

AGAINST THE LAW: NON-IDENTITY AND THE CRISIS OF INDIVIDUAL  
AUTONOMY IN WORLD LITERATURE

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In  
Comparative and World Literature

by

Nathan Cranford

San Francisco, California

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## CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Against the Law: Non-Identity and the Crisis of Individual Autonomy in World Literature* by Nathan Cranford and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Arts in Comparative and World Literature at San Francisco State University.

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This thesis explores the literary and societal implications of “non-identity” as outlined by Theodor W. Adorno in his seminal treatise on the concept: *Negative Dialectics*. I analyze several primary and secondary examples of literature by European authors such as William Blake, Carl Jung, Thomas Mann, and Hermann Hesse, as well as figures such as the Chinese Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi and Korean author Kim Tong-in in order to showcase how non-identity can spark a renewal in the individual’s willingness to become autonomous once more. As a counterpoint, I examine the dangers of individual autonomy and unrestrained non-identity through a discussion of a figure I call the “malignant ascetic.” The conclusions made herein should help to augment already established theories of non-identity and individual autonomy set forth by thinkers such as Adorno, G.W.F Hegel, and Immanuel Kant in a way that is both clear to the average reader and relevant to the times in which we live.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

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Date

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To the memory of Robert Anton Wilson

## INTRODUCTION

“Immersion into the particular, dialectical immanence raised to an extreme, requires as one of its moments the freedom to also step out of the object, the freedom which the claim of identity cuts off.”

--Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

Franz Kafka, in his parable “Before the Law” (“Vor dem Gesetz”), brought into unique perspective the metaphysical relationship between the autonomous human body/subject and the abstract subjectivity of the law. The parable comes near the end of an incredibly bleak portrayal of a man pursued by a legal bureaucracy that never reveals the reasoning behind the criminal charges made against him. The novel gives no relief or quarter to the protagonist, Josef K, as he haphazardly attempts to navigate a labyrinthine legal system in an effort to discover why he was suddenly cast as a criminal in the eyes of the law—only to be spontaneously executed at the novel’s end “like a dog” (Kafka 229). The parable, discussed by Josef K and a priest prior to his execution, details the struggles of an individual who stands before a gate to the law who, after spending many years trying to convince the gatekeeper to allow him access to what lies beyond the gate, dies of old age as the gate is shut forever.

When reading this parable, one may be left with a strong feeling of desperate confusion surrounding the plight of a man who squanders his entire life waiting before

the gate to the law. The reader is perhaps also left to fear that one day such a scenario might present itself in his or her own life. Such a fear is strengthened by the inherent absurdity of the protagonist's situation—an individual subject's powerlessness in opposition to the dominant subjectivity of an inherently positivist legal code or system he or she has no direct (or even indirect) control over or access to. Moreover, because the protagonist has no access to the creation or interpretation of such laws, one can safely assume that he is left helpless before a legal system that may or may not serve his interests. It is precisely because of this helplessness on the part of the outlying individual to gain access to a universally defined "natural" law that the flaws of a socially-constructed positivist legal system are brought to the fore. Thus, Kafka presents to us the crisis of an autonomous individual who finds his or her freedom to be put in jeopardy by an ever-fluctuating set of laws that actively eludes complete understanding by those without sufficient empirical education or influence within a social context. Such an individual has been determined to be inconsequential to the arbitrary social forces that exist behind the gates to the law—he is the uninvited, the other—negative.

Positivism is typically defined as the adoption of new knowledge based upon experiential evidence and a rejection of knowledge gained by intuition or introspection (ideology). Many critics of Kafka's parable, particularly Jacques Derrida in his lecture "Before the Law," come to the conclusion that the work reveals positivist legal practices as being responsible for leaving countless numbers of individuals powerless before a system that has empirically determined (purposively or otherwise) their interests to be

null and void. Such laws, like literature, are considered inherently “fictitious,” and the product of authors who are biased towards enforcing a particular point-of-view, which by its very definition, cannot be shared or agreed upon universally. What the man is searching for, Derrida claims, is the law’s categorical imperative, or its most basic (“natural”) form, devoid of positivistic (quasi-literary) confusion. However, even the categorical imperative is subject to the interpretation of the autonomous individual, whose very existence negates the possibility of any universally shared form of law or morality.

This claim stands in deliberate contrast to that of Derrida, whose extrapolation of the relationship between “literature” and the “law” as allegorized by Kafka’s fable serves only to deepen the dichotomy between the two—where the law is read as “truth” in binary opposition to literature, which is “fictitious.” Though Derrida successfully deconstructs the relationship, he further reifies the dichotomy by seeking out the law’s “natural” origin as a *categorical imperative*. I posit that there can simply be no distinction between the two, and that even the concepts of so-called universal “law” and “literature” are one in the same, and that the “laws” that govern their creation and interpretation are, in and of themselves, hypothetical and to be adhered to at will. The force that equalizes the two concepts of “law” (both “natural” and “positivist”) and “literature” is language, which presents itself to each unique individual in a different way. A “true” categorical imperative can only exist outside the ambiguity of language and is determined only by the sense and will of the individual.<sup>1</sup>

Theodor Adorno blasts positivism throughout much of his work, but particularly in *Negative Dialectics* wherein he states that positivism becomes exactly the ideology it is tasked to dispense with: “Positivism turns into ideology, by eliminating the objective category of essence and then, logically, the interest in the essential” (Adorno, ND).<sup>2</sup> In other words, positivism, like ideology, requires that the individual ignore the unfathomable essence of an object—that which cannot be expressed empirically. It relies instead upon blind faith that the object’s category is *essentially* correct. He goes on to state that even an apparently universal categorical imperative (“the hidden general law”) is inherently positivistic, explaining, “By no means is [positivism] exhausted however in the hidden general law. Its positive potential survives in what the law covers, what is inessential to the verdict of the course of the world, what is thrown to the margins” (Adorno, ND). If no moral imperative can be experientially *proven* to exist beyond a doubt in any case, what then do we do with the malignant individual? Must he or she simply be stamped as defective by those who are lucky enough to conform to the categorical imperative? Where does such an individual’s quest for the law end? Given the impossibility of answering such questions without invoking our own individual biases, even Kafka’s man before the law, whose own morality is ultimately left unknown to us, runs the risk of never truly gaining access to the law, even if he were allowed to pass beyond its initial gate.

