehow work together or work out their differences for the sake of exerting and gaining more power in the world. Cox suggests something like this.

> The force of the organization [subject political] resides in the collective power of its members, in their ability to struggle in a particular direction and yet be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances by drawing upon the capacities of individual members or subgroups (NNI 138).

While this is a partial answer, it still does not answer why these forces stick together for an entire lifetime and why they do not, somehow, strive to spin off and reassemble themselves with other forces from other subjects precisely because they might be more consonant with their own particular needs and desires and thus be better able to exert their own particular powers. Of courses this is precisely what happens between

individuals and groups, they regroup according to interests to promote themselves; yet it does not happen that the subject ceases to be a subject. Evolutionary survival concerns might come into play, but this argument remains weak unless further work is done to support it. It would have to prove either that it is impossible for such a thing to happen, for the human being to come apart and reform with other parts of other individuals, or why although remaining a possibility, it does not happen. Why the individual subject remains that particular subject, however much it may change over time, remains a mystery. All Cox can say, following Nietzsche, is that "interpretation goes all the way down and all the way up", and that "everything is subjective" and "even this is interpretation" (NNI 139). Cox summarizes the outcome of Nietzsche's position as follows.

> If interpretation can never be brought to an end, it is simply because there is nothing to interpret…at bottom everything is already interpretation.
> Thus the doctrine of "becoming" holds that there is being only according to an interpretation…will to power (NNI 167).

That is, interpretation itself is the creative life process. Becoming, and what becomes at any given moment is understood as that which is considered to be the best constellation of forces to serve life better. At least, that is the attempt made, and the process is endless.

There is another similar important theorist to consider in this philosophical reading of Nietzsche that adds to our understanding of Nietzsche's conceptual framework, and that is the work of Gregory Stack. Stack continues with the idea of perspectivism, but adds to it an emphasis on the dynamic process that compliments the work of Cox and puts a different slant on it. His main ideas are contained in the article, "Nietzsche and Perspectival Interpretation" (NPI).

> The assumption that each dynamic entity interprets "the world" from its own fluctuating perspective is at the heart of Nietzsche's theory of knowledge (NPI 221).

> …he embraced the dynamic conception of "matter" that conceived of it as comprised of centers of force and applied it to all entities, including man…Nietzsche appropriated the general theory of force-centers and conceived of both inorganic and organic "force-points" in terms of "will-points" and characterized man as a dynamic plurality comprised of conflating "forces" that strive for "self-governing"….And of course, Nietzsche's interpretation of the underlying nature of reality in terms of "will to power" is intimately related to his persepectival theory of knowledge (NPI 222).

Similarly, Stack takes seriously the idea that for Nietzsche, the subject is a constellation of such forces and comes to conclusions that echo Cox.

> But the conception of a subject is itself a fiction. And the consequent distinction between subject and object is fallacious.
> …there is a rhythmic process of increasing and decreasing "power" in which there is a dialectical relationship between what he typically refers to as "constellations of force"…(NPI 226).

> The answer to the question, "Who interprets?" is "our affects". Since the individual is conceived of as a plurality; each individual is subject to numerous value-interpretations, to competing "affecta" and therefore, to competing interpretation of the surrounding world (NPI 229).

Again, what looks like a unity in the subject is really more like a plurality coming together. Again, this gives more justification to Nietzsche's rejection of the idea of the subject. Similarly, the purpose of our interpretations and the result of our meaning-making capacity is that it is "for the sake of life and life-end enhancement" (NPI 229). Thus our interpretive abilities are for the sake of survival and for living better. They fulfill, at least, a practical, utilitarian, and instrumental value. Stack speculates on the connection to Heraclitus.

> Perhaps because he was committed to a Heraclitean notion of the flux of reality, he was strongly attracted to emerging dynamic theories of the natural world (NPI 231).

In this view of the world there is a constant play of force fields battling for power. This is also the idea behind causality.

> The regular sequence of phenomena that we ostensibly misinterpret as 'causality" is actually generated by "a power relationship between two or more forces" (NPI 231).

The power relations play out as such because it is beneficial for them to cohere in this manner, a manner that gives them a display of power and the possibility of exerting power. However, this does not mean that they are stable entities. Power relations can change and shift and these shifts are more prominent in the human being. Yet, "even in the realm of the inorganic there is presumably a "perspectival view"" (NPI 232). This, coupled with his non-substantialist view of the world and its dynamic flux, leads Stack to call Nietzsche's view a type of "radical process theory of reality" (NPI 232). It is a process view also in the sense that there is no teleology, no strict end-goal or purpose. However, this is not to say that it is all meaningless striving, since there is some type of guiding principle which Stack defines in the following manner.

> However, there is a conatus in reality, a striving towards "growth" that appeals to us as if it were teleological (NPI 233).

Again, these force relations come together for the purpose of better exerting power. Hence, even if there is a certain battle for power, it is not without some cooperation, for otherwise there would be no coming together at all. Yet, a certain paradox ensues.

> It is assumed that the "will to power" is "the ultimate ground and character of all change".
> The will to power is said to be "the last fact that we come down to" or else is the "primordial fact' that is the basis of all reality (NPI 233).

Taken in this manner, the will to power and the idea of perspecitivsm due to the dynamic flux of the world and play of forces takes us right back to our original paradox. It seems

to allude to an ontology and metaphysical view of the world, albeit a dynamic Heracletian view. It also seems to espouse this view as an absolute truth, as the way the world is in itself and how me must, or should, interpret it. However, Nietzsche is just as emphatic that "there are no facts," only "value interpretations" (NPI 234). Even in the sciences, including the dynamic theory he embraced, there are "cognitive metaphors" and "regulative fictions" (NPI 236). Due to their anthropomorphic nature, not even the hard sciences can give us "Truth".

Moreover, Stack admits that there is a certain circularity in Nietzsche's thinking.

> He ends, finally, in a circularity: the hypothetical metaphysical principle of wills to power is itself a perspectival interpretation of "reality,' and it serves as the foundation for the perspectival theory of knowledge (NPI 240).

However, even though Nietzsche's philosophy has in some sense undermined his own position, it is undermined only to the extent that we are looking for absolute certainty and truth. This, however, does not mean that he does not think he has stumbled upon something useful, something that can assist life.

> I believe that Nietzsche sees the provisional hypothesis of the will to power as an opening up of a new field of possibilities, a radical break with the past, or a post-teleological unleashing of energy that can be used to create "human meaning" for the earth, a thesis that allows for the "spiritual" transformation of the world and human nature itself… (NPI 239).

In order to understand this creative possibility and not stay on the viscous circle that logic imposes on us from this vantage-point, we must now move to understand other aspects of Nietzsche's writings, by looking at Nietzsche's literary style.

In his book, *Allegories of Reading* (AR), Paul de Man focuses on a rhetoric class that Nietzsche taught while at the University of Basel, and especially points out the importance of topes and metaphors for Nietzsche. As de Man points out, the importance

of the trope is highlighted by the fact that "The trope is not a derived, marginal, or aberrant form of language but the linguistic paradigm par excellence" (AR 105). He quotes Nietzsche from the lectures on this point.

> Language is itself the result of purely rhetorical tricks and devices...Language is rhetoric, for it only intends to convey a doxa (opinion), not an episteme (truth)...Tropes are not something that can be added or subtracted from language at will; they are its truest nature (AR 105).

This again points out the “lying” or “trickery” aspect of language. De Man further illustrates by commenting on the famous "moving army of metaphors" passage to elaborate his point.

> What is being forgotten in this false literalism is precisely the rhetorical, symbolic quality of all language...It is the naive belief in the proper meaning of the metaphor without awareness of the problematic nature of its factual, referential foundation (AR 111).

However, this problem of the referent, along with the denial of a logic of contradiction, pushes language to its extreme deconstruction, and de Man concludes that “the possibility of language to perform is just as fictional as the possibility for language to assert” (AR 129). Yet, at the same time, Nietzsche’s writings want to reassert “the active performative function of language” and want to persuade the reader even as it deconstructs figural speech (AR 131). Thus, according to de Man, language, and especially Nietzsche’s writings, will always be “hiding” something, always caught between, always perplexing, and always proposing difficulties in interpretation. As de Man summarizes,

> the discovery that what is called "rhetoric" is precisely the gap that becomes apparent in the pedagogical and philosophical history of the term. Considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative but when considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance. Rhetoric is a text in that it allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding. The aporia

> between performative and constative language is merely a version of the aporia between trope and persuasion that both generates and paralyzes rhetoric and thus gives it the appearance of a history (AR 131).

Yet, this gap, this space of perplexity can also be a creative space. Especially when considering the writings of Nietzsche, the use of language is meant precisely to confound the reader, or more accurately, to stun the reader, to shake the reader up, to perhaps a new way of interpreting and hence, to a new way of living. These possibilities are considered with the remainder of our authors.

Douglas Thomas, in his book *Reading Nietzsche Rhetorically* (RNR) thinks that "Nietzsche's understanding of interpretation, … can and should be read as a rhetorical system of thought which ultimately effects a return to style as a constitutive element of representation itself" (RNR 2). Thomas argues, "rhetoric has a relationship to the world that is marked by overflowing possibility, wherein the experience of one's emotions and imagination, rather than the empirical experience of "historical accuracy", is the guiding force" (RNR 4). If Nietzsche uses rhetoric, then it follows, Thomas contends, that "one cannot expect to read Nietzsche in order to "get" him. It is frequently the very process of engaging the thought, the idea, the text, or the language that constitutes an argument itself (RNR 5). Therefore, "What Nietzsche demands of his readers is an interaction with his texts that goes beyond any surface level of meaning to the level of feeling and of mood, and of emotion (RNR 5). So it is in this regard that that Nietzsche's style is especially harmonious with his philosophical preferences for perspectives and interpretation. For "perspective is a rhetorical rather than a metaphysical construct…" (RNR 12). "The very nature of rhetoric is danger itself" (12). So Thomas argues that "Nietzsche's insights into rhetorical theory, then, should be reevaluated as means to offer a sense of therapeutic

social discourse…" (RNR 39). The end result is that the artistic aspect of language is a necessary part of the therapy. Therefore, lies, or a certain amount of artful deception, can function in a positive sense. As Nietzsche writes, and Thomas reminds us, "truth kills" and "everything which is good and beautiful depends on illusion" (RNR 107).

To sum up, Thomas emphasizes Nietzsche's rhetorical side since

> …a rhetorical way of thinking is a vision of the world that embraces art, danger, and decidability, and forces one to see the beauty and ugliness of the world at once. It is a way of seeing that risks everything certain, calculable, regular, and reliable. As endorsement, Nietzsche asks us to change the way we live in the world, to embrace art and illusion, to advocate risk and danger, to place ourselves beyond good and evil. But he also recognized repeatedly, that we cannot do so without incorporating many of the "necessary fictions" of language, grammar, and even truth itself (RNR 174).

Thomas' emphasis on the potential and dangerous aspects of rhetoric is consonant with Nietzsche's idea of the world in dynamic flux and its creative aspect. Its artistic possibility allows us, and challenges us in a coaxing manner, to change, to serve life better. Yet, his summary acknowledges that this cannot be done without recourse to lies, or as he calls them, "necessary fictions". We need the ideas of language, grammar, and yes, even truth. However, what is important is to note that these concepts no longer dominate as they did before. Rather, they are now subordinated and in the service of creative life. If and how we answer the challenge is up to us.

A specific part of this challenge is how it affects women. We find that truth, lies, and issues of authenticity play out differently in Nietzsche's system of thought as they apply to women. Does the philosophy hold together or are there more contradictions and aporias to contend with? Do the same concepts, such as will to power, function in the same way when applied to women? For this analysis we now turn to the feminist theorists.

In turning to the works of feminist authors, I turn mostly to the work of Frances Nesbitt Oppel. She offers a view that combines the more literary aspects of Nietzsche's thought with the gender issues. However, as much as I agree with a great deal of her work, sometimes it is overly optimistic regarding Nietzsche's view of women. To balance this view, I also interlace the work of Carol Diethe on some critical issues of Nietzsche and women. However, Diethe's work sometimes is too harsh on Nietzsche and does not take ample consideration of Nietzsche's use of irony. Ironically, both of them agree about one of Nietzsche's most infamous misogynist passages, that of the whip in Zarathustra. In *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* (NG), Frances Nesbitt Oppel offers a unique and somewhat controversial perspective on Nietzsche's position and view of women. Her general thesis is as follows:

> Nietzsche's apparent misogyny is part of his overall strategy to demonstrate that our attitudes towards sex gender are thoroughly cultural, are often destructive of our own potential as individuals and as a species, and may be changed. What looks like misogyny, may be understood as part of a larger strategy whereby "woman-as-such" … is shown to be a product of male desire, a construct (NG 1).

Embedded in her thesis is the idea that "as woman is erased, so too is her dichotomous counterpart, man-as-such" (NG 1). When both are erased then what is left? What is left is an empty space. Yet this space is not to be taken in a nihilistic fashion, but rather, it provides "a potential new horizon" (NG 1). That is, the space can be a creative space in which to rethink our attitudes and constructs of gender.

Rather than take Nietzsche literally, Oppel suggests that we read Nietzsche's passages on women ironically, particularly since this is consonant with much of his writing. Oppel also appeals to Nietzsche's Basel lectures where he "defines irony narrowly as the trope whereby "the words say exactly the opposite of what they seem to say" (RL 63, Oppel 89). Again, irony, especially irony defined in these terms, implies a

type of lie in that the opposite of what is said is meant. This is also why it is a mistake to separate the philosophical from the literary reading of Nietzsche. A logical analysis can only point out where the paradoxes and conundrums are. In order to go further, a literary read is necessary where the tone, the type of language used, and the style, is also analyzed. This combination brings together a more fruitful endeavor, for in the end, the paradoxes and conundrums are actually sharpened and even extended. In addition, creative possibilities emerge that were not seen before. Thus, instead of finding the contradictions in Nietzsche highly problematic, Oppel suggests viewing them as rich creative ground. "I prefer to think of the doubleness of Nietzsche's texts as expression of his finely-tuned and almost pervasive irony, a literary style that is both witty and subversive…Self-contradictions are only apparent and usually strategic, they serve to make us question the text and read carefully" (NG 10). Oppel suggests that what Nietzsche in fact does with his writings is create an agon, a power struggle. That is, Nietzsche and pushes his idea of "will to power". Perhaps the real hope, according to Oppel, is not only to engage the reader, but that the reader might even take the upper hand. It is as though Nietzsche's texts are meant to bite their reader and, as an act of aggression, the hope is that the reader will bite back. Thus, Nietzsche's texts are designed to evoke a visceral reaction in the reader.

As demanding a bodily response this includes a gendered response, and one that is often characterized by metaphors of war for Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, love and hate are two sides of the same coin in male/female dynamics. "Has my definition of love been heard? … Love in its means, war at bottom, the deadly hatred of the sexes" (EH "Why I

Write Such Great Books" 5, GM 11). This particularly has ramifications for questions of truth.

> Because different viewpoints clash, and Nietzsche's texts often cast this metaphorically as a struggle between the sexes, interpretation becomes a matter of participation in the erotic agon … (NG 12).

Lest anyone think that Oppel is too optimistic regarding Nietzsche, she reminds us that there is a certain condemnation of woman in Nietzsche that is hard to rectify, such as when he says that women "put on something" even when they take off everything, and that "woman is so artistic" (GS 361 NG 22-23).

Yet, it may be argued, as Nietzsche himself reminds us, that man created the image of woman that he wants and woman forms herself accordingly. Thus, as we are told by the sage in *The Gay Science* (GS), "Will is the manner of men, willingness that of women." (GS 68 NG 26). This one statement brews much trouble for Nietzsche, and for his readers, for though it goes along with the idea of an eternal feminine and the traditional role of women as passive and willing to please, it presents a major problem for Nietzsche's basic idea of will to power as being at the heart of existence. In some sense it contradicts the basic paradigm, or at best is a subdivision of it, for if man is the one who does the willing, then woman is an aberration of the human in this regard, since she does not will, but merely is willing. Yet, a case could be made that woman wills covertly precisely by pretending to be willing and by playing the part of the eternal feminine. Thus she gets her way, or gains the upper-hand, and thereby exercises power. Even if this reading is favored, it must still be admitted that with regard to willing, woman only wills in a secondary fashion and never openly. However, the result is that such training for women playing their role results in resentment and "the eternal hostility between the sexes" (NG 29). Still, there are those women who resist. Nietzsche refers to them as the

emancipated women. Yet, instead of praising them, he sides with the eternal feminine side and says point blank, "there is stupidity in this movement" (BGE 239 NG 30). Thus it seems that woman is damned if she plays the game and damned more-so if she does not play the assigned role. This statement is read more as a misogynist statement by Diethe, who argues that while Nietzsche condemned ideas of the herd-like societal notions of the feminine, he also left women no real wiggle room, since he often sided with traditional ideas of woman and a nurturing mothering role over against any emancipation movements for a variety of reasons, including his own eugenic project.

> "Emancipation of women" – that is the instinctive hatred of the abortive woman, who is incapable of giving birth, against the woman who is turned out well (Ecco Homo, "Why I write such Good Books": 5).
>
> To be sure, there are enough imbecile friends and corrupters of women among the scholarly asses of the male sex who advise woman to defeminize herself in this way and to imitate all the stupidities with which "man" in Europe, European "manliness", is sick, probably even of reading the newspapers and talking about politics...they even want to turn women into free thinkers and scribblers,...Almost everywhere one ruins her nerves...and makes her more hysterical by the day and more incapable of her first and last profession – to give birth to strong children (BGE, VII: 239).
>
> Has my answer been heard to the question how one cures a woman – "redeems" her? One gives her a child. Woman needs children, a man is for her always only a means: thus spake Zarathustra (Ecco Homo, "Why I Write Such Great Books" 5).

According to Diethe, "the notion of breeding (*Zucht*) is never far away in these arguments; feminism is seen as both degenerate, in breeding terms, and life-denying" (46). Due to these types of misogynist, and perhaps even racist, sayings, Nietzsche cannot ever be totally exonerated. However, Diethe here misses some of the ironies of the texts in that Nietzsche is also laughing at the European males and their herd-like stupidities, as he calls them. So, at least part of what he is chastising is the idea of getting women to do the same stupid things that men do. However, whether or not this leaves

them real freedom, is another matter. It seems that when Nietzsche is speaking of ideas of a future race or *Ubermensch*, he seems to have more traditional ideas of women in mind, since their biology is necessary to the process. However, even in some of these misogynist sayings, Diethe points out that even Nietzsche stresses that these are "his answers", but she also says, this still "does not remove the jeer from Nietzsche's remarks" (66).

As asserted above, Nietzsche's texts cut both ways. Some are more redeeming and some more misogynistic, but usually there is some combination of the two and the sting can never be removed. Ironically, many of the women closest to Nietzsche, and those influenced by him, and even of his generation, "were prepared to overlook his misogynic remarks" (Diethe 165). That is, they often remained more loyal to him than he was to them. Diethe offers several examples of this loyalty and overlooking of some of his more troublesome sayings in women such as Braun (153) and Stocker (162), for instance. However, in someone like Dohm, and in her literary writings, Diethe says, there was another voice, who spoke thus:

> Oh Nietzsche! You high, priestly mind, profound knower and yet completely ignoramus...on simple matters of truth! You can talk with God and gods, with the stars, the sea, with minds and spirits...You just cannot talk with or about women... (*Nietzsche un die Fraune* 543 in Diethe 147).

Diethe offers a rationale for the acceptance of the more difficult passages for women. On the balance of it, for many of his women adherents, the gains from Nietzsche's writings outweighed the negatives. The gain could be summed up as "the liberalizing effect he had exerted on their whole lives" (165).

If we take another look at Nietzsche, we may take an even more sympathetic reading and say that the only way woman can really gain power is by playing the

willingness game, so therefore it is smarter for women to do so in order to exert power, than play at the power game straight out and lose. Or still, Nietzsche may be building an insurmountable tension in his readers, particularly his women readers, so that they will confront the situation and do something about the conventions. This would certainly be a disruptive intent of the text and consonant with Oppel's thesis, one that would be consonant with what Diethe has termed the more liberalizing aspect of Nietzsche's texts. Yet it leaves open the question of how they are to do this if men dominate in the power game. Still, what is most important is that the irony or paradox of at least some of the texts, and even their no win dead ends, opens up the text to a variety of readings that are not obvious if Nietzsche is read literally without noticing his use of irony and metaphor.

Oppel tells us that Nietzsche highlights the gender problem, or problem between the antithesis "man and woman" by using "the whole bag of rhetorical tricks" (35). Also,

> He "presents" the problem to us by mimicking the contemporary attitudes and voices on the subject, but the very excessiveness of the presentation indicates that there is something wrong—that there is, in fact, a "problem", and a "great stupidity" (35).

So it seems that Oppel views at least one of Nietzsche's roles as being a type of jester or sacred clown for society that points out in a humorous manner some of the more absurd aspects and beliefs about both the individual and society. If that is the case then the intended result is to get us to see how absurd these ideas are and to change them. What is more, there is then a certain amount of theatricality at work in the text, a performance for the audience, one that he hopes will work in that he thinks it will incite the needed action. For example, consider Aphorism 59.

> We artists – When we love a woman, we easily conceive a hatred for nature on account of all the repulsive natural functions to which every woman is

> subject…The human being under the skin is for all lovers a horror and unthinkable, a blasphemy against God and love (Oppel 93).

But as Oppel points out, we know what Nietzsche thinks of God, and Nietzsche's writings were often thought of as blasphemous, so blaspheming God does not strike one as a bad thing in Nietzsche's writings. In addition, Nietzsche typically favors nature and uses nature metaphors as life-giving affirmations, as for instance in his essay on history and its uses and abuses. So perhaps the reader is being nudged in a play of irony to reject the common ideas of woman as one would that of God and to favor nature, even woman's natural functions. What Nietzsche might be doing, somewhat as a court jester, is showing the ridiculous ways people think about women in society. If we look, embedded in this discourse regarding the way things are amongst the sexes is an acknowledgement of its prejudice and stupidity. Nietzsche may simply be stating the convention, the herd mentality of gender relations. In addition, he may be challenging us to question the status quo and change it.

Oppel continues, and after her analysis of Aphorism 363 finds that "the speaker admits that maybe, just maybe, a man might want to give love rather than take it" (NG 99). However, a problem arises since the man would not be acting manly in the traditional manner. While the passage does not seem to worry about a woman losing her identity in love, since this is what she is supposed to do, the passage does show concern for what would happen to a man if he gave himself away in love. Further, a certain philosophical problem arises, since logically, "if both renounce themselves, then man and woman would disappear" (NG 100). A gap would result, a hole, a space, and who would be left? Thus, the impetus seems to be for the woman to disappear and the man to remain. Yet, if woman disappears, who is it that the man is in relationship with?

Obviously, it can only be himself. He becomes somewhat carnivorous feeding off the woman until she totally disappears and he becomes all that he can be as a result of taking her over, engulfing her. Oppel, however, is able to read in this passage, still other possibilities.

> In fact, the woman in this aphorism is Zarathustra's ubermensch, the one who puts herself, her identity at risk and "goes under" (NG 100).

She allows herself the risk, the danger of going under, and this going under is something applauded by Zarathustra. In fact, it is something suggested or required for the new hero, the ubermensch. Oppel suggests that a woman losing herself in relationship might have overtones of this possibility, especially since this is not the only reference that Nietzsche makes to renunciation. In fact, Oppel highlights that the "equal will to renunciation" deplored by the speaker of the above aphorism is a source of astonished admiration in Daybreak 532, where "Love makes the same." (NG 101)

> There is no more confused or impenetrable spectacle than that which arises when both parties are passionately in love with one another and both consequently abandon themselves and want to be the same as one another; in the end neither knows what he is supposed to be imitating, what dissimulating, what pretending to be; the beautiful madness of this spectacle is too good for the world and too subtle for human eyes (NG 101).

That is to say, there is the possibility that a new possibility is opened up, something that is stated to be, "too good for the world". This creative possibility was not even mentioned in the earlier aphorisms. Nonetheless, the possibility for this type of creative process shares affinity to the creative process described in the Dionysian moment of reverie and the merger of Apollo and Dionysius in *Birth of Tragedy* (BOT), for instance. In this case, the case of the man and woman in love, love seems to dissolve boundaries and leaves a possibility through the very space that is created when the two lose

themselves. Thus, it is not a space of nothingness in the nihilistic sense, but becomes a space of creative possibility.

> The empty space left when a woman and a man in love both give themselves away, losing their separate identities, is not really an empty space at all. It just seems so to the prejudiced man of Aphorism 363 (NG 115).

There is one more saying of Nietzsche that must be explored in order to understand both the tension and the creative possibility of Nietzsche's thought. It is probably the most misogynist of Nietzsche's saying and one that even suggests violence to women. It is found in Zarathustra. "Are you visiting women? Don't forget your whip!" (118). What can we possibly do with a saying like this? What does Oppel do with it? Quite a lot. Oppel has already made a case for taking Nietzsche's irony seriously regarding his sayings on woman. Here she explores the use of riddle in Nietzsche's thought along with that irony. In addition, she will explore Nietzsche's own history, particularly with Lou Salome, a woman of incredible intelligence and accomplishment. The exploration of Nietzsche's relationship to this woman is necessary to gain further insight into this vexing saying.

Nietzsche himself says of this incredible woman:

> "She is the most intelligent of all women" he writes to Peter Gast… and correspondence to Franz Overbeck describes their talks as the "most profitable occupation" of the summer"…. "I should like to know whether there has even been such philosophical openness as between the two of us" (quoted in Binyoun 81-82) (NG 122).

Obviously, this is a woman that Nietzsche admired highly and with whom he shared quite a bit of philosophical discussion. He obviously did not think that she couldn't discuss philosophy and other intellectual topics. Lou was quite obviously not a typical woman and their relationship appears to be atypical in many respects. Perhaps Nietzsche was also

setting an example in his own life as to alternate gender relations. Perhaps it was out of this relationship that new possibilities emerged in his writings. In fact, according to Gary Shapiro, the reference to Lou in *Ecco Homo* is one in which she should be considered "the father of the work" (NG 127). Nietzsche was still playing with mixing gender roles and their possibilities.

> Returning to the famous passage regarding the whip, Oppel tells us that:
>
> In his conversation with Haussmen, in Sils-Maria, Nietzsche characterized the line about the whip as a joke, and an "exaggerated symbolic mode of expression" and said that it had arisen from a "personal memory" (NG 145).

Here we have several thoughts interlaced. Nietzsche claims that the line about the whip is to be taken as a joke. So perhaps Oppel's reading of the passage as being part of the overall riddle of woman is closer to truth than we would have originally thought. Perhaps it is also ironic in many aspects. In addition, Nietzsche, according to Haussmen, speaks of its symbolism in exaggerated mode. It is left for us to unpack some of its possible symbolism. In addition, we are also told that it arose from a personal memory. What are the foundations for that memory? The memory takes us back to 1882, to northern Italy, where Nietzsche and Salome climbed Monte Sacro, and it was there that he explained to her and shared with her his ideas of the eternal return. According to Salome, in Lucerne he wanted to commemorate the occasion with a photo.

> This is the famous photographs of Salome; seated in a small cart and holding a tiny whip that Nietzsche decorated with a sprig of lilac, with Nietzsche and Ree in the cart (*Salome Looking Back* 48, NG 120).

The photographs thus commemorated the event of one of Nietzsche's most important ideas, that of the eternal return, and particularly, his sharing of that event with Lou Salome. More importantly, for our purposes, the picture reveals that it is Lou who holds

the whip. Thus she is in the more powerful position and the men are more subservient in the picture. If we return to the actual saying in Zarathustra, though the man is enjoined not to forget the whip if he is visiting women, it is never said who is to use the whip and who it is to be used on. This fact of both the photo and the actual words is echoed by Diethe, who also says that much confusion over the passage was due to a mistranslation by Hollingdale who said "do not forget your whip", when in fact the correct translation of the German is Kaufman's "Do not forget the whip" (64). Diethe also cites Pieper's creative interpretation that the intention of Zarathustra's machismo list of attributes is really aimed to "expose the clichés" (63-64). This would also be consonant with Oppel's creative reading that Nietzsche is here doing one of his overturning numbers. In addition, she also cites Hinton Thomas, who concluded that it is "hardly imaginable that Nietzsche would have wanted to identify himself with its literal meaning" (Diethe 65). Thus, when we read that Nietzsche intended it to be a joke, and that it was exaggerated symbolism, this coupled with it being a commemoration of the idea of the eternal return, makes Oppel's thesis more compelling, especially since the memory, the photo, and the saying, play at gender relations. Had he not had this relationship with Lou, and had the event never taken place, and had the photo not existed, and had Nietzsche never written in aphoristic and ironic style, and had his writings been quite conventional philosophy, we might be compelled and justified to dismiss Oppel's thesis as wishful thinking. But since all these things happened and we have evidence for them, and Nietzsche did write so radically, and sought to overturn traditional values, we must conclude that Oppel's theory has some validity. We must conclude, or at least entertain the possibility, that since in the picture it is Lou who holds the whip, Nietzsche might be playing with gender, once

more, and even, perhaps, shifting the power dynamics between the sexes. In addition, the constant play and interchange of gender and its creative possibility might be reminiscent of Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return itself. If we recall that Nietzsche advocates *amor fati* in the famous saying of the return, then might Nietzsche not be asking us to love our fate, including our gendered fate? Possibly, he might also be telling us that what we make of it, how we play with it, or create it, is up to us.

We are again led to ask, as Oppel does, who is wielding the whip?

> I hold that the whip itself returns symbolically in a pattern of repetitions and differences and goes through 2 or 3 of the metamorphosis of the spirit – from being a tool of resentment, specifically of women and the feminine, to being a tool of resistance to that very resentment (NG 143).

That is, the symbol cuts both ways, it cuts as a misogynist tool against women, and yet, if we play with it, as Nietzsche did with Salome, reversing its symbolism until new ground is opened up, something new may emerge.

Tragically, even though Nietzsche made a valiant effort with Lou, to the point where he even asked her to marry him, the interference of his sister and mother eventually ended the relationship.

> Elizabeth persuaded her brother to write a letter of complaint about Salome to Lou's mother, which he immediately regretted; afterward he told his sister, "It is only now that I feel truly humiliated" (Lou 125, NG 128).

Sadly, and ironically, the man who preached the will to power and a radical break with traditional norms and values did not have enough will to claim the woman he wanted and advance the fruit of his writings to completion in his own life. Later, Nietzsche would speak of Lou differently; he would write letters bearing tones of resentment. "Formerly, I was inclined to take you for a vision, for the earthly apparition of my ideal. Observe: I have poor eyes" (NG 127). The relationship ended in Oct of 1882.

Oppel concludes and summarizes as follows.

> Knowing that Nietzsche found one captivating and intelligent woman flesh and blood rather than figurative; with whom he drafted aphorisms on "woman", helps us to throw some light on the displacement and the praise of women that occurs in Zarathustra (NG 130).

This leaves us to conclude that Nietzsche was ambivalent about women, and that inside him were perhaps various wills to power, some of which were supporting the general herd instincts and social constructs of gender, and others of which fought hard to bring new perspectives and possibilities to bear. Nietzsche laid the groundwork for this new possibility, but could not see it through. It is for us to do the work.

Some of this work has already been carried out by feminists such as Oppel. There are others in agreement with her and who also carry on the task. For example, Lynne Terrell, in her essay "Sexual Dualism and Woman's Self-Creation" (SDWSC in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche* (FIFN)), argues that while Nietzsche's writings give us many misogynist saying, "they also contain the seeds of a deconstruction of that misogyny" (SDWSC in FIFN 200). Or, as Kelly Oliver puts it in the same book in her essay "Woman as Truth in Nietzsche's writing" (WTNW),

> If I can read Nietzsche as a feminist it is because Nietzsche himself gives me some suggestions as to how to transform the often ugly and nauseating "truths" that are my cultural resources into something I can affirm in the present…What I do with these truths, how I arrange or rearrange them, is up to me (WTNW in FIFN 126).

In fact, when compared to the rest of Nietzsche's writings, Tierrell comes to the following conclusion.

> Nietzsche's works present a complex character who took himself to hold a very negative view of women but who was not philosophically entitled to hold this view (SDWSC in FIFN 200).

In Tierrell's view, Nietzsche's negative assessment of women falls into two categories. Sometimes he faults them for their nature and other times for allowing themselves to be slaves to men (SDWSC in FIFN 202). Yet, as we have already seen, when a woman becomes assertive, as for example if she becomes part of the feminist movement, then he condemns this too. Tierrell also points out that Nietzsche thinks that "by giving up traditional feminine roles, women give up their (currently) greatest source of power" (SDWSC in FIFN 207). Therefore, he criticizes them for decreasing their power. This, he thinks, is a great stupidity. In fact, from the concept of will to power he may argue that this is a destructive tendency since it results in decreased power. Yet, Nietzsche does not consider that women may be willing to gamble and fight for more power. Since Nietzsche believes the world is in flux, might it not be possible for power dynamics to change more in the favor of women? His own basic philosophy would tend to allow for this possibility.

Diethe comes to a similar conclusion on Nietzsche. His statements on women were, in her assessment:

> inconsistent with the views on individual liberty (and the responsibility of that individual's self-overcoming) which are so frequently experienced elsewhere in his writings. This ambiguity at the heart of the topic makes the discussion of Nietzsche's influence on the women of his generation peculiarly complicated. Nevertheless, a host of women who were leading figures in the artistic, pedagogic or political domain in Wilhelmine Society believed- ironically perhaps – that his invitation to affirm life included them, and like so many men of their generation, said a resounding 'yes' to all that was construed as "Nietzschean"... (65).

It is this very challenge that feminists such as Opppel take up. Further, we consider the discussion of power in earlier women's circles and in feminist and even liberation studies where discussions of empowerment take place. Does all power have to end in power over? Can there not be other modes of being in the world where people can

extend and utilize their power, and thereby fulfill the basic will to power concept, but without having it be at the expense of others? If indeed there can be cooperation amongst various will-points or will-powers in order to exercise power, even creative power, can there not be cooperative power endeavors between people, and indeed, amongst groups of people, even perhaps amongst nations? Yet, as Tierrel says, Nietzsche does not take this route. He has not thought through these possibilities. Still, as Oppel has said, and Tierrel reminds us, he did indeed consider the possibility that some men could love like women, namely by exercising a willingness, an ability to give over. However, the conclusion he comes to is that "there cannot be an "equal will to renunciation" for "we would then get, I do not know what, perhaps an empty space" (KSA 3:611; GS 363, p 310 SDWSC in FIFN 216). This empty space is precisely the space that Oppel tells us has creative possibilities. Perhaps, if Oppel is correct, Nietzsche has already alluded to that possibility. If we read him ironically and rhetorically, as Thomas suggests, and feminists as well, then what we have is possibility, no guarantee, but rather a dangerous possibility.

If we do not admit or allow for this type of creative possibility, then we are left in a world where the play of wills becomes a war of wills, and one in which the master-slave dichotomy perpetuates itself. This general analysis can apply to any relationship that finds itself subject to the master-slave dichotomy, for any liberation movement. Indeed, it offers possibilities for men as well as women, and for humanity as a whole. It is up to us, where we will take Nietzsche's philosophy and if indeed it will serve life, and whose lives it will serve. In the end, reading is a dangerous activity, and reading Nietzsche is particularly dangerous. We struggle with the text, engaged in the agon he set up. The response, the bite, is up to us.

CHAPTER 4

BAD FAITH AND LIES IN SARTRE'S PHILOSOPHY AND WORKS

In this chapter we visit the work of Jean Paul Sartre as it applies to the topic of truth and lies. Sartre's philosophy is known for its emphasis on such topics as freedom, and most of all, for his concept of bad faith. Since part of our analysis has been an internal critique based on the author's own definitions, it is important to explore the main concepts of Sartre's philosophy in order to situate the problem of the lie. Thus, in the first part of this section we explain the main concepts central to Sartre's thinking, and the examples given in his philosophical works. This allows us not only to understand his thought and some of the inherent tensions in it, but the examples allow us specifically to apply them and also to analyze his characterization of both men and women. As with our other authors, the gender issue provides for another problematic layer in the topic. The philosophical examples, however, do not provide for further context in which to undertake the analysis. Therefore, in the second half of the chapter we look at two specific literary works where the context is fleshed out and we can therefore examine how Sartre's concepts interact with each other. In addition, the gender focus in relation to lies and bad faith are drawn out. The main works that will be considered are his earliest plays, *The Flies* (F), and *No Exit* (NE) in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (NOTOP). *The Flies* is chosen because it exemplifies existential dilemmas both for the individual and for a group, or a society, even for a government, as well as for its familial relations. The second play, NE, was written afterwards and is chosen for it contemporary experimentation with existentialism for a modern audience. In this play the main characters have no family ties and thus the play provides another dimension for the

examination of human interaction. In both plays the female characters are important to the plot and to our analysis. They are also depicted stereotypically and often lack genuine agency.

Part One PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK: FREEDOM AND BAD FAITH

Perhaps the most important of Sartre's concepts, and the one that is behind all his thinking is his view of freedom, a category that permits the development of his idea of "bad faith". Sartre states chillingly that humans are "condemned to be free", for the only thing that a human being cannot do, is refuse to choose, for even every non-choice delineates a choice. It is therefore up to each human being to choose his/her own values. Similarly, there are no absolute essences, so human beings make themselves into whatever they will be. Thus, the weight of responsibility falls upon the person. No excuses are tolerated. Truth in such a system can only be cast against a human background.

> By existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity (The Humanism of Existentialism (HE) in Essay in Existentialism (EE) 32).

Sartre readily admits that there are two kinds of existentialism, the religious and the atheist. Yet, for both of them, Sartre argues, "existence precedes essence" (HE in EE 34). The important difference is that for the atheist,

> If God does not exist there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any human reality. Man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines himself … he himself will have made what he will be. Thus there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it (HE in EE 35).

Yet, at other times Sartre goes even further than this. He says that "even if God did exist, that would change nothing" HE in (EE 62). This seems to be a violation of the entire

project, for Sartre has repeatedly said that human beings define their values and there is no God to define a human essence or determine right from wrong. If God does exist, this seems to change everything, and values cannot be as arbitrary as Sartre implies. Yet, Sartre could save himself here if he were to add an important detail from his system of thought. That is the notion of freedom. What Sartre wants to say by resorting to an extreme possibility regarding this odd saying about God changing nothing, is that even if there were a God, human beings would still be free and have to take responsibility for their own actions. It is only in this sense that it would make sense to say that the existence of a god would change nothing. Also, it should be mentioned that this implies a certain anthropological view, one that claims that freedom is in fact in the nature of being human, and a certain theological view of a God who created human beings with freedom and who does not interfere with that freedom. Either way, the results for human beings are the same; they must choose and take responsibility for their choices. This is not inconsistent with traditional theistic views that human beings must shoulder the responsibility for their choices and values. The only real difference here is that the existence of God, or belief in such a God, would surely determine the values and the right choices that human beings should be making and according to which, someday, they will be so judged. Of course, this reference to God changing nothing, is an extreme example by Sartre, and in general, his real view is that

> Existentialism is nothing else than an attempt to draw all the consequences of a coherent atheistic position. It isn't trying to plunge man into despair at all. …existentialism is optimistic, a doctrine of action (HE in EE 62).

This idea of action is one of the hallmarks of Sartre's system of thought. In fact, this idea of responsible action is what constitutes not only his existential project, but may indeed

be said to constitute his ethics as well. As Sartre himself states, "Consequently, we are dealing here with an ethics of action and involvement" (HE in EE 50), and again he make this a marker of the human when he says "we define man only in relationship to involvement" (56). This involvement amounts to the choices one makes, and consequently the responsibility lies with the individual for who one is and who one will become.

> Man first of all is the being who hurls himself toward a future and who is conscious of imagining himself as being the future. But if existence really does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is…the full responsibility of his existence rests on him. (HE in EE 35-36).

Moral freedom, as well as the full weight of moral responsibility, rests with the individual. In this sense, the awful weight of freedom is upon the shoulders of each individual, like it or not. This is the human condition, and there is no escape from it.

It is in our choices that we affirm our values. They are the values that we choose. Thus, values are totally arbitrary and up to us. Yet, Sartre betrays a degree of optimism in human nature with respect to values.

> To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for one without being good for all…Therefore I am responsible for myself and for everyone else: I am creating a certain image of man of my own choosing. In choosing myself, I choose man. (HE in EE 38).

Sartre takes the position that humans aim for the good in their choice of values. Whether or not they achieve it is another story, but they at least, according to the above passage, will choose what they think is for the good. Good for whom, one might ask? Sartre's answer here is that the good is both for oneself and for all. This thought is not well-developed and leads to a lot of questions, such as, how is this process of choosing the good determined to be good for everyone? Has Sartre's subjectivism turned into a

universal ethic at this point? Similarly, the responsibility that comes with freedom is here extended to everyone else. That is, the responsibility entailed is not only for oneself but for everyone else, for all humanity. Sartre seems to recognize that our choices have implications, not only for ourselves but for others. Further, there is a certain type of universalism that is implied, though not directly stated. The values we choose and the choices we make determine what image we have of humanity, what values we think a human being should espouse. This seems odd for an existentialist ethic in which every human being is free to determine his/her own values. Thus we cannot really choose for all, we can only choose for ourselves. This, however, does not contradict that we may still be positing our values against that of others and their universal choices, only that there will be a clash of views. However, there is also the possibility that humans may freely choose to adhere to the same values, perhaps even to enforce them as a group. While this is not fleshed out in Sartre's philosophy, these comments on universality can only be implied in this way given the existentialist leanings. They should, however, be taken seriously since, unlike the remark regarding a god changing nothing, Sartre makes several such remarks regarding universality. For instance, Sartre says that "every configuration, however…individual it may be, has a universal value" (50). Again, he says,

> …there is a universality of man; but it is not given, it is perpetually being made. I build the universal in choosing myself…This absoluteness of choice does not do away with the relativeness of each epoch (HE in EE 53).
>
> For us …man is an organized situation in which he himself is involved. Through his choice, he involves all mankind, and he can not avoid making a choice (HE in EE 54).

Thus it seems that Sartre has not eliminated the universal, but rather redefined it. He does not see a contradiction between the concepts of universality, freedom, and absoluteness. This aspect of his thought has not been given sufficient attention. Yet, it seems essential to his basic existential theory and in any building of an ethical system out of his philosophy. For, it implies that any individual choice is de facto linked to, and has implications for, humanity in general. It means that when I choose, even if I am choosing for myself, I am also implicating the other, for my choices both have ramifications for others, and also bear the mark of how I wish to define the human in general.

Nor are these general remarks the only thoughts that Sartre has on the subject, for he also links the universal to our specific topic of choice, namely, the subject of lying.

> A man who lies and makes excuses for himself by saying "not everybody does that," is someone with an uneasy conscience, because the art of lying implies that a universal value is conferred upon the lies. (HE in EE 38).

What Sartre appears to be saying is that in the choice of lying, the value taken up is that of untruthfulness, and, according to the logic of the passage, lying is taken up as a universal value for all whenever it is taken up by anyone. In some sense Sartre, who railed against a Kantian ethic, still seems to be under the influence of some sort of categorical imperative, in that for an act to be considered morally correct it must pass the universal test. By default, in an existentialist system this translates into allowing the same prerogative to all other human beings. Further, if someone wants to be dishonest, and blame anything other than free choice, one is certainly free to do so, but this is not much of a choice in Sartre's eyes.

> Suppose someone says to me, "What if I want to be dishonest?" I'll answer, "there's no reason for you not to be, but I'm saying that's what you are, and that the strictly coherent attitude is that of honesty (HE in EE 57).

Sartre does not fully explain why honesty is better than dishonesty. On the one hand he says choose whatever value you want, on the other he implies some kind of commitment to truth, even if it's the truth to be honest enough to admit one's dishonesty. However, it does not work too well in that, as Kant argued, there is some logical inconsistency in saying that lying should becomes a universal law. The very nature of truth itself and of meaningful communication breaks down if one is to adopt such a maxim. Sartre also seems to imply that there is more coherence to truth than to lies. Therefore, it seems truth, or honesty, is the more logical position. This does not seem too far away from Kant. This however, is easier to see in Kant's system, since for Kant there is at least the possibility of a God as posited by reason, a lawmaker behind the moral law. Sartre, however, harbors no such possibility. "There can no longer be an apriori Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it" (HE in EE 40-41). Or, putting it even more succinctly, Sartre quotes Dostoevesky who said, "If God didn't exist, everything would be possible" (HE in EE 41). Indeed Sartre views this as "the very starting point of existentialism…" (HE in EE 41), as "he [man] can't start making excuses for himself". At the heart of Sartre's existentialism is a certain ethical view of the world, or at least of human beings. No excuses are tolerated. In an odd twist of logic, Sartre comes up on the same side of Kant in this regard. However, while for Kant there are no excuses for violating the categorical imperative, for Sartre there are no excuses because freedom is a given and thus each is responsible for his/her actions. As Sartre poetically puts it:

> …there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom
> So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, no justification before us. We are alone, with no excuse (HE in EE 41).

> Man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he does not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does (HE in EE 41).

Similarly, for the existentialist, there is no way to seek help by learning to read the signs around us or by looking for an omen. Such efforts amount to superstitious beliefs, or at least, the most they do is to show us our own beliefs.

> The existentialist does not think that man is going to help himself by finding in the world some omen by which to orient himself. Because he thinks that man will interpret the omen to suit himself. Therefore, he thinks that man, with no support and no help is condemned every moment to invent man (HE in EE 41).

This makes sense in Sartre's system since there is no God. Therefore, there is no divine help and no divine will to interpret. To see it differently for Sartre would be to look for a crutch, a way out of taking responsibility. This aspect of interpretation may well be one of the most sticking points between believers and nonbelievers, for a believer will always interpret life in terms of some divine plan or will, and the non-believer, especially of Sartre's stripe, has already ruled this out *apriori*. Sartre seems to know, ahead of time, that there is no God and no such possibility. Pascal might well ask of Sartre, have you yet died that you can say for sure what lies on the other side? Have you wagered wisely? Sartre would likely answer that it matters not, the choice, and the sole choice, and the responsibility, lies with him for his actions, regardless of the existence or nonexistence of God.

Sartre's starkness is likely to also clash with even some secular notions, such as that of psychological synchronicity. According to Carl Jung, these are moments when inside and outside seem to point to a meaningful coincidence, to strike a chord, in a manner that seems to point a way, a direction for the psyche. One need not be a believer in God to be a believer in psychology or of the life of the psyche. Could not a modern

person still see or read “signs”, very personal signs, in the world, for oneself? According to Sartre, no, he would only be reading what he wanted into them, since no one but the person can give meaning to, or interpret the sign. Yet, Sartre has not paid attention to the entire issue of hermeneutics or how one is to interpret, or how to choose between varying systems of interpretation, or even the communal aspect, or language-game aspect, of interpretation, let alone how to set up norms and standards. That is, he has not offered us anything like Wittgenstein’s language games and rules of grammar, or even Habermas’ procedural account of truth and justification. Sartre seems only to tell us that we are free to choose and that we must choose. There is a certain danger of complete arbitrariness in his system of thought that lends itself to a certain capriciousness of interpretation.

Sartre, of course, would also discount certain psychological readings, since he was not a fan of psychology, as we shall shortly see. However, on this one point of reading signs, he did give a concrete example to illustrate his point, that of a young man who interpreted his past failings as a sign that God wanted him to be a priest, a Jesuit, to be exact (HE in EE 45). That is the sense that the young man made of his past failings, and how he interpreted his calling. Of course, Sartre took this to be a crutch. Perhaps it was, but once again, how is one to decide or judge between systems of interpretation? Sartre has left us no rules for judgment.

There is perhaps a more famous example that alludes to the issue of omens and signs, and more importantly, points to the radically absolute view Sartre has of human freedom. That is, of course, the example of the young man faced with the choice of joining the armed forces or staying to take care of his mother.

> The boy was faced with the choice of leaving for England and joining the Free French Forces. That is, leaving his mother behind – or remaining with his mother

> and helping her carry on….As a result he was faced with two very different kinds of action…On the one hand, an ethics of sympathy, of personal devotion, on the other, a broader ethics, but one whose efficacy was more dubious.
> Who would help him choose? (HE in EE 42-43)

> Which does the greater good, the vague act of fighting in a group, or the concrete one of helping a particular human being to go on living? Who can decide apriori? Nobody (HE in EE 43).

Sartre implies that not even Kant's categorical imperative, nor even a utilitarian standard, is of help here. He uses the second version of the categorical imperative, that of treating humanity as an end and not as a means, as the test. Sartre says:

> If I stay with my mother I'll treat her as an end… but…I'm running the risk of treating the people around me who are fighting, as means .. and conversely (HE in EE 43).

Sartre is not at all clear here how there is a violation of the categorical imperative. However, he is clear, that there is no *apriori* given choice for the person. The young man who comes to see him next decides to make a decision based on his feelings, on "whichever pushed me in one direction" (43). But, Sartre is still not satisfied. For him, neither passions, nor blind rage, nor even feelings, are to be used as excuses for choices.

> The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never agree that a sweeping passion is a ravaging torrent which fatally leads a man to certain acts. It is therefore an excuse. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion (HE in EE 41).

So, if he flies into a passion or rage, that is not an excuse, and similarly even a feeling isn't to be used as an excuse for a choice.

> But how is the value of a feeling determined? What gives his feeling for his mother value? Precisely the fact that he remained with her…The only way to determine the value of this affection is, precisely, to perform an act which confirms it, defines it. But since I require this affection to justify my act, I find myself caught in a vicious circle (HE in EE 44).

> In other words, the feeling is formed by the acts one performs, so I cannot refer to it in order to act upon it. Which means that I can neither seek within myself the

> truth condition which will impel me to act, nor apply to a system of ethics for concepts which will permit me to act (HE in EE 44).

So this attempt to choose on the basis of feeling, that is, on the basis of an inner leaning, is not acceptable to Sartre. In addition, as we have seen, for Sartre, passions are not reasons for choices. Sartre seems to deny that there might be an inner feeling more towards the one than the other. Or, he might say that this is an unacceptable way to choose. However, might it not be the case that someone has an inner feeling that something is the right or wrong way to go and yet not be able to articulate it in a reasonable argument? Or, take for instance a person who makes a choice, and then has a "bad feeling" or sick feeling about it. These feelings would seem to indicate to the person that s/he has chosen incorrectly and to turn down another road. Sartre says we choose our values, yet he appears to denounce the value of a feeling as unacceptable in choice making. However, Sartre may still be redeemed. What he might have in mind is the problem of shirking our responsibility for our choices and blaming them on our feelings. Would Sartre be able to accept it if someone said, "I freely chose on the basis of my feelings, and I accept full responsibility for that choice"? It seems that Sartre would have to say yes, but his devaluation of feelings leaves one in doubt.

Returning to the young man, he next turns to seeking advice. Sartre seems to frown on this avenue of assistance too.

> But if you seek advice from a priest, for example, you have chosen this priest; you already know, more or less, just about what advice he was going to give you. In other words, choosing your advisor is involving yourself...
> But some priests are collaborating, some are just making time, some are resisting. If the young man chooses a priest who is resisting or collaborating, he has already decided on the kind of advice he is going to get. (HE in EE 44).

Sartre's position is a little unsettling here. He implies that when you select an advisor, you predetermine the type of advice that you will be given. This would seem to imply a certain foreknowledge that would exclude true contingency. For example, even when we think we know people well, their responses might still surprise us. They might give us a different answer than we expected. In addition, it assumes that we always know the person well enough that we can predict a response. Aside from a few basic stereotypes, we can very rarely make predictions regarding what the other person will say or do. For example, might it not be possible that the young man truly does not know the political leanings of a particular priest? Most times, we simply do not have that much information to go on. Does Sartre mean to imply that we should always do our homework before making a choice? For some choices this may be advisable, but for others we may not have the luxury of time to investigate further. Also, we must ask Sartre, is it not also a possibility that the person truly has not yet made up his/her mind and is still wrestling with the problem? Since Sartre assumes that people know ahead of time what advice others will give, he implies that a person should not seek or give advice. In the case of this particular young man, Sartre makes the point clear.

> Therefore, in coming to see me he knew the answer I was going to give him, and I had only one answer to give: You're free, choose, that is, invent.
> There are no omens in the world
> Even if there are signs, I myself choose the meaning they have (HE in EE 44-45).

Sartre's point is clear, in the end the young man must choose for himself and he cannot abnegate his responsibility to anyone else. Sartre seems to have in mind a person who is trying to get out of responsibility in going to others. In such a case, his advice makes sense, since we cannot blame influences for our choices. Yet, we may genuinely be in the horns of a dilemma. In such a dilemma where the costs are high, as that of the

young man, one may indeed try to seek advice. For example, he may go to seek the advice of a relative, or that of a member of the clergy, or of a military general. Sartre's response is illuminating in that he implies we really know ahead of time the type of advice we will get from each person. Therefore, while we think we are getting an objective opinion we are really looking to hear what we already have in mind.

Yet, Sartre's example is not so clear-cut and unproblematic. For, taken to its extreme, such a view would imply that we cannot have any real dialogue, influence, or change of heart. In addition, just because we might know what position someone holds, this does not mean that we will swallow it hook, line, and sinker, or that the person might not surprise us with a different view. Most of all, the purpose of dialogue is precisely to clarify positions and leave an open space for the possibility of changing one's mind. If the young man were a hundred percent sure of what to do, he would not need to talk to anyone. Yet, he still might need to talk to another to mirror, affirm, or help him hear his own voice. While none of these scenarios takes away from Sartre's basic contention that ultimately, the choice, and therefore the decision, and the responsibility, lies with the individual, in this example Sartre does not seem to make room for the place of the other. He glosses over as unimportant the role that dialogue plays. In his view, if the young man were to place responsibility for his actions on the advice of the other, he would be acting in bad faith, somehow abdicating his responsibility and inauthenticating himself, that is, lying to himself. Yet, this total reliance on self to the exclusion of others seems somewhat skewed and out of place for the man who wrote that "In order to get to any truth about myself, I must have contact with another person. The other is indispensable to my own existence, as well as to my knowledge of myself" (HE in EE 52). Sartre also

puts it another way, that we can only come to discover ourselves "in a world peopled with demands, in the heart of projects" (The Origin of Nothingness (ON) in EE 135). That is, we will always have demands upon us, even all kinds of influences. Such is life. We are to define ourselves precisely in the midst of the situations we find ourselves in, not by extricating ourselves from them, or wishing for a clean slate. Sartre himself hints at intersubjectivity, by alluding to a "world in which man decides what he is and what others are" (50). Therefore, it does not seem unethical at all for another to try to influence us or vice versa. What would be "bad" is for someone to try to choose for us, or for us to give up choice and let another decide. However, even in this case, I think Sartre would have to say that we are choosing, although perhaps in a cowardly manner. Sartre will not allow for any excuses. This also eliminates using a hard life or terrible circumstances as excuses. For Sartre, that would be trying to shirk responsibility and putting the blame elsewhere than on oneself. Of such people he writes "Because often the only way they can bear their wretchedness is to think "circumstances have been against me" (HE in EE 48).

At this point, before venturing into any further examples of Sartre, it is especially important to distinguish the concepts of lie from bad faith, as well as to stress Sartre's rejection of psychology, particularly regarding ideas of repression. None of this makes sense unless we realize that Sartre places freedom as the ultimate value. For instance, Sartre says of a human being that "In his forlornness he imposes values, he can no longer want but one thing, and that is freedom, as the basic of all values" (HE in EE 57). This presents us with somewhat of a paradox. One must choose one's own values since there is no God. The values one chooses help define oneself, and they are always chosen in

the midst of concrete situations that present themselves. Sartre puts it poetically when he says "values are sown on my path as thousands of little real demands, like the signs which order us to keep off the grass" (135). Yet, freedom is the arch value and it seems that one can only choose to acknowledge one's freedom or not. One is never free to get rid of one's freedom, for one is, by definition of being human, condemned to be free. Therefore, anything less than an acknowledgment of the choices we make as being our choices, amounts to some dishonesty.

For Sartre, however, lies have to be distinguished from bad faith and it is the issue of authenticity that is more at stake.

> But if I am what I wish to veil, the question takes on quite another aspect, I can in fact wish "not to see" a certain aspect of my being only if I am acquainted with the aspect which I do not wish to see (ON in EE 143).

Here we have the beginnings of Sartre's idea of bad faith, which involves a type of lie to oneself, rooted in a desire not to see something, to deny something, or as Sartre puts it poetically, to attempt to veil something from oneself. The motive behind it seems to be an attempt to escape anguish of the existential sort.

> This annihilating power annihilates anguish in so far as I flee it and annihilates itself in so far as I am anguish in order to flee it. This attitude is what we call bad faith (ON in EE 144).

The deep purpose of bad faith is "intended to free up the nothingness which I am in my relation to myself" (ON in EE 144). However, this implies a paradox in that it "precisely implies the nothingness which it suppresses" (On in EE 144). For Sartre, consciousness is always an existential consciousness. "Consciousness is a being, the nature of which is to be conscious of the nothingness of its being" (Bad Faith and Falsehood (BFF) in

EE148). It is precisely to avoid the awareness of this type of recognition that is at the heart of bad faith.

Yet, there is another aspect of bad faith for Sartre, and it is connected to the idea of the unity of consciousness (ON in EE 145). It is precisely for this reason that bad faith has to be distinguished from a lie in general.

> We shall willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general (BFF in EE 147)
> The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding. A man does not lie about what he is ignorant of; he does not lie when he is mistaken (BFF in EE 148)
> The liar intends to deceive and he does not seek to hide this intention from himself…(BFF in EE 149).

In general, lying implies "my existence, the existence of the Other, my existence for the Other, and the existence of the Other from me" (BFF in EE 150). That is, there is more than one consciousness that is involved in general lying. This process involves the consciousness of the liar and that of at least one other person, and the interaction between them, as well as how one appropriates the action of the other. Obviously, the situation is different in bad faith since it implies a lie to oneself.

> Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth. Thus the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here. Bad faith or the contrary implies in essence the unity of a single consciousness (BFF in EE 150).

Bad faith poses a certain problem for consciousness, in that one is attempting to deceive oneself in one and the same consciousness.

> …the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet, I must know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it more carefully – and this not at two different moments, which at a pinch would allow us to reestablish a semblance of

> duality – but in the unitary structure of a single project. How then can the lie subsist if the duality which conditions it is suppressed? (BFF in EE 151).

Thus it seems that what appears to be particularly "bad" about bad faith is not merely that one wants to deceive oneself, but that it is, at bottom, an impossibility. If the consciousness of deceiver and deceived is one and the same, then the attempt to lie to oneself, must, by definition, fail.

> We must agree in fact that if I deliberately and cynically attempt to lie to myself, I fail completely in this undertaking, the lie falls back and collapses beneath my look… (BFF in EE 151)

Yet, Sartre admits that despite the failure of bad faith,

> it can be the normal aspect of life for a great number of people. A person can live in bad faith, which does not mean that he does not have abrupt awakenings to cynicism or to good faith, but which implies a constant and particular style of life… (BFF in EE 152)

It is for reason of the unity of consciousness that Sartre has great difficulty with psychoanalysis. Yet, he also admits that in order to account for the rampant phenomenon of bad faith, "people sadly have recourse to the unconscious" (BE in EE 152).

> Thus psychoanalysis substitutes for the notion of bad faith, the idea of a lie without a liar, it allows me to understand how it is possible for me to be lied to without lying to myself since it places me in the same relation to myself that the Other is in respect to me, it replaces the duality of the deceiver and the deceived, the essential condition of the lie, by that of the "id" and the "ego". It introduces into my subjectivity the deepest intersubjective structure of the Mit-sein (BFF in EE 154)

Sartre finds a contradiction in this idea. The language of a censor implies that the censor "must know what it is repressing…The censor must choose and in order to choose must be aware of so doing" (BFF in EE 156). Thus, even resistance from a patient, according to Sartre, implies that the censor is conscious (of) itself.

> It must be conscious of being conscious of the drive to be repressed, but precisely in order not be conscious of it…what does this mean if not that the censor is in bad-faith? (BFF in EE 157).

So, in Sartre's terms, psychoanalysis has not really solved the problem. Quite the contrary, it seems to perpetuate bad faith. What is worse, from Sartre's point of view, is that it resorts to a type of magical superstition.

> By rejecting the conscious unity of the psyche, Freud is obliged to imply everywhere a magic unity linking distant phenomena across obstacles…The unconscious drive (*Trieb*) through magic is endowed with the character "repressed" or "condemned" which completely pervades it , colors it, and magically provokes its symbolism. Proponents of the theory have hypostasized a "reified" bad faith, they have not escaped it (BFF in EE 158).

Thus far, this seems consistent with his views of consciousness. Yet, there is still some difficulty. Sartre has not really answered why people continue to live in bad faith, if bad faith is always a failed attempt. The only answer he seems to imply is that at root, bad faith is part of the existential condition of not wanting to live with the terrifying knowledge of the nothingness of our existence, or even, perhaps, accepting the weight of our freedom. That is, one would rather attempt and fail than face existential reality. Sartre could do more to mine the depths of this anguish. Sartre may also be dealing with a special subset of cases, where one knows, but does not want to acknowledge it. Again, Sartre implies a definite knowledge that the person may not have, or have in varying degrees. He omits this possibility.

However, there is another difficulty in Sartre's concept of bad faith. When he turns to women, as beings or in his literary characterization, the added gender and sexual dimension colors and sometimes distorts or contradicts his theory. For instance, Sartre mentions the findings of a doctor Stekel, regarding women who are referred to as "pathologically frigid women". The supposed finding is that they "apply themselves to

becoming distracted in advance from the pleasure which they dread" (BFF in EE 159). Sartre concludes that this is a perfect example of bad faith.

> Will anyone speak of an unconscious here?...We have in fact to deal with a phenomenon of bad faith since the efforts taken in order not be present to the experienced pleasure imply the recognition that the pleasure is experienced; they imply it in order to deny it (BFF in EE 159).

This passage is problematic and somewhat inconsistent. It also betrays traces of sexism. First, Sartre has previously acknowledged the finding that the women distract themselves ahead of time. This fact does imply a certain willful act. Yet, this advance distraction seems to be precisely to prohibit the possibility of a certain experience. It by no means implies that the experience of pleasure was actually experienced and denied, as Sartre wants to imply. What it seems to imply is that the women willfully choose to avoid the possibility of a future pleasure, no matter how near in the future, for whatever reason. That is, the women are articulating their free choices. There does not seem to be any evidence of bad faith. Sartre seems to assume that a woman, de facto, experiences pleasure in every sexual act, or at least the sexual acts intended in this passage. This is rather presumptuous on his part. The only way the women can be in bad faith is if they willfully denied an experienced pleasure. However, there is no evidence for this and Sartre jumps from the anticipation of a pleasure, and its avoidance, to the actual experience and denial of it. It is possibly Sartre who is in bad faith, willfully denying the testimony of the women who attest to not experiencing sexual pleasure. Or perhaps it is even the husband and the doctors who are also disavowing the knowledge and evidence provided by the women. Even if it is the doctor or husband who makes the presumption, Sartre certainly seems to uphold it.

Another aspect that is to be considered in this, and other examples of women, is that it particularly ties the woman to her body. The tie to the body is the outcome of certain types of phenomenological philosophies of the time. Sartre may be within his "rights" to protest against the disassociations from the body. However, he has defined himself primarily as an existentialist, and therefore, the body cannot be blamed or excused for the free choices of the individual, nor take priority over it. In addition, the examples he chooses to illustrate this point are typically examples or characterizations betraying a certain stereotypical and sexist view of women. So while on the one hand Sartre may be an earlier version of an advocate for the wisdom or truth of the body, the fact that freedom in the use or experience of one's body is not seen to be in the rightful prerogative of the women, is problematic. His view also implies a certain body consciousness that may or may not be the same as ordinary consciousness. And, since Sartre argues for the unity of consciousness, it seems we should be bound to accept the testimony of the women as to whether or not they experienced pleasure, unless of course Sartre wants to deny their freedom to do so and choose for them. This would indeed put him in very bad faith.

There is one other example regarding women that is important even though it is somewhat outdated. It clearly illustrates the gender issue, the role of the body, and the issue of self deception. It is best to let Sartre speak in his own words to illustrate.

> Take the example of a woman who has consented to go out with a particular man for the first time. She knows very well the intentions which the man who is speaking to her cherishes regarding her. She knows also that it will be necessary sooner or later for her to make a decision. Bus she does not want to realize the urgency; she concerns herself only with what is respectful and discreet in the attitude of her companion…She does not want to see possibilities of temporal development which his conduct presents…she does not wish to read in the phrases which he addresses to her anything other than their explicit meaning. If

> he says to her, “I find you so attractive”! She disarms this phrase of its sexual background… (Patterns of Bad Faith (PBF) in EE 160).

Sartre’s example of the woman out on a date leaves much unsaid and again, presumes much. As Sartre himself says, it is the first time she is out with the man. One can therefore assume that she does not know him very well, at least not in a romantic sense. We are not told if she has just met him or if she has known him for a while. We are not given any context for the relationship. We therefore cannot tell how much she knows about his personality and therefore how well she may predict his behavior. Yet, Sartre assumes that she has knowledge, and indeed, that she “knows very well” what his intentions are. Again, as in the case of the young man selecting an advisor because he already knows the advice that will be given, Sartre assumes it is possible to have knowledge of another person that, in fact, one simply may not have. In addition, this summary seems to stereotype the man and his intentions as well. Sartre may want to imply that it is better to err on the side of caution and that the woman should be prepared. Well enough. Yet, he implies that she should be able to “read into” his words that which he does not say. Sartre expects presumption, correct interpretation in reading “the signs”, and behavioral foreknowledge. This is problematic for an existential philosophy rooted in freedom. If there is true contingency in the world, then neither of them may yet have made up their minds as to what they want from the evening. How could they know what the other may not yet know? Sartre has not mentioned the importance of true contingency in this regard. In addition, this simple act of “reading into”, even if it is correct, implies interpretation. Further, he often reserves the right for males to impose their interpretation of women’s experience of pleasure and their bodies, over-riding the women’s own assertion. In this example of the woman out on a first date, he derails the

possibility of her good faith and authenticity by her sexuality and her refusal to interpret her date "correctly", that is, as he thinks the scenario should be interpreted. Interpretation and knowledge collapse at this point, and it is particularly problematic for women.

Sartre says we must choose, yet based on what? To choose we must have choices, be aware of these choices, and we must also be able to interpret situations. In addition, Sartre implies that we must judge, yet, he never discusses how to judge or choose correctly. Once again, the issue of bad faith is also being insinuated, as something uniquely, even "perfectly" represented with regard to woman and her sexuality. Sartre does, however, give a reason for her "denial" of the obvious.

> This is because she does not quite know what she wants. She is profoundly aware of the desire which she inspires, but the desire, cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her (PBF in EE 161).

Again, Sartre assumes knowledge or a certain self-image that the woman may or may not have. He insinuates that she knows she is inspiring desire in another person. Not all, and indeed not many women, would be so presumptuous as to think they can know a man they just met that well. It takes time to read the intricacies and idiosyncratic behavior that accompanies any individual, and even more time to learn to read correctly, or at least to read better, even to read the body as text. Sartre himself has set the context as being their first date, but he does not allow for this time to accumulate data before making a decision.

In addition, as Sartre himself has just said, it is the man's desire for her that is at issue. Sartre is expecting her to own and take responsibility for a desire that belongs to another person. However, it would seem that she cannot own the man's desire for him. She can only own her own. Therefore, issues of responsibility for the desires of another

are totally out of step within Sartre's own existential philosophy. To do otherwise, would be, again, bad-faith.

Sartre's next move is to extend the circumstances and move from the man's desire to the unacknowledged action and desire of the woman. It is this move that will really implicate her in bad faith.