While Kafka’s work can be viewed as both a paradox and a lament for the accelerating decay of the individual’s autonomy in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Civilization,

encoded between the lines is the hopeful possibility that the human subject might become autonomous once more in the face of an abstract dominating force that has determined freedom to be the privilege of those who conform instead of the fundamental right of those who do not. In addition, particularly for those who have found themselves suddenly immobilized as a result of positivist social change, Kafka's parable can be seen as a literary embodiment of Søren Kierkegaard's concept of existential anxiety (later secularized and expanded upon by Jean Paul Sartre),<sup>3</sup> in that the inherent freedom the subject has to dispense with absolutes and walk through the gateway to the law (or, to go against the will of the law) is hindered by the terrible anxiety over what ill effects that decision might collaterally inflict upon the him or her (e.g., the complete negation of one's freedom, the forced acceptance of absolutes, or perhaps even death).

With that said, one question still remains clear: what exactly is keeping this man from coming face to face with the law? Is it the fear of a burly gatekeeper's allusions to the danger that might befall him should he attempt to enter without permission? Is it the despair of having to face more gatekeepers and more gates (infinite regression) once his initial entry is obtained, either by permission or otherwise? Is the man truly seeking entry to the law or merely reaffirming his own identity as the law's subjugated object? All these questions and more could be asked, ad infinitum, and yet no universal truth could be reached. That is, unless those who derive a conclusion wish to act as gatekeepers themselves—before the law. It is in our freedom to be autonomously subjective that we can derive our own conclusions from Kafka's parable as an example of literature. In the

same way, we are free to derive our own conclusions as to how we stand as autonomous subjects before the law itself, particularly if the law actively seeks to limit our autonomy. The law, even as a categorical imperative, cannot claim to be shared by humanity on a universal scale.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, like literature, the law is authored by one or by many, and it is left to us as autonomous subjects to *will* ourselves to submit to its authority. Whether or not the law is devised empirically or stripped bare to reveal its so-called natural form, the law's relevance is always determined by the will of its beholder. Rules, when applied to the interpretation of literature and the law, are simply guideposts by which the autonomous subject chooses to take action. Such abstract rules, however, in no way hinder the subject's inherent freedom to interpret or act in any way he or she sees fit.

Like many of Kafka's seminal works, such as *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*) and *The Trial*, "Before the Law" attempts to give a voice to those whose voices have been ignored or altogether silenced by an overarching power structure or circumstance upon which they find themselves dependent. It is easy to become hypnotized by the tone of despair that so permeates his body of work, and as a result, allow sorrow or pity to keep them from finding hope and possibility in the desperation of characters such as Gregor Samsa, Josef K, or even our man standing before the gate to the law. In the end, these stories show us that it is often the fear of collective reprisal that keeps the outlying autonomous individual confined and/or running in circles looking for an escape from despair, when in fact, the gates to freedom are always standing wide open. It is the autonomous individual's freedom to subjectively interpret literature or the

law that determines how one stands before it: either as one who stands down in fear or as one who stands against the law by walking through its gates to meet with it face-to-face. Moreover, the very possibility of the latter, which stems from the individual's ability to reflect upon his or her own identity and that of the laws they are beholden to, betrays the inherent crisis of individual autonomy before a positivistic legal system, which actively seeks to preempt and squash such an act from ever occurring. Therefore, whether or not one pities, despises, or loves the man who forever stands impotent before the law, Kafka's parable represents a boon to those who might look therein for a small reminder of their capacity for subjectivity and their freedom to affirm for themselves that access to the law is not always as impossible as one thinks.

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My project moving forward will be to examine various and often disparate examples of literature in an effort to come to a better understanding of how these works lay bare the cracks in positively-constructed identity. This is done by conjuring for the reader the oft-forgotten "non-identity"— or as Adorno states in *Negative Dialectics*: "The ideas [that] live in the hollows between what the things claim to be, and what they are" (Adorno, ND). The works I will be considering deal in one way or another with the controversial topic of exercising one's autonomous subjectivity within a repressive positivist paradigm. Often, this is exemplified by an anti-hero or individual who may not

belong or “fit into” the mold of a generally “acceptable” identity and instead chooses to overcome the anxiety of standing up as an autonomous subject against it. The ideas that are espoused by such works help readers to think differently about the laws or identities that work to suppress or imprison certain defining aspects of themselves or their own beliefs—effectively keeping them from achieving true autonomy in a world ruled by the will of others. Therefore, when an unacceptable amount of autonomy is exercised within a positivist paradigm, a false dichotomy is often created between the “true” and the “false,” the “whole” and the “fractional,” where the latter of both polarities is often applied to the autonomous subject who stands against the will of the collective or the overarching power structure. It will be my aim over the course of this thesis to show that autonomous subjectivity is not only a necessary exercise for the individual to maintain his or her freedom in relation to a positivist monolith of conformity, but also as a necessary starting point for reconciling identity with its oft-forgotten counterpart, non-identity.