> But then suppose he takes her hand. This act of her companion risks changing the situation by calling for an immediate decision. To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to engage herself. To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm. The aim is to postpone the moment of decision as long as possible…The…woman leaves her hand there, but she does not notice that she is leaving it. She does not notice it because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect…And during this time the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished…(PBF in EE 161).

> We shall say that this woman is in bad faith. She has disarmed the actions of her companion by reducing them to being only what they are, that is, to existing in the mode of the in-itself. But she permits herself to enjoy his desire, to the extent that she will apprehend it as not being what it is, will recognize its transcendence. Finally while sensing profoundly the presence of her own body…she realizes herself as not being her own body (PBF in EE in 162).

This example is a very complicated one that encompasses many intricate details. At the moment that the man takes her hand, Sartre implies she must make, is forced to make, some type of decision. According to Sartre, the woman postpones making a decision, a sexual decision that supposedly the man has in mind, and she wants to avoid. Since for Sartre, not to act is indeed an action or choice in itself, when the woman does not pull her hand away, one must say that she is making a choice. Sartre implies that it must be a conscious choice and that it implies she is willing to flirt, but unwilling to admit it to herself and so does not notice that she has left her hand there. Hence, she is in bad faith. Once again, he implies a certain immediate consciousness of the body and/or from the body to the mind. There are many factors to consider in Sartre's analysis. For instance,

is one always so aware, so conscious, of what happens in all parts of the body? Might it happen that we are distracted from the body? That is, if I think about it, I might be experiencing pain in some part of my body. For example, my foot might be hurting me. Yet, if I am busy attending to something else I may not be consciously aware of what goes on in my foot. I cannot consciously hold every detail of my body and my surroundings at every moment. Such a constant flood of details would exhaust a person. This does not mean that they might not be taken in at a certain lower level of experience, but perhaps not all experience is conscious experience, as many scientists and philosophers would argue. Sartre does not seem to account for this simple possibility that the woman in question might not even be aware of her hand, for that moment.

Further, Sartre seems to imply a deliberate attempt at not noticing that her hand is still there. This deliberate attempt to mask this fact, and the impending choice ahead, is what Sartre terms bad faith. At least Sartre admits that she may not know what she wants at that moment. Yet, if she does not yet know what she wants she cannot be in bad faith, for bad faith implies an attempt to lie about knowledge that one already possesses. Or Sartre may mean that she is in bad faith by denying a future possibility. Yet, how can this be if the future has not yet arrived? She cannot have this future knowledge, and again, cannot be in bad faith, unless Sartre wants to change the meaning of bad faith to imply that she is cutting off a certain possible future choice.

Finally, her crime mainly seems to be that she is “all intellect” at that moment, and divorced from her body. Sartre exhibits an extreme frustration in his attitude towards the woman. He seems to want to force women to not only have, but to be, their bodies, and to be their bodies experiencing sexual pleasure as determined by male desire. Yet,

within Sartrean existentialism, does she not have the right, the free choice, to concentrate on her intellect and choose to be more conscious of that aspect of her experience? Might she not honestly be engrossed in conversation and not be aware where her hand is, for that moment? Once again, Sartre does not give us enough information about the situation. He does not tell us how the man took her hand, if it was abrupt or innocuous. Perhaps the man's signals were not clear. Sartre never considers this possibility but puts the entire burden of responsibility on the woman. He, and perhaps the young man that he defends, seem to fall prey to stereotypical male behavior or beliefs, one of blaming the woman for leading him on. Perhaps they are the ones in bad faith. Further, Sartre does not tell us anything about their conversation other than a few phrases that Sartre interprets to have sexual overtones. If she found the conversation interesting and that is where her mind is, where her attention is, then she cannot be accused of bad faith.

Notice the term Sartre uses to describe the act of the woman who leaves her hand there, who, according to him, is flirting. He uses the verb form of engagement, she engages herself in flirting. It is a term that Sartre uses to describe political involvement and the action of a human being decidedly involved in life. Yet, here it is specifically used to describe a personal encounter with sexual overtones. For Sartre, the involvement of two human beings in a personal encounter, especially one with sexual overtones, is an act of engagement. Sartre is somewhat to be commended for this insight, in recognizing personal encounters as acts of engagement, as well as political encounters. Yet, on the other hand, in tying the woman to her body he falls victim to stereotyping the woman, and to relegating her to the personal sphere. What is worse is that he fails to name her intellectual activities, particularly in conversation with men, as acts of engagement.

Sartre therefore invalidates the choices this woman is making, or at the very least, seems to be prescribing the type of action, and thereby choices, that are valid for her to make. In addition, he seems anxious for her to make a choice regarding the evening that she may not yet be ready to make. Choose, we must, but making good judgments take time.

Another possibility that Sartre totally overlooks is that the woman knows exactly what she is doing. That is, she may purposely be leaving her hand there as a romantic response to acknowledge her perception of her date's advances, within the permissible societal parameters of being out on a first date and in public. Once, again, such a possibility does not present any bad faith on the woman's part, or for that matter, on the man's part.

Sartre makes one more attempt to explain the actions of the woman regarding her bad faith. This time he resorts to the difference between facticity and transcendence.

> These two aspects of human reality are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination. But bad faith does not wish either to coordinate them nor to surmount them in synthesis. Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences (PBF in EE 162).

What Sartre alludes to is to succumbing to one or the other pole of being while denying the other, and not being honest about doing so. Or, according to the definition at the back of *Being and Nothingness* (BN), bad faith is:

> A lie to oneself within the unity of consciousness. Through bad faith a person seeks to escape the responsible freedom of Being-for-itself. Bad faith rests on a vacillation between transcendence and facticity which refuses to recognize either one for what it really is or to synthesize them (BN 800).

In particular, the implication in this example is that the woman resorts to identifying with the transcendent aspect rather than the realm of facticity.

> But thanks to transcendence, I am not subject to all that I am.

> I am on a plane where no reproach can touch me since what I really am is my transcendence. I flee from myself…But the ambiguity necessary for bad faith comes from the fact that I affirm here that I am my transcendence in the mode of thing…It is in the sense that our young woman purifies the desire of anything humiliating by being willing to consider it only as transcendence…Similarly, the young coquette maintains transcendence to the extent that the respect, the esteem manifested by the actions of her admirer are already on the plane of the transcendent…this metastable concept of "transcendence-facticity" is one of the most basic instruments of bad faith, it is not the only one of its kind (PBF in EE 164).

It is necessary, at this point to unpack Sartre's definition of transcendence from more typical definitions of transcendence. Before doing so, however, it is worth noting that Sartre has already labeled the woman, a "coquette" and thus placed a negative value judgment on her action and choice. We are well within reason to view his assessment of the woman's action with suspicion. This, however, demands that we follow his thought on transcendence. First and foremost, transcendence is a very existential term for Sartre, one that is directly linked to the idea of freedom. A human being for Sartre is never finished, "because he is always in the making" (HE in EE 61). That is, one is always free to define who one is, what values one will espouse, and what course of action one will take. In addition, this propensity to define oneself and take on the projects one chooses is possible because of a certain ability to anticipate ahead and to look beyond oneself.

> Man is constantly outside of himself, in projecting himself, in losing himself outside of himself, he makes for man's existing; and on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist; man being this state of passing-beyond, is at the heart, at the center of this passing-beyond. There is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity (HE in EE 61).

Sartre's version of transcendence is a very human type of activity. It does not imply a transcendent God. Yet, it does mean a certain ability of a human being to go outside oneself. This is always to be balanced with the idea that the human being is rooted in the

world in time and space. What Sartre implies is that the woman attempts to deny being rooted in the world of time and space, which implies in this particular case, a denial of the body, of the sexual body. According to Sartre, she also takes the earthiness out of the encounter by experiencing and interpreting it in a transcendent manner; a manner that, according to Sartre is false and takes transcendence out of its proper perspective. That is, she chooses to idealize the conversation as well as the man and not notice the possibilities of and for the body. Yet, Sartre has given us no reason for accepting his reading of the story, no real reason to presume bad faith. Does she not have the right to define her own values, values that at that point in time may perhaps be more concerned with the intellectual world than the physical? Does she also not have the right to delay a sexual decision, until she has more data? Why is Sartre so absolute in his determination if there is no absolute truth? How can he be so sure of the motivation and intention of another person? He may make his judgment and his interpretation, but he has given no reason, no method, for verification. In addition, she seems to be perfectly aware that she is engaged in conversation with another person. Her interpretation of the situation is very much rooted in the facts of the moment. Sartre does not seem to have a strong footing in denying that she is aware of her environment. Therefore, it does not appear that she can be accused of falling into, a "faulty transcendence".

In addition, Sartre seems to privilege the data of the body over that of the mind, or the verbal. Nothing in his system of thought gives him the right to place a higher value on the body, especially since freedom and choice are givens for him. Again, Sartre's interpretation here presumes knowledge of other minds. Namely, he presumes the intention of the man and that the woman can know it. Either way, even if she is choosing

to assume innocence on the man's part or even choosing to delay future physical possibilities and choices, this is totally consistent within the realm of free choice in Sartre's existential system, and does not, in itself, imply bad faith. Bad faith can only occur in the one scenario where there is a deliberate attempt to fool, or lie, to oneself about self-knowledge or motivation, and that much information we simply do not have from the woman in question or from the man for that matter. In fact, none of the possibilities, even that of deliberate flirting and engagement, imply bad faith. Quite the contrary, each implies a rightfully owned ability to try to influence the relationship in the way she wants it to go. She has this right of agency as much as the man does. Of course, most of these options may not reveal the choice Sartre would like her to make, but she is still within her right to choose. It may not even be the choice her date would like her to make, but the two will simply have to negotiate decisions for the future, even if that future is only for the immediate evening. Such is the nature of relationships and free choice. In the end, Sartre's presentation of his interpretation as being the only correct interpretation of the situation discredits the woman's own agency, and perhaps even undercuts the freedom of choice and values that is so central to his system of thought.

Before leaving our analysis of Sartre's basic concepts for his existential philosophy, there are a few more caveats to add, particularly as they inform the concept of bad faith. These caveats also add another dimension of paradox to Sartre's ideas. For instance, Sartre examines the relation of bad faith to the concept of belief.

> The true problem of bad faith stems evidently from the fact that bad faith is faith. It cannot be either a cynical lie or certainty. If certainty is belief – adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given indistinctly then bad faith is belief (The Faith of Bad Faith (FBF) in EE 181).

Sartre appears to involve himself in a type of contradiction. On the one hand he says that bad faith is a type of faith that is neither certainty nor a lie in the cynical sense. Yet he also ends up saying that bad faith is a type of belief. Yet, belief implies a type of certainty. To complicate matters further, Sartre also says that "to believe is to know that one believes. And to know that one believes is no longer to believe" (FBF in EE 183). That is, in a certain sense, belief excludes knowledge. Yet, knowledge that one wishes to hide from oneself is precisely what is at issue in bad faith. To add to the dilemma, Sartre also says that "every belief is a belief that falls short; one never wholly believes what one believes…" (FBF in EE 184). Thus it seems that we never really believe with one hundred percent certainty. The only sense that can be made of this conundrum is to recall that Sartre has already said that bad faith is a project that must fail due to the unity of consciousness. Therefore, we can never quite totally deceive ourselves and to the extent that we don't believe our deceitful attempts at self lying we are not in bad faith but good faith. To the extent that we do believe or want to believe, our own deceptions, in contradiction to other beliefs that may contain more accurate knowledge of ourselves, then we are in bad faith. Further, if every belief is a belief that falls short, then we can never be one hundred percent certain. Therefore, by Sartre's own admission, in the case of the woman out on a date, she could never know with certainty the intentions of another person, namely, her date. In addition, Sartre has not said or defined how we are to discern accurate from inaccurate beliefs. Or, put more generally, if there is no arbitrator of absolute truth and values, then the problem is deeper than originally suspected. For, not only is there no one to decide what values we should hold, but there is no one to define what these values mean in the first place except for the human being.

What happens when humans disagree on meaning or interpretation? Sartre does not answer this question. For instance, consider Sartre's remarks on the concepts and values of heroes and cowards. Sartre writes that "when the existentialist writes about a coward, he says that this coward is responsible for his cowardice" (HE in EE 49). Similarly, he writes that "there's always a possibility for the hero to stop being heroic" (HE in EE 50). On the one hand this is consistent with his idea that the human being is not determined, and therefore is always free to choose new modes of behavior. So, indeed, a coward may choose in the future to act otherwise and the same is true for the hero. A person must make him/herself into what s/he wishes to be. The problem is, however, who is to determine what constitutes a heroic act and what constitutes a cowardly act. The problem is compounded since is only the individual that knows his/her interior motives. In addition, external acts are not so easy to decipher either. More importantly, if each individual must choose, then there is again, subjectivity in values and in definitions as well. Yet, Sartre says that one can be in bad faith regarding just such an example. For example, he also says the following regarding bad faith.

> It attempts also to constitute myself as being what I am not. It apprehends me positively as courageous when I am not so (PBF in EE 179).

Or, another way to put it is that "bad faith apprehends evidence but it is resigned in advance to not being fulfilled by this evidence, of not being persuaded and transformed into good faith" ((FBF in EE 181). That is, bad faith fails to recognize the facts, the given evidence of a situation, of our actions. Yet, facts need interpretation. Who is to judge and according to what standards or norms? If the judge and the norms are set up by the individual, the one must conclude that one does not meet up with one's own criteria of courage, and in addition, one is not willing to admit that one does not measure up to

oneself. Or, the individual may judge according to the group norm and lie to oneself accordingly. In either case, in bad faith one attempts to hide this "fact" or judgment, from oneself. Yet, if one were to change one's definition of what a cowardly or courageous act is, then one may change the evaluation of a particular act without even having to act differently in the future. In this case, one would no longer be in bad faith since one would be consistent with one's own definition. Once again, the problem of arbitrariness presents itself as a problem in Sartre's existential philosophy.

There is yet another important concept in the discussion of bad faith. It is the idea of sincerity. As Sartre says, "bad faith is possible only because sincerity is conscious of missing its goal inevitably, due to its very nature" (PBF in EE 179). In addition, Sartre says, "consciousness conceals in its being a permanent risk of bad faith…to be what it is not and not to be what it is" (FBF in EE 186). Therefore, it is not so easy to overcome this missed mark, nor are we guaranteed that we ever will. Further, it is not even desirable to try to live in a state of constant sincerity. In fact, a certain paradox results in that the very attempt to always be sincere is yet, or results in, another instance of bad faith.

> one can fall into bad faith though being sincere…Total, consistent sincerity as a constants effort to disassociate oneself from oneself. A person frees himself from himself by the very act by which he makes himself an object for himself. To draw up a perpetual inventory of what one is means constantly to redeny oneself and to take refuge in a sphere where one is no longer anything but pure, free regard. The goal of bad faith, as we said, is to put oneself out of reach; it is an escape…we must use the same terms to define sincerity (PBF in EE 177).

Yet, whereas this might leave us in despair, Sartre says that there is indeed a way out, if only occasionally. In a footnote he adds the following:

> …that does not mean that we cannot radically escape bad faith. But this supposes a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity (FBF in EE 186).

So, the project that Sartre calls for is not one of supposed sincerity but one of authenticity, and this authenticity takes place in a mode of recovery. It is work that one has to do By its existential definition, it is also a work that has to be done in acknowledgement of human freedom. Sartre fleshes out this mode of recovery not so much in his philosophical works but in his literary works. It is there that he provides ample examples of characters in good and bad faith, characters that lie, and most importantly, varying examples of how individuals make their free choices in concrete situations in particular contexts.

PART II LITERARY ANALYSIS

A. ISSUES OF LIES AND REMORSE IN SARTRE'S THE FLIES.

Sartre's play *The Flies* (F) is rich in existential questions, as well as moral ones, both individual and group-related. In it, our topic of lies and bad faith is bound up with Sartre's view of freedom as well as the specific issues of remorse, repentance, and forgiveness. It is a play where most of the people lie, including the gods. In addition, this play affords us to view lies at a group level. Further, issues of state are tied into the lies told. Finally, there is the added dimension of relationships with the female characters in relation to truth and lies. There are several questions to ask at the end of a play like this. Who has lied and who has been in bad faith? Do rituals actually produce repentance and remorse? What is the function of ritual in relation to memory, repentance and forgiveness? Can one be too lenient as an individual, as a ruler? What of the crowd that thirsts for blood? Where is the line between justice and revenge? Do acts of

violence lead to irrevocable changes in human behavior, even when they seem justified? Can someone take upon themselves the guilt of the multitude and release their burden? Who has the right to forgive? Is it ever a violation of freedom to forgive? Is anyone in good faith at the end of the play? How do the characters exercise their freedom? What of the brother/sister relationship and how does that change during the play? What of the role of the crowd and city dwellers? What happens to the city as a result? These are some of the issues that the play allows us to uncover.

The main character of the play is Orestes, known as Philebus when he first enters the city of Argos with his tutor. Unbeknownst to the two, they are greeted by Zeus, who tells them it is Dead Men's Day. He proceeds to explain to them the meaning and background to the ritual. The past king, Agamemnon, was killed by Queen Clytemnestra's lover, Aegistheus. Thus, one function of the ritual is the commemoration of the murder of the prior king (NOTOP 54). However, what is most important about the ritual is that it is a call for the people to repent, since the people of Argos are implicated in the crime through their silence at the time of the murder. In addition, the past king is also faulted for being too lenient, and for not recognizing the value of public ritual. Zeus recounts the tale.

> Agamemnon was a worthy man, you know, but he made one great mistake. He put a ban on public execution. That was a pity. A good hanging now and then – that entertains folk in the provinces and robs death of its glamour….So, the people here held their tongues, they looked forward to seeing, for once, a violent death.. They still kept silent when they saw their king entering by the city gates. And when Clytemnestra stretched forth her graceful arms…They still said nothing. Yet, at that moment a word, a single word, might have sufficed. But noone said it; each was gloating in imagination over the picture of a huge corpse with a shattered face…When the folks of Argos heard their king screaming his life out in the palace, they still kept silence ... (54-55).

Zeus implies that violence has an entertaining function for the people, and that in order to fulfill this function, the people allowed their king to be murdered, supposedly for the mere spectacle and sensational effect. Sartre already hints at a major question, the role of the masses or the crowd in matters of justice, and the psychological factor of mob mentality, particularly a crowd's thirst for blood or demand for a scapegoat. At this early stage of the play it is guilt by silence. In other words, not speaking out, in Sartrean terms, is still a choice, and a choice that bears responsibility. Orestes points out that the murderer is now on the throne and raises the question of justice. "For fifteen years he has enjoyed the fruits of crime. And I thought the gods were just" (54). The crime has not only gone unpunished, but has also paid off in the reward of the throne for the murderer. To this Zeus relies that he shouldn't be judging the gods, that there could be a good reason for the behavior of the gods. As he says, "must they always punish? Wouldn't it be better to use such breaches of the law to point a moral? ... And they sent the flies…They are a symbol" (55). The answer is somewhat the traditional response that a greater good can sometimes come out of a great evil and that, quite simply, God, or the gods in this case, know best. Of course one must see in this dialogue an ironic attitude or even a mockery, for Sartre does not believe in God. Irony can also be seen regarding the sign of the pestilence, since we already know that Sartre does not believe in such signs. Omens are interpreted by the people and not pre-given. Still, one might ask, if there were no flies in the city before and now there are a pestilence of flies, what has changed in the city? One might not answer morally that the people's sin brought it about, but one might look for a scientific explanation. Or, the uncomfortableness of the situation might lead

some to review their behavior and have a change of heart. Yet, Sartre does not seem to allow for any such reasoning.

Zeus continues to explain, in a somewhat boasting fashion, that the main good that has come out of the tragedy of the murder of King Agamemnon, is the repentance and mourning of the people. Zeus asks an old woman if she is in mourning for the murdered king. Her answer is originally in the negative. "I am not in mourning. Everyone wears black at Argos" (56). The woman might be putting on an exterior show or even have forgotten the reason for the black. Or, still, she might not be willing to tell the truth to a stranger. That is, she might be lying. Zeus reminds her of the death of the king, and her answer is at first a justifiable excuse. "My good man was in the fields, at work. What could I do, a woman alone? I bolted my door" (56). Although appearing reasonable, her answer is an excuse. She refused to be engaged. Zeus is not satisfied with the answer and he also appears to be a reader of souls, as he tells her the real events that took place that night, and the real reasons for her actions. "Yes, but you left your window not quite closed, so as to hear the better… and didn't you enjoy it…". He adds: "that night you had a grand time with your man" (56). Zeus implicates the woman, not only for her silence, but that her behavior shows she took pleasure in the event. She enjoyed the king's murder, and it also served as an impetus for sexual pleasure. The woman's mood then changes to one of repentance. Zeus asks her to try to earn some forgiveness by repenting. To this she replies:

> oh sir, I do repent, …and my daughter too, and my son-in-law offers up a heifer every year, and my little grandson has been brought up in a spirit of repentance…Though he's only seven, he never plays or laughs, for thinking of his original sin (56).

The reply incorporates a religious idea of original sin, passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, it implicates not only the original guilty people who were around during the time of the king's murder, but subsequent family members. The result is that an entire family, indeed an entire city, as we shall shortly see, is steeped in contrition and outward acts of repentance. Yet, one must ask, is the ritual effective? The answer would depend on the intended effect. Is it forgiveness? If so, it does not appear to have accomplished its mission, since the people are still repeating the same act for the same crimes. The reader is also left to wonder, who is it that is supposed to forgive? Who has the right to forgive? (The debate between Derrida and Jankelevitch in Derrida's book *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* raises just these issues). In this play, the victim, the old king, is dead, so it cannot be him. The new king reenacts the ritual each year but does not offer the people the forgiving relief from their past sins. Perhaps the gods are to offer forgiveness? However, there doesn't seem to be a response from them that all is forgiven, or that they have suffered enough, atoned enough, for their sins. Perhaps the people are to forgive themselves. Yet, it is obvious from their behavior that they do not. Or, the people may be waiting in hope of a future forgiveness, one not guaranteed in this life. That is, Zeus has told the old woman that repentance is her only hope of salvation, but what this salvation consists of is not defined in the play. One might ask if the purpose of the ritual is remorse, but we are not given insight into the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters, whether they are truly sorry for what they did, or if there is only the outward display of ritual repentance. In sum, we do not know the reasons for the performance. Is it done out of fear? Zeus himself seems to acknowledge this last element. "We have there the real thing, the good old piety of yore, rooted in terror" (57).

So it seems that part of the purpose of the ritual, of the purpose of the gods, is a pietistic attitude that has its basis in fear and terror. And, it seems to be working.

At this point Zeus poses a question to Orestes. Does he think that Aegistheus should have been struck down for his crimes? Orestes vacillates, and finally admits that he isn't sure. Sartre seems to be raising a question regarding capital punishment. Should capital punishment be an acceptable, and in certain circumstance, justified, form of punishment? Is revenge or avenging a wrong, ever justified to the point of death? Specifically, the question pertains to capital punishment for a king, that is, for a sovereign, or head of state. The reader is left to ponder the question with no answer, except than in a Sartrean world we must choose our values. The choice is up to us and up to society how we will respond to crimes, especially violent crimes, and who will be held accountable.

Orestes' final response to Zeus on the matter raises another question. "Does Aegistheus feel contrition" (57)? Zeus responds:

> I'd be much surprised. But what matter? A whole city's repenting on his account. And its measured by the bushel, is repentance...Fifteen years ago, to a day, Agamemnon was murdered. And what a change has come over the light-hearted folk of Argos since that day (57).

While Orestes is concerned with whether or not the murderer is sorry for what he did, this does not interest Zeus in the least. In fact his response seems to imply both that the gods are not so omniscient as to have insight into the soul of a person, since he doesn't know, and that it doesn't really matter since a higher good has come out of it, namely many more, in fact an entire city, is in repentance. The good of the many seems to outweigh the evil of the one. Yet, the implication is more than this, for it cannot be forgotten that Aegesthius is a head of state. The further question concerns government and politics. Is

it necessary for a head of state to reveal, or even be, sorry for one's actions, to admit a mistake? Zeus appears to take the side of the old van guard in excusing the king for his action.

Zeus next moves on to more urgent matters. He tells Orestes about Agamenmon's missing son who Aegistheus ordered killed as a young boy, but the men had pity on him, spared him, and he was whisked away and raised by foreigners. Zeus utters a warning in the form of what advice he would give the young man now.

> You have better things to do than reigning over a dead-and-alive city, a carrion city, plagued by flies. These people are great sinners, but as you see, they are working out their atonement…let them be, respect their sorrowful endeavor. You cannot share in their repentance, since you did not share their crime. Your brazen innocence makes a gulf between you and them…If even for a moment you turn their thoughts from their remorse, all their sins will harden on them – like cold fat. They have guilty consciences, they're afraid – and fear and guilty consciences have a good savor in the nostrils of the gods…What, moreover, could you give them in exchange? Good digestion, the gay monotony of provincial life, and the boredom – oh the, the soul- destroying boredom – of long days of mild content (58-59).

Zeus' answer leaves something to be desired. The logic does not hold given the prior conversation of the old lady and her family. That Agamemnon's son is innocent of the crime of the city is clear enough. Yet, so was the old lady's grandson. Neither one partook of the crimes of that day, so how is it that the gods accept the repentance of the little boy yet Orestes can have no part of the city's repentance? The only sense that can be made of this is that the grandson of the old lady is implicated by blood to the sins of his family, and Orestes is innocent by blood, as well as being innocent of the crime. Sartre is already setting up Orestes to be a scapegoat, an innocent Christ figure, and the reader should already have a hint of what is coming. Of course, another possibility is that Zeus is not concerned with truth and will say anything to avert Orestes from the city.

Left alone again, Orestes and his tutor discuss philosophy and the tutor states the benefits of Orestes' education.

> Your mind is free from prejudice and superstition; you have no family ties, no religion, and no calling, you are free to turn your hand to anything…But you know better than to commit yourself – and there lies your strength (61).

Of the many virtues that the tutor sites, such as freedom from superstition and religion, Sartre would agree with these. However, according to Sartre's philosophy, there is a negative or void in his education, which the tutor views as a plus, namely, the lack of commitment, of engagement. No demands at all are placed on Orestes and, more importantly, he has placed none on himself. This will be the paramount lesson in the rest of the play. The toll it will take is already foreshadowed when Orestes acknowledges that he is the son of Agamemnon. For now what the young man laments is that he has no real memories, meaning memories of his real family and of a typical childhood.

> When I was seven, I know I had no home, no roots….For memories are luxuries reserved for people who own houses, cattle, fields, and servants. But mind you, if there were something I could do, something to give me the freedom of the city if, even by a crime, I could acquire their memories, their hopes and fears, and fill with these the void within me, yes, even if I had to kill my own mother…(62-63).

Orestes is free to invent himself, free to choose his project. Yet, it seems he lacks a certain connection to his life. He is aware of who he is, heritage-wise, the son of a murdered king. Yet, up to now, he has not had to deal with it. Of course one must also say that in a certain sense he already has an alternate history. He was raised by a different family. He does not have to choose to bond to the roots of his lineage. Yet, the young man feels a void that he thinks will be filled with acquiring the memory, good and bad, of the people of the city of his birth. One might say that he is looking to trade on his memories, from one cultural memory to another. This does not seem legitimate. Nor is it

legitimate to think that the primal existential void he feels can really be filled. On this point the young man is very much mistaken. However, he is correct that he must choose his own future, and it is one that will involve engagement of one sort or another.

It is at this point in the story that the young man meets up with Electra, the princes, and his sister. When she encounters Orestes she tells of her plight, of how she has been reduced to servitude instead of treated as a princess. Electra also bemoans having no real friends and no one to help her. Both brother and sister, and perhaps sister more so, suffers from existential isolation. She rightly characterizes the people of the city as fearful, and yet, this is not the emotion that captivates her. "Everybody here is sick with fear. Everyone except me….I'm sick with – hatred" (67). On the one hand she seems very courageous and even wants to bring down the gods. Yet, on the other hand she plays the part of a stereotypical woman in that she is waiting for someone to help her. She pleads that she is not strong enough to take down Zeus by herself. This may be typical female behavior, or it may be an awareness of the facticity of the life of a woman in Argos. She wants change; she even perhaps envisions bringing down the old regime. Yet, she does not want to act alone, to take on the burden herself. So, she taunts Orestes by posing hypothetical problems to him. Her pedagogical style is comparable to that of the tutor, and even to the style of Zeus. Therefore, she is capable of assuming the questioning privilege of both gods and men. She is a daring young woman in many respects. Her pedagogical style is meant to incite Orestes into action. It is she that tries to instigate or extract from him a commitment to action. She poses the question:

> …Suppose one of the young men came home after a long journey and found his father murdered, and his mother living with the murderer, and his sister treated like a slave. 0restes, what would he do…Or would he draw his sword and hurl himself at the assassin, and slash his brains out? (68).

At this point the Queen walks in on them and reminds Electra that she is to dress up for the ceremonies tomorrow. Electra is revolted by the thought of Aegistheus and his pretenses to the public, and his treatment of her. The Queen tells Electra that it is up to her how Aegesthius will treat her. So long as she keeps rejecting him as king, she will get the same awful treatment. This is the price paid for her obstinacy, or her truth. Electra is very good at laying bare the lies and pretenses of the people, including those in the royal house.

> Yes, - if I let myself be tainted by your remorse; it begs the gods forgiveness for a crime I never committed. Yes if I kiss your royal husband's hand and call him father. Ugh! The mere thought makes me sick. There's dry blood under his nails (69-70).

Recalling what Zeus had said regarding the repentance of the people, there is a further problematic. For, if Orestes could not, or should not, take part of the repentance since he was innocent of the crimes of the people against his father, then it seems that Electra is also innocent, even innocent by blood ties to the murdered king. Therefore, Zeus should not allow her to suffer either. Yet, Electra did not have the good fortune to be whisked away to escape the wrath of the new king, and as a woman, there were other ways to deal with her. It seems, then, that not only Aegistheus, but the gods too, had another purpose in allowing Electra to be punished for a crime she did not commit and allowing Orestes to escape. The gods, it seems, are quite capricious, and their motives more secretive than originally envisioned. Nonetheless, Electra has owned her decision and is engaged.

The queen now questions Orestes. "Did they tell you that we bear the burden of an expiable crime, committed 15 yrs ago...and that Queen Clytemnestra bears the heaviest load of guilt?" (70-71). It is now that Electra cautions Orestes.

> Don't pity her, Philebus. The queen is indulging in our national past time, the game of public confession. Here everyone cries his sins on the housetops…But the folks of Argos are getting a little tired of these amusements; everyone knows his neighbors sins by heart. The Queen's especially, have lost interest they're official- our basic crimes, in fact…she finds someone like you…to hear her tale of guilt…It is as if she were confessing for the first time (71).

The ritual now has another aspect to it, that of public confession. There is a ritual of humiliation, even self-humiliation involved. Yet, according to Electra, this has become a game, the sport of the people. Apparently, the queen is not exempt from this spectacle of debasement. In a certain sense, this debasement of the royalty feeds the people. We do not yet know if there is any sincerity in her public display of remorse. It is evident that Electra does not think so, and that she mocks the whole show. The queen protests: "Anyone has the right to spit in my face, to call me murderer and whore. But no one has the right to speak ill of my remorse (71). Electra again contests.

> People will beg you to condemn them, but you must be sure to judge them only on the sins they own to, their other evils deeds are no one's business, and they wouldn't thank you for detecting them (71).

Electra is proven correct as Clytemnestra's next speech reveals. She tells Orestes that:

> it is not the death of that old leech that I regret. When I saw his blood tinging the water in the bath, I sang and danced for joy. And even now, after 15 yrs, whenever I recall it, I have a thrill of pleasure. But I had a son…when Aegistheus handed him over to his bravoes... (71).

It seems that the Queen has indeed been lying, or hiding the truth about her remorse. She does not grieve for the late king, but for the son that she lost. In addition, she admits to feeling pleasure at watching the king, who is also her husband, die. It is not only the

people of Argos, but their queen as well, that takes pleasure in violence. It is worth noting that this is now the second female character in the play for whom violence is said to give pleasure to women, the other being the old lady. In addition, we have the crowd as a general figure that takes pleasure in bloodshed.

Electra interrupts the queen's dialogue to remind her that she had a daughter too, whom she has allowed to be reduced to servitude. Electra comments that "that crime, it seems, sits lightly on your conscience" (72). Crimes, or horrible behavior, against women are not counted, even amongst the women themselves. Moreover, the queen admits to no remorse regarding Electra's plight. Instead she chides that her day will come too when "nothing remains for you but to drag your crime after you until you die. For that is the law, just or unjust, of repentance" (72). Repentance implies ritual performance, but does not add up to forgiveness in this play, much less does it imply justice. The queen also hints at another motive for her slighting of Electra, that of rivalry between women. "Here we are, scolding each other like two women of the same age in love with the same man! And yet I am your mother" (72). Perhaps there is more truth in this statement than either woman is willing to admit. The queen has already mentioned that she regrets the loss of her son, and Electra has dreamed of her brother coming back to save her for quite some time. Further, the queen rightly fingers the stranger, who turns out to be Orestes, as the cause, for she says "And now you have come, you have spoken, and here we are showing our teeth" (72). That is, the rivalry amongst the two women is over a man, a man with blood-ties to each.

The ritual of dead man's day is described in detail. Once a year the stone is rolled back, that it is said leads to Hades, and the dead are allowed to roam around the town.

What is interesting about the event is that the dead serve to accuse the conscience of the living for all the wrong they have done against them. The attitude of the people of Argos is one of fear and contrition. A woman cautions her son "to start crying when you're told" (75). It seems he still has to learn the procedure for the ritual and the proper show of remorse. When he becomes frightened, instead of comforting him, his mother says: "And so you should be, terribly frightened. That's how one grows up into a descent god-fearing man" (75). The next generation is being trained in the same state of fear and show of respect and remorse. The show, the performance, is terribly important in Argos, and if it is not genuine, then one must conclude that one can lie in gestures as well as in words.