I headed this introduction with a quote by Adorno, whose work *Negative Dialectics* is considered to be his final herculean attempt at proving the failure of positive dialectics in our time. At its core, “positive dialectics” requires that new identities are constantly formed and adhered to as “new” or “discovered” truth through the reliance upon purely substantive empirical evidence, while “negative” dialectics claims that the empirical basis for identity (as distinguished through dialectics, the scientific method, etc.) is inherently flawed and must constantly be reevaluated. Hegelian dialectics operates

on the assumption that a “whole” exists and that our discoveries work towards our realization of this “whole.” Adorno refutes this by positing that the “whole” can never exist, that the universe of “things” is constantly shifting and expanding its definitions, and that such definitions must always be considered critically and never considered to be stable, universal truth. His theory of negative dialectics is the culmination of his efforts to exhibit the infinite scope of how much was forgotten and/or suppressed during the progression of our so-called “enlightened” times.

To further clarify how negative dialectics stands in direct opposition to its positive counterpart, Henry Pickford claims that “negative dialectics works to regain the consciousness of non-identity between present society and the concepts with which it understands and justifies itself, such as ‘opinion,’ ‘freedom,’ or ‘progress’” (Gibson 332). Thus, negative dialectics stands as a rationalization in itself for the importance of bringing into “consciousness” that which no longer has a basis in a positively-constructed identity—in other words, a “non-identity.” Further, Adorno asserts that the dualist perspective so inherent to positive dialectical theory is too simplistic a rationalization for progress. Moreover, it allows for the possibility of a single individual or group (identity) to dictate how its “other” (non-identity) *must* exist under the pretenses of secular/spiritual enlightenment, progress, and/or righteousness. Instead what is called for is the reconciliation of the two, as Jack Marsh astutely points out: “Adorno’s testimony to reconciliation is not violent: reconciliation would entail a non-instrumental, nonsubsumptive, peaceful relation between identity and alterity, where neither are

oppressed by the other” (Marsh 10). Hence, as an alternative to the “violent” repression of non-identity so inherent to positivism, Adorno’s aim with negative dialectics is to see all difference working together in constellation with the other, as opposed to a war between static opposites wherein one identity attempts to exert control and/or dominance over the other.

I was particularly intrigued with Adorno’s colossal text for its genuine drive to act as a roadmap for navigating the many voices of those who suddenly, or throughout their entire lives, found themselves without one. Like much of Adorno’s work, *Negative Dialectics* succeeds at bringing into focus the problem so inherent to Enlightenment rationality and its totalitarian goal<sup>5</sup> of creating a universal ideal towards which the whole of humanity must strive. Rationality, as such, is problematic because it fails to consider that the very process of formulating such an ideal is inherently flawed, if not completely broken. When considering Adorno’s ideas as a counterpoint to Enlightenment reason, one could say that empirical positivism represents a monolithic Tower of Babel where all is forced to conform until a certain critical mass is reached and the whole structure collapses. What is called for instead is a cosmic consideration of identity—cosmic in the sense that identity should be considered by the individual as a *constellation* of infinitely variable non-identities that work together to form an image of what can only *represent* an identity at a given moment without ever becoming one absolutely as it does in positive dialectics. For example, one might consider how the major constellations one learns about in astronomy were called by different names in different places. Identity itself,

according to Adorno, must be considered just as subjectively. This means that identity can never be fixed, and one must always prepare oneself for its fluctuation. By toppling the looming obelisk that was created by positivism, Adorno proposes a method of thought that seems especially suited for our global, multi-national era, while warning us at the same time that the moment to adapt our way of thinking towards this end is rapidly evading our grasp, if it hasn't already. Hence, if the whole, as Adorno proclaims, is the false, constant immersion into the particular finds the autonomous subject in its truest, most self-reflexive state—unhindered by the fixed identity it might otherwise feel compelled to assume.

Although further discussion of Adorno's work and ideas concerning negative dialectics could fill many theses, I find Adorno's "cosmic" metaphor of reconciliation to be especially pertinent to my own goal: to present alternate viewpoints regarding the concept of non-identity and the question of individual autonomy in works of literature that span various world cultures and time periods. Each of these present a polemical stance against very distinct and oppressive collective regimes that exist in various paradigms of religion, art, crime, and even governance—where making a conscious effort to stand autonomously as unique subjects is often met with destruction or a synthesis into another, equally oppressive regime. These works show how simple it can be to cast an entire epistemology into question, thereby positioning literature itself as one of the few remaining bastions of non-identical thought and a place where autonomous subjects—

particularly those without a voice in a social context—have a place to be heard and understood in constellation with the other.

I will begin with a comparative consideration of William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and a few, select chapters from the ancient Chinese Daoist text, *Zhuangzi*. Both works invite the challenge of conservative, identity-based ideology that would seek to dismiss or devalue that which refuses to conform to its tenets. In Blake’s case, we understand his “marriage” between heaven and hell as a means for reason (heaven) and its opposite (hell) to come together so that all voices are heard in a resounding trumpet call for progress through the continuous negotiation of opposites. This call is directly opposed to that of a select few, whose ideas work to trump those they view to be wrong, irrational, or “unholy,” so to speak. The *Zhuangzi* takes a similar approach, but for the benefit of a select readership. Due to its situation in space-time, the text would have only been accessible to a small pool of the educated elite, in contrast to Blake, whose unique knowledge of printing as an engraver and a self-published author saw his work made available to more unique individuals than ever before. However, like Blake’s *Marriage*, the *Zhuangzi* prescribes methods of detaching one’s self from identity-based thinking so that new ideas could be used and brought to fruition in order to solve major societal problems.

In the second chapter, I will examine the implications of Carl Gustav Jung’s “Seven Sermons to the Dead” and Hermann Hesse’s bildungsroman *Demian* in an effort to tie together Adorno’s ideology of constellation-based thinking with the somewhat

analogous cosmic doctrine found in the Gnostic religion, particularly as exemplified by the deity Abraxas. One could view Jung's Gnostic writings in the "Seven Sermons" as directly influencing Hesse's own experimentation with the same spiritual thought in *Demian*, only this time as a particularly effective method for preparing a young person for the chaos of adulthood and free thought. Jung's attempt to grapple with the marginalized subset of Christianity came at a unique period in his life where his own identity as a professional/creative individual was on the verge of collapse. Hesse, as a patient of Jung during this period, would take the psychiatrist's ideas and apply them in his own unique way via the irreverent questioning of the charismatic, free-thinking Max Demian, and his influence upon the narrator of the novel, Emil Sinclair.