At least one role of this ruler is to enforce fear as a method of keeping the people in order. He officiates at the ceremony, along with the high priest, as the sins of the townspeople are recounted. When the people cry for mercy they are told "the dead have no mercy! Their grievances are times proof, rancor without end, in their eternal keeping your crimes have no reprieve" (80). Thus the dead become the repository of a collective memory, one that will give no reprieve to the living of their sins.

One wonders if any true remorse could be had with or without ritual. Then again, rituals are important for human beings, as even modern psychologists, as well as the religions teach us. But Sartre will have none of this. To him it serves no value and amounts only to superstition, as echoed in the words of the tutor. "These folk are perishing of fear…The effects of superstition" (77). One wonders if there can be any valid remorse in Sartre's philosophy. What value would it serve if there is no sense of absolute values of right and wrong but merely the values one chooses? Still, society,

individuals collectively, can decide what values it will consider worthwhile and honor. The individual must still choose to accept the norm or set up some other. The individual must also interpret and judge the value of an action. For instance, to decide whether an act is worth repeating or is regretful, missing the mark in some way, and thus lead to a changed behavior in the future. The entire idea of conscience, and of remorse in the sense of regret, appears to be eliminated in such a system.

The ritual continues and Electra begins to dance. She plays a ruse on the people and sets up an experiment. “My dead ones, I invoke your silence that these people round me may know your ears are with me” (84). Since she does not believe the dead are walking around, she thinks she will win the battle and dismantle their superstition. At first there is no response and the townspeople begin to believe that the dead indeed protect her and they turn against the king and towards Electra. All is well until Zeus comes to the assistance of the king in acting against Electra and causes a stone to rumble and crash against the temple steps. With this the people’s fear increases once more, as they interpret the sign being a sign of displeasure from the dead. The woman they were about to praise becomes the subject of scorn, and they call for her demise. With this the king seizes the opportunity to banish her and gives an order for her death if she returns to the city (85).

Orestes feels compassion for his sister and tries to get her to run away with him. She refuses and laments that he got her to think that “one could cure the people here by words” (87). Instead, she says, “an evil thing is conquered only by another evil thing, and only violence can save them” (87). Through this character Sartre seems to be raising the issue, again, of whether violence is the only option in some circumstance. For, as she

says, she has tried the way of words and they have failed. The only option now, she thinks, is violence. For this act, she awaits her brother, who "has crime and tragedy in his blood…The bad blood of the house of Atreus" (87). Electra hints at a fate of bloodlines. Orestes is not so clear, as he offers a different scenario to Electra.

> But mightn't he be weary of all that tale of wickedness and bloodshed; if for instance, he'd been brought up in a happy, peaceful city? (88).

Orestes is raising the possibility of the influence of environment and upbringing. Electra is not convinced. Lineage is the stronger tie in her eyes.

> You're a grandson of Atreus, and you can't escape the heritage of blood…But after it will come and hunt you down…and then you will commit the crime, however, much you shirk it. (88).

It is at this point that Orestes reveals who he is to his sister, and she is disappointed.

> I was waiting for the Orestes of my dreams; always thinking of his strength and my weakness…I see you're just a boy…but you know I love you (88).

It is in the image of her brother, and not the real thing, that Electra finds strength. She is also poised as the typical damsel in distress. It is somewhat hard to believe that the same woman, who is brave enough to thwart the king, queen, high priest, and the people of Argos, meditates on her weakness in comparison to the imagined strength of a brother she has never met. The woman does not realize her own strength and courage. When Orestes still cannot prevail upon her to leave Argos, she answers in a fatalistic manner, that "No its here the doom of the Attrides must be played out." (88). Electra is a believer in fate, a most unSartrean idea. Or, perhaps she is just being practical that the inevitable is going to happen. Perhaps she is pushing her brother to take action and own who he is. Or perhaps again, she is using the blood tie as an excuse for her choice, that is, perhaps she is in bad faith, or lying to get her way. Electra has begun to persuade Orestes. "I too

am of the house of Atreus, and my place is at your side". (89). Blood lines have become important to Orestes, too. Instead of being elated that she now has her brother at her side, Electra changes her reasoning. She now tries to dissuade him, to point out how different the two of them are. Indeed, it is now that she begins to turn the tables, as she impresses upon him that they really have nothing in common, except for blood, and this does not seem to be enough.

> my childhood was quite different [than yours]…So go away my noble-souled brother. I have no use for noble souls; what I need is an accomplice…No Philebus, I could never lay such a load upon a heart like yours; a heart that has no hatred in it. (89-90).

Orestes notes that he has no hatred but also no love, and that both call for a type of surrender. It seems that what this lack of emotions and lack of surrender symbolizes is a lack of engagement. The very fact that he brings it up, and that he is identifying more and more with his family of origins, suggests that Orestes is preparing himself for some type of engaged choice. In addition, Electra appears to disown the blood-tie, calling for an accomplice instead. That is, she wants a free-willed answer from her brother and not an excuse of blood. But at this point he seems perplexed as to what to do next, and actually asks for direction, for a sign, from Zeus.

> Ah – if I only knew which path to take. Oh Zeus, not often have I called on you for help…I need a guide to point my way…And yet you have forbidden the shedding of blood...make plain your will by some sign…(91-92).

Zeus mumbles an incantation and lightening flashes around the stone. He interprets this as a sign that Zeus indeed wishes peace, not bloodshed. Yet, he is not satisfied with the answer he gets and decides to defy the sign, and the god.

> From now on I'll take noone's orders, neither man nor god's…What a change has come on everything…Until now I felt something warm and living round me, like

> a friendly presence. That something has just died. What emptiness. I say there is another path – my path. (92-93).

Electra recognizes this change in her brother as she comments: "Your eyes have lost their glow they're dull and smoldering" (93).

> Supposing I take over all their crimes. Supposing I set out to win the name of "guilt-stealer,", and heap on myself all their remorse…Surely once I am plagued with all those pangs of conscience, innumerable as the flies of Argos- surely then I shall have earned the freedom of your city (94).

Orestes' intent is very peculiar. In Sartre's system every human being is responsible for the decision of his/her own free choices. Therefore, one cannot take upon oneself the crimes of others. In addition, Orestes wishes to take upon himself their crimes in order to earn freedom or, more likely, to set the city free. Yet, the people are already free, but they can not see it, they don't know it. He cannot make them free, but perhaps his action will open up the eyes of the others to recognize their freedom. It is in precisely this context that Sartre's universal idea may make some sense. Namely, what he chooses for himself he chooses for them too, the acknowledgment of freedom of choice. He cannot, however, really take on their crimes and remorse.

There is one other way that Orestes' perplexing idea may make some sense. Orestes is a prince and the rightful heir to the throne. As a royal leader and governmental insignia, he also can make laws and can grant pardon. As such, he can, in a certain sense, free the people from their crimes and can also grant them clemency. One also cannot help but notice that he is taking on divine scapegoat qualities by a willingness to take upon himself the crimes, or sins, of the people. For only a god, an innocent god, can atone for the unatonable. It is precisely on this point that Electra questions him. "So you wish to atone for us" (94). Orestes, however, denies this idea. "To atone? No…I'ld

house your penitence" (94). That is, he offers himself as ransom. Is this not a type of atonement?

Orestes then devises a practical plan, to remove the instruments, or enforcers of remorse and penance, namely, the king and queen. Assured now of his decision, Electra recognizes him as not only brother, but head of household, head of royal household in this case (95). Therefore, we can expect troubles in the state as well as for the individuals.

Meanwhile, back at the palace, Aegistheus is tiring of his role.

> I am tired, so tired. For fifteen years I have been upholding the remorse of a whole city, and my arms are aching with the strain. For fifteen years I have been dressing the part……I have no remorse – and no man in Argos is sadder than I (98).

As current king, Aegistheus has been presiding over the ritual of the dead each year. Also, as the killer of Agamemnon, he must partake in the rites of remorse. Theoretically, as killer of a king, his guilt should be higher than that of the people whose guilt was only that of remaining silent when the old king was being murdered. Aegistheus' words reveal that it was all a show, a lie for the sake of the people. He admits that he felt no remorse at all. Now we have both the king and queen admitting no remorse for their part of the murder. Ironically, the lack of remorse is accompanied by sadness. Also ironic, Aegistheus starts to believe in the watchful eye of the dead and the queen must remind him of the lie.

> the dead are underground and will not trouble us…Have you forgotten it was you yourself who invented that fable to impress your people? (98)

Not only did they not feel remorse, but the rite itself was a hoax for the people. That is, he has deceived, lied to them. The dead don't really come back to life to haunt the living

on the ritual day. Yet, keeping up the lie for all these years has taken its toll on the king. He makes further lament.

> I parade the terror of my frown, and all who see me cringe in an agony of repentance. But I – what am I but an empty shell? I am more dead than Agamemnon… (99).

Zeus returns to the scene. Aegistheus is not pleased to see him and inquires, "Have I not paid heavily enough? (99). The reply is no, he has not paid nearly enough. It seems that the gods are not forgiving, they only crave more repentance. Or, perhaps, could it be that Zeus is aware that Aegistheus really does not repent and is not remorseful? No matter, this is not the reason for the divine visit. Zeus has come to warn the king of imminent danger. Aegistheus asks a notable question, one that hinges on justice and fairness. "If today you hinder the crime Orestes has in mind, why did you permit mine of fifteen years ago" (101). In other words, the action of the god appears capricious even to the king. Zeus replies that all crimes are not equal and do not displease him equally. "Its because you are atoning for it that it served my ends", and "you struck in a frenzy and rage. And then, when your frenzy had died down, you looked back on the deed with loathing and disowned it". (102). Is Zeus implying that Aegistheus really did feel remorse, or that he did not really want to kill Agamemnon? Yet, Aegistheus has just said the opposite a little while ago, that he has no remorse. So we are left with a few possibilities. Either Aegistheus is lying and he really did feel remorse, or the god is lying in trying to convince Aegesthius that he really did have remorse. Or, perhaps the god is taken in by the outward show, or takes that to be the only remorse that counts, the performance of remorse. Or perhaps Aegistheus may have had some remorse back then, but none now.

When Aegistheus comments that he infers from Zeus' statement that Orestes will have no remorse, he seems to insinuate that he himself indeed did have remorse. We are left to judge what kind of remorse. By all indications, the difference is a ritual difference. Orestes will not put on a show of remorse, like Aegethius did. Further, which is of no consequence to god or king, he will have no interior true remorse, at least that is the prediction. For, as Zeus has previously said, it didn't really matter whether or not Aegistheus repented, what mattered was the remorse and repentance of the people. Remorse is used as a vehicle for controlling the people. He attempts to win over Aegethius by likening kings to gods. "A king is a god on earth, glorious and terrifying as a god" (103). Zeus may also be alluding to a divine right of kings, and therefore of an allegiance between kings and gods. In addition, Zeus reveals that he had a very good reason for allowing Agamemnon's death, namely that, otherwise "he'd have died of apoplexy in a pretty slave-girls' arms" (102). Zeus' divine foreknowledge, therefore, was able to prevent a worse disaster and thereby serves the higher good.

However, the main motive for Zeus to want to save Aegistheus is to keep up the show and protect the secret of the gods; namely, "the bitterness of knowing men are free" (103). This is a secret that both king and god share, but not the people. "But your subjects do not know it, and you do" (103). The real threat posed by Orestes is that he knows that he is free. As Aegistheus comments: "A free man in a city acts like a plague…He will infect my whole kingdom and bring my work to nothing" (104). Thus, while the flies may plague the city, the real threat is the plague of freedom. It is this plague that the flies try to stop. Zeus confesses that "once freedom lights its beacon in a man's heart, the gods are powerless against him" (104). Therefore, Zeus implores

Aegistheus to defend himself against Orestes. For his part, Aegistheus is tired, and not even the political ramifications are enough for him to defend himself. Even when Orestes comes and tells him to defend himself, he refuses. "I shall not defend myself. Its too late for me to call for help…No, I shall not resist, I wish you to kill me" (104). Orestes response is quite callous. He says that he does not care how it is to be done and strikes him down anyway. Aegistheus poses a question to him. "Is it true you feel no remorse?" (104). Orestes' reply indicates that in certain matters of justice there should be no remorse, even for killing or murdering.

> Why should I feel remorse? I am only doing what is right.
> Justice is a matter between men and I do not need a god to teach me it. Its right to stamp you out, like the foul brute you are, and to free the people of Argos from your evil influence. It is right to restore to them their sense of human dignity (105).

Orestes conflates two issues, the one, a just issue of ridding the people of a terrible evil, the other of the taking of human life with a certain satisfaction, or at least, without remorse. Even if killing a tyrant is in certain circumstances justified, and even if it is an only option, this should still not cancel out the solemness or the basic remorse that one has taken another human life. Sartre seems to imply that remorse implies that one is sorry for what one did or wished one had not done it. The responsibility of freedom means one accepts what one has done. Yet, is it not possible to say something had to be done and still regret that it had to come to this? Is it not possible to feel an act is justified and yet regret that it came to the taking of a human life, that one wished it could have been otherwise? But such distinctions do not seem possible in Sartre's system of thought as highlighted by the callousness of Orestes reply. He does not seem to care at all that he is striking down a man who does not even defend himself. It is an easy kill. With this

Orestes strikes him a deadly blow, but not before Aegistheus issues a curse on him and Electra, and warns them of the flies.

Having killed the first time, far from feeling remorse, Orestes asks Electra to show him the way to the queen's room. Violence appears to foster more violence. Electra's reply indicates some hesitation or change of heart on her part. As she says: "she can do us no more harm" (106). It does not appear that Electra wants further vengeance on the woman who made her suffer so much. With the king dead the queen may no longer be a problem. Orestes is not convinced. This dialogue of Electra is one of the few places we see her inner thoughts and watch her struggle with the problem.

> I want it now, I must want it. So this is what I wanted. I did not realize how it would be. (She covers the king's face)…She was our mother – and he's struck her…Its done; my enemies are dead…my heart is like a lump of ice… Was I lying to myself all those years?...I'm not a coward. Only a moment ago I wanted it… (106-107).

At this moment, Electra takes no pleasure in the knowledge that her enemies are finally stamped out. She also asks herself if she is a coward for not wanting to have her mother killed. Yet, her moment of confusion or remorse is only temporary. Her next words reveal a different attitude, one of revenge. "I want her to suffer. Make her scream…my father is avenged" (107). Orestes response is non-wavering, as he says "I shall not repent of what I have done" (107). In addition, it is now that he feels his freedom, not just in the head, but in act. "Freedom has crashed down on me like a thunderbolt" (108). However, Electra offers another perspective on freedom. "But I don't feel free. And you- can you undo what has been done? ...we are no longer free to blot it out" (108). That is, freedom does not mean freedom to do anything, or freedom to do the impossible. What Electra has learned is that acts are, in a certain sense, irrevocable, once done they are done. One

can regret an act, or make amends for an act, but there is no real way to take it back. Orestes, however, does not wish to do any of these.

> Do you think I'd wish to repent it? I have done my deed, Electra, and that deed was good…The heavier it is to carry, the better pleased I shall be for that burden is my freedom…Today I have one path only…But it is my path (108).

Orestes' reply is one of clear acceptance for what he has done and for any consequences that may come with it. He acknowledges his freedom of choice in a very Sartrean way, of defining himself according to his deeds. In addition, he calls his deed a good one. There is obviously no remorse or repentance in him, as Zeus predicted.

As a result of their deeds a change that has come over the two. Orestes looks like a wild beast, and Electra seems to have grown old. Yet, there is a worse change that occurs. Electra begins to accuse her brother and disowns the crime, or her part in it. That is, she starts the blaming game. Orestes says that "we planned this crime together we should bear its brunt together" (114). That is, they should both own and take responsibility for the action. Yet, responsibility and culpability is exactly what Electra is renouncing, or wants to be able to deny.

> Of course I deny it. Wait! ... I don't know. I dreamt the crime, but you carried it out, you murdered your own mother (114).

Orestes accepts both the responsibility of the act and the associated burden of memory. He readily owns them both.

> Do you imagine that my mother's cries will ever cease tinging in my ears? …
> And the anguish that consumes you – do you think it will ever cease ravaging my ear?
> But what matter? I am free. Beyond anguish, beyond remorse, free. And at one with myself. (114-115).

At this point, Electra should be totally satisfied that her dreams have come true. Instead of thanking her brother, she turns on him. "How I hate you", she utters (115). Electra

cannot hold on to her original decision. According to Sartre's philosophy she is unwilling to take responsibility for her actions, and as such, would be in bad faith. Yet, is it not possible to change one's mind? Are there not truly situations and times where one regrets, genuinely regrets, one's actions and wishes that the act never was performed? This seems reasonable and Sartre seems unreasonable for advocating an unwavering blind acceptance of any action performed. Still, it may not be that Sartre objects so much to a change of mind as to not taking responsibility for one's action, and in this regard Sartre is one hundred percent correct ethically. For Electra not to own any responsibility, and to want to pin the blame totally on Orestes, is a totally irresponsible act. For Orestes did not originally want to kill Aegesthius. If Electra had not pushed him, he would not have acted. Still, one could say that in a Sartrean world Orestes is totally responsible for his action and he did not have to listen to his sister. This is true. Orestes was free to choose to listen or to ignore her. He was longing for engagement and found the impetus for it through his conversation with his sister. Did she influence him? Most definitely she did. Yet, the act and final decision belonged to him. However, this does not make Electra innocent by an means. She was, in every regard, an accomplice. She did not have to help Orestes find the king and queen and she could have offered more resistance to his decision, tried to stop it. In the end, she did not. She aided and abetted a murder. In addition, she reverted back to her original intention even after her momentary remorse. And, in a sense, she was the brains behind the operation since it was her idea in the first place.

Zeus shows up again and tries to influence Orestes, but his words have no effect.

"I am no criminal, and you have no power to make me atone for an act I don't regard as a crime…Torture me to your heart's content. I regret nothing (116)". Zeus' next tactic is to try to get Orestes to repent on account of his sister. To this Orestes replies:

> She is dearer to me than life. But her suffering comes from within, and only she can rid herself of it. For she is free. (116).

The nerve has been struck and the issue of freedom arises. Orestes acknowledges his freedom and displays knowledge that human beings are free. He acknowledges that he cannot save his sister from her distress, that only she can do this for herself. Yet, earlier Orestes implied that he could take upon himself the guilt of the people of Argos. Obviously, this reply shows that he can no more remove the guilt of the people than he can that of his sister, for this kind of salvation calls for an acknowledgment of human freedom. When Zeus realized he is having no effect on Orestes, he turns to Electra and offers her a way out. He asks only that she repent and renounce her act. He also plays on Electra's desire not to own her part in the crime by trying to get her to admit that she was not the one who committed the murder. In addition, Zeus urges her to consider that "she did not really want the deed to be accomplished...It was just a way to make her forget her servitude" (117), and in general that she "never willed to do evil" (118). Orestes tries to council Electra to think for herself. "For who except yourself can know what you really wanted? Will you let another decide that for you?" (118). In other words, what Zeus is offering is a way to disown not only the deed but the past intention and the past feeling, and in general, a way to denounce the original desire, by erasing it and replacing it with another motive, that of coping with her servitude. On the one hand Zeus seems almost diabolical in trying to change someone's intentions and memory of the past. Yet, on the other hand, might there not be deeper motives than one is aware of on the surface, and

might not Electra's vacillation be indeed a response to a deeper desire and motive? Of course Sartre will hear of none of this since he renounces the unconscious. In one last attempt to win over Orestes, he promises them both the throne if they will repent. Defiantly, Orestes refuses. Zeus tries another angle. Whereas Orestes feels like a hero, Zeus reminds him that "you butchered a defenseless man and an old woman who begged for mercy" (119). That is, Zeus tries to convince Orestes that he acted cowardly. Orestes replies that "the most cowardly of murderers is he who feels remorse" (119). In truly Sartrean fashion, Orestes will define himself and his values and will choose his own definitions. He will not be told by another, not even a god, what defines a cowardly act. Even if the whole world were to define him otherwise, he will define it thus for himself. However authentic the choice may be, this is a somewhat complicated and dangerous stance. It implies that the values of a group have no bearing on an individual, that one need not play by the rules or account to the group. Someone can, in grandiose style, live under whatever illusion they want and not face reality. Orestes' act, by most standards, does not seem very heroic. He does indeed slay a defenseless, broken-down, aged, and worn-out king. But Sartre will say that there are no absolute values, so even if the group defines a value, an individual need not succumb to it, only that the individual must bear the consequences and responsibility of the value s/he chooses. At least Orestes has chosen for himself, chosen authentically, and accepts the responsibility of choice.

Finally, at the end of the debates, Orestes asserts: "I am my freedom" (121). In fact, he places blame with Zeus for creating him free, adding: "no sooner had you created me than I ceased to be yours" (121). Orestes does not belong to anyone, nor owe anyone anything, not even, and especially not, the God who created him. He is free to choose,

and for the choices he makes, he is willing to take the responsibility. As he says, he is "without excuses, beyond remedy, except what remedy I find within myself. But I shall not return under your law; I am doomed to have no other law but mine" (122). That is, Orestes acknowledges that he is condemned to be free. Yet, Orestes, for all his bragging at not feeling remorse, poses the following question to the god.

> How can you know I did not try to feel remorse in the long night that has gone by? And to sleep? But no longer can I feel remorse, and I can sleep no more (122).

This line implies the possibility that Orestes felt remorse for a split second, at least. Or, at least that he has tried to feel remorse. It also questions divine omniscience, since Orestes thinks that Zeus cannot read what is in the heart of a person. He does, however, give up quickly on the idea of remorse. Instead, he opts for taking upon himself the task of liberating the people of Argos. "The folk of Argos are my folk. I must open their eyes" (123). This burden he willingly assumes. Yet Zeus cautions him that this will not be a gift to them, but rather, will bring them loneliness and shame. The outcome will be more misery. "You will tear from their eyes the veils I had laid on them, and they will see their lives as they are, foul and futile, a barren boon" (123). Rather than lament the pain they will feel, Orestes' reply can suggest an idea of "misery loves company".

> Why, since it is their lot, should I deny them the despair I have in me?...They're free, and human life begins on the far side of despair (123).

Electra herself seems to be the first testimony to what Orestes' liberation will entail. She says to him, "All you have to offer me is misery and squalor" (124). At this point she begs Zeus for help. "Save me from the flies from my brother from myself !... I bitterly repent" (124-125). Electra repents her former position.

At this point in the play the two have taken shelter in the temple of Apollo for some time, but are unable to come out because of the flies and the people. The very people that Orestes is willing to liberate, the reason for him to take on the burden, stand ready to condemn him, to surge upon him at the threshold. In some ways his attempts seem quite foolish, since, it appears, they do not wish their liberation. This aspect of freedom is worthy of further comment. Just as Orestes has the freedom to do as he chooses, do not the people of the town also have a right to choose? Although they are his subjects, they, by their action and words, are in effect telling him they do not appreciate and do not want his action on their behalf. In a paradoxical manner, Orestes has come up against a certain version of the paradox of freedom. Do they not have the right to choose their own bondage, according to the very freedom that Sartre says is part and parcel of human nature? (Derrida raised this paradox in *Rogues* with respect to democracy, whether it is inherently suicidal and must permit its own undoing, but the analogy holds here as well). Since the group in the play is the people of the city, and they as a group don't want the interference, one could say that the democratic choice, their choice, is to not be set free. That is, must freedom allow for its own demise? Isn't Orestes, in some sense, attempting to violate their freedom by attempting to liberate them? Or, are the people as a group in bad faith for wanting to deny their freedom? Yet, we must recall that Orestes, as rightful heir to the throne, can pronounce a decree of liberation, and as both representative and ruler of the people, has a juridical right to make such a decision, even though it clearly is not a democratic decision. The very least that we can say for Orestes is that he has the right to act in such a way that acknowledges the value of

freedom that seems to be the tantamount value for him. His act is, therefore, very much an act for himself, if for no one else.

Dramatically, and courageously, Orestes walks through the temple doors. While the crowds call for his death, he announces his kingship over them. “I am Orestes, your king, son of Agamemnon, and this is my coronation day” (126). So he does, to a certain extent, claim a right to rule due to his royal lineage. He uses the occasion to chastise their superstitious beliefs as well as their forgiveness of Agisstheus. Again we run into a certain paradox, or at least, a clash of values. Orestes wants to say that the people have got it wrong, that the crime of murder cannot be disowned, and that it is not forgivable. (Jankalevitch sometimes makes such pronouncements regarding the unforgivable nature of crimes against humanity in *On Forgiveness*). Orestes seems to conflate the issues, for forgiveness does not necessarily mean that there is no responsibility or punishment. He rightfully wants to assert the value of responsibility and ownership of one’s actions. Yet, do not the people also have a right to choose the value of forgiveness? Sartre would probably argue that before we can talk the language of forgiveness we must first acknowledge ownership and responsibility, and that these are higher values. But, does anyone have the right to tell others what values they should hold if there are no absolute values? Of course we have a further complication in that in this respect we have a ruler, or would-be ruler, telling the people what their values should be. Also, as ruler, and as son of the victim, perhaps he asserts that only he can forgive, and, he does not forgive the murder of his father. (Derrida makes a similar remark regarding truth trials and the example of the woman who came before Bishop Tutu in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*). Yet, Orestes wishes to set an example, and so he acknowledges his action.

> …You see men of Argos, you understand that my crime is wholly mine I claim it as my own, for all to know, it is my story, my life's work, and you can neither punish me nor pity me (125).

Moreover, he claims that this act vindicates his rule. "I have earned my kingship over you" (126). How has he earned it? Precisely by committing a crime, a crime of murder, and in so doing he has participated in the crimes of the people. Only, and especially, he has the courage to admit and own what he has done. However, he does, or wants to do, more than this.

> As for your sins and your remorse…and the crimes Aegethius committed – all are mine, I take them all upon me. Fear your dead no longer, they are my dead. And see, your faithful flies have left you and come to me…I shall not sit on my victim's throne or take the scepter in my blood-stained hands. A god offered it to me, and I said no. I wish to be a king without a kingdom, without subjects (126-127).

It is here that Orestes goes overboard with crime, and attempts to do the impossible, to take upon himself the sins of the community, to act as a sacrificial scapegoat for his people. Indeed, he acts like a Christ figure, the innocent lamb to the slaughter, only now he is no longer innocent; he has partaken of their crimes. Yet, as already said, in Sartre's existential philosophy one can own only own one's own acts, not those of another person. It seems that Orestes realizes this when he renounces his kingship over them, for as he says, he wishes to be a king without subjects, that is, he is setting them free. Yet, of course, they are already free. This can be read either in the political sense that he will not rule and make choices for them, and/or even in the sense that his one act is supposed to be an act that inspires a different course of action in the lives of the others. Paradoxically, he wants to use his position to eliminate his position. He most definitely wants to influence their lives. He wants them to see his truth, which he thinks is an absolute truth, namely, that they are free. While Sartre renounced absolute values, in the

end freedom is an unacknowledged absolute truth for Sartre, and the basis of his entire existential philosophy.

The play ends with Orestes leaving the temple, attacked by the shrieking Furies. Yet, he does not see this as a horrible end. As he tells the townspeople, "All is new...And for me, too, a new life is beginning" (127). Thus, Orestes has given his own life, particularly this particular act, his own meaning, a meaning aimed at the redemption of a community. He gives his own life, and perhaps even his own death, the meaning he wants it to have by affirming in action the value he most espouses, freedom.

B. LIES AND EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN SARTRE'S NO EXIT

In this section we look at one of Sartre's most famous plays, his second, *No Exit* (NE), in order to further explore existential themes in Sartre's philosophy, and especially with respect to our inquiry of truth, lies and issues of authenticity. In NE we are thrown into a thought experiment for a contemporary audience, namely, the setting is post-mortem and the characters find themselves in a modern analogue of hell. In NE, the temporal dimension is questionable, or suspended, as the characters have already lived their lives. There is often a backward glance to past actions as well as a "simulation" of attempting new ones. Further, in NE there is no family tie between the characters. Indeed, they never knew each other before their encounter in hell. NE provides us with two main female characters.

The main characters in NE are Garcin, Estelle, and Inez, Garcin being the only male, Estelle a type of vain stereotypical woman, and Inez, a lesbian. In fact, with the exception of the valet, these are the only speaking characters in the play. The main characters find themselves in hell after their death. In one sense Sartre again takes up one

of the most treasured ideas of religion, that of an after-life. He does not deal with this concept in the typical fashion, but invents a quite imaginative rendition of what, if anything, hell would be like.

The setting for the opening of this play is itself somewhat indicative of Sartre's view. None of the characters really likes the furniture in the drawing room, as Garcin says, "I had quite a habit of living among furniture that I do not relish, and in false positions" (NE 3). From the start, Sartre brings up the idea of a false positioning. The stage is already set for the concept of bad faith and lies. The character also notices that there are no windows and nothing breakable in the room (NE 4). As he notices these things he looks for the instruments of torture. These too are missing, and yet, this is hell. Garcin notices that there is no bed. He also notices that the valet's eyelids don't move at all (NE 5). There is no blinking, as there is no rest and no sleep in hell. Or, as the saying goes, "no rest for the wicked". In addition, the gaze is an important aspect of Sartrean drama. Sadly for Garcin, there are also no books in hell. This is a clue that there is no further learning in hell, there is nothing new. So we might expect that the characters will not be changing their behavior or nature much. Being dead, there is finality to life's endeavors and projects. However, there is one inconsistency in that the characters do seem to grow in their knowledge of their circumstances, self-awareness, and each other. However, this does not change their behavior one bit.

The next person to arrive in hell is Inez, and she also looks for the instruments of torture (NE 8). Yet, if this is hell, there must be some punishment, some pain of some sort. As Inez says, "there's no more hope" (NE 10), and Garcin comments, "we haven't yet begun to suffer" (NE 10). It is Inez who first notices yet another missing element, no

mirrors or glass in hell (NE 9). Thus, the characters cannot see themselves at all. They can only see one another, another clue for the lock of the gaze of the other.

The next and last person of the group to arrive is Estelle, who immediately comments on the clashing colors and the hideousness of the décor. At some level her comments seem trivial, and quite stereotypical. Yet, on another level, Estelle's comments are of an aesthetic and symbolic nature. They are cues that nothing will harmonize in hell. There will be clashes, not only of taste but of personalities. It is also Estelle that notices the positioning of the furniture as being "all in angles" (NE 15). This angling of the room décor hints at Sartre's existential philosophy. Namely, that since there are no essences, no God, and no absolute truth, people must choose their own values. Without absolute truth, all we have are different perspectives. Yet, there is something hellish implied. These perspectives of other people include their view of us, and this is a view that we cannot control. We are at their mercy in this regard, and their view or opinion might not be too kind. Further, it suggests that there might be something shady, untruthful, or malicious, about these perspectives.

It is Inez that makes the observation, or draws the conclusion that "they've thought it all out. Down to the last detail. Nothing was left to chance" (NE 15). This utterance, while consonant with the idea of an all knowing God to punish our sins justly, and with an omniscient knowledge of the characters, is quite at odds with Sartre's atheist philosophy. Yet, he may be setting this up as a parody and mock of our traditional beliefs. In addition, we are not told, now or ever in the play, who are the "they". Further, the idea that there is nothing left to chance would seem to preclude the idea of any contingency or even of freedom. Or, as an ironic sub-theme, depending on who this

"they" are, it may be the ultimate testimony to freedom. That is, perhaps the characters have arranged it themselves by their own choices. We may ask, at the point of death, or after death, can there be any more choice? Isn't everything determined? Haven't we written our lives at that point? We cannot go back and choose again, for as we learned from *The Flies*, once an act is done, it is done, there is no erasing it, and we bear the consequences of it. In this sense of the past, there is determinacy. However, we are still free to reinterpret it.

At this point in the play, Inez thinks out loud, half-hoping for a way out. She exclaims, "if only each of us, had the guts to tell" (NE 15). She questions Estelle. "What have you done? Why have they sent you here?" (NE 15). Estelle's immediate answer is that she doesn't have a clue, and has nothing to hide (NE 16). She is making a claim to honesty and to transparency, but one wonders how sincere or truthful her statement is. After all, hell is reserved for people who do terrible things, and no one seems to get to hell by mistake. Unless there is some possibility for a mistake or for arbitrariness in judgment, then it appears that Sartre has an absolute of sorts built into his play. That is, if someone is condemned to hell, then it seems they "should" be there, though what is not clear is who sends them there, what are the standards, and/or if there is a "natural mechanism" of good/evil at work in the universe, even if there be no god.

Estelle continues to tell her story, designed to catch the sympathy of the other two. The story concerns losing her parents at an early age and raising her younger brother herself, followed by marrying a man twice her age, and then meeting someone she loves, and refuses to run away with him. She contracts pneumonia and dies. To this she adds "That's the whole story…Do you think that could be called a sin?" (NE 16). Of

course Garcin answers, no. So it seems that Estelle does not belong in hell. Of course we are suspicious that this is the "whole" story, and we are already thinking that she has lied.

Next, Garcin recounts his story, of running a pacifist paper when the war broke out and since he refused to fight they shot him. He too asks, "Had I done anything wrong?" (NE 17). He too, like Estelle, asks the others to be judge of his actions. The only issue is how honest each one is in the telling of their stories. Are they lying? Inez, for her part, is not buying any of this. "Whats the point of play acting, trying to throw dust in each other's eyes? We're all tarred with the same brush" (NE 17). Inez' response reveals that she does not believe them nor does she have tolerance for "polite" conversation. Yet, much like the old lady in *The Flies* who has come upon a stranger, these people have just met each other. Is it reasonable to assume that one has to be compelled to tell the truth, the whole truth, to strangers? Do others have the right to know intimate details of our lives? What about privacy issues? Kant would say, again, that no lie is tolerable. However, might they not have simply said they don't want to tell their stories? That would be an honest answer. Yet, each feels compelled to tell a story to the others. This is because each is seeking a verdict of not-guilty, from the others. They are hoping that somehow they will not be condemned, or that they can escape their condemnation, searching, ironically, for their freedom. Inez continues.

> Yes, we are criminals – murderers – all three of us. We're in hell, my pets, they never make mistakes, and people aren't damned for nothing,
> …So now we're here to pay the price (NE 17).