In the final chapter of my thesis, I will explore the destructive possibilities of non-identity, particularly in how an individual's lust for power and/or greatness can cause the dissolution of identity-based thought so that a more restrictive and oppressive identity might take its place. These "malignant ascetics," are individuals who hold a distinctly subjective interpretation of the law in a way that conforms wholly around their ascetic ideals. These individuals care nothing for the autonomous subjectivity of others that fail to conform to the individual (or group) subject's own ideals. The existence of the malignant ascetic (as a concept or otherwise) proves that the categorical imperative is left to the interpretation of the individual in that they are not nomadic in their malignancy, but often create categories of their own to be adopted by others—by choice or by force. Moreover, the failure of the malignant ascetic's plan to bring his or her ideal into fruition

often has a profound impact upon the society that experienced or was affected by the actions taken to bring it about.<sup>6</sup>

Two works have been chosen to reflect this: one, Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, which follows the creative journey of a syphilitic composer whose apparent "pact" with the devil offers him 24 years of creative greatness in exchange for his body and soul; and two, Kim Tong-in's "Sonata Appassionata," which describes a composer whose creativity becomes increasingly dependent upon the destruction he inflicts upon others and the degree to which his atrocities are carried out. Both works present the dangers inherent to giving a voice to those who might seek to destroy all others, including themselves, in favor of bringing to life an ascetic ideal<sup>7</sup> that has no basis in shared, humanistic reality. Moreover, these works further cast our present ideas of "natural" law and the categorical imperative in an increasingly positivistic light. If the malignant ascetic is able to convince others of his or her own distinct categorical imperative—which stands in complete moral opposition to the idea of the categorical imperative as presented by Immanuel Kant—who, then, is to say that such an imperative is wrong? It will be my goal to show that the inherent positivism of the categorical imperative gives rise to the possibility of its malignant counterpart, and that only through continuously reflecting upon the categories we use to organize our world will we be able to avoid the destruction malignant asceticism promises for the future.

In the end, I hope to provide a better understanding of non-identity and the progressive power of literature to communicate the autonomous subjectivities of those

who find themselves without the ability to be heard in oppressive social circumstances. I headed this section with a reading of Kafka's "Before the Law," and like the man who seeks entry to the law, many opportunities face the subjective individual to encounter and ultimately effect change in their own lives or the society in which they find themselves a part. The moment becomes eternally lost to those who fail to see the importance of having an autonomous voice within a paradigm that strives to keep the world the way it is. Indeed, it is also in one's failure to view the world as a "clown's cosmos,"<sup>8</sup> or a constellation of infinite jest and possibility, that many sacrifice their autonomous subjectivity so that their lives might be filled with less uncertainty. However, certainty often comes at the cost of freedom, and the few who feel they can deliver it often despise the ever-expanding constellations of thought and proclivity held in secret by the many outside of their reach. It is to those who live in constant fear of loving and understanding the uncertain world in its infinite variations that I also earnestly dedicate this thesis; and for them, I hope that the writings that follow offer them the consolation of knowing that they too are empowered to set themselves free from the tyranny of identity.

## HEAVEN AND HELL

"Without contraries is no progression."

William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

Many religions, whether they are ancient, modern, synthesized, or hybridized, deal with the two opposing concepts of heaven and hell. In my introduction I laid out a possible interpretation of Kafka's parable regarding the law, claiming that one's access is hindered by a certain lack of willingness or courage on the part of the subjective individual to challenge, or perhaps more controversially, break through. The concepts of heaven and hell, as perceived generally, can be considered similarly. Heaven, like the law that exists in an infinite regress beyond Kafka's gate, represents an ascetic ideal that requires one's strict adherence to a set of preordained rules in order to gain entry. Whether it contains the promise of lush gardens, eternal delight, immortality, or several virgins awaiting one's beck and call—the constructed concept of heaven seems bound to appeal to those in search of something to live for. Hell, on the other hand, is typically seen to be in binary opposition to heaven—often conceptualized as a place where suffering remains eternal and the hoped-for bounty of heaven remains eternally out of reach.

Yet, what if one were to ask why? Why must heaven be so preoccupied with a binary set of rules when the needs of the world below are much more nuanced? What is it

about hell that is so appealing to the individual that many forsake heaven's utopian promise for a moment of unlawfulness? An 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet and engraver sought to ask such questions through a series of divinely-inspired works of poetry embedded into similarly inspired print engravings. These works would showcase an alternate perspective on how religion could be considered by subjective individuals, as opposed to the fixed point of view espoused by organized religion. Of particular interest to this man were the writings of a "progressive" Swedish philosopher and Christian theologian by the name of Emanuel Swedenborg, whose book *Heaven and Hell*, published in 1753, would inspire the poet to write a polemic 33 years later that would challenge Swedenborg's binary moral ideas. However, of most interest to Blake was the agelessly static dichotomy between the concepts of heaven and hell and how one might lift the heavily guarded barrier that separates the two in favor of a marriage that would see the two working hand-in-hand.

William Blake, who lived during the transition between the Age of Enlightenment and the era of Romanticism in European culture, fancied himself "the Devil." Blake asserts that hell should not be considered a place of suffering but a fiery storehouse of irrational "Energy" without limits, while heaven represents a supremely rational black hole of sorts, or the complete absence of energy. The two exist in constant turmoil because each attempts to exert power in relation to the other without considering the subjective experience of the individuals they hope to wield power over—leaving them ultimately as pawns in a grand cosmic game of chess. Thus, individuals are forced to

choose sides and battle on behalf of an invisible overarching force that rationalizes its existence as being necessary for the “better good.”