Again we have the absolute verdict of no mistakes, no arbitrariness. This appears inconsistent with Sartre's philosophy of no absolute truth. However, "no mistakes" can

also mean “no excuses” for our actions. Yet, if there is no God to condemn and no absolute standard, then why should there be any punishment for our actions? Sartre does not flesh out, or consider, group norms or a cosmic justice without a god. Cosmic justice he cannot consider as it might put him too close to absolute values. Another angle of this truly hellish schema is that we might end up “in hell” purely as the result of the working out of our own decisions and those of others as they interplay with ours. However, if there is no absolute, then the way it played out was simply that, an arbitrary twist of fate, fate here being the sum of all free decisions. This would be the worst hell of all and an element that Sartre does not consider, namely, the horrific possible results of having no absolute values or judgment.

Returning to the story, Inez notes again the lack of physical instruments of torture and concludes they are locked in together, forever, and that “each of us will act as torturer to the two others.”(NE 18). This is an instance where, the characters do seem to acquire new knowledge, or new interpretations. Garcin comes up with an idea. “So the solution is easy enough, each of us stays put in his or her corner and takes no notice of the other…Also, we mustn’t speak” (NE 18). Garcin had said earlier that he wasn’t much of a talker and would rather be alone (NE 9). So perhaps Garcin’s heaven doesn’t involve other people, or at least not these others. On the positive note, it is a plea for self-reflection, which is consonant with existentialism. However, in addition to the plea for silence, Garcin deduces that “we’ll work out our salvation looking into ourselves, never raising our heads” (NE 18). This seems quite absurd to think that one can work one’s way out of hell, at least by western ideas of hell. At most, in a Catholic perspective, one can get out of Purgatory, but never out of hell. From a Buddhist world-view one

reincarnates to work off past karma, and further, from a Tibetan perspective there are bardo states between lives as presented in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, where one has the possibility to realize one's situation and move towards enlightenment. Barring these type of eastern views, and some modern generic spiritual trends in belief in reincarnation, Garcin's answer seems preposterous, as a desperate attempt to avoid the inevitable. Perhaps Garcin is attempting bad faith, to lie to himself, as well as to the others, about the reality of his situation. The only way it would not be ridiculous, and in fact laudable, is if reflection would result in changed behavior in the future. However, once again, they have died, and there can be no more future. Yet, if they have died, what role is there for the others after death? Is death or the after-life, social? Does not Garcin have the right to wish to be alone and to no longer be under the gaze of the other? Does not death, at least, grant this solace? Apparently, Sartre's hell does not.

As mentioned, another torture of hell is the lack of mirrors. In the absence of mirrors no one can see themselves. In this sense it seems they have lost the ability to define themselves or perhaps to transcend themselves in the sense of taking on new projects. Or, they can have no accurate mirrors since they can have no access to a direct truth, only their own perspectival truth, which in hell, it seems, means they have lost a certain self-reflexive ability, the very thing Garcin thinks will save them is cut off to them in hell. And, on the other hand, this absence of physical mirrors points to the reflection each one provides for the others. They are each at the mercy of the others, infinitely caught in the torturous gaze of the others. For instance, Estelle says that "When I can't see myself I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist" (NE 19). In addition, Inez teases Estelle about a pimple that really does not exist.

> You know the way they catch a lark – with a mirror I'm your lark-mirror, my dear, and you can't escape me…
> Suppose the mirror started telling lies? Or supposed I covered my eyes…and refused to look at you (NE 21).

Inez's response explicitly makes the point that mirrors can lie. Here it seems that physical reality does speak some kind of truth, and we can either acknowledge it or not. This is seen with respect to something as simple as a pimple on one's face. It either is or is not there. The mirror that may lie is not the body, which seems to be privy to a certain state of truth regarding physical matters of fact. Is there then a certain level of objective truth, at least about physical matters of fact, which needs to be acknowledged? Sartre's emphasis, however, takes us in another direction, namely, that the judgment of others, the gaze of another, may not be accurate. It also assumes that people can deliberately lie. One never knows if one is hearing the truth or not from another. One can think of other circumstances where interpretation is not so easy to decipher or judge as that of a pimple on a face. What then will differentiate lie from truth in these cases? Sartre does not work this out except for arguing for freedom of choice. From this example, one notices again, that Sartre seems to favor or invest the body with some kind of knowledge and truth. In addition, one notices that Inez is outright cruel in her evaluations, playing on Estelle's vanity. Also, she has lied in the sense of telling a joke, a humorous type of untruth, although she then attempts to come clean by telling Estelle that she is her "lark-mirror". However, Inez never outright admits to lying. She offers the question, what if mirrors lie? In addition, she poses another question, one that attacks Estelle's admitted weak spot. Estelle has been honest and said that without a mirror to look at herself she questions her existence. She admits to a certain fear. Inez preys on this fear. She rubs salt in the wound, as it were, and suggests that she might cover her eyes so as not to see

Estelle, thus adding to Estelle's doubt about her own existence. This additionally tortures Estelle in the sense that given her vanity, one would assume that she craves attention, and if Inez refuses to look then Estelle's desire for attention goes unfulfilled. It is also noticeable that Sartre highlights the unhappy results of telling the truth, especially self truths. The result is that other people can use it against us. Authenticity and self-revelation do not necessarily have favorable results. Here, the results are quite gloomy. Finally, one must notice the irony of the entire dialogue. That is, the category of existence is one that, by definition, applies to the living. Here, it is the dead who are wondering if they exist, caught in the throws of existential angst.

Getting frustrated with the antics between the two women, Garcin suggests that each try to forget the others, once again looking for some silence (NE 23). However, Inez says that forgetting the existence of others is an impossible task.

> How utterly absurd! I feel you there, in every pore…You can nail up your mouth, cut your tongue out – but you can't prevent your being there. Can you stop your thoughts? I hear them ticking away like a clock … (NE 23).

That is, the other exists and exists as a fact for the others present. There is no escape from the others. In addition, Inez also taunts Garcin, "I won't leave you in peace" (NE 23). Inez' cruelty is part of the torment that the others will have to endure in hell. Garcin's reply is somewhat stereotypical. "If they'd put me in a room with men, men can keep their mouths shut. But its no use wanting the impossible…" (NE 23). Hell for Garcin, who wants peace and quiet and solitude, includes being stuck in hell with two women who keep talking and bickering with each other. Garcin then thinks of another idea. Since he can not silence them, perhaps he can put their conversation to better use.

> So long as each of us hasn't made a clean breast of it – why they've damned him or her, we know nothing…If you're frank, if we bring our specters into the open, it may save us from disaster. So – out with it! Why! (NE 24).

Again, the absurdity of the request is apparent. They are in hell, so how can "coming clean" with each other save them from disaster? It as if they still have hope of getting out. Or perhaps Garcin hopes to achieve the best that can be achieved out of their eternal damnation, to suffer the situation with as little further annoyance as possible. He hopes that at the very least, they will cease to torture each other. Again, Sartre may be mocking our expectations of truth or even the idea of a happy ending for humans, that they would stop torturing each other. Sartre's existentialism is gloomy, for even if they have the freedom to make better choices, they do not. Like inmates in the same jail, each must serve out the allotted time, but depending on how they get along with each other the time can pass better or worse. Yet, if death closes off possibility, then hoping that, for instance, Inez can stop being cruel, is a lost cause. Theoretically the future is open in an existential philosophy, particularly of Sartre's type, since there are no human essences. However, for an existentialist, death closes off a life, no further opportunities present themselves. Sartre portrays both these aspects of existential philosophy in this ironic dialogue and in the play in general.

In an effort to persuade the other two, Garcin begins round two. This time the stories take on another dimension. He confesses to having treated his wife shabbily by nightly drinking and carousing with other women. What is more important than the crime, true to Sartre's belief in responsible freedom, is that Garcin owns his behavior and says that he does not regret anything, that he "must pay the price" (NE 25). Again, Sartre's existential hero shows no remorse. But, this seems somewhat unduly heroic. Is

it not normal to look back on some past foolishness with some regret when one realizes the price? And in this case the price was hell, everlasting punishment. Garcin owns his action and at the same time sarcastically refers to his wife as “a born martyr” and “victim by vocation” (NE 25). This is perhaps one of those rare places where Sartre’s parody of stereotypical female behavior might actually have some feminist potential. If one considers Sartre’s philosophy, then no one is born with a vocation any more than one is born with an essence. Therefore, the message seems to be that the woman chose to make herself a victim by putting up with the behavior, and just as much as she chose before, she is free to choose otherwise now. That is, change is possible. However, Sartre does not seem to take seriously the enormous difficulty in changing one’s behavior or attitude, especially if one has been abused, or if, as liberation and feminists theorists are known to say, one has internalized the oppressor. Issues of self-worth and restructuring an image of the self do no really come into Sartre’s philosophy, except that, since the human being is free, it should be theoretically possible to change behavior and make different choices for one’s life. As we see here, they do not.

Next it is Inez’ turn. She confesses to being “a damned bitch” (NE 26). This seems like a truthful statement. She elaborates about a certain affair she had with someone named Florence, and the result of the incident was the death of three people. It is obvious by this time that Inez is a lesbian. Apparently, she persuaded Florence to leave the man she was with to be with her. A tram killed the man, and in typical cruel fashion, Inez tortured her by saying “Yes my pet, we killed him between us” (NE 26). But again, she admits her cruelty. In fact she admits to taking a sadistic pleasure in the suffering of others. “I can’t go on without making people suffer. Like a live coal…” (NE 27).

Sartre's characters, particularly the women, often display the cruel side of life. Lest anyone think that honesty, truth, or life with others is a romantic honeymoon where everyone gets along, wants to do good, or where there is a happy ending, Sartre displays the shadow side of a group, the deviant behavior and back-biting undercurrent that is often not discussed. If there is such a thing as human nature, even of one's own making, Sartre's characters stand as a warning that human beings are not beneficent but have the potential to be horrible to one another. In NE, this constant cruelty by Inez drives Florence to one night turn on the gas, and they both die. Behavior and actions have consequences, and the consequences of how we treat one another can be tragic. Sartre's characters stand for a stark brutal realism where life ends more in defeat than in victory, or at least in disaster.

Having told her story, Inez picks up on a slip of the tongue by Estelle earlier and asks her about a man that killed himself on her account and if she was his mistress. Estelle relates that she was married, became pregnant by another man, ran to Switzerland, and although the man was happy about it, she was not. Then she committed a horrific act.

> …There was a balcony…I brought a big stone. He could see what I was up to…He saw the rings spreading on the water (NE 28).

Estelle adds murder to infidelity by throwing the baby over the balcony. After she returned to Paris the man she was having an affair with blew his brains out. Estelle protests that it was an absurd thing for him to do, and that, in addition, her husband never knew anything (NE 29). At this point she seems to try to cry but as Garcin points out, "tears don't flow in this place" (NE 29). This could be because since they are in hell, it is too late for remorse. It could also be indicative that Estelle is not really sincere abut her

remorse. If she does want to cry, one wonders what for? Perhaps because her secret is out now, and she has to face others who know what she has done in the past. She may not be sorry for her deed, but she is sorry, it appears, that others know about it. This reading is supported by her response to Garcin a little later, that "You know too much about me, you know I'm rotten through and through" (NE 38). In addition, it seems to bother her tremendously when she sees Olga on earth with her husband and fears most that the she will tell him about Estelle's affair and the incident with the baby. Her fears come true. Honesty has its price. When her secret is out she turns her attention to Garcin (NE 33-34).

At this point it is Garcin who begs for a mirror, but of course there are none in hell. He also complains about the heat, which is as much about the level of intensity growing between them due to their acknowledgement of past crimes, as it is about the temperature in hell. He makes another plea for salvation, but this time not by staying quiet and isolated from each other, but rather by helping each other. Poor Garcin is still hoping for redemption of some kind.

> And now suppose we start trying to help each other…Alone, none of us can save himself or herself… (NE 29).

In response, Inez says she is through with excuses, and is the first one to really admit she is dead. She is also honest in that she admits she doesn't feel compassion for the others. She has nothing left to give, which is of course true in hell. Yet, on another level, might it not also be an excuse for not engaging, not trying to help the others? Might it also be her saying that her "essence" is rotten and therefore can not be changed, an abdication of responsibility and an excuse for bad faith?

> No more alibis for me! I feel so empty, desiccated – really dead at last.

> …Human feeling. That's beyond my range. I'm rotten to the core….I'm all dried up. I can't give and I can't receive. How could I help you? A dead twig, ready for the burning (NE 30).

Garcin's reply, again, is that he doesn't regret anything and that he realizes he's dried up too (NE 31). Yet, he is able to feel pity for others, especially for Estelle who has just told her story (NE 31). Estelle throws herself at Garcin, who rejects her only to tell her that she should be turning to Inez. Estelle's remark is blunt. "But she does not count, she's a woman" (NE 34). It is obvious at this point that there is a thwarted lovers' triangle developing. Estelle wants Garcin who wants Inez who wants Estelle. Although they are stuck in hell together, each will suffer from unrequited love or desire for the other, thus adding to their eternal torment. Yet, this also suggests a stark reality about death. At the point of death each one of us will go with at least some unfulfilled desires, and these are left unfulfilled for all eternity, whether they are unrequited loves, forbidden loves, or projects not realized. In the end, despite our best efforts, we go out with lack.

Meanwhile, Inez is irate that Estelle has just said she does not count, and does not count because she is a woman. Inez makes another biting comment regarding keeping Estelle in her gaze.

> I'll keep looking at you for ever and ever, without a flutter of my eyelids and you'll live in my gaze like a mote in a sunbeam (NE 35).

Then Inez tries a different tactic; depending on how Estelle plays her cards, there is the possibility that Inez will see her in a good light.

> You shall be whatever you like…And deep down in my eyes you'll see yourself just as you want to be (NE 35).

But Estelle wants nothing to do with Inez and looks for a way to get rid of her, or at least to break off her gaze. So Estelle spits in her face (NE 35). Estelle does not want to look

at or be looked at by Inez. It is to Garcin that her attention turns. "I'll sit on your sofa and wait for you to take some notice of me" (NE 35). Garcin decides to kiss her. However, Inez keeps protesting that she is right there and can see them. That is, she will not turn her gaze away. More importantly for Garcin, he overhears a conversation back on earth in the press room. The conversation interrupts his romantic aspirations, and instead he poses a question to Estelle, namely, if she trusts him. This time it is Estelle's turn to answer.

> …my trust! I haven't any to give…You must have something pretty ghastly on your conscience to make such a fuss about my trusting you (NE 37).

Estelle's answer, while not directly answering the question, both seems to allude to the fact that she does not trust him and that Garcin is untrustworthy. Garcin does not answer Estelle's curiosity directly but says that he was shot, a fact that Estelle already knows, and the reason is that Garcin refused to fight. Garcin protests a little and says that he "didn't exactly refuse" (NE 37). In addition, he protests that there was not much else he could do.

> Should I have gone to the general and said: "General, I decline to fight."? They'd have promptly locked me up, But I wanted to show my colors,…I wasn't going to be silenced…So I took the train.. They caught me at the frontier...to Mexico. I meant to launch a pacifist newspaper (NE 38).

Garcin is beginning to make excuses and covering-up for something. In addition, he seems to want to emphasize that he is a man of principle, that his motive was to start a paper that would be grounded in his beliefs in pacifism. Estelle is focused on one fact. She tells him "you acted quite rightly, as you didn't want to fight" (NE 38). That is, Estelle appears to gives him right but yet focuses on his not wanting to fight. She placates him further by saying "But you had to run away. If you'd stayed they'd have

sent you to jail, wouldn't they?" (NE 38). The real issue for Garcin is not his principles, or trust, per se, but he wants to know something from Estelle, something about himself. He wants to know, "am I a coward"? (NE 38). Estelle does not answer the question directly, instead, in a revealing existential reply, she puts the burden back on Garcin. "How can I say? ... I can't put myself in your skin. You must decide that for yourself…You must have had reasons for acting as you did" (NE 38). In Sartrean terms, the freedom of choice and the reason for the intention reside with Garcin. Garcin's answer is first that he wanted to make a stand, but he still is not quite sure of his motives. As he says "But was that my real motive?" (NE 38). This time it is Inez who puts the question back to him, and more.

> Exactly. That's the question. Was that your real motive?
> No doubt you argue it out with yourself, you weighed the pros and cons, you found good reasons for what you did. But fear and hatred and all the dirty little instincts one keeps dark, they're motive too. So carry on, M. Garcin, and try to be honest with yourself – for once. (NE 38-39)

Inez' accusation, while not directly answering Garcin, is to taunt him with the possibility that he had other motivations, ones not so noble and not so heroic. Further, she seems to be accusing him not only of perhaps lying to them, but of lying to himself. That is, she accuses him, or suggests the possibility, that he is in bad faith. It also suggests flaws, in general, in the human character, and that perhaps no act is pure. Garcin takes up Inez' challenge and relates further his inner thoughts and activities to the other two.

> Day and night I paced my cell…By the end of it I felt as if I'd given my whole life to introspection. But always I harked back to the one thing certain – that I had acted as I did, I'd taken that train to the frontier. But why? Why? Finally I thought: My death will settle it. If I face death courageously, I'll prove I am no coward (NE 39).

Garcin's response reveals that after all his reflection he was no closer to knowing the real reason that he took the train to Mexico. All he ends up with is his action, namely that he did indeed take the train. He proposes for himself a test, a final one. Courage will depend on how he faces his death. In curiosity Inez asks him how he met his death. His reply leaves something to be desired.

> Miserably. Rottenly. Oh it was only a physical lapse – that might happen to anyone I'm not ashamed of it. Only everything's been left in suspense forever (NE 39).

Up to now we might be inclined to believe Garcin, that he was not sure what his motivation was for taking the train. Yet now, he admits that he met his death not like a hero at all. However, he quickly adds an excuse, namely that it was just a momentary lapse that could happen to anyone. Garcin is trying to deny the obvious, that he didn't act like a hero, that he was a coward. He seems to be in some bad faith at this point, and he even further adds that things are still in suspense as to whether or not he's a coward or courageous. Yet, what further suspense could there be since he is dead? There does not seem to be any further deed that he can do that will undo his cowardly acts. Yet, there is one sense in which things are still in suspense, and that is the way in which others will think of what he has done. Again he listens in on what is going on below on earth. He is upset that they too, will consider him a coward, that this will be his legacy. As Garcin says, "I've left my fate in their hands" (NE 40). He wishes for one more opportunity to redeem himself.

> I was a man of action once…Oh if I could be with them again, for just one day. I'd fling their lie in their teeth. But I'm locked out; they're passing judgment on my life without troubling about me, and they're right, because I'm dead. …A thousand of them are proclaiming I'm a coward…If there's someone, just one person, to say quite positively I did not run away, - That I'm brave and

> decent…Well, that one person's faith would save me. Will you have that faith in me? Then I'll love you and cherish you forever. Estelle – will you? (NE 40)

It appears that Garcin realizes that he will not be given another chance on earth, and that the people back in the press room will not be thinking of him in a kind light. His one hope, therefore, is that Estelle will believe in him and be the voice that finally proclaims him a hero. This view is somewhat mixed from an existential standpoint. On the one hand, human beings must make themselves into whatever they will be and define themselves. So, form this standpoint he cannot hope for Estelle to make him into anything. On the other hand it is also part of Sartre's philosophy that we decide who others are for us. On this account, Garcin is within limits to want to know how another will view him. We may appear differently to different people. His hope is that he will appear not as a coward, but finally as a courageous hero. Estelle's answer is somewhat ambiguous, as if she does not really want to answer the question, as if she is hiding her true beliefs. She says to Garcin:

> Oh, you dear silly man, do you think I could love a coward?...
> I was only teasing you. I like men, my dear, who're real men, with tough skin and strong hands. You haven't a coward's chin, or a coward's mouth…And its for your mouth, your hair, your voice, I love you (NE 40).

Her first words cut like a double-edged sword. She says, by way of a question, that she could not love a coward. This can mean that she can not therefore love Garcin or, as she later says, since she loves Garcin (or his features), he therefore is not a coward. To this Garcin wants to believe her and yet asks, "Do you mean this? Really mean it?" (NE 40). Her response is another question. "Shall I swear it?" (NE 40). Yet, she never has to since her affirmation in the form of a question is enough for Garcin, and he thinks he has found his salvation. "Then I snap my fingers at them all...Estelle, we shall climb out of hell"

(NE 40). While Sartre this appears ironic or sarcastic, the dialogue is worthy of further attention. Is it really that ludicrous to think that the positive view that even one person has of another person can help to change a life? How many times do we hear that someone was waiting for just a kind word? How many times do people wait or look for just one person who cares? This anticipation or hope seems to be a quite human one. And if Sartre's "no essences" is true, then someone might, at the next turn, turn around. The coward might indeed act like a hero next time and vice versa. And, how many times do we hear psychologists speaking of the importance of positive reinforcement, especially of parents with their children and the difference that makes in a life? We can influence others to bring out the best or the worst in them. True, the ultimate choice and decision belongs to the individual, but the journey can become easier or harder, depending on the relationship with other people.

In this specific case, however, the problem is that Garcin is already dead and so are the others with him. What is worse, Inez picks up on a certain fraudulent behavior on Estelle's part. As Inez clearly says, Estelle has her own specific interests at heart.

> But she does not mean a word of what she says. How can you be such a simpleton? "Estelle, am I a coward?" As if she cared a damn either way…she wants a man…She'd assure you, you were God Almighty if she thought it would give you pleasure (NE 40).

That is, Inez accuses Estelle of lying for her own benefit. Estelle's answer, once again, is somewhat evasive, neither affirming nor denying, but somehow trying to cover-up any possible holes and still hoping she can get what she wants out of Garcin. "I'd love you just the same, even if you were a coward. Isn't that enough?" (NE 41). Estelle's pretentiousness warns us of a common human tendency to seek our own interests. When considered as part of the equation of truth and lies, one wonders how honest anyone is

with others or with themselves regarding other people. That is, do we not often twist the truth for our own self interest? Even when we say we are speaking the truth, are we really being motivated by our own interests, rather than by the idea of truth itself? Perhaps we even try to deceive ourselves, act in bad faith, regarding someone else's behavior or attributes. Still, we really can never know the interior feelings or motivation of another, and sometimes, even our own are questionable to us.

At this point Garcin is disgusted with the two of them and tries to leave. This prompts Estelle to say, either honestly or vindictively, "Yes, its quite true, you're a coward" (NE 42). Is she now revealing her true feelings or just getting back at him? Further, with respect to what actions is he a coward? His previous actions back on earth? Or, perhaps that he tried to leave hell just now? Or even, perhaps, that he tried to leave her company? Is he a coward because he does not want to face her, wants to escape her gaze? Is he a coward because he will not take responsibility for his actions and wants to get out of his justly deserved hell? Who would not want to find a way out of hell? Or, perhaps he is being called a coward simply because he wants to be alone and reflect by himself, without the voices of the others? We are not privy to his inner thoughts, only his outward words and action. He begs for the door to open. "I'll put up with any torture you impose. Anything, anything would be better than this agony of mind" (NE 42). This is the first time there is some mention or recognition of the type of hell they are in. It is not a place of physical torture, but quite literary here, hell is a state of mind. It is described as a "creeping pain", one that "gnaws and fumbles and caresses one and never hurts quite enough" (NE 42). This type of pain and torture seems to be the analogue of that caused by the flies in *The Flies*. There it is a physical pain aimed at occupying one to the point

of keeping away the mental pain and torture. The insinuation is that the mental pain would be worse and that the physical torture of the flies is actually a compassionate act. Here, in NE, presumably there is no physical torture because, since they are in hell they must experience the worst torture, that of the mental.

Oddly, at this point in the play, the door opens. Yet, no one attempts to walk through it. We do not know for sure what would have happened if anyone really did try to walk through it, if it would have been permitted or if the door would have closed in any attempt to leave the room. Yet, what we do know is that the three have become inseparable at this point. As Inez says, "But what a situation! We're inseparable" (NE 43). They are dependent on one another; they have become accustomed to the torture of the others. Or, each will not give up hope of convincing the others. As Garcin says, "only you two remain to give a thought to me", and "if you'll have faith in me I'm saved" (NE 44). He has not yet given up hope that the others will believe in him. In addition, he reviews his situation again.

> …I aimed at being a real man … Can one possibly be a coward when one's deliberately courted danger at every turn? And can one judge a life by a single action? (NE 44).

Inez' answer is less than flattering to Garcin.

> why not? For thirty years you dreamt you were a hero, and condoned a thousand petty lapses…Then a day came when you were up against it, the red light of real danger – and you took the train to Mexico (NE 44).

In effect, Inez is calling Garcin a liar, a coward, and perhaps also of being in bad faith. He did not lapse once, but he had "a thousand petty lapses". In addition, she insinuates that perhaps one can judge a life by how one acts in the most difficult moment of life. Garcin still protests and tries to convince her.

> When I chose the hardest path, I made my choice deliberately. A man's what he wills himself to be (NE 44).

At first glance Garcin has echoed a favorite theme of Sartre, namely, that a person must choose to define his/her own self. True enough, one must define one's own values in an existential system. However, Sartre is equally clear on the importance of action and not wishful thinking. As Inez says "its what one does, and nothing else, that shows the stuff one's made of" (NE 44). One can also think of Aristotle here, who in the *Nichomichean Ethics* thought that vices and virtues had to be cultivated by good habit, and displayed, and that no one was proclaimed a hero unless there was opportunity to display courageous action. That is, the thought itself was insufficient. In addition, it is others in the community who call one a hero from the outward display. Garcin, however, is even now not convinced. If it is what one does, then he laments that "I died too soon. I wasn't allowed time to – to do my deeds" (NE 44). If he had more time he could have acted the part of a hero. While this is true that the future is open, in this case the future is closed by death, therefore the book is closed. One always wishes one had more time to do things better or differently or to do more things. Inez aptly summarizes.

> One always dies too soon or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are-your life, and nothing else… (NE 45).

Inez is expounding the hard facts of existence in existential philosophy. We are thrown into life, and we only have a limited time to act. At the time of our death the facts of our lives are closed, except for future interpretation by others. Every act has this finality about it. We can reflect back but not change the past. To repeat a cliché, "we have to make the most of the time we have". If we don't, according to Sartre's existential philosophy, that is our fault. It is no use wondering or bemoaning what would have been

had we more time to learn, or if we had been born into another family or another time period. There is no existence free of circumstances. We are all thrown into something in this world, like it or not. Freedom for Sartre is not a freedom from circumstances, let alone ideal ones, but how we act in the midst of the mire.

So far, Inez has echoed an existential truth for Sartre. Yet, she does not stop there. True to her character, she has to be cruel.

> Now you are going to pay the price and what a price! You're a coward, Garcin, because I wish it.
> …see how weak I am, a mere breath on the air, a gaze observing you, a formless thought that thinks you…You must convince me, and you're at my mercy (NE 45).

Inez' answer in this dialogue has begun to take on the issue of half truths. True, she can view Garcin as a coward, but she is also free to see him differently. Or, even if she does see him as a coward, she isn't forced to share her opinion or to throw salt in the wound. In addition, her view of him is just that, but that doesn't make him a coward in essence. She knows he needs her approval. Precisely because he looks to her for comfort, Inez will not show any signs of compassion. In retaliation, Garcin does the most hurtful thing he can. He utters his truth to her. "That's true Inez, I'm at your mercy but you're at mine as well", and he bends over to kiss Estelle at her prompting. Inez answers back "love is a grand solace, isn't it my friend? Deep and dark as sleep. But I'll see you don't sleep" (NE 46). As we learned, there is no sleep in hell, no way to avoid the cruel gaze of the other. In addition, Inez hints that love, or romance, or sexual encounters, are an escape, an opium of sorts in that they are a way to avoid harsh reality. Inez taunts on.

> What a lovely scene: coward Garcin holding baby-killer Estelle still in his manly arms!
> …Coward! Coward! Coward! ... Thats what they're saying.
> Its no use trying to escape, I'll never let you go (NE 46).

Garcin begs for night, which of course, will never come. There is no escape, no way out. No exit. Suddenly he goes for the bronze statue, which of course can not hurt Inez. Garcin then utters the most famous words of the play. "So this is hell…Hell is – other people!" (NE 47). Caught up in the insane outbursts of rage, Estelle picks up the paper knife and attempts to kill Inez. Of course this fails, since, as Inez says, she is already dead, and she demonstrates by trying to kill herself with the knife. The stark reality of their situation is demonstrated again by Inez.

> Dead! Dead! Dead! Knives, poison, ropes. All useless.
> It has happened already, Once and for all. So here we are, forever (NE 47).

They all have a good laugh then slump back into their respective sofas. After a long silence, they gaze at each other. Garcin suggests another round. They might hope for a better round, but by now the message is clear, they will repeat the same cruel procedure. Of course they must, they are in hell for all eternity, with no way out, no exit from their mental games and mental cruelty. With this the play ends.

Summary and Conclusions

What may we conclude by this analysis of Sartre? First of all, the philosophical section makes clear that Sartre's idea of bad faith, which he defines as a lie someone attempts to tell oneself, is a project that no one can completely accomplish, given his stance on the unity of consciousness and disbelief in the unconscious. Hence, there can really be no complete example of bad faith. Further, there are problems with the examples he chooses of bad faith. All the examples leave out other possibilities for interpretation. The example of the young man deciding between the service and his mother leaves out the important role of communication and dialogue in decision-making.

Further, the examples of women are particularly problematic as they tend to stereotype women and their sexuality. In addition, these examples also omit other interpretations, for which there can be many. The examples provided simply do not warrant the conclusion of bad faith.

With respect to the literary works, we see examples of lies and of possible bad faith. In the story of *The Flies*, several examples of lies are brought out, as well as the deep connection in Sartre's system between freedom and responsibility. The play also brings out the paradoxes of freedom, and the issue of remorse and repentance, particularly in connection with group and community situations, as well as for government. In addition, while the main female character makes her decisions, in the end she is not able to own her original decision, in contradistinction to the male hero of the play. However, our analysis has shown that the analysis of behavior is more complex than Sartre allows.

Finally, in *No Exit*, the more contemporary drama displays how people get stuck in repeating their same behavior, without ever finding a way out, or really taking responsibility for their actions. This play also brings out the paradoxical nature of the idea of an after-life for Sartre, in particular for the idea of damnation as it results from human freedom. The characters both lie, and also display behavior that seems to point to bad faith. In addition, as usual, the female characters are cast as stereotypes. In general, however, the females in Sartre's literature display more responsible agency than they do in his philosophical examples, though not by much, and they are not cast in a favorable light.

CHAPTER 5

TRUTH AND LIES IN CAMUS' ABSURD WORLD

Having looked at Sartre's existentialism in the last chapter, in this chapter we examine another variant of the same type of writing, Camus' literature of the absurd. The entire theory of the absurd is cast by Camus in terms of truth and lies and how one should live in relation to it authentically. Therefore, the writings of Camus allow us to look at the central themes of this study, namely, truth, lies, and issues of authenticity, from yet another angle. Camus' work is chosen primarily because of his emphasis on the absurd, and it is only in relation to this overarching concept that any issue of truth and lies, and particularly of authenticity, can be framed. In addition, while Camus himself did not consider himself to be an existentialist and put his writings in another context, there are still themes typical of existentialist preoccupations that may justify his frequent inclusion in the existentialist literary tradition, such as his emphasis on freedom and death. These familiar existential themes take on a certain slant in light of Camus' theory of the absurd. Finally, Camus is chosen, as with our other authors, since the application of his theory reveals inconsistencies in his writings and character portrayals which pose questions about gender within Camus' absurdist universe.

The structure of this chapter follows the same sequence as the others. In the first part the main concepts and philosophical ideas of the author are sketched out. In the second part literary works are examined to see how well the philosophy emerges within the literary example. As with the other authors, the intersection of the philosophical system with literary expression is the location of anxiety about gender. The main writings of Camus that are chosen for this endeavor are: *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other*

Essays (MS), *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (LCE) and *The Stranger* (S). The first two works are chosen for their philosophical and conceptual detail regarding the absurd, and the latter work for its literary enactment of the theory.

As Camus' entire theory of the absurd is represented according to the concept of truth and lying, the problem posed by such a representation is how to live authentically. In particular, S is a story that has often been seen in the light of a man on trial who refuses to lie. Indeed, this is how Camus himself characterizes the story. However, this chapter contends that a closer reading of the story reveals that the main character does indeed lie, or at least fails to tell the truth, and that very often these lies concern the women in the novel. Therefore, this particular narrative has significant implications with regard to its female characters and the relationship of the main character with respect to them.

Part I Philosophical Considerations

This section outlines Camus' theory of the absurd and all its variances as will be necessary to understand our analysis of S, such as the absurdity of life and particularly life in relation to impending death. The main ideas in this section are gathered primarily from Camus' own observations in MS and secondarily from LCE. LCE sometimes sheds a backward glance on the ideas, and in places, sometimes revises them. Camus opens MS with a quote from Pindar: "O my soul,do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible (Pythiam iii)." (MS 2). The concern of Camus is clearly with this world and he does not concern himself with even the possibility of the next. As an atheist, like Sartre, he does not believe in the after life. This leaves him with consideration for, and a careful examination of, life as it is here and now. The main

concept he comes up with to describe this life is the concept of the absurd, which he will take several venues to explain and elucidate. As he states at the beginning of this work: "the absurd is considered in this essay as a starting point" (MS 2). In these early essays, the absurd is often defined as the lack of a raison *d'etre*, so that no reason exists to prevent the choice to commit suicide. "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide". (MS 3). Camus notes a certain paradox in that while "many people die because they judge that life is not worth living", others are killed for the very ideas "that give them a reason for living" (MS 4). Later, when we come to the explication of S, the main character will receive a death sentence, in part, because he illustrates this principle of living according to his ideas. While S does not discuss suicide explicitly, the topic of death, and of authentic living is of central concern, as it is throughout his works.

> Dying voluntarily implies…the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering.
> … in a universe suddenly divested of illusions of lights, man feels an alien, a stranger.
> …This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity (MS 5-6).

Camus thus asks: "Does its absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide…Does the Absurd dictate death?" (MS 8-9). S deals with the familiar theme of how one faces one's death and how one should live life in the face of absurdity. Camus reiterates this connection. "Reflections on suicide give me an opportunity to raise the only problem to interest me: is there a logic to the point of death? ... This is what I call an absurd reasoning" (MS 9). Camus shares with the existentialists this concern over death, especially as it concerns authentic living. Yet, Camus takes pains to distinguish himself from the existentialist tradition. Camus places emphasis on the absurd and its resistance

to clear and obvious meanings, and logical analyses. For Camus, existentialist philosophy was still too optimistic, too rational, and generally too hopeful, given life's absurdity.

> Now, to limit myself to existential philosophies, I see that all of them without exception suggest escape. Through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. That forced hope is religious in all of them (MS 32).

That is, the existential philosophers discussed in MS take a wrong turn and even misuse reason to turn the absurd into a hope. Thus, instead of truth, they end up believing in a false hope.

Another aspect of Camus' philosophy and writings is his emphasis on the practical aspects of life, that is, his view that a person's behavior is more important than an elusive abstract inner essence that remains out of grasp.

> It is probably true that a man remains forever unknown to us and that there is in him something irreducible that escapes us. But *practically*, I know men and recognize them by their behavior, by the totality of their deeds, by the consequences caused in life by their presence. Likewise, all those irrational feelings which offer no purchase to analysis. I can define them *practically*, appreciate them *practically*, by gathering together the sum of their consequences in the domain of the intelligence, by seizing and noting all their aspects, by outlining their universe.
> …a man defines himself by his behavior as well as by his sincere impulses (MS 11).

This philosophy is precisely what we have in S where the main character is of an extremely pragmatic temperament. The novel gives us detailed accounts of his behavior and often the behavior of others. What Camus does not address is what happens when people analyze behavior differently? How is one to judge what a particular behavior means? Without recourse to intentionality, Camus is hard pressed to provide an answer. Of course, if we can, we can ask the person, or in a novel, the narrator might provide the

intention. Then the problem becomes if we are to trust the answers given. Are the answers provided by the character, or narrator, or in real life, honest answers regarding intention of behavior? Here again we are dealing with the question of truth and lies. In addition, the matter is more complicated if we ask about psychological factors. Can there be unconscious reasons that are out of the control of the person? Further, in the above passage Camus has mentioned that there are also irrational feelings that cannot be analyzed. Again, the outburst of feelings, when it does occur, will be extremely important to the story-line of S. These are matters that will be discussed in our analysis of the novel. For now we continue with Camus' conceptual framework, as these concepts are all aspects of the absurd for Camus.

In Camus' theory of the absurd, silence and the non-answer has a particular place.

> The absurd world more than others derives its nobility from that abject birth. In certain situations, replying "nothing' when asked what one is thinking about maybe pretense in a man…But if that reply is sincere, if it symbolized that odd state of the soul in which the void becomes eloquent, in which the chain of daily gestures is broken, in which the heart vainly seeks the link that will connect it again, then it is as it were the first sign of absurdity (MS 11)

Thus, silence, or the non-answer carries a great deal of weight for Camus, and sometimes signifies an "eloquent void". The difficulty, again, is how to tell this meaningful "nothing" from the meaningless "nothing". Our main character will often not say anything or answers "nothing" throughout the novel. A certain paradox arises. Once silence speaks meaning and if this meaning is linked to the absurd for Camus, then how absurd can this silence or its potential meaning be? Regardless of the absurd reasoning, however, the important point is that silence, at times, can be an authentic response.

There is another aspect of the absurd that Camus links with everyday life "Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, street car, four hours of

work, meal, sleep, and M T W TH Fr and Saturday" (MS 12) . Camus refers to the monotony of our everyday routines, and it specifically refers to the external work force and implicates work in our bourgeois culture. The everyday routine that includes work will come up again in S. Camus explicates his philosophy, despite his own protestations elsewhere, in a manner that sounds very much in alignment with existential leanings. The lengthy quote that follows links the everydayness with issues of the absurd and end up with the problem of death, once again.

> according to the same rhythm – this path is usually followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. "Begins" – this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequences: suicide or recovery... Mere "anxiety" as Heidegger says, is at the source of everything....He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd. (MS 13-14).

Camus here refers to a gradual awakening or consciousness of life that evokes, or is the result of, a certain weariness of, or nausea with, the life we are living. When this awakening occurs, the options are suicide or recovery, or, of course, falling unconscious again, in Camus' words, "back to the chain." Of course if he opts out of suicide he will again fall into the chain in one form or another, but the point is how he will face his life given this new conscious awareness. Camus likens this weariness with life to Heidegger's concept of anxiety, the dull (and sometimes sharp) angst that permeates our existence. With this awakening comes an awareness of time that brings to the forefront an acknowledgement of what tomorrow will bring, and it brings, ultimately, death. There is a natural "revolt" against this impending future. So the human being, knowing the fate

that awaits, is left with the tension of living with the inevitable. The question is, again, how the person lives, if the choice is to live at all. That is, what is authentic or true existence?

Another aspect of this strangeness or absurdity comes in how we relate to other people, how we come to see them, as well as how we view ourselves, and also how others view us in this awakened consciousness. For Camus, this type of strangeness is evoked also through a reference to woman, linking his philosophical idea with gender.

> Just as there are days when under the familiar face of a woman, we see as a stranger her we had loved months or years ago, perhaps we shall come even to desire what suddenly leaves us so alone (MS 14).
>
> …that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd (MS 14).
>
> Likewise this stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs is also the absurd (MS 15).
>
> I come at last to death…in reality there is no experience of death. Properly speaking, nothing has been experienced but what has been lived and made conscious. Here, it is barely possible to speak of the experience of others' deaths. It is a substitute, an illusion, and it never quite convinces us…This elementary and definitive aspect of the adventure constitutes the absurd feeling (MS 15).

In the first example, Camus particularly raises the issues of close relationships with those of the opposite sex. Specifically, a man sees the familiar face of a woman he has been in relationship with, even in love with, and now sees that person as a stranger. The phenomenon that he describes is the realization at a certain point in some relationships that the person once thought of as so close, is really not so anymore. What Camus fails to mention, but perhaps it can be implied, is that it is the relationship that is "strange" now, and perhaps even one's own self. One way we recognize this state is by how we perceive or are perceived by others. Our relationship with them has changed.

The mark is one of distance. In addition, Camus connects it to the precarious fluxes in the human being who may even come to desire the opposite of what was originally desired, namely here, the loneliness itself. This example of "woman as stranger" marking an aspect of alienation of the self is one that merits more attention, as part of our discussion is the specific gendered issue of truth, lies, and authenticity with respect to how the women in S are characterized, in addition to how honest, or not, the main character is in relation to the women in the novel. This will be explored in depth in the next section. For now the point is that the strangeness of the other, in particular of the female other in this case, is also a marker of estrangement in the life of the person.

The examples move from the strangeness of the other to the strangeness of the world itself, namely that the human being finds the world a strange place to be, and this experienced strangeness of the world constitutes another aspect of the absurd, and estranges the self further. For example, Camus utilizes the specific example of the self and the familiar symbol of the mirror, the mirror being an object that can provoke conscious eruption. On occasion when one glances at a mirror or photograph, one perceives both a familiarity and strangeness in the image. The poignancy of this example is that it illustrates that the ultimate stranger is one's own self.

In the final example provided here, the ultimate strangeness is that of the human with respect to death. As Camus says, we cannot really speak of the experience of death since we haven't died yet, and any analysis or expression regarding the deaths of others is somehow substitutive and unconvincing. We may see them dead and know that they were once alive; we may watch them suffer in terrible anguish prior to their death, but we cannot experience their deaths. We cannot know what it is for them. What we

experience is our relationship to their passing, our observations and our own feelings and meanings and projections and musings on what it was for them. But we never really know their deaths. That is why Camus speaks of the deaths of others as having somewhat of an illusory or even fraudulent aspect to it, since it never really gives us the taste of death. That is, while death is a true reality, thinking one can taste it through others is a lie of sorts.

Death is a prevalent theme in Camus' literary writings as well and it will play an important role in S and our analysis of it. There are several deaths in the novel and the reaction of the main character to the deaths of others will also be assessed, as well as his relation to his own upcoming death. In the end, though, death provides the ultimate limit to the concept of the absurd since we who are, no longer will be, and what this "no longer will be" really means, escapes us, no matter how much we think about it. Camus comes up with a question regarding death. "Is one to die voluntarily or to hope in spite of everything?" (MS 16). But this question is not complete for him. To die voluntarily, is suicide, and that is only one option. Another option he presents is: "to hope in spite of everything". However, hope is not something that Camus thinks is the real answer. Still, another option is to live without hope. That is both hope and suicide are fraudulent routes, are inauthentic choices. Camus will build up to this point, but first he starts chiseling away at the armor of hope. This first cut taken is with respect to knowledge, and anthropomorphism is implicated.

> Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal. The cat's universe is not the universe of the anthill… If thought discovered in the shimmering mirror of phenomena eternal relations capable of summing them up and summing themselves up in a single principle...That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama… (MS 17).

Thus Camus thinks, like Nietzsche and many others before him (and after him), that any knowledge is only human, perspectival knowledge and not absolute knowledge. Truth, in this big sense, does not exist for Camus. Related to this quest for knowledge is a quest for unity, including the quest for unifying principles. There is a tug at the human in this direction. This is a type of hope that the universe will make sense and ultimately fits together logically, and even perhaps that it may be based on an absolute principle. Camus echoes sentiments against this type of hope. "We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar, calm surface which would give us peace of heart" (MS 18). This type of despair, however, is authentic and true and serves a "good" purpose. The quest for knowledge leaves us agitated and unfulfilled. Knowledge is a broad term and includes several disciplines.

> Forever I shall be a stranger to myself. In psychology, as in logic, there are truths but no Truth. "Know thyself" has as much value as the "Be virtuous" of our confessionals…They are sterile exercises on great subjects. They are legitimate only in precisely so far as they are approximate (MS 19).

The quest for knowledge, then, leads off to another aspect of strangeness. Here it is the strangeness associated with incompleteness and having to settle for approximations of truth and even a plurality of them. This applies as much to psychological truths as to truths about the human in general, or any truths about oneself, as it does to the outside physical world. Perhaps this is why Camus contents himself with behavioral descriptions of the person, since this is perhaps the only thing that can be got at. In S, the main character often merely describes situations and people. He falls short of analysis. Yet, as we saw, this does not eliminate ambiguity. This lingering ambiguity may yet be another aspect of the absurd. Or, perhaps, it is the desire for clarity that is more absurd.

> But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world….It binds them one to the other as only hatred can weld two creatures together…(MS 21).
>
> The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation…The absurd is not in man…nor in the world, but in their presence together (MS 30).

Camus illustrates that absurdity resides in the relationship between the human being and the world, rather than in any single characteristic. Further refined, this is an antagonistic relationship between the irrational forces and the quest for clarity. Even further, the relationship is characterized by hostility. Camus makes a statement that what most binds people together is hatred, overturning ideas of love and harmony. In this sense, separateness and hatred are truer than love and harmony for Camus. This idea of love and harmony is perhaps another false hope that Camus wishes us to resist. Camus does not explicate this idea further. In this context, however, Camus appears to be clarifying that the relationship that results with the absurd is an agonistic one, one that brings not peace but agitation for the human. Further, Camus' notion of clarity is not always so clear. In the above context he juxtaposes clarity to the irrational, implying a human wish to impose some kind of order or reason on that irrationality. Camus is not always consistent with his terms, and his variation of usages allows for a plurality of meanings and truths. Therefore, sometimes it is the absurd forces which are irrational, sometimes it is the relationship that is absurd, and sometimes it is the attempt to impose order on that which defies order that is itself absurd. One thing is certain, Camus does think the human being lives in tension between opposing forces. He phrases this as "the essential passion of man torn between his urge toward unity and the clear vision he may have of the walls enclosing him" (MS 22). In this instance the tug is between a drive to unity, towards

perhaps some reasonable principle holding the universe together, a hope perhaps, and a drive towards clarity implying a certain truth and realization of the irrational and of impending walls or doom closing in on one. Yet, a certain paradox ensues. Does not this clarity to see the situation for what it is, to clearly accept the irrational, imply the very use of reason? And, is a unity that excludes the irrational really a unity after all? The divisions are not so clear cut, and perhaps one spills into the other. In Camus' language, however, the drive or hope towards unity is a false hope, an untruth, while brutal clarity is true and authentic.

Camus' thought takes him always back to death, for, like everything else, "the absurd ends with death" (MS 31). This notion of the absurd is so central to Camus' thinking that he says of it:

> I judge the notion of the absurd to be essential and consider that it can stand as the first of my truths…For me the sole datum is the absurd…I have just defined it as a confrontation and an unceasing struggle (MS 31).

So Camus, like Sartre, despite both their protestations, does have an absolute, or an ultimate value. For Sartre the ultimate truth is human freedom, whereas for Camus it is the absurd. In this case Camus calls it the "*sole datum*". However much truth is relativized, there is a rock bottom truth for both thinkers. Camus would say that his idea of the absurd is not so much based on principle but on pragmatic reality, especially given the reality of death. Yet, however practical this datum might be, it still results in a principle for him by which he organizes his thoughts. More than this, however, the absurd, especially with its implications of death, is a truth, perhaps even "the truth" for Camus. The truth of this concept functions as a "first principle" for him.

It is because the absurd defies a clear-cut rationality and especially because it ends in death, or points to death, that Camus says that hope itself must be given up if we are to remain true to reality. To hope would be to falsify existence somehow.

> And carrying this absurd logic to its conclusion, I must admit that that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair) a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest). Everything that destroys, conjures away, or exorcises these requirements (and, to begin with, consent which overthrows divorce) ruins the absurd and devaluates the attitude that may then be proposed (MS 31).

For Camus, a human being who wishes to live authentically must accept life honestly for what it is, without resorting to false hope or religious crutches. Camus' hero of the absurd lives without hope yet does not despair or committing suicide, and always "manages". This is the challenge for the human being. For, to hope is a type of lie one tells oneself to cope with living. Thus, Camus does not put too much stake on finding meaning, since meaning is often fraught with hope, and thus implies a certain amount of lying, or self-deception.

> It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully… (MS 53).

In a summation reminiscent of Nietzsche's idea of *amour fati*, the absurd hero lives life fully but without hope. All that matters is how one faces life, which includes how one faces death.

While despair may cause one to commit suicide, the contrary position, he says, "is the man condemned to death", and if one resists the pull to take one's own life, the attitude of this resistance should be "consciousness and revolt" (MS 55). By

consciousness is implied the proper lucidity without hope, and revolt means not apathy but a certain will in living and thriving despite it all until the bitter end.

> The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day to day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance. This is a first consequence (MS 55).

Thus there is also a positive or true sense of acceptance of the absurd. However, it is not grounded in any hope or reason, for there can be none for Camus. It may be an irrational leap, but it is not a leap of faith. Rather, it is a leap into the abyss. The only reason, or rather description, in this face of this truth, is defiance. We should therefore expect to see in Camus' literary writing something of this struggle, examples of such awakening, and if handled "well" according to Camus' terms, a defiance without hope. Since no person knows the hour of death, it will be hard to "force" this confrontation naturally. The most fitting example, metaphorically, of the death we all have to face, is that of a condemned person. S provides just that type of experiment with its story of a condemned criminal. Camus is concerned with how people use their freedom, particularly in the face of death. Yet, it is not freedom in the abstract as a principle that interests him.

> Knowing whether or not man is free does not interest me. I can experience only my own freedom…The problem of "freedom as such" has no meaning… The only conception of freedom I can have is that of the prisoner or the individual in the midst of the State. The only one I know is freedom of thought and action. (MS 56).

If someone is condemned one would think they lose freedom, and Camus does not deny that a certain amount of freedom is lost. However, there is an increase in "freedom of action" since "that privation of hope and future means an increase in man's availability" to the present (MS 57). Hence, this should leave one more fully alive in the moment, to

attend to the here and now, and thus able to be more authentic to the moment. This is another place where Camus conflates terms for when he says "freedom of action" he has in mind also, and especially, freedom of thought. Sometimes he makes this distinction but other times not. Otherwise we would have a logical problem. The prisoner obviously loses a lot of physical freedom and with it the freedom of certain actions. What he still has, though, is freedom of thought.

While the proper response to the absurd is neither hope nor despair, and while it does require a certain amount of will as "defiance without hope" and a striving to live life fully, this response, however, paradoxically requires indifference. This indifference is not to be confused with despondency, but is, part and parcel of the acknowledgment merged with revolt. This kind of acceptance of stark reality yields, paradoxically, strength to forge on.

> But what does life mean in such a universe? Nothing else for the moment but indifference to the future and a desire to use up everything that is given. Belief in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, a choice, and our preferences. Belief in the absurd, according to our definitions, teaches the contrary (MS 60).

However, even though Camus does not want to acquiesce to a values program, for that would be too much dependant on meaning and perhaps too close to hope, Camus does seem to place a certain value or a certain hierarchy in place precisely because of the absurd in the face of death. He says: "belief in the absurd is tantamount to substituting the quantity of experience for the quality" (MS 60), and again: "what counts is not the best living but the most living" (MS 61), and yet still: "there will never be any substitute for twenty years of life and experience" (MS 63). What Camus intends is to emphasize the practical. Therefore he asserts that "value judgments are discarded here in favor of

factual judgments" (MS 61). However, does not Camus exalt the practical and the tangible by making these value judgments? In addition, quantity over quality seems to conflict with some of Camus' other thoughts that have been discussed. For example, Camus repeatedly asserts that life must be faced lucidly in the face of the absurd and without hope. This is his type of authenticity. If, therefore, someone approaches life, and death, without this lucidity, or full of hope, has not Camus already judged these attitudes with a negative valence? That is, has he not already devalued these responses to the absurd? If so, then it seems that logically the life faced with lucidity and without hope is clearly of higher value than one that might be longer, though false in attitude. So quality in this sense of the word does indeed matter to Camus.

The only way he can escape this bind, at least partially, is to place this comment of quantity over quality within a certain context. For example, if someone faced with a short life were to use the quality of his life as an excuse, as a way of somehow having hope or rationalizing that his short life was still better than someone else's of longer life, or that it does not matter who dies sooner or later since we all have to go anyway, then this might amount to an excuse, an escape, or a hopeful attempt to escape the awaited fate. Camus might assert that even a consciousness of the absurd faced without hope can become a crutch, an escape route, if this view is seen to justify life, to give it an unequivocal edge, even if life ends abruptly. Life and death must be faced without even the hope of the conscious hopelessness with which you face it. One can see a certain truth in this from Camus' perspective. Indeed, these very arguments will be visited by his main character in S as his death approaches. Still, one cannot help but notice that Camus has gotten himself into a conundrum here. If quantity of life always trumps

quality, without any extenuations, then there would be no need for lucid consciousness without hope. Camus would probably respond and say that this is not a matter of value but of the truth of existence. Camus clearly places a value on this truth of the absurd and how to face it. His own words seem to elevate, even perhaps at times to glorify, this approach to life.

> Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform it into a rule of life what was an invitation to death - and I refuse suicide (MS 64).

Strictly speaking, however, Camus does not want to make this an ethic (even if it does have overtones of value), for he says that "the absurd mind cannot so much expect ethical rules at the end of its reasoning" (MS 68). It is, rather, that in facing life squarely, and rejecting suicide, an authentic attitude brings with it an acknowledgement of freedom in life, a revolt against wanting to hope and all its implications, and a passion to live life by.

One cannot speak of passionate revolt for Camus without at least briefly mentioning one of his favorite mythic heroes, Sisyphus. Without going into the details of the myth, a few comments of Camus are in order to understand the connection of the myth to the modern individual.

> It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me....That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock (MS 121).

> Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.
> If the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy (MS 121).

These words of Camus unpack his theory and explicate the myth further. The in-between times are times of decision. What is important is that the man continues on, knowing the futility of it all. As Camus says, this is his torture, his tragedy, and his crowning glory. What is important about Sisyphus is that he is victorious because he continues on. In addition, Camus imagines him continuing on happily, not with desperate gloom and doom, but rather with joy, a joyful wisdom. Notice that scorn is the rebellion necessary to overcoming, and to facing reality. However, is not this scorn or rebellion itself absurd since it cannot change the inevitable? Still, it does hold back or resist both suicide and hope. It allows one to press on. This type of victory and acknowledgement of "happiness" or "joy" is also ascribed to the main character at the end of the novel as it is also the joy of Sisyphus.

> All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torments, silences all the idols… The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny...At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death…He is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.
> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain. One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of the stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the height is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy (MS 122-123).

This long and rather poetic quote from Camus echoes his philosophy of the absurd quite eloquently. The response to the absurd, the proper response for Camus, is the "yes" that is given to life, in spite of it all. It requires consciousness, and also implicated here is a certain responsibility for his fate, for Camus points out that although the actions seemed

unrelated, they created his fate. In addition, Camus adds, "created by him". So even if there is not an ethics per se in Camus, there is responsibility. As he said earlier in this series of essays:

> All systems of morality are based on the idea that an action has consequences that legitimizes or cancels it. A mind imbued with the absurd never judges that those consequences must be considered calmly. It is ready to pay up. In other words, there may be responsible persons, but there…are not guilty ones, in its opinion (MS 67).

Thus, while there is responsibility, there is no real "guilt". We can expect to see, therefore, in a character that personifies this attitude, an awareness and acceptance of the circumstances without a feeling of guilt. This will be pivotal in understanding *The Stranger*. Notice, also, that in the previously cited passage, the universe is without a master, namely, without a god, and yet, this does not result in despair, and is neither "servile nor futile". A person can be, in spite of it all, happy amidst the struggle, perhaps even because of it. One final note on this passage and the myth is worth mentioning and that is the amount of earthy and sensory details. Rocks, stones, and physical labor all speak of concrete things, of the tangible world, and it is only with this connection that the jump to the feeling of joy, or of sensory happiness, contentment, is made, even metaphorically. For the protagonists of Camus' novels, and perhaps for Camus himself, the earthy pleasures are the best, or the most real.

Much has been said, thus far, concerning Camus' concept of the absurd that will be applicable to our next section on the novel *The Stranger*. Before proceeding with the literary analysis, however, it must be mentioned that in later interviews in 1945 Camus somewhat revised or clarified his position on the absurd.

> This word "absurd" has had an unhappy history and I confess that now it rather annoys me. When I analyzed the feelings of the Absurd in the Myth of Sisyphus, I was looking for a method and not a doctrine. I was practicing methodical doubt.

> …If we assume that nothing has any meaning, then we must conclude that the world is absurd. But does nothing have a meaning? I have never believed that we could remain at this point. Even as I was writing the Myth of Sisyphus, I was thinking about the essay on revolt that I could write later on…This is what I have tried to do…though naturally, I still do not claim to be in possession of any truth (LCE 356).

Thus, even Camus concluded that one could not live without some meaning. The clarification that he provides suggests that it was not <u>all</u> meaning that Camus revolted against, but rather meaning steeped in a particular type of hope that Camus considered to be unrealistic, and thus inauthentic, and at bottom, a lie. However, what is clear is that whatever meaning we give must be created or constructed by us in the moment with full consciousness, without a hope of a future and with acknowledgement of the absurd, including the absurd end, of death.

Again, in an essay entitle "The Enigma" in LCE, he further explicates his idea of the absurd, and also revises his position on values. He ends up conceding to at least relative values. In addition, there is a certain amount of meaning we give to the world. It is expressed even by the logic of its denial.

> The moment you say that everything is nonsense you express something meaningful. Refusing the world all meaning amounts to abolishing all value judgments. But living and eating, for example, are in themselves value judgments. You choose to remain alive the moment you do not allow yourself to die of hunger, and consequently you recognize that life has at least a relative value (LCE 159-160).

Camus acknowledges that in a certain paradoxical sense, even accepting meaninglessness gives meaning or value to life. What is consistent, however, is his "admiration" for a certain type of individual that faces the absurd in the manner already described. While Camus said the following with respect to Prometheus, it could easily apply to Sisyphus.

> In the thunder and lightning of the gods, the chained hero keeps his quiet faith in man. This is how he is harder than his rock and more patient than his culture. His long stubbornness has more meaning for us than his revolt against the gods (LCE 142).

In fact, this is the prototype for what he expects from, or sees in, modern man. "One could doubtless claim this God-defying rebel as the model of contemporary man and his protest" (LCE 138). It is with this image in mind, and the conglomeration of ideas that Camus has provided us regarding the absurd, that we now move to explore his first, and perhaps most elucidating novel of the absurd, *The Stranger*.

Part II – An Analysis of *The Stranger*: Does Meursault Lie?

The Stranger (S) has most often been described as a man on trial for not playing the typical games demanded by society, particularly by its author. For example, in his Preface to the 1956 edition included in a series of essays in *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (LCE), Camus writes the following:

> …the hero of my book is condemned to death because he does not play the game. In this respect, he is foreign to the society in which he lives; he wanders, on the fringe, in the suburbs of private solitary, sensual life. And this is why some writers have been tempted to look upon him as a piece of social wreckage. A much more accurate idea of the character, or, at least, one much closer to the author's intentions, would emerge if one asks just how Meursault does not play the game. The reply is a simple one: he refuses to lie...For me, therefore, Meursault is not a piece of social wreckage...he is animated by a passion...a passion for the absolute and for truth. This truth is still a negative one, the truth of what we are and what we feel, but without it no conquest of ourselves or of the world will ever be possible. One therefore would not be much mistaken to regard *The Stranger* as the story of a man who, without any heroics, agrees to die for the truth. (1/8/55). [Published as a preface to the American edition 1956] (LCE 335-337).

This rather lengthy quote reveals much of Camus' literary intention (at least his conscious one) and analysis of the character. His aim is to demonstrate that Meursault is a man who refuses to lie; indeed he has a passion for the truth, and hence dies for the truth. It also helps explain the title, namely, how Meursault is a stranger to the society he lives in. Commentators, such as, Alba Amoia in her essay "Indifference as the Guiding

Principle of the Stranger" in Derek Mauss's *Readings on the Stranger* (RS), rightly points out that Meursault is often brutally honest with the courts, even against the advice of his lawyer who is trying to help him in his defense (RS 55). Meursault is also very honest in pointing out, time and again, that he does not believe in God. Amoia also points out the existential themes that are prevalent in the novel. She concludes her essay with the following:

> The Stranger illustrates the deep internal contradictions within society's conventional attitudes, as well as the typical existential themes of the emptiness of the universe and the absurdity of human existence (RS 59).

While, indeed, S reveals the absurd spirit that Camus intended, to stop at that reading is to tell only half the story, for, in many ways, Meursault is not always as honest as he is intended to be by Camus. The author who comes closest to questioning Meursault's honesty, although not far enough, is Robert Solomon. In his essay, "Is Merseault a Stranger to Truth?" in RS, Solomon asks the following question.

> What would it be – not to lie? Perhaps it is impossible. It is not difficult to avoid uttering falsehoods of course. Once can always keep silent. But what if lying is also not <u>seeing</u> the truth? For instance, not seeing the truth about oneself even in the name of "not lying"? What then would it be not to lie? (RS 61).

What Solomon has is mind is a certain psychological reading that ascribes to Meursault a stunted growth.

> I want to argue that the whole question of Meursault's "honesty" and "the lie" should be replaced by an examination of the presupposition of honesty and a new kind of thinking about "feelings". For I want to argue that the character of Meursault is not to be found in the reflective realm of truth and falsity but exclusively in the pre-reflective realm of simple "seeing" and "lived experience."… I want to argue that Meursault neither lies nor tells the truth, because he never realized that (meta) level of consciousness where truth and falsity can be articulated. Moreover, he does not even have the feelings, much less feelings about his feelings, to which he is supposed to be so true (RS 63).

The case that Solomon wants to build is that Meursault operates pre-reflectively or pre-thematically, never quite allowing or developing to the point where certain feelings become conscious. Yet, to say that Meursault has no feelings is also incorrect, as Solomon himself points out.

> He enjoys the warmth of the sun and Marie's company. But he does not feel regret for his crime nor sorrow for his mother's death. He is confused when Marie asks him if he loves her, not because he is undecided, but because he does not understand the question. What Meursault does not do is make judgments. As the narrator of the novel he describes, but he does not judge the significance of his actions or the meaning of events, other people's feelings, or his own. Accordingly, he does not reflect; he has few thoughts and is only minimally self-conscious. He cannot be true to his feelings, not only because he does not know what they are, but because, without judgments, he cannot even have them (RS 63-64).

What is described above as Meursault's feelings is not so much emotional feeling but pleasurable sensation. At this level Meursault is aware of his likes and dislikes, like the warm sun and sexual pleasure. We agree with Solomon that the deep human emotions are not something that Meursault exhibits. He does not regret the crime, and he does not feel deep sorrow for his mother's death. With respect to his girlfriend Marie, Solomon raises the point that he at least acts as if he does not understand the question or the meaning of love. That he does not reflect much we also agree with, except that perhaps at the end of the novel he does seem to reflect a great deal about death, his death in particular. He does not, it is true, ever really connect the dots between his actions and the series of events that lead up to his conviction. However, we cannot agree that Meursault never lies, for Meursault admits that when he gets bored with conversations or wants to get someone off his back, he pretends to agree with them, as for instance, with the magistrate after his arrest. Solomon does make the important contribution, however, that what seems to be lacking is a certain judgment factor in Meursault. Meursault keeps

company with the wrong people and doesn't seem to realize that violent outbursts from someone like Raymond are to be expected. Yet, Meursault is not totally without a judging faculty since when he is on the beach he does judge and anticipate that he must somehow calm Raymond down and get his gun away from him, or else there will be disaster. He also makes a judgment when he reads the newspaper article that the murdered man was rather foolish for playing that kind of a hoax on his family and should have expected bad consequences (though he doesn't make the connection to his own predicament). He did not, however, either realize or implement similar caution before he wrote the letter, which was another sort of lie. He also does not exercise judgment to get involved in either the problem with Salamano with his dog or Raymond beating his girlfriend. So his judgment is limited and selective, and we would contend has a certain gender bias associated with it. Meursault seems capable of male bonding, and he seems to be comfortable with, and capable of at times, strong emotions of anger. It is the more vulnerable and tender feelings that is problematic for Meursault. We do agree, however, that Meursault seems somewhat inhuman or incomplete as a human being. He certainly does not have what we would call, emotional maturity. As Solomon puts it, "he is a demonstration, even despite the author's intentions, of the poverty of consciousness…" (RS 64). This is especially true regarding his dealings with women, but sometimes with others. It is with this other side of the story, that this essay is concerned. In order to examine this issue more carefully, we must return to the story.

The novel opens with the death of his mother. "Mother died today. Or, maybe yesterday. I can't be sure" (S 1). The reader is struck immediately with bare facts and a certain coldness and uncertainty, "I can't be sure". This uncertainty might be related to

the problem of knowledge presented in the philosophical section. It seems quite odd that Meursault would not even know the date of his mother's death, but actually there is a good explanation. His mother was living in a home when he received the news, but the letter left the actual day ambiguous. These opening lines already betray a theme the novel, one of justified excuse and of uncertainty. Meursault is a man that very often will say he can not be sure of things, or that one never knows. He does not (ordinarily) make hasty judgments. However, the uncertainty will also be a warning to the reader not to judge too quickly and also foretells that perhaps others in the novel will make rash or inaccurate judgments. It also makes it more difficult to ascertain truth and lies.

In addition to uncertainty, Camus does not waste anytime to let us know that death will be of consequence in the novel. The death of Meursault's mother both opens the novel and is important in his later reflections at the end of the novel. In addition, the death of the mother, and Meursault's reaction to it, will figure greatly during the trial. The relationship with the mother, therefore, permeates the novel even when only in the background. His reaction to his mother's death is one of semi-denial. "For the present, it is almost as if Mother weren't really dead. The funeral will bring it home to me…"(S 2). It hasn't really sunk in yet, what this death of the other, of this close relation, means to him. Yet, if we follow Camus's logic on death, this also alludes to the fact that the death of the other will always be a somewhat illusory death since it isn't our death. Since we have no way of experiencing death, per se, it remains a mystery and somewhat illusive, and is a sign of the absurd. When people offer Meursault the usual condolences and kindnesses, such as Celeste's remark that "There's no one like a mother" (S 2), there is no reply from Meursault, nor does he show any emotion. He stays focused on the

physical tasks of having lunch, getting on the bus, and getting to the home. He tells us he had to walk quite a ways on foot and the sun was hot. We gain access to the physical images and actions, but are not told of any feelings or inner thoughts (other than thoughts regarding the senses or material realm).

We gain some insight regarding his relation to his mother when he arrives at the home where his mother died. He remarks: “When we lived together, Mother was always watching me, but we hardly ever talked” (S 3-4). We are told that he experienced his mother as “always watching me”. The verbalization of the constancy of the gaze seems somewhat paranoid. Yet, we are not told if she was smiling or angry or what kind of look it was, only that she was always watching. The other detail we are given is that they hardly ever talked. It seems odd that two people living in the same house would hardly ever talk. We might be tempted to interpret this statement as revealing that there was no meaningful conversation, which certainly seems to be implied. However, for someone like Meursault who includes the physical details, it seems more likely that they hardly had any conversation of any kind, including small talk. In either case, it speaks to a certain distance between them. Perhaps they were both non-verbal types, or perhaps they might have had some harsh words in the past. We are not told anything further at this point. We are not told what this silence between mother and son is all about, or even given one instance of it, or even one explanation for it, only that they do not talk. Meursault very often does not have much to say about anything. What we are often left with is a void, a silence, which seems to hang in the air but is never defined.

Meursault does tell us that the mother cried often when she first got to the home, but that she got used to it. He adds to this an excuse for not visiting her.

> That was why, during the last year, I seldom went to see her. Also it would have meant losing my Sunday – not to mention the trouble of going to the bus, getting my ticket, and spending two hours on the journey each way (S 4).