For the purposes of this portion of my thesis, I am primarily concerned with the first six plates of Blake's work, which are comprised of an "Argument" and a section entitled "The Voice of the Devil." These introductory plates lay out the ideological foundation that Blake will further explicate in his work. The remaining plates are separated into "Memorable Fancies," or anecdotes that Blake relates to the reader concerning his journeys and observations in Hell, and "The Proverbs of Hell," which according to Blake, "shew the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments" (Blake 88). These proverbs could be considered to have philosophical value as an antithesis of sorts to their Biblical counterparts but serve little purpose for the discussion at hand.

Let's first take a look at the "Argument," a poem and comment that begins the work. It is here that Blake sets the tone for the work: that two disparate dualities exist in all forms of nature, and that "as a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives" (Blake 86). Here, "a new heaven" can be seen to correlate with the deification of Enlightenment rationality during his time, and more specifically, Swedenborg's use of reason to explain the polarization of heaven and hell in his book written 33 years prior. The revival of “Eternal Hell,” while also referring to Swedenborg's conceptualization of hell, is more in reference to Blake's task at hand: to present a case for hell as being just as important and necessary to human progress as

heaven, and that the two should be aligned in their goals instead of at war with each other.

In the final sentences of Blake's "Argument," we can see an attempt to break down the co-dependence of certain "natural" dualities perceived as being necessary to human existence:

Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (Blake 86)

One can become easily drawn into the logic Blake provides us here. It is difficult to argue with the existence of opposites, whether they exist in nature or as concepts, religious or otherwise. Here, Blake is setting the stage for a possible marriage of opposites and the resulting "liberation of all human powers which at present are in bondage to the institutions of church and state." (Blake 81) Hence Blake's ideas should not be confused with a call for the dialectical synthesis of the two, wherein a new subject/object duality is created that would ultimately end up presenting the same problems as the duality which came before. Instead, there is a call for a transvaluation of the two concepts made by the autonomous individual, who can then view heaven and hell as two entities with two different, though equally important roles to play.

Moving forward into the next section, we are met with an interesting headline: "The Voice of the Devil." Here is where Blake attempts to call into question the extensive genealogy of belief that has come to formulate the two concepts of Heaven/Reason and Hell/Energy at his particular moment in European history: "All bibles or sacred codes, have been the causes of the following Errors" (Blake 87). Upon which, the voice presents a list of three assertions that it feels to be in error, of which the third claims, "3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies" (Blake 87). This assertion follows two others that claim as erroneous the generally accepted ideology that the body and the soul exist separately from each other, and that energy is a practice of the body that must be kept in check by the reason of the soul (which, in turn, is informed by "bibles or sacred codes"), thereby creating a system of dominance wherein energy becomes subordinated to the demands and rules of the rational soul.

The third claim, which asserts that God's eternal torment of those who follow their energies in life is an erroneous assumption, immediately calls into question the validity of the fear an individual has in pursuing his or her unique subjectivity in the face of an authoritarian set of moral and/or sacred codes. If God, in this case, is to be considered the personification of supreme reason, then indeed, this could relate back to the initial "Argument," should one assume that the poles are not merely static but constantly in flux. Therefore, we can interpret these errors as relating directly to the concept of duality in that there exists a body and a soul, a heaven and a hell, reason and

energy, or what have you. However, it can also be said that the Devil himself holds a bias towards the polar extreme he has been typically thought to represent: Hell.

With that being said, the "Voice of the Devil" then goes on to establish its own series of truths in contrast to the aforementioned series of errors. For example, "1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age" (Blake 87). Here, the voice claims that there is no separation of body from soul, but that, in fact, the soul is a part of the body and relies upon the "five Senses" as its only means of absorbing information about the outside world for consideration by the soul. This creates a strange paradox for a heaven that attempts to squelch any and all energy from being experienced or acted upon by the body, simply because in order for reason to survive, experiential evidence is needed, and experience can only be recorded via energy interacting with one or more of the five Senses, which is then used to discern the soul. This also serves to cast doubt upon Swedenborg's work, which, in and of itself, relies upon "hellish" energy and sensory information in order to detail his so-called revelations as a tourist of heaven and hell. Moreover, this "truth" might also serve to further debunk the "error" made by "all bibles or sacred codes" that asserted the existence of a God that "will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies" when, in fact, no rationale can be given to prove that energy is not required for even the most rational soul to survive.

Blake continues this rationale by opening the possibility for an interesting paradox: "3. Energy is Eternal Delight" (Blake 87). If we consider Blake's (or the Devil's)

logic surrounding the distinction between heaven and hell thus far, this final assertion of “truth” would seem to be equating the energy of hell with the promise of eternal delight one might associate with Heaven. Indeed, one could rationalize that one's obedience to God's law is simply based upon the belief that, in the afterlife, such obedience would be rewarded *with* eternal delight. Hence, Blake creates another paradox that calls into question the necessity of holding back one's autonomous energy in life when there is nothing to prove that heaven exists as anything more than an ascetic ideal. Again, what Blake, and/or perhaps more ironically the Devil seems to find umbrage with is the apparent *irrationality* of rational humans who invest their lives into the achievement of an ideal that may or may not come to pass. Instead, what is called for is the autonomy of the individual who realizes that nothing is holding them back from following their energies in life if one truly feels compelled to execute such energies. One is, essentially, gambling their life away in hopes that the urges and desires they feel obliged to keep hidden in life per the “laws of heaven” will either change or become acceptable following the moment of death. However, if there is no guarantee or proof that faith in the ideal of pure reason<sup>9</sup> will allow one to unlock the gate to the Promised Land, what would be the point of stifling one's energies in life?

The “Voice of the Devil,” in an affront to the work of Swedenborg, then goes on to further confuse the dichotomy between heaven and hell through a reinterpretation of Judeo-Christian scripture in a more radical way:

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out, but the Devil's account is that the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss. This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter or Desire that Reason may have Ideas to build on, the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he who dwells in flaming fire. Know that after Christs death, he became Jehovah. But in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses, & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum! (Blake 87-88)

The first sentence of this passage hints once more at the inherent contradiction, and perhaps the hypocrisy, of a heaven that forbids the very energy it needs to remain relevant or, at worst, uses energy to expand the hegemony of its moral/sacred codes. Reason/Heaven, having convinced itself that Desire/Energy had been cast out from its domain, fails to understand, according to the Devil, that the Messiah had in fact created a heaven from "what he stole from the Abyss." This relates back to the idea of heaven existing as the promise of Eternal Delight fulfilled upon inhibiting one's desires in life whilst properly adhering to the laws of reason and/or morality. In other words, by positing that the Messiah has ironically formed the basis for Reason out of what we can assume to be Energies from the Abyss, Blake appears to be creating a genealogical synthesis: a singularity where Heaven and Hell are intrinsically linked by the energy expended to bring Reason into being.

As such, the symbol of the Messiah further confuses the boundaries of Heaven and Hell by asking the Father to deliver "the comforter or Desire" so that the pursuit/instruction of "new" Reason might grow and prosper, and not simply stagnate and remain blindly enforced despite its irrelevance for present or future generations. The Jehovah of the Bible, or the Father, would seem to be in a position to grant the Energy needed in order for Reason to remain relevant, and as a result, "dwells in the flaming fire" of Energy as perhaps the Devil himself or at the very least, the executor of Hell's Energy. Yet it would appear that, after Christ's death, the Jehovah that dwelt in flaming fire became the Jehovah of "calm reason," no longer ambiguously associated with the Energies of Hell. In other words, one might view the coming of the Messiah or the aftermath of Christ's death as the birth of a New World Order, in the Ovidian sense, wherein reason became a necessary tool for maintaining a sense of formal order following a period of chaos.

From a theological perspective, the symbol of the Messiah (Christ) is important because it represents a moment in Christian history where energy was able to triumph over the stifling limitations brought about by the stagnant social paradigm of the time. Blake's Messiah<sup>10</sup> represents a moment in history, however brief it was, where the forces of energy and reason were able to come together in a marriage that would paradigmatically shift the course of Western history for two millennia. However, it would appear that the moment for absolute freedom was lost, as reason had once again built its positivist walls to control the flow of energy under the guise of "Enlightenment." The

Messiah, in almost Promethean fashion, “stole from the Abyss” the energy needed to topple the walls of reason set forth by an entire religious epistemology, only to have those walls built up once more later on by European religious organizations and secular movements. With the rise of these great monoliths of science and religious belief, energy, once more, became the maligned force that sought to unsettle reason’s (Heaven’s) authoritarian aim at providing a singular answer to the question of life itself—with or without God’s involvement.

The irrational energy of hell can be seen as something to be feared by individuals or group who, by successfully passing through the myriad gates of a positivist social structure throughout their lives, find themselves at a level of comfort they wish to hold onto for as long as possible. Going back, for such individuals, is not an option, and reason (or its irrational foil: cognitive dissonance) becomes the tool they use to remain where they are. Energy, in Blake’s sense of the word, is the wind that puts the tenuously-constructed house of reason in danger of toppling over. These gatekeepers of reason reside in what Blake calls “Heaven,” while those whose comfort is subordinated to the rules and laws of this former group represent the energies of “Hell” that wish to make their own voices heard. To Blake, these two forces, at their core, are simply unable to naturally compromise, given that both are externally-constructed opposites with interests that violently conflict with each other.

However, where the apparent arbitrariness of duality and static contraries are concerned, what Blake seems truly fearful of is stagnation, or the death of creativity and

progression resulting from a zealous attention to Reason or Good. The author's famous quote, "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (Blake 93), speaks towards the inherent injustice of only experiencing a minute fraction of what the universe has to offer due to the arbitrary restrictions placed upon human experience by religious or secular reason. To Blake, rationality exists as a cavern that forbids "irrational" energy from wreaking havoc with those safely residing within. This relates back to the crisis of individual autonomy within a paradigm dominated by those who propagate religious doctrine and empirical science as a one-size-fits-all method of organizing the world. This way of thinking leaves countless individuals, such as Blake, who would rather live a life full of energy and the pursuit of non-identity, powerless in the face of a positivist system they have no influence over. Hence, like Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* calls for a reconciliatory approach in our consideration of the world and the infinite view-points that exist all around us. By marrying strongly opposing concepts (such as reason and energy) together, one ensures that compromise and change no longer remain exceptions to the rules of warfare between opposites.

The *Zhuangzi*, written over two millennia prior to Blake's work, deals in many ways with the idea of dissolving the walls of stagnant reason so that change can occur. The *Zhuangzi*, similar to other Chinese philosophical texts, is named after the philosopher or "master" (子) responsible for its creation, who in this case is Zhuangzi, or "Master Zhuang."<sup>11</sup> It was written or compiled during a period in Chinese history known as the "Hundred Schools of Thought" (諸子百家), a time when philosophical and cultural knowledge had a unique opportunity to move forward dramatically with little or no resistance from the tenuously organized powers of the time. This period is also considered to be the "golden age" of Chinese philosophy, similar to the almost simultaneously occurring period in Ancient Greece where massive leaps were being made in Western philosophical thought by the likes of Socrates and his student Plato. In China, the main figures of Confucianism and Daoism saw their rise during this time, of which Confucius (also known as Kongzi [孔子]), Laozi (老子), and their own disciples serve as preeminent examples. It was an era marked by bitter and seemingly endless war between kingdoms, and philosophy was turned to in the hope that a solution might be found so that order might be synthesized from the chaos.

Zhuangzi was a major Daoist figure during this period in Ancient Chinese history who would go on to promote new and often outrageous ways of considering reality in an autonomously subjective way. His interpretations of the "way" (or *dao*/道) often conflicted with others (such as Confucius) who felt that the *way* was equivalent to a sort

of “supreme order” wherein all parts of the machine played their designated roles without fail, and where those who have been granted wisdom through age and experience determine social realities through discipline and the subservience of those below them. However, as the subordinate must properly execute his or her responsibilities, so too must a superior fulfill his responsibilities for the benefit of those below him on the social ladder. Therefore, from a Confucian perspective, the problems that faced China during the Warring States period could be seen as resulting from a certain lack of discipline among leaders and their people, and that the chaos in their ranks had yet to be sufficiently excised.

Daoism, on the other hand, held that the *way* could in fact be likened more to the willingness on the part of a leader to open the floodgates of chaos (or in the Blakian sense: irrational “energy”), in an effort to “reset” the harm done by an ever-tangled web of legal and social practices that serve to hopelessly immobilize progress and change to an ineffective or, at worst, malignant status-quo. The philosophy calls for a return to a certain “natural” law that represents the basic foundation of reasonable human conduct through constantly reevaluating the terms of one’s own existential paradigm. This “natural” law is, in many ways, analogous to the middle way, or the Dao, in that it is where one returns to when the alternate paths we take cause us to become hopelessly lost. It can also be fruitfully related to my earlier discussion of Kant’s categorical imperative, in that it represents the foundation of shared human reason and morality. However, while the original tenets of Daoism were devised by Laozi as a tool for bringing a society,

hopelessly clogged by the unrestrained build-up of ineffectual rules and laws, back to the basics of natural law, Zhuangzi took the theory further in an attempt to apply Laozi's base ideology to individual freedom and happiness.

Perhaps Zhuangzi's most renowned paradoxical argument for the autonomy of the individual in its most basic sense lies in the parable titled "Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly" (莊周夢蝶 [*Zhuāng Zhōu mèng dié*]). The parable tells the story of Zhuangzi, who woke from having dreamed of becoming a butterfly, only to be confused as to who or what he was. Indeed, the paradox inherent to the now popular parable is the question "was Zhuangzi dreaming of the butterfly, or was the butterfly dreaming of Zhuangzi?" (不知周之夢為蝴蝶與，蝴蝶之夢為周與？ [*bù zhī zhōu zhī mèng wéi hú dié yú, hú dié zhī mèng wéi zhōu yú?*]).<sup>12</sup> Suddenly, that which made up his reality was nothing more than a dream, or an illusion, brought into rational existence by simply asking himself whose or what reality he was ultimately experiencing at that given moment—even if both realities were constructed or perceived only by Zhuangzi himself. Upon giving "consciousness" to the hidden, or suppressed, non-identity of the way things *are* at any given moment, the possibility for change becomes a reality in itself. Therefore, Zhuangzi concludes that the moment of questioning one's reality opens the door to the possibility that the horrors of a supposedly fixed reality may not actually be as fixed as one thinks, and that once one chooses to distinguish a reality using the newly conjured non-identity as a basis, the "changing of things" (物化 [*wùhuà*]) is allowed to occur.

Further, it is exactly through questioning the validity of an individually or socially constructed epistemology that Zhuangzi takes aim at the very foundation of reason (as it existed for him at the time).

Yet even bringing about the “changing of things” by casting doubt upon an existing rational paradigm presupposes the outcome of such change as being the creation of something that did not exist prior—or the building of a brand new epistemology that would inevitably need to be demolished at some point in the future. Blake referred to this moment in his own unique historical circumstance as the coming of the Messiah—a catalyst to the perfect alignment of reason (Heaven) and energy (Hell) brought about by a marriage of the two. In the case of Zhuangzi, he asserts that in order for change to be cognized, it is only *natural* that “something must be distinguished between Zhuangzi and the butterfly” (周與蝴蝶則必有分矣. [zhōu yú hú dié zé bì yǒu fēn yǐ]), or that a *choice* must be made to somehow reconcile two or more opposing realities. This is done so that a new coherent reality for one's self can come into being, as opposed to being continually trapped in an infinite loop of non-being or indecision.

Zhuangzi further elaborates upon the concepts of choice and distinction as being the crucial moment where the worlds of objective reality and subjective chaos meet to produce change by introducing the Daoist sage Hong Meng (鴻蒙 [Hóng Méng]).<sup>13</sup> Situated in the Outer Chapters (外篇 [wài piān])<sup>14</sup> of the *Zhuangzi*, the reader first comes into contact with Hong Meng in the chapter on "Self-Control" (在宥 [zài

yòu]). The parable details the character Yun Jiang (雲將 [Yún Jiàng], translated as “cloud general”) encountering Hong Meng on his way to the east. The former could not help but to notice the latter dancing around in the middle of the road, slapping his behind. What follows is a conversation between the two where Yun Jiang queries the boisterous sage as to how he might bring the various energies (氣 [qì])<sup>15</sup> of nature back into balance. Yun Jiang’s question relates more specifically to the six vital energies that fuel natural life: “Presently, I wish to combine the essential qualities of the six energies so that all living things (under me) can be nourished, how might I go about this?” (“今我願合六氣之精，以育群生，為之奈何?” [jīn wǒ yuàn gě liù qì zhī jīng, yǐ yù qún shēng wéi zhī nài hé?]) (Zhuangzi 外篇/在宥;4). Here, the text highlights a situation where an elite member of society, who in this case is represented by Yun Jiang, cannot understand how his previously successful methods of governance (managing or exerting control over natural energy) are suddenly failing him. Hence, it is with the heavy head of a responsible ruler that Yun Jiang looks to the sage Hong Meng for quick advice. However, Hong Meng would not allow the “Cloud General” to disturb his dancing and instead shakes his head saying “I don’t know, I don’t know.” (吾弗知，吾弗知。 [wú fú zhī, wú fú zhī.]) (Zhuangzi 外篇/在宥;4). Upon which Yun Jiang leaves the sage alone and continues on his way. This moment emphasizes the traditional idea that the Dao cannot be taught, as the use of man-made language and logic is insufficient to communicate its meaning<sup>16</sup>—hence the sage’s repetition of the words “I don’t know.”

Three years later Yun Jiang encounters Hong Meng once again, and having found no solution for his problems at home, queries the sage once more, only this time in a more subservient manner. Here, following several kowtows, Yun Jiang begins referring to the sage as Heavenly Master, or in the original Chinese, simply as “Heaven” (天 [*tiān*]). Unlike his initial encounter with Hong Meng, Yun Jiang’s attitude has shifted to that of desperation as he decries his inability to find his way anymore in the world. Moreover, like Hong Meng, he is driven by wild impulses that only jeopardize the well-being and comfort of his people who seek to follow and imitate him: “I, too, am controlled by chaotic influences, yet people follow my every move; (Like you) I, too, have no choice but to interact with people, and now they won’t leave me alone.” (“朕也自以為猖狂，而百姓隨予所往；朕也不得已於民，今則民之放也。” [*zhèn yě zì yǐ wéi chāng kuáng, ér bǎi xìng suí yú suǒ wàng; zhèn yě bù dé yǐ yú mín, jīn zé mín zhī fàng yě.*]) (Zhuangzi 外篇/在宥;4). Hong Meng, preferring to remain in his blissful state, was initially uninterested in taking on the responsibility of advising the ruler on his affairs. However, upon being pressed further by the Cloud General, the sage provided his advice:

You must reside in a paradigm of non-action and allow things to transform of their own accord. . . The countless multitude of living things, each returns to its own root without being aware of having done so. They spend their entire lives in chaos and confusion;<sup>17</sup>

and if they knew they were in it, they would (try to) remove themselves from it. By not seeking to classify or pry into the nature of chaos, things are allowed to fall into their natural state of being.

(汝徒處無為，而物自化...萬物云云，

各復其根，各復其根而不知。

渾渾沌沌，終身不離；若彼知之，乃是離之。無問其名，無闕

其情，物故自生。” [“Rǔ tú chǔ wú wéi, ér wù zì huā. . . Wàn wù

yún yún, gè qí gēn, gè qí gēn ér bù zhī. Hún hún dùn dùn, zhōng

shēn bù lí; ruò bǐ zhī zhī, nǎi shì lí zhī. Wú wèn qí míng, wú kuī qí

qíng, wù gù zì sheng.]) (Zhuangzi 外篇/在宥;4)

Satisfied with having finally learned something from his association with Hong Meng, Yun Jiang thanked the sage, kowtowed deeply, and went on his way.

Hong Meng's final words of advice might come across as confusing or even dangerous given the fact that, as a leader or an elite member of society, the Cloud General is required to take action in order to ensure the welfare of his people. However, as Blake claims in his "Marriage of Heaven and Hell," there is an even stronger danger for a person or a group of people who choose to hang on to old methods of order and reason without taking into account the changes that work to cast doubt upon their effectiveness. Perhaps, at an earlier time in Yun Jiang's life, his own life and that of his people had achieved a comfortable level

of distance from chaos that made his responsibilities as a leader manageable. However, as time progressed, changes, natural or otherwise, saw the introduction of chaos into his realm of governance, and suddenly the Cloud General had found himself ill-equipped to satisfy the needs of the “living things” that sought his leadership in dire times. Hence, where Blake called for a marriage between supreme order (Heaven) and chaos (Hell) so that the world might become free to correct itself *ad-infinitum*, Hong Meng’s advice is based purely in the Daoist concept of “non-action” or in other words, the willingness of the subject to remove his faultily constructed notions of reason and order and allow all living things to find their own way in the world once more. This, however, is not to be confused with immobilization—quite the opposite. The concept of non-action can also become a quality of leadership in that the leader has the power, through non-action, to properly influence the course of events by relying upon the power of Dao—or the natural law of all things great and small.

However, as for what Yun Jiang chooses to do with this wisdom he's obtained through Hung Mung, we are left in the dark, just as we are not privy to the existential outcome of Zhuangzi's encounter with the "Butterfly Dream." However, what presents itself to both Zhuangzi and Yun Jiang is the opportunity to relinquish the control they attempt to assume over nature in order to view it once more with new eyes and a new appreciation for its power to change. Similar Blake’s call for a “marriage” between “Reason” and “Energy,” this story from the

“Outer Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi* attempts a similar goal when assessing the world and the roots of its myriad problems. According to these texts, these problems do not result from our inability to create more and more laws that work to stifle the chaos that nature devises spontaneously; instead, they call for a complete and utter dismissal of such laws in favor of reassessing our unique relationship as human beings with nature.

Like Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, there are several moments in the *Zhuangzi* wherein the author asserts that the many problems that plague the world result from the inevitable confusion and injustice brought about by artificially constructed epistemology. From man-made languages to the construction of binary opposites, Zhuangzi was mostly concerned for the unhappy individual who finds him or herself lost in a thicket of outmoded rationality that only gets thicker and more complex the longer it is allowed to stand in his or her way. Moreover, like Blake’s “Heaven” of pure reason, as such positively-constructed epistemology gets closer to reaching a critical mass, it is only a matter of time before the growing armies of irrational “energy” begin breaking down its walls—ultimately leaving the unrelenting disciple of reason and order at the mercy of such energies. Thus, the aims of both Blake and Zhuangzi can be seen as being similar, despite being distinct in their social and cultural circumstances. A