His remarks seem quite callous. He hardly went to see his mother at all in the year prior to her death and there is no mention of guilt or regret. There is, instead, a rationalization that it wouldn't have been good for either one of them. Perhaps, buried underneath, are a lot of unresolved feelings for his mother, but at this point we can only note that he does not mention any. Curiously, when the keeper offers to take the lid off to let Meursault view his mother before the funeral, he doesn't want to see her. Perhaps he doesn't want to remember his mother dead, or perhaps he does not want to watch his mother as she once watched him. Whatever the reason may be, and we the readers are told that he does not know why, but he prefers to keep death at a distance, in a box, perhaps keeping its truth at bay.

Before the others arrive for the vigil, Meursault has some coffee, offered to him by the keeper, and though he wants to smoke, he hesitates.

> But I wasn't sure if I should smoke, under the circumstances – in Mother's presence. I thought it over really, it didn't seem to matter, so I offered the keeper a cigarette, and we both smoked (S 9).

Again, we are not told why he should not smoke. Is it because his mother is dead and it is inappropriate to smoke in front of the dead, or is it because he is in front of his mother? Either way, he rationalizes that she is dead after all, and he and the keeper smoke together. Meursault is a man for whom sensory gratification means a lot. He takes pleasure in such things as smoking and drinking *café au lait*. Although we do not know if he ever smoked in front of his mother, one cannot help but note that there is something somewhat defiant in his behavior. Now, with mother dead, and even though this is a

wake, he freely takes pleasure right in front of her and somewhat in public. He defies convention for his own pleasure, with the rationalization that it didn't really matter after all. This also displays a certain indifference which is characteristic of Meursault, and also of Camus' general attitude towards the absurd. Death, of course, marks the ultimate limit of the absurd.

When the others arrive for the vigil, Meursault is neither comfortable with the outbursts of emotion nor of the deadening silence. He is irked. When it was over he was surprised that: "each of them shook hands with me, as though the night together, in which we had not exchanged a word, had created a kind of intimacy between us" (S 13). This is somewhat of an ironic passage. Meursault often says nothing, and Camus, in his essays, certainly appreciates the value of silence, images, and gestures. Yet, here, Meursault does not seem to understand the gesture. He is not connected to these people. Of course, one cannot get to know all about someone in one evening. However, there are some things that can be known or shared. They have all shared a ritual together, the vigil of the dead, which does, in a sense, at least for a short time, bond people together. In addition, he has learned something about his mother's life and friends by listening to the keeper. He has had a chance to come to know his mother a little better, and yet, this seems to mean nothing to him. All the members at the wake share something in common, his mother, and he, as her son, is the center focus at the evenings end. Of course they come up to shake his hand. Yet, the meaning of this ritual and the time spent eludes Meursault. He remains alienated from them, and just an observer.

At the funeral there is one more guest that Meursault has not seen before. It is old Mr. Perez, and he is told that his mother developed quite a friendship with him. In fact,

the people in the home used to tease him, asking "When are you going to marry her?" (S 15). His mother evidently developed a relationship, a special friendship, in the home. Up to now we know nothing about Meursault's relationships. The humanity of the mother seems more present than that of the son. Other people tell him about his mother, or inquire about her, including the warden of the place, and even the undertaker asks him his mother's age. The only response he makes is "Well, she was getting on" (S 19). In fact, he tells us that "as a matter of fact, I didn't know exactly how old she was" (S 19). Meursault might be honest in his reply, but he is unusually unaware of any details of his mother's life. It seems extremely odd that not only does he not talk (much) to his mother, but he also does not know much about her, even important details. Yet, he is painstakingly aware of many physical details of his environment and of the people he encounters.

When he returns home from his mother's funeral we are introduced to the various people in Meursault's life. The next day, we meet another woman in his life, Marie. Meursault decides to go for a swim at the pool, and it is there that he bumps into Marie, who was an office typist. We are told that he liked her and the feeling was presumably mutual, but that she was not there long enough for anything to come of it (S 23). Now, at the pool, outside of work, there is another opportunity. This is the first we are told of any relationships, or possible relationships, with women. It is noteworthy that it occurs after the mother's death in the novel. No time is wasted. It is as though sex and death go together or that the mother's death frees him in a way. While helping Marie on a raft he tells us "I let my hand stay over her breasts" (S 23). He joins her on the raft and later lets his head sink into her lap. They both seem to enjoy the swim, and while we are not told

of any real dialogue between them, the description of the scene tells us that the silence was a fruitful one. At the end of it all, he asks Marie to go to the movies with him. She agrees. Meursault, the man who is often uncertain or has nothing to say, does not suffer at all from a lack of speech here when it matters to him. He easily asks Marie out for a date. Nor is he shy when out on the date.

Later, they go back to his place and Marie spends the night. Not only does he go for a swim after his mother's funeral, but he has a date and has sex with her. Nothing seems to interfere with Meursault's sensual pleasures, or perhaps, with mother gone, he can enjoy them the better. Marie leaves before he wakes. He does not mention any feelings for Marie but he does mention being able to smell her hair still on his pillow. He decides not to go to lunch at his usual place because he does not want to deal with any questions, presumably about his mother's death and funeral. As he says, he "dislikes being questioned" (S 25). While he phrases this in general terms, one must reflect that he doesn't want to be questioned about his mother. While he does not display any emotion, something leaves him uneasy about such questions. Perhaps because again, he will have no answers to questions that he "ought to know". Or perhaps he does not like to reveal himself. How could he when he does not reflect much. He is an enigma even to himself. He spends the day in watching people from the window. At one point during the day he glances in the mirror, and mentions only the objects that he sees, yet he does not mention seeing himself at all (S 30). He does tell us that he feels "at loose ends" in the apartment. Yet, he does not tell us why, or he does so without knowing it. He tells us that his apartment seems too big to him now. It seemed to be of the right size before.

> It suited me well enough when Mother was with me, but now that I was by myself it was too large and I'd moved the dining table into my bedroom. That was now the only room I used…(S 25).

This is a revealing statement. He rationalizes that since she left he didn't need so much room. That is, he never appropriated the space back for himself. He has quartered himself off into a small space that was never occupied by mother. Behind all this rationalization, one gets the sense that Mother is still too much in the apartment. She is in the air, as it were, and the only space that he feels is his, where he has his privacy, is his bedroom. He has even made his bedroom a dining room. So he takes his nourishment and gratification in the same place now, away from where mother would have been. At the end of the day he remarks that he got through another Sunday, and that "Mother now was buried", and tomorrow he returns to work, and that "really, nothing in my life has changed" (S 30). Of course this is a fact, that his routine will go on, but one wonders if there is hidden beneath it a resistance to feel anything. Interestingly, one of his last thoughts of the day is about his mother. He seems to acknowledge that she is now gone, gone for real. Yet, is she?

We also learn of the male characters in his life, especially of old Salamano and his dog, and of Raymond, the pimp, both of whom live in his building. Even Raymond the pimp, considers it "a damned shame" what Salamano does to his dog, how cruelly he treats him (S 34). That is, even a hard core pimp displays some human compassion and yet Meursault none at all. Meursault accepts a dinner invite from Raymond and during the course of the evening Raymond reveals that "I'm a bit short-tempered" (S 35). We soon learn he was in a brawl with a man and that it involved a woman that he was

involved with physically. The woman, he says "was letting me down". As a result, he beat her.

> He'd beaten her till the blood came. Before that he'd never beaten her, not hard any how only affectionately-like. She'd howl a bit, and I'd have to shut the window. Then of course it ended as per usual. But this time I'm done with her. Only, to my mind, I ain't punished her enough. (S 38).

Raymond asks him if Meursault thinks "she really had done him dirt?" (S 39), to which he responds: "I had to admit it looked like that" (S 40). He asks further if he thinks she deserves more punishment and inquires what Meursault would do in his shoes. True to form, Meursault replies. "I told him one could never be quite sure how to act in such cases, but I quite understood his wanting her to suffer for it" (S 40). Yet, how could he understand his wanting her to suffer? On what basis is this judgment made? What feelings does this bring up, if any, for Meursault? Where does this understanding for revenge arise? Further, why is violence done to a woman of no consequence? How can he say the girl had done him wrong without hearing her side of it? How is it that Meursault trusts Raymond's story to be the truth? Regardless, Raymond has heard all the assurance that he needs and wants Meursault to help him with a plot against her. He wants Meursault to write a letter for him, "a real stinker that'll get her on the raw", as he says (S 40). His plan is to coax the girl to come back with the letter, take her to bed, and then throw her out, spitting in her face. Meursault is asked to write the letter and though he remains silent at first, Raymond asks him point blank if he would "mind doing it right away" (S 40). Meursault says he would not mind. He learns the girl's name, who turns out to be a Moor, and he writes the letter. Meursault's reaction, while appearing indifferent is not terribly so. "I didn't take much trouble over it, but I wanted to satisfy Raymond as I'd no reason not to satisfy him" (S 41). Why is it that Meursault wants to

satisfy Raymond's desire to punish the girl? Why is he willing to write a fraudulent letter that he knows will get the girl in more trouble? Why does he think Raymond will just spit in the girl's face and then let her go without any more trouble? Raymond has already been violent with the girl repeatedly. Meursault has information straight from Raymond to that effect, and he has already admitted to having a short temper. He gets into brawls. So why does Meursault foolishly trust Raymond and ignore all the evidence in front of him to the contrary? Meursault does not reflect on either Raymond's intentions or his own. Further, when Raymond is delighted and slaps him on the shoulder commenting that they are pals, Meursault keeps silent and says that he "didn't care one way or the other" (S 41). Of course he cares. Why else does he go along with such a horrible scam? He wants Raymond's friendship as another male pal but will not admit it, perhaps not even to himself. When Raymond persists, Meursault finally says yes. Now either he has just lied or he really does think they are pals. Meursault also lies in writing the letter to the girl. At the end of it all, they have a smoke, as a sign of male bonding.

On Saturday he sees Marie and they go to the beach. By now they are becoming an item. They both enjoyed the time and seem to be taken with each other. This time she does not disappear Sunday morning but stays, as mutually agreed. Through the walls the voices of others are heard, a woman in Raymond's room, and Salamano and his dog in another room. Meursault explains about the dog and Marie just seems to laugh it off. Then, she asks him some more personal questions to ascertain his feelings about her. She asks if he loves her. "I said that sort of question had no meaning really but I supposed I didn't" (S 44). The indifference of Meursault to his girlfriend is quite noticeable. We certainly have enough information from Meursault that he is sexually attracted to her and

that he enjoys being with her and swimming with her, and the way she laughs. Meursault is comfortable at the physical level but as soon as he is asked an emotional question he becomes reticent. His reply that the question has no meaning seems illogical. He is not asked to decide someone else's fate but about his own feelings or intentions regarding her. It is something he should be able to answer but he hedges. We are then told that he supposes he does not love her. However, this is somewhat ambiguous to the reader. It is unclear if he has told Marie that he does not think he loves her, or if he thinks this and has only told her that the question is meaningless. Either way, Meursault has been less than honest. If he did follow-up with telling her he did not think he loved her, then the question was not meaningless and he simply avoided giving her a direct answer. If he did not tell her, then he did know and withheld the truth although we the readers are told. Either way he has, to a certain degree, lied to her. Perhaps because he just wants what he wants at the time and does not want to lose Marie's companionship, and of course the sex that goes with it.

While they are getting their lunch ready the noise in the other apartments gets out of control. Raymond can be heard screaming at the woman. But it gets worse.

> "You let me down you bitch! I'll learn you to let me down!" There came some thuds, then a piercing scream- it made one's blood run cold – and in a moment there was a crowd of people on the landing. Marie and I went out to see. The woman was still screaming and Raymond still knocking her about (S 44-45).

Raymond is once again beating up on the woman. Apparently there was such a commotion that the scene drew a crowd. Marie's response is typical, "wasn't it horrible" she says. Meursault again, says nothing. He is unmoved by the display of violence. Marie also suggests getting a policeman, but Meursault simply says that "he doesn't like policemen" (S 45). This reply, too, seems out of place. Marie did not ask him if he liked

police or not, but requested that he get one. Meursault seems to dodge the question, and thus the truth, with an excuse. Obviously, the situation is out of control, and obviously, the letter Meursault wrote precipitated the event. Yet, he feels no remorse, no compunction, no guilt, and displays no feelings at all. He also does not take any responsibility for what he has done. He does not mention to Marie the real reason he does not want to get the police. He is less than honest, again. Fortunately, the police show up and break up the fight. After the commotion is over, they get ready for lunch, but Marie does not have the appetite. Meursault, however, "ate nearly all" (S 46). He is totally undaunted by the scene. That the woman could have been even more hurt, or worse, had not the police come, means nothing to Meursault. That he had something to do with her predicament also means nothing to him. It is not his body being abused. Marie, on the other hand, shows human compassion and compassion as another woman. Marie leaves afterwards and Meursault naps. He attends to his bodily needs quite well.

Later that day Raymond drops by and explains the incident; things had gotten out of control when she slapped him. One would expect Meursault to be quite enraged with Raymond's behavior and upset that he dragged him into this with the letter-writing. Meursault mentions none of this. Astonishingly, he answers: "Well," I said, "You taught her a lesson all right, and that's what you wanted, isn't it?" (S 47). Meursault is not in the least concerned with the girl but with his friend's satisfaction. In fact, he almost sounds proud that Raymond succeeded. Male bonding takes precedent even over the physical welfare of the woman. Raymond wants something more from Meursault. He wants Meursault to be his witness. Meursault agrees before he even knows the terms. This is quite incredulous. How can Meursault be a witness without lying? "Its quite

simple" he replied. "You've only got to tell them that the girl had let me down. So I agreed to be his witness." (S 47). How can Meursault agree that the girl let Raymond down? What proof does he have; none whatsoever, only a story from Raymond. If anything, Meursault should be a witness for the girl and all the violence that he heard and observed. As if he has not had enough experience of Raymond's bad temper and where it leads, he now wants to do him yet another favor. Despite his earlier protestations that he did not care one way or another about his friendship with Raymond, it seems that he cares a great deal to keep the friendship and to keep his friend happy.

That evening, Marie came by and boldly asks him to marry her. His response is quite typical of the responses he has been giving her.

> I said I didn't mind, if she was keen on it, we'd get married. Then she asked me again if I loved her. I replied much as before, that her question meant nothing or next to nothing, but I supposed I didn't. "If that's how you feel," she said, "why marry me?" I explained that it had no importance really but, if it would give her pleasure, we could get married right away. I pointed out that, anyhow the suggestion came from her, as for me, I'd merely said "yes". Then she remarked that marriage was a serious matter. To which I answered. "No" Suppose another girl had asked you to marry her, I mean a girl you liked in the same way as you like me- would you have said "yes" to her, too?" "Naturally". Then she said she wondered if she really loved me or not. I, of course, couldn't enlighten her as to that…she murmured something about my being "a queer fellow" "And I daresay that's why I love you," she added "But maybe that's why one day I'll come to hate you". To which I had nothing to say, so I said nothing. She thought for a bit then started smiling and, taking my arm, repeated that she was earnest; she really wanted to marry me. "All right," I answered. "We'll get married whenever you like." (S 52-54).

Meursault does not think much of marriage, or at least he doesn't have any romantic ideas about it, as he doesn't think much of love either. Yet, he is willing to marry her if it would please her. He is now, at least willing to satisfy her desires. There is some change in the relationship albeit a small one. While the bonding with Raymond seems obvious enough, the bonding with Marie is more subtle. He has no objection to marrying her,

though he does not reveal any depth of feeling for her. One almost gets the impression that he lives vicariously through Raymond and Marie, who are able to feel what he cannot. Yet, one also wonders why Marie stays since he does not admit to loving her. Still, he has consented to marrying her, so Marie makes the best of it, or is perplexed by it all. Either way, she admits to loving him and they agree to get married. After dinner they discuss the Paris job option. He reveals more to Marie than he did to his employer. He dislikes Paris, calling it dingy and dark and he describes the people as having "washed-out, white faces" (S 54). These remarks suggest that Meursault really was not indifferent to the Paris job offer after-all, as he had said to his employer. He just pretended to be. Once again, this is a certain type of lie, and Meursault has been less than truthful.

The next day is the day of the beach-outing. They go to meet Raymond, and Meursault remarks that the previous evening he had indeed been a witness for him "about the girl's having been false to him", so they let Raymond go (S 60). Meursault still feels no remorse or guilt. He does remark that the police didn't check his statement out. So he shifts the responsibility on them rather than accept responsibility for his part. Practically speaking, the police should have checked out the story, but this doesn't exonerate Meursault from being less than honest. The police station incident is yet another sad reminder of how little the life or testimony of a woman is valued. For, even if she had been false to him, why would this give Raymond the right to physically abuse her? The police had seen the woman beaten up, so why did they release Raymond? Since the novel takes place in Algiers, perhaps the reader is also being reminded that the rights of women were probably not quite what they would have been in Paris. What is more

problematic in the novel is why the brutal treatment of the woman doesn't bother Meursault.

When they arrive at the beach house they are introduced to Masson and his wife. Meursault notices that Marie gets along with the hostess. The harmonious domestic scene makes an impression on Meursault. "For the first time, perhaps, I seriously considered the possibility of my marrying her" (S 63). The comment is telling. We do not know if he has any more feeling for Marie, but the possibility of the social privileges that come with having a wife appeals to Meursault, such as weekend social events with other married couples, and pleasant days at a bungalow. Yet, the phrasing is odd. Meursault had previously already agreed to marry Marie, so why is this the first time marriage crosses his mind? Does this mean that it is the first time Meursault wants to marry Marie and not just to satisfy her? Or, was he lying before just to keep her quiet and keep the relationship the way he wanted it? After all, it is one thing to say he will marry her, another thing to do it. Again, the implication is that Meursault's response betrays some lack of honesty on his part.

The day proceeds well until the men go for a walk after eating and the fateful events on the beach take place involving the Arab men. Raymond went to the beach house prepared for trouble, with a gun. It is Raymond who appears to make the first move for his gun when they encounter the Arabs and lets Meursault know that he wants to shoot one of them. Meursault does not want Raymond to use his gun, yet he does not tell him that outright, afraid that it will insight him to violence. Instead, Meursault says that the Arab has not done anything yet and it would not be right to kill him in cold

blood. Raymond agrees but is aching for the opportunity. The next remark implicates him further.

> You take on the fellow on the right and give me your revolver. If the other one starts making trouble or gets out his knife, I'll shoot. But nobody made a move yet…We could only watch each other, never lowering our eyes.
> And just then it crossed my mind that one might fire, or not fire, and it would come to absolutely the same thing.
> …Then all of a sudden the Arabs vanished …So Raymond and I turned and walked back (S 72).

Something has definitely changed in Meursault. He is now very much involved. If this were Sartre we would say that Meursault is now engaged, having spent most his life unengaged. He steps into the situation, even though no one has asked him to get involved. He persuades Raymond to give him his gun with the advice that Raymond should go fight the other guy. In addition, he promises to shoot if the man takes out his knife. One doesn't know why Meursault made this claim. Was he just saying anything to get the gun away from Raymond? Was he lying about being willing to use the gun, if need be? Obviously, if Meursault had the gun, even if the Arab took out his knife, Meursault would only have to threaten him with his gun, but not use it, to get the Arab to back down. Only if the Arab really came at him, or his friend, in spite of it all, would Meursault really have to shoot. The possibility of actually firing does come to Meursault's mind, since he comments that one has a choice. Yet, he seems to think that whatever choice is made, it would not really matter. This is quite an absurd comment. The wrong decision could mean the difference between life and death or at least amount to a whole lot of trouble. However, since the Arabs decide to leave, Meursault does not have to choose what to do. They return home. Yet, by the beach house, with the beating sun on him, Meursault can not force himself up the stairs. He is even more adamant not

to “make myself amiable to the women” (S 72). There is something between men here and the women are outsiders. Meursault does not want Marie to have any part of it, or to see this side of him, or to interfere with it.

Given the devastating heat he contemplates: “To stay, or make a move – it came to much the same.” (S 73). He decides to return to the beach. Meursault is becoming conscious of all the moments of choice that he has. He decides not to return to the women and the house, but to return outdoors and risk the Arabs. He says that he is looking for cool water, but this does not seem quite the entire truth. Even when he says that he wants to be rid of “the sight of women in tears” (S 73), this does not seem quite truthful. He is going back because something is unfinished. There is some bigger decision he still has to make. Of course he finds the Arab, the one with a knife. The description is that the man was just lying on his back with his hands behind his head. Meursault says that he is taken back, that he “hadn’t given a thought to it on my way there” (S 74). Yet, how could he not have thought of it? They had already had two close encounters. Why does he return to the same place of trouble? At the very least, a case can be made that there is something that was left unfinished, and it is to this that he returns. Again, Meursault seems less than honest. Upon seeing Meursault, the Arab reaches for his pocket, and Meursault for the revolver in his, and at that moment he looked to Meursault as “a blurred dark form wobbling in the heat haze” (S 74). It is at this point that Meursault admits he had another choice. “It struck me that all I had to do was to turn, walk away, and think no more of it” (S 74). One suspects, however, that since he did turn and go back home before, and he came back, that this time the outcome was going to be different. No sooner does Meursault admit he had a choice, than he finds

an excuse. The excuse, or the reason he gives, is the environment. He blames especially the heat.

> I waited, the heat was beginning to scorch my cheeks... I couldn't stand it nay longer, and took another step forward. I knew it was a fool thing to do. I wouldn't get out of the sun by moving on a yard or so. But I took that step, just one step, forward. And then the Arab drew his knife and held it up toward me, athwart the sunlight …shaft of light shot upward from the steel and I felt as if a long, thin blade transfixed my forehead…Beneath a veil of brime and tear my eyes were blinded, I was conscious only of the cymbals of the sun clashing on my skull, and less distinctly, of the keen blade of light flashing up from the knife, scarring my eyelashes, and gorging into my eyeballs (S 75).

> Then everything began to reel before my eyes, a fiery gust came from the sea, while the sky cracked in two, from end to end, and a great sheet of flame poured through the rift. Every nerve of my body was a steel spring, and my grip closed on the revolver. The trigger gave, and the smooth underbelly of the butt jogged my palm. And so, with that crisp whipcrack sound, it all began. I shook off my sweat and clinging veil of light. I knew I'd shattered the balance of the day. The spacious calm of the beach on which I had been happy. But I fired four shots more into the inert body on which they left no visible trace. And each successive shot was another loud, fateful rap on the door of my undoing (S 76).

Camus gives his character quite eloquent language. Meursault is more in charge of his speech here than anywhere else in the novel, except possibly the end. He waxes quite poetically in his own thoughts. He blames the sun, yet he says that he knew that by moving forward he could not get out of the sun. This does not seem a very rational move for a man that always has something rational to say. Of course the Arab draws his knife in self defense. Meursault mistakes the glare of the sun from the blade for a stab of the knife in his forehead that goes into his eyes. He says his eyes were blinded. Of course he means blinded by the sun, but perhaps for the first time, Meursault is flying into a blind rage, the kind he often saw Raymond in. In fact, with gun in hand he has now transposed himself into Raymond. Now he can feel what Raymond feels, anger. However, Meursault still does not admit to any feelings, except the physical ones of being

uncomfortable with the weather. Almost mechanically he describes the shooting. He does not even own the act but describes it as the gun's doing. Perhaps he was enraged and he did not know what he was doing. Indeed the first shot and the description just before it sounds almost like a psychotic break. Yet, having fired the first shot, there are more to follow, and these are described differently. His senses seem to return to him and he owns more of the other four shots. He is aware that he is firing into an inert body and that he has sealed his fate. He is also aware that the same place that gave him so much pleasure has now been the site of his downfall. Or perhaps it was too much pleasure, too much of a blissful future ahead, married to Marie and enjoying life together. Or perhaps it was just too common and bourgeois a life that was in store for him.

The rest of the novel deals with various aspects of the trial and prison and Meursult's reflections on his situation. He is appointed a lawyer and questioned several times by various people. His lawyer tells him that he thinks he has a good chance if he follows his advice. The first question that is raised concerns Meursault's perceived callousness at his mother's funeral. He asks him point blank if "he had felt grief on that "sad occasion" (S 79). The question strikes Meursault as odd. In addition, he says he would be embarrassed to even ask that kind of question. Here is another example of how Meursault is uncomfortable with anything on the feeling level. In addition, he says that "of recent years, I'd rather lost the habit of noting my feelings, and hardly knew what to answer" (S 80). He does not say that he never had feelings, but that for some reason, in the past few years, he has stopped noticing them. For what reason, we are not told, and Meursault does not reflect on it. He adds that he was fond of his mother. He adds further that all normal people "had more or less desired the death of those they love, at some

time or another" (S 80). Where this comment comes from we are not told. It seems out of place in Meursault's character. He does not spend much time with books, yet, it seems he knows something of popular psychology. Still, Meursault is aware that he could very well have wished his mother dead at times. However, he states that this is a normal wish and thus is not to be taken seriously. Again, he distances himself from any responsibility. Yet, while he admits to the possibility of these "normal" feelings, he admits to no tender emotions for his mother, and never once to any feelings of grief at her passing.

When Meursault does allow for the possibility of feeling, it is always for the more aggressive feelings, never anything that would show care, concern, or any vulnerability on his part. Needless to say, his lawyer cautions him never again to utter such things. Meursault's reaction is also tellingly consistent. First, he tells us that he wants to satisfy his lawyer. This is typical of his bonding relationships with other men, like Raymond. Next, he adds that "my physical condition at any given moment often influenced my feeling" (S 80). Meursault is very much a man attuned to the senses and his creature comfort is important to him, to the point that he admits that sometimes if he is not physically comfortable, his feelings can be influenced. What this means is not explained. Of course we know that the extreme heat of the sun was one of the factors in the murder of the Arab, according to Meursault. Yet, how else his feelings are affected he does not say, and given that he has just stated that he has not noticed his feelings much over the past few years, this is an odd choice of words. Perhaps he means that he may mislead (or perhaps even lie to) Marie to get the sex he wants, or that he sometimes placates people. However, none of these reveal any feelings on his part. Rather, feeling here seems to mean merely that his reactions and responses are subject to whims according to how his

physical body is feeling. It does not really mean emotional feelings, except perhaps for some anger that may be displayed on occasion. Still, he assures his lawyer that he really would have preferred it if his Mother had not died. That is, he did not really want her dead. The lawyer is not satisfied with his answer and asks Meursault if "he could say that on that day I had kept my feelings under control" (S 81). Meursault answers no, for that would not be the truth. So it is not that Meursault is not aware of what his feelings were for his mother that day, he clearly states here that he had no feelings to keep under control, that is, he did not feel grief. Why didn't he say this the first time the lawyer asked instead of stating he does not take note of his feelings? Meursault withheld the truth at first. Again, in doing so he has lied, if not come close to it. He has to be pushed into acknowledging feelings, or more precisely here, his lack of them. He seems aware enough of the consequences of his words to choose them carefully, and at times, to cover up the truth.

Next, the magistrate returns to question Meursault. The magistrate, not content with Meursault's answer of nothing to say, asks him straight out if he loved his mother. This time, Meursault says yes, but with a caveat. ""Yes" I replied, "Like everybody else"" (S 83). Meursault does not give a straight reply, leaving the reader to wonder about the truthfulness of the statement and the implications of the caveat. Has he again lied? He has just said that all he felt was fondness for his mother. Is this mere fondness now tantamount to an expression of love? In addition, Meursault's answer twists the meaning of the word. What does he mean by love? He only tells us that he loves his mother the same as everyone else. Yet, he can have no knowledge of how strongly or weakly anyone else love's their mother. Having no knowledge, this is again a lie to

pronounce love like the others. Or, perhaps Meursault just means that he has the same type of practical relationship most people do. He allowed her to live with him for as long as he could, he gave up school for practical reasons, etc. That is, he has been, in his eyes, at least as dutiful as others. Or, it can be that Meursault is very reticent to admit to any emotional feelings, that he feels embarrassed to do so. Still, by putting these words in Meursault's mouth, Camus raises a question to society, as well as to the magistrate and other characters. How much do the other people really love their mothers? Meursault's answer is likely to sound insolent, since he has, in effect, just turned the question around. Regardless, Meursault has not met the social expectations nor displayed the proper attitude about one's mother, nor has he responded correctly at something as serious as death. Meursault seems a monster to them.

The next question of the magistrate seems quite reasonable. "Why did you fire five consecutive shots?" (S 83). Meursault does not answer the why but corrects the magistrate. He did not shoot all the shots consecutively. First he fired the first shot, and then paused, then the other four. He is asked another why question, why the pause in between? He makes no reply to the magistrate, though we are told that Meursault vividly recalls the physical heat, and that he is almost reliving the sensation (S 84). Again the interrogator tries for a third time and asks why he kept firing at the man once he was on the ground, and again he does not reply. Is he being obnoxious? Does he think they will not believe him? Or, is it, quite simply because he really doesn't know why. Then, why not say so? Again, Meursault appears to withhold a truthful reply.

At this point the magistrate angrily demands an answer. He pulls out a crucifix and attempting to get the answer out of him, asks if he believes in God. The astonishing

answer, is no. So now Meursault appears even odder, even more of a monster, for he does not even have the fear of God to guide him in a truthful answer. The magistrate is incredulous and says that everyone believes, even those who reject such a belief. Though not quite a logical reply, the magistrate probably means that at a time like this, most people find some belief. Since he can not get Meursault to tell him the truth based on Meursault's belief, he tries a different tactic. The magistrate asks Meursault if he wants his life to be meaningless because of Meursault's answer. Of course Meursault does not see the connection. Whereas in other cases Meursault wants to satisfy others, here he feels no such compunction. At this point the magistrate is totally infuriated and asks how he cannot believe that "he suffered for your sake"? (S 86). The attempted guilt does not succeed. We are told that the magistrate's conversation bores him (S 86). Every time the conversation gets to an emotional level, Meursault simply does not want to deal with it. A similar episode occurred when Salamano was grieving over his dog and Meursault said he was bored with the conversation. However, this time Meursault admits that he reacts as is typical when he is bored. What does he do? "I pretended to agree" (S 84). So Meursault is not above lying if it will get him out of something. Had the magistrate stopped there that would have been the end of the conversation. However, he pushes further and asks again to admit his belief in God. To this Meursault shakes his head, he thinks. He can not quite go this far with his lie.

The frustrated magistrate asks one last question. Does he regret his action? Meursault's reaction is strange. "I said that what I felt was less regret than a kind of vexation" (S 87). By this time Meursault has had time to consider what he has done, namely, that he has killed a man. Is this not something to regret? Whether Meursault

accepts his actions, that is, takes responsibility for them, is still questionable. Perhaps Meursault's answer is that he does not feel guilt. This would be in alignment with Camus' philosophy that the absurd person will be responsible without guilt. Yet, Meursault has not yet taken any responsibility. He does not say that he made a poor judgment to go back to the beach. He does not explain his actions at all at this point. Even if it was because of the sun, or because he thought he was being attacked, that it was truly in self-defense, can not he still regret the whole episode or at least that it resulted in a man's death? Can one not regret the taking of a life even when it might be justified? In addition, Meursault was not asked if he feels guilt but does he regret the whole thing? He clearly feels neither.

The trial follows. One of the most important questions he is asked concerns the murder. Did he return to the spot intending to kill the Arab? Meursault answers no. This does not satisfy as he is then asked why he took the revolver and why return to the very same spot. Meursault's answer: "it was a matter of pure chance" (S 110). This seems incredulous to the reader as well as to the jury. The series of witnesses on Meursault's behalf do not really accomplish much. Despite Marie's efforts, the prosecutor focuses on that the fact that their relationship started the day after the funeral and concentrates on the sexual aspect. Masson paints him as a decent guy, and Salamano that he was kind to his dog and that his mother was probably better off in the home. Raymond champions Meursault's innocence, and, has the loyalty and decency to admit that the Arab had a grudge against him and not Meursault, and that, his return to the beach with the revolver was a pure coincidence (S 119-120). Despite his best efforts, Raymond's testimony seems to be more damaging by the time the Prosecutor gets through with his questions.

> "How comes it then," the Prosecutor inquired, "that the letter which led up to this tragedy was the prisoner's work?"
> Raymond replied that this, too, was due to mere chance.
> To which the Prosecutor retorted that in this case "chance" or "mere coincidence' seemed to play a remarkable large part. Was it by chance that I hadn't intervened when Raymond assaulted his mistress? Did this convenient term "chance" account form my having vouched for Raymond at the police station and, having made, on that occasion, statements extravagantly favorable to him? (S 119).

The Prosecutor asks a very reasonable set of questions and points out some of the most damaging facts of the case. Meursault wrote the letter that led to the disaster. The word "chance" is being thrown about too easily. He also lied, or exaggerated circumstances, to the police to vouch for Raymond. He also remains uninvolved and uncaring during the beating of the woman. In addition, the prosecutor attacks Raymond's credibility by pointing out that Raymond lies about his profession. Whereas he pretends to be a warehouseman, he in fact is a pimp. So, his testimony is to be taken with more than a grain of salt. What is worse is that Meursault is cast as an intimate friend of such a social deviant. Raymond is asked point blank if Raymond is his friend and he replies, certainly, that they were the best of friends. (S 121). Meursault is asked the same question regarding their friendship and when pressed, answers yes. So either Meursault is lying now or lied then (or perhaps finally realizes that he had indeed acted as his friend). Yet, it seems more likely that at least consciously, Meursault is just reacting as he normally does when he's in a tough situation, he pretends to agree. That is, he lies.

Somewhere during the course of the trial, Meursault's lawyer realizes that the prosecutor is intermingling Meursault's lack of emotional connection to the killing, and comments, "Is my client on trial for having buried his other or for killing a man?" (S 121). The Prosecutor's response is extremely insightful.

> They hinge together psychologically…I accuse the prisoner of behaving at his mother's funeral in a way that showed he was already a criminal at heart" (S 122).

While they are two different events, the prosecutor's stringing together the series of events is not without merit. First of all, psychologically it does tell us about the character of the person, the type of person he was. So even if we do not find him guilty on legal grounds, we might psychologically accuse him or find him lacking in human compassion. Further, character witnesses and the character of a person are important in trials. Thus, even legally, his character matters, as does the discrediting testimony of his character witnesses. He objects to Marie being referred to as his mistress, whereas for him "she was just Marie" (S 127). Meursault does not seem to catch on that the fact that he and Marie were not married does speak to his character. We will never know how sincere his agreement to marry Marie was, but we do know that during the time he did spend with her, he hadn't yet married her, and, in none of his reflections in prison that we are privy to, does he ever mention marrying her or looking forward to the wedding. From the outside, Meursault looks like a cad promising anything to get his way.

The summary of his actions weigh heavily against him. The prosecutor rejects any extenuating circumstances such as insanity or a psychological break with reality.

> We are not concerned with an act of homicide committed on a sudden impulse which might serve as an extenuation…the prisoner is an educated man…he is an intelligent and he knows the value of words.…it is quite impossible to assume that, when he committed the crime, he was unaware what he was doing…And has he uttered a word of regret for his most odious crime? Not one word. Not one in the course of these proceedings did this man show the least contrition (S 127).

In addition, ironically, he is painted as an educated or at least an intelligent man, and this damns him further, as does his lack of regret. In the end, despite the fact that he had to drop out of school and never showed any further ambition, his education betrays him. He

knows the value of words and he chooses them carefully. Even the fact that he was asked to write the letter goes to show that others consider him a literate person. Of course even educated people suffer emotional illness, but the point the prosecutor wants to make is that he was aware of shooting the Arab. In addition, the prosecutor finds it incredulous that Meursault did not know what his actions were leading to, so therefore, he must have intended the result. Though the reasoning is a little shaky, it is also incredulous to the reader that Meursault could be so unaware of his actions. Further, the prosecutor notes the lack of remorse after the fact. Meursault tries to explain.

> I have never been able to regret anything in all my life. I've always been far too much absorbed in the present moment or the immediate future to think back (S 127).

He does not realize that this makes him a man without a conscience and certainly without reflection. It proves further that he does not consider others. He is always too preoccupied with the new to think about what he has done. It is as if he has no past in some sense, as if his mind is a blank screen that just absorbs the sensations of each moment and then moves on. He does not seem to think or realize that reflection can sometimes change how we act in the future and that the past is linked to the future. He does not have this much depth. In fact, the prosecutor accuses him of having no soul. He recalls the prosecutor saying that "there was nothing human about me, not one of those moral qualities which normal men possess had any place in my mentality" (S 127). The prosecutor also insists that the jury should show him no mercy based on his behavior.

> this man has, I repeat, no place in a community whose basic principles he flounts without compunction. Nor, heartless as he is, has he any claim to mercy. I ask you to impose the extreme penalty of the law: …ask for a capital sentence (S 129).

He is accused as much of disregarding societal norms as he is for his crime against the individual Arab. That is, his crimes are crimes, and his attitudes, are not only against individuals but against society at large. As the logic goes, he does not deserve to continue to live in society. The judge has one last question regarding his defense and asks him to explain the reason for the murder. He answers that "it was because of the sun" (S 130). Immediately he realizes that it does not sound like the right thing to say, this much reflection he does have. His lawyer attempts to paint a different picture, that of a dutiful son, a hard-working man, and a man sympathetic to the troubles of others. The lawyer asks, instead, for homicide with extenuating circumstances (S 132). The verdict returned is death by the guillotine.

The remainder of the novel concerns Meursault's thoughts while awaiting his execution. We would be amiss if we did not admit that there is some development in his character, for in the second half of the novel Meursault begins to reflect more. It is the Meursault imprisoned who takes notice and remembers. In fact, remembering is one of his pastimes in prison. He remembers events, and he has a good memory of detailing objects. However, we cannot be too quick in saying that Meursault has grown, or that he has had a grand epiphany regarding the importance of feelings or is willing to take responsibility for events.

Imprisoned, Meursault soon realizes that all his musings on escape are futile. But as he says: "one can't be sensible all the time" (S 139). This is quite an odd thing for Meursault to say since for the most part, that is exactly what we learn about Meursault's character. He is sensible at facing reality to a fault. He gets used to things. In addition, aside from momentary hints of feelings welling up, he shows no emotion. This is

probably Meursault's excusing himself for his momentary lapse of facing reality. He does, however, continue to make the best of it. When another day has passed and he realizes that they have no come for him, he counts his blessings, as one would say.

> Still, I was lucky in one respect, never during any of those periods did I hear footsteps. Mother used to say that however miserable one is, there's always something to be thankful for. And each morning, when the sky brightened and light began to flood my cell, I agreed with her…And I knew I had another twenty four hours respite (S 142).

It is the education that he obtained from his mother that dominates his attitude, even to the bitter end. He still makes the best of it, even pending his execution.

One of the things Meursault contemplates is his appeal. He first begins by imagining it is denied. He tries to accept this by dwelling on the insignificance of life. So, he reminds himself that "life isn't worth living anyhow", and that the age at which one dies does not matter, that eventually dying is inevitable (S 143). However, this proves little consolation to him, and is consistent with Camus' philosophical argument, discussed earlier, that quantity of life does matter in an absurd world. Since death does come to all, he argues, "the precise manner of your death has obviously small importance" (S 243). In one sense this is true, insofar as death will eventually come regardless. Yet, that is does not matter seems an overstatement and a rationalization. Some deaths are more violent than others. In addition, depending on the type of legacy one wants to leave, the reason or type of death, and especially the type of life lived, does matter, even if there is nothing further after death. Yet, the purpose of all this was so that Meursault could follow the rejection of his appeal with the possibility of its acceptance, and thus end up with better thoughts, and as he put it, "earned a good hour's peace of mind" (S 144).

Marie also crosses his mind after he is convicted, especially since she has stopped writing. He contemplates the possible reasons. Perhaps she has "grown tired of being the mistress of a man sentenced to death. Or she might be ill or dead" (S 144). Rather than expressing any sense of loss or emotional let-down, Meursault, again, makes the best of it. His method of doing so, however, is to rationalize and trivialize the relationship. He retorts that "apart form our two bodies, separated now; there was no link between us, nothing to remind us of each other" (S 144). That is, now that their bodies can no longer meet and she can not visit and she no longer writes, for all intensive purposes, she no longer exists for him. If she were dead he could not have an interest in her and when he is dead people will also forget him. So after all, it seems that mother was right, that "really, there's no idea to which one doesn't get climatized in time" (S 144). Meursault is getting used to all his losses and taking them in stride.

Perhaps one of the most significant dialogues takes place during the chaplain's visit, who has forced himself into a meeting with Meursault. When asked about his refusal to see the chaplain, Meursault answers honestly that he doesn't believe in God. Again, like the magistrate earlier, this seems like an incredulous answer to the priest. Besides, Meursault says, it was a "question of so little importance" (S 145). In what sense is this unimportant? It can only be unimportant since Meursault has to face the death penalty anyway, regardless. Yet, whether or not there is a God and judgment and an afterlife, seems of crucial importance. It is unimportant for Meursault since he has really already rejected the possibility. The priest comments that sometimes people aren't as sure as they think. Next the priest inquires whether Meursault feels despair, to which he replies no, just natural fear. The priest tries to befriend Meursault and to get him to

ask God for help. He adds that "in his opinion every man on the earth was under sentence of death" (S 146). Meursault responds that it is not the same thing and of no consolation. Yet, the priest has uttered a deep truth as far as existentialism, and even Camus' absurd philosophy, are concerned. Meursault has trivialized the priest's statement because it comes from a priest. Meursault points out that the only death that interests him is his own, that is why it is of no consolation. To the bitter end, Meursault remains self-absorbed. He never really contemplates a problem of humankind, but his own particular distresses. Still, the priests points out that no matter when someone dies they still must face "that terrible, final hour" (S 147). He asks a more specific question. "Have you no hope at all? Do you really think that when you die you die outright, and nothing remains?" He replies, "yes" (S 147). The question of hope has been raised and Meursault answers true to the philosophy of the absurd that Camus advocates, without a crutch, that is, without hope. According to Camus, this is admirable, but the idea of an afterlife is not always a matter of hope, for with it comes the idea of judgment, and that it does after all matter how one acted and treated others in this life. On the possibility that there is an afterlife, quite the contrary to what Camus thinks, the thought is not a crutch but a possibly harsh reality that one will face. Still, neither Meursault nor his author takes up Pascal's wager.

The priest continues to badger Meursault, who is getting tired of the discussion, one would say, getting bored with it, as he has so many times with others before. The priest's next tactic is to tell him that the real trial is not this one but that God's justice mattered more, to which Meursault sarcastically replies that it was the former one that

condemned him. When the priest brings up the concept of sin, Meursault becomes more adamant.

> I told him that I wasn't conscious of any "sin"; all I knew was that I'd been guilty of a criminal offense. Well, I was paying penalty of that offense, and no one had the right to expect anything more of me (S 148).

The issue of guilt is again raised, however, it is raised in a legal sense that Meursault was found guilty of a crime and that he was paying the price, and that was all. The priest, of course, does not think that is all. He refers to the stone walls and the deep human suffering that they bear witness to, and upon which, sometimes one can see a divine face (S 149). Of course Meursault says he has never seen anything in those stones, not even when he has tried to imagine a face, and the face he tries to imagine is that of Marie, full of desire. The priest wants to elevate the conversation to loftier and spiritual matters and Meursault brings it right back down to earth, where he is comfortable. Meursault's memory and imagination fail him. The priest becomes more perturbed and insists, as did the magistrate, that he can not believe Meursault's obstinacy regarding the matter. Meursault, undaunted, says that he will not waste the little time he has left thinking of God.

The priest asks one last curious question. He wonders why Meursault has never addressed him as Father, since he is a priest. We are told that the question irritates Meursault, and further, "I told him he wasn't my father" (S 150). Why should this question perturb Meursault so much? Is it simply because the priest represents a belief system that Meursault does not believe in? Or, has the priest hit a nerve with the mention of "father"? Meursault only has brief memories, given to him by his mother, of his father. The father is absent. Meursault will not accept a father substitute. Perhaps also,

father means someone who was never around, who left him with too much responsibility, which was probably the reason behind his having to give up school. Father, perhaps, means the beginning of having to accept things in life and not dreaming or hoping for a better future. Father, in Meursault's life, brings on the absurd, is the limiting factor, and also signifies death, perhaps more than the death of the mother. Whatever the reason, Meursault explodes.

> …something seemed to break inside me. I started yelling at the top of my voice. I hurled insults at him, I told him not to waste his rotten prayers on me; it was better to burn than to disappear. I'd taken him by the neck of his cassock, and in a sort of ecstasy of joy and rage, I poured out on him all the thoughts that had been simmering in my brain. He seemed so cocksure, you see. And yet none of his certainties was worth one strand of a woman's hair. Living as he did, like a corpse, he couldn't even be sure of being alive…Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of the death that was coming. That no doubt, was all I had, but at least that certainty I could get my teeth into just as it had got its teeth into me…I'd passed my life in a certain way, and I might have passed it in a different way, if I'd felt like it (S 151)

Finally we get a full-blown emotional response from Meursault. As one would expect, it is one of rage. He insults the priest and is willing to accept even damnation. Notice his words, "it is better to burn than to disappear". Who has disappeared? Certainly his father has disappeared, and this might be some misplaced aggression towards his absent father. This reference that it is better to burn is also out of place philosophically if one considers that one does disappear at death and that to imagine anything, even burning, is a kind of after-life hope in Camus' world, and in Meursault's. Thus, this disappearing must speak of something different. The psychological reading seems appropriate. On another lever, Meursault's insults are aimed at showing the priest that Meursault, even condemned in jail, is more alive than the priest. The priest, due to his choice of vocation, has spent an existence more disappeared than alive, as indicated also by the reference to being "like a

corpse". In addition, the passage enforces Meursault's preference for the tangible and earthly pleasures, and his conviction that these are worth more than abstract spirituality, for Meursault says that even one strand of a woman's hair is worth more. The tangible earth and daily life is more certain for Meursault. Finally, the absent father may also be connected to his denial of the existence of God. In most people's minds, and in the Christian theology of his time, God was viewed as the ultimate father figure. Just as his father is absent and will never return, and one should not hope for that impossibility, so one should not hope for an absent God. So goes Meursault's logic.

Further, Meursault maintains that it does not really matter how one spends one's life, that one could have just as easily made other choices. As he says: "nothing, nothing had the least importance" (S 152). This, however, seems somewhat contradictory to the speech he has just made where he quite clearly thinks it is better to live his life as he did than as the priest does. He is not <u>that</u> indifferent. The emphasis here is on the ultimate end, death, as being the same regardless, and it is in this vein that indifference is to be the accurate response. Meursault continues his introspection and sounds more cold-hearted.

> What difference could they make to me, the deaths of others or a mother's love, or his God; or the way a man decides to live…All alike would be condemned to die one day...And what difference would it make if, after being charged with murder, he was executed because he didn't weep at his mother's funeral, since it all came to the same thing in the end? The same thing for Salamano's wife and for Salamano's dog. And that little robot woman was as guilty as the guilt from Paris who had married Masson, or as Marie, who had wanted me to marry her (S 152).

In the above passage, Meursault affirms that since death awaits us all, it really doesn't matter after all how one lives. Here Meursault adds to the general and abstract, the deaths of specific people, like his mother, and even these could not make a difference to him. How harsh the words that a mother's death does not matter. Yet, this is precisely

how Meursault has been acting all the while regarding her death. The comment also serves to point out that no one else's death, can really prepare one for one's own death. Death is something one can only know when one goes through it, and then, ironically, it is not a knowledge that one lives to talk about. Not even a mother or a mother's death can save one from the fate of death. In addition, there is a leveling factor in death that is quite egalitarian, that chooses all regardless of status or wealth or anything else; hence again, it does not matter. Since all are sentenced to die, all are guilty. But, then the priest was right in this regard, wasn't he? We all face a death sentence.

The novel ends on a poetic note, and with further illumination. Again, as the mother's death opened the novel, it comes again to close it.

> On the edge of daybreak, I heard a streamer's siren. People were starting on a voyage to a world which ceased to concern me forever. Almost for the first time in many months I thought of my mother…and now, it seemed to me I understood why at her life's end she had taken on a fiancé, why she'd played at making a fresh start… With death so near Mother must have felt like someone on the brink of freedom ready to start life all over again. No one, no one in the world had nay right to weep for her. And I, too, felt ready to start life all over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up a that dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, that I was happy still. For all to be accomplished for me to feel less lonely, all that remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration (S 153-154).

With death near, a certain release comes, that Meursault describes as freedom. Meursault also seems to make a connection with the immanence of death to being able to face life better, or at least more authentically, more fully, which is a common theme in existential literature. In addition, the release of emotions, in particular the flood of anger that he describes, has enabled Meursault to get rid of any vestiges of hope to which he clung. His last images are again of nature, and he accepts, almost defiantly, but at least whole-

heartedly, the indifference of the universe. This indifference seems to him now not cold and callous, but brotherly. However, is not this description of nature also a pull towards the engulfing unity that Camus had warned against in his philosophy? Is this not also a type of hope in the cosmic oneness of it all? On the one hand Meursault embraces his fate, looks it squarely in the eye, and yet on the other he still has a pull towards a unity or oneness that Camus ridiculed. Perhaps this is part of what the preoccupation with the senses has been about for Meursault, especially with the ocean swims that he finds so enjoyable. Perhaps nature, and being one with it, has replaced the concept for unity, even perhaps unity with an infinite God that he has rejected.

The novel ends with an ironic twist. He realizes that he had been happy all the while with the little pleasures he enjoyed in his life and that even up to now he was enjoying his life, whatever little pleasures he had left. However, he did not need all this introspection to prove that he enjoyed swimming, enjoyed sex with Marie, and enjoyed the sky. There is hidden in his speech a certain mockery of intense reflection and intellectual brooding. What does consciousness buy him after all that he did not have before? The one thing he does seem to gain is an acute awareness of death and the ability to face it directly, or so he thinks. In addition, his defiant attitude persists to the end in that what he "hopes" for is that on the day of the execution there will be a crowd of people not weeping for him but hating him. His hope appears ironic, as an anti-hope. However, even this is not so clean and pure as it seems. Throughout the novel Meursault has been reticent and abhorrent towards any display of tender emotions. Yet, he is capable of accepting anger, and even displays it in the dialogue with the priest. Similarly, Meursault cannot face a crowd of weeping people, anymore that he could face the

weeping women on the beach. This would make his death somewhat unbearable. In addition, why does he want people there in the end at all? For him to truly be indifferent to his death he should not care if he was alone or with a crowd, if the people cheered or wept, or even if they remained indifferent, like the stones of his prison wall, like the stone-cold beliefs that Meursault holds until the bitter end.

In the end, then, Meursault does have an epiphany of sorts regarding the absurdity of life and death. However, if anything, his epiphany serves to confirm the way he has been living all along, not to change him. If one were to try a thought experiment and imagine Meursault eventually winning an appeal and not undergoing the guillotine, one would imagine that he would go on living as he did, with perhaps an even more heightened awareness of life's few pleasures and perhaps more of a gratitude for them, but not much else.

In conclusion, what can we say, in sum, of Meursault's character? On one level, Meursault often lies, or at best, withholds the truth. We have seen several instances of this in the novel. On another level, Meursault does not gain much consciousness as a character, thus we cannot attribute to him much depth. We can also fault him for not taking responsibility, especially the responsibility for growth. We agree with Solomon's general contention that he never reaches a high level of development for the reasons already cited, namely, that his level of feelings never matures, he does not ever connect the dots in his own case, and that his judgments remain limited. However, we disagree that there has been much development in the second half of the novel. The grand results of his epiphany merely confirm his previous life. To get Meursault to any minimal point of reflection, it was necessary that his back be put against the wall, so to speak. Thus, the

series of incidents that leads to the murder and his conviction and sentence of death by the guillotine were necessary plot developments. We agree with Solomon that the real purpose of the trial was precisely to get him to this point. Solomon states that this is why a real defense, such as self-defense, was never the real focus of the trial, even though it would have been reasonable. He thinks that it is thus appropriate that

> Meursault is tried for not weeping for his mother, for his friendship with a pimp, for his "liaison" with a woman. In each case, he is forced to see for the first time what his unthinkable habits and relations appear to be "from the outside"…It is true that the trial is a political mockery but its purpose is not to demonstrate some perverse injustice or to make a victim out of "innocent" Meursault. It is a trial of Meursault's uneventful life, not for justice, but in and for himself (RS 71-72)

We would agree with this reading from an existential standpoint. However, we would add that the trial, and the novel, can operate on more than one level, and that one interpretation need not necessarily cancel out the other. For instance, the trial can serve to awaken Meursault, to the degree that it did, but it can also be a social commentary, as Camus hints. In addition, while Meursault may not lie in a deep-seated conscious fashion, he does manage to lie quite a bit about those things that he does have knowledge of. What Solomon's emphasis on consciousness makes us aware of is the ironic possibility, or fact, that the more conscious or developed one becomes, the more culpable one becomes in issues of truth, lies, and especially authenticity. However, this may lead to the position that ignorance is bliss, or at the other end of the spectrum, that a certain randomness of chance is at work.

Whether or not the murder itself really was the result of pure chance or an accident is another matter. In point of fact, Meursault recognizes a moment where he realizes he could turn and go back but chooses to go further. There are several moments where he consciously is aware of having a choice. Meursault also demonstrated his

freedom in how he chose to answer the questions posed to him, even after his attorney's warnings. There are some instances, however, that do seem more like chance, as when they met the Arabs on the beach, at least the first time. Of course the case may be made that had Raymond not had the run-in with the girl's brother earlier, nothing would have come of this, and perhaps even the meeting could have been avoided. Similarly, if the sun really blinded his eyes and he misjudged the situation, and he shot the Arab in self-defense in a moment of fear, that too was at least an extenuating circumstance. How coincidental these factors were we may never know, and thus we are unable to ascertain with clear-cut certainty all the vicissitudes of his guilt or innocence. However, even in the shades of gray and blurring of boundaries, some judgment can be made, as Atkins so poetically phrases it in his essay on "The Role of Fate in The Stranger" in RS. "Innocence through ignorance and innocent at the hands of fate he is nevertheless in another sense guilty: as guilty as any man who freely kills another man at a crossroad" (RS 151). Thus, even with a charitable read of extenuating circumstances, Meursault did freely choose his actions on the beach.

Ironically, it is when he is "cornered by death, emptied of hope" that, he finally feels himself freest (RS 148). Perhaps he is most authentic at this point. What kind of freedom is this? On the one hand he has lost a lot of physical freedoms, such as smoking, being with a woman, swimming, and just coming and going as he pleases. However, he still has freedom of attitude (RS 149). He chooses various ways to cope with his situation, to pass the time remembering all the artifacts in his room, and most of all, he has the freedom to contemplate death. He authentically affirms his disbelief in God to the priest. What the confrontation leads to is his affirmation of the life he has lived.

Thus the constraint of prison and the confrontation, leads him to a freedom of attitude that is more acute than he previously realized. He becomes more authentic in prison in this regard than he ever was outside of it. However, he is not very well developed even in the end. What is a more accurate analysis of the work is that authenticity calls for a certain level of development and consciousness, and that any distinctions between types and levels of truth and lies are necessarily related to it.

While this summary is probably a fair one, there is still another aspect of the novel that must be noted, that in fairness has not been given adequate attention. The beating of the Arab girl is not given sufficient attention in discussions of cultural bias, as for example that presented by Hargreeve in his essay "The Algerian Context of the Stranger" in RS. It is not only the Arab male that is the Other in the novel. Certainly the Arab woman is as nameless (except in a letter that Meursault writes and we are not even given her name) and as faceless as the male, if not more-so. She is so much other that she is barely even mentioned. She is surely not engaged as equal. While the police do come after the woman is beaten, Raymond is released when Meursault testifies that the girl had somehow wronged him. This may not simply be a bias against women but against the Arab woman, who may have doubly less rights, not only from the standpoint of the white male, but within the Arab community itself. The inherent sexism of the novel is not implicated or brought up, especially the cultural sexism, and it should be. This would make it both an extra and an intra cultural problem.

Finally, we may bring to light that just as Camus may have unconsciously, as Hargreeve suggests, set up the Arab in the novel, we contend that Camus may have brought about an unintended, unconscious justice, as well. That is, Meursault is, in the

end, found guilty of the crime, and the fact that he killed an Arab does not lessen the severity of the charges or the verdict. Quite the contrary, Meursault gets the heftiest sentence possible, death by the guillotine. In the end, poetic justice prevails, and despite the possible ambiguities and turns of fate and chance, and unconscious motivation and underdeveloped psyche, no exceptions or excuses are permitted. In addition, his original lie about the woman written down in a letter to please his friend finds itself used as evidence by the police and leads to his ultimate demise. As the prosecutor said, "How comes it then, that the letter which led up to this tragedy was the prisoner's work?" (S 119). His own words, words of lies, lead to his death. Perhaps this is the only justice the unnamed woman in the novel will ever receive, and perhaps Camus never intended it to be read that way. Nonetheless, Camus does have the jury find him guilty in the novel, and we the jury of readers can also find Meursault guilty now.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this chapter is to summarize the most significant findings of our study as they apply to our inquiry of truth, lies, and authenticity with respect to our primary authors, Rousseau, Sartre, Nietzsche, and Camus, with special attention and consideration given to gender issues and the representation of women as uniquely connected to these themes in each author's philosophical discourse and literary works. Another, secondary task of this conclusion is to raise specific issues emergent from this study and to point to possible next steps for future investigation.

The starting point of this investigation was Kant's categorical imperative, which provides a universal ethical norm and validity test applicable to all human beings, at least theoretically. Kant, as we saw, upheld this principle specifically in the case of lying, even under the most severe circumstances and dire consequences. Disagreeing with Constant, he held that no deviations are permissible for once exceptions are granted honest communication breaks down, along with the integrity of contracts and of the law in general. That is, with the breakdown of ethical norms there is a societal breakdown that is implicated. In addition, it is implicit in the categorical imperative test that human beings must be treated as ends in themselves, and not as means to an end. Lying, as a deviation from the moral law, for example, objectifies the person lied to and is an affront to the moral and human character of both parties. With the deterioration of the Kantian norm, and the introduction of subjective and relative values, we are left with a conundrum of how to postulate and apply a universal standard that will respect the

dignity and humanity of the person, as well as formulating new constellations of meaning between human beings and between the individual and society.

Each of our authors writes both literary and philosophical works focused on some subjective aspect of truth, lies, and issues of authenticity. Each author also addresses this subjective turn within a conceptual framework unique to his own philosophical perspective. With each subjective turn we encounter a rift between the individual and society that is hard to rectify in a post-modern world without any universal truths. This rift is especially paramount in areas of epistemology and verification, particularly with respect to discerning the credibility of intentionality. Lying is implicated in the demands of social interaction and creates tension for the individual and society for each main character and author. The problem of the lie for each author is also a problem of the paradox between an individual moral stance, the freedom of the individual, and the demands of social engagement. In addition, each author addresses the issue of character development and flaws as aspects of human culpability. Further, each author implicates women as illustrative examples of philosophical points and/or characters in fiction who embody the problem. The bracketing of the feminine in their works, however, raises further problems for truth both in their own philosophies and regarding their own authenticity and truthfulness. In a Kantian sense, each case also results in the objectification of the woman that devalues her own humanity and agency.

We began with Rousseau whose conceptual framework introduces us to a complex treatise on what it means to lie, and the various gradations of lying. In *Reveries* Rousseau highlights the importance of intentionality in his thesis, as well as the criteria of harm. We learn that intentionality is difficult to assess and leaves us with an epistemic

gap to fill, especially with respect to verification. This is especially true of an author such as Rousseau for whom truthfulness involves an authenticity or faithfulness to feelings. We are, with Rousseau, often left to judge the veracity of interior states and sentiments. However, we are not left totally bereft since Rousseau has also made harm a major category for discernment, and whereas intentionality of harm is often difficult to assess, a harmful exterior effect is not so difficult to ascertain. For example, in the ribbon incident we learn that after an initial crime of theft Rousseau repeatedly lied about the theft, which resulted in the joint dismissal of both himself and the young woman, Marion, from employment in the household. Therefore, his lack of malicious intentionality grows less credible as a defense, as does his argument for the spontaneity of the moment. Further, critics such as Derrida and de Man raise psychological issues to explicate the nature of excuses in lying. This psychological factor opens a barrage of questions regarding culpability, as does the sexual and gender aspect of the theft. Rousseau, it seems, though pledged to truth, has extreme difficulty in telling the truth about this incident that involved a young woman. He has, as do our other authors, a blind-spot particularly in applying his own principles in matters of the heart and to the other gender. The result spells bad news for women. In addition, Rousseau himself speculates that truth itself is harmed whenever a lie is told, and despite his own subjective criteria, Rousseau stills aims for a universal affirmation of the value of truth. With respect to character development, this analysis of Rousseau on the theme of lying also implicates him with a serious character flaw. That is, lying harms not only others, but the self in character as well.

Since Nietzsche does not share Rousseau's concern for the traditional value of truth, his particular mode of theorizing on the topic leads him to a different type of analysis. In addition, Nietzsche's analysis is complex and carried out on several levels. Nietzsche concludes that truth and lies are defined according to their perceived service to life. On one level he interprets the entire metaphysical tradition as a useful lie that has outworn its usefulness. Decisions of truth and lies also serve the social function of agreement amongst peoples, thus emphasizing its instrumental and pragmatic function. On another level he emphasizes the perspectival aspect of all life as being the subjective basis for any definition of truth and lies. This definition of perspective is intricately tied with his key concepts, including his most famous concept of will to power. His dynamic view of life also plays a major role in his assessment. That is, Nietzsche believes that there is a creative aspect to all life, one that is both artistic and agonistic.

Part of the challenge raised by Nietzsche is how humans define themselves. Thus he implicates truth and lies in a particular mode of dynamic creativity that challenges the human being to attempt to live authentically. This dynamic challenge is often voiced by his ironic and rhetorical literary style that challenges as well as engages the reader. Unfortunately, despite his prolific creativity, under careful analysis Nietzsche's philosophy also displays a blind-spot regarding women, particularly with respect to issues of woman's will. However, the misogynist nature of some of these texts is debatable, discernible when irony opens the texts up to gender issues that require further scrutiny. Though the question of truth and lies regarding passages on women, and for women reading Nietzsche, is extremely problematic and difficult, it is not without its creative opportunities. This study suggests that the writings of Nietzsche are not simply

misogynistic or simply pro women, but rather, present a complex mix. However, women can take up the basic challenge of the text and fight back, pushing Nietzsche past his own limits and creating new spaces for women.

With Sartre we encountered atheistic existentialism grounded in the key concept of freedom. The issue of truth and lies for Sartre revolves around how one takes up the challenge of freedom and accepts the responsibility for it. Any attempt to escape responsibility is a lie and displays inauthentic behavior. It also particularly results in bad faith. Sartre's definition of bad faith especially takes the form of lie, or the attempted lie, to oneself. Since Sartre accepts the unity of consciousness and does not follow, or allow for, psychological factors such as repression, or multiple aspects of the self or consciousness, no excuses of any kind are tolerated.

While Sartre's system of thought seems like an air-tight system, much is left unexplained and is, therefore, problematic. For example, since lying, and lying to oneself especially, involves issues of intentionality, it is not easy to discern a truth from a lie. In addition, in the example that Sartre provides from his philosophical works, it is women who are often presented as being in bad faith. These examples often stereotype women and her sexuality. Under close examination, Sartre fails to provide valid and specific evidence that these women are in bad faith, thus raising the issue for the reader of how much to trust the author on his own truthfulness of analysis. Or, perhaps, Sartre himself unconsciously provides us with the very best example of self-deception, namely, himself. Sartre's stereotyped depiction of women is traced in the literary works. For example, in *The Flies* a gender reversal takes place that highlights the feminine character of bad faith. Originally it is the sister who is engaged and poised for action, and the brother who must

learn the meaning of engagement. However, by the end it is the brother who emerges as the authentic hero and the sister who falls into bad faith. In addition, this play particularly opens up issues of authenticity and truth with respect to the concept of remorse, on both the individual and communal level. As we have learned, ritual performance does not guarantee authentic truthful intentions. This play also raises the paradox of freedom as well as the further complication for a government or heads of state and their rights over the people with respect to the freedom of the people. Similarly, *No Exit* raised existential themes of values and how the self is viewed by others. In particular, we find that the interpretation of truth and lies is further complicated in a modern world where there are no absolute values and where norms are arbitrary.

Finally we come to Camus, whose concepts of truth and lies and authenticity are intimately bound with his idea of the absurd. An outcome of both his atheism and his concept of the absurd is that the world is ultimately without hope. Thus, authentic living for Camus means to acknowledge the truth of this absurd life, to face it squarely without any idea of ultimate hope, and yet to live it fully nonetheless, without falling into despair, much like his mythic hero, Sisyphus. Camus wants to present us with a story in *The Stranger*, of a man who doesn't lie, who will not play the game. What we have learned is that the main character indeed does often lie, and that he lies especially, once again, regarding women. In fact, it is the written lie about a woman, followed by the lie that defends his friend at the expense of the Arab woman, which eventually leads to his demise. This results in the murder that follows, the trial, and eventually earns him the death sentence. Here again, the author and his character exhibit a gender blind-spot when it comes to women and the application of philosophical principles to the other gender. In

addition, this novel leaves open, again, the role of psychological culpability and emotional growth. Finally, the ending of the story is not as pure as the author intended, or as his philosophical analysis would imply, for though the main character faces death defiantly, he does so without substantial character development and without much self-awareness. In addition, while Camus generally maintains a philosophy of hopelessness, and a philosophy of non-preference in the face of the absurd, the novel ends with the glimmer of a twisted hope and preference regarding his execution day.

To summarize briefly our findings, the philosophy and writings of each author considered here tackles the question of truth, lies and authenticity in a unique manner, discernible in the contextual framework of their main ideas. Each author ends up with certain contradictions and paradoxes in his thoughts. Each author also exhibits a blind-spot that stereotypes, transposes the blame, demonizes, or ignores the implications for, or regarding, women. The degree to which failure to recognize this implication establishes yet another level of lying, in the mode of self deception, to our study. It is left to the reader to discern the level and degree of truth for each author and in their texts. With respect to our topic of truth lies and issues of authenticity, while Rousseau painstakingly details the various aspects of lying, agonizes and repeatedly confesses his own misdeeds, and Nietzsche overturns traditional categories and uses an ironic literary style that challenges his readers to new levels of creativity in the service of life, and Sartre insists on no excuses for bad faith and reveals the paradox of freedom, and Camus espouses a philosophy of authenticity in light of the absurd, each remains oblivious to certain gendered aspects of their thoughts regarding women. To this extent they are all caught in a lie, one that implicates their authenticity, or speaks to their own self-deception.

In the end, we are left with a cautionary note regarding blind-spots. We must ask both of the text and of ourselves, who is being left out, marginalized, or demonized, as women were in the analyses by our authors. That is, we are left to read carefully, critically, and cautiously, if not suspiciously. Yet, we are also challenged to create new spaces for the future. Kant, at least, provided a universal test. Whether or not it was applied equally is debatable, as is the question of whether or not any moral code or ethic can be free of its own perspective. This adds yet another rift to the problem and challenges us further. What norms will society, or societies and cultures in the plural, define for themselves and on what basis? We are left with a world where pluralism reigns and where the clash of values is apparent, but where the means to adjudicate between them remains questionable. This is true for the individual and the group, and for the interrelation between the two, as well as for the international community at large.

That is, we are left to further intersections and complicated boundaries in philosophy and literature. We are led to push frontiers in areas as diverse as political theory, cultural studies, and aesthetic theory, where the idea of representation and truth and lies intersect each other, and where plurality forces us to reformulate ideas of justice, ethics, and values. We are led to even redefine, or ask ourselves, what does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to be a human being in the twenty-first century situated in a particular place? That is, how will we respect both the dignity and diversity of the human community, and also maintain some universal ethical norms, or even if we will maintain any. We are also left with the question, how will we narrate the stories of our lives, both individually and collectively? In sum, we are left with the challenging question of how do we, and how shall we live?

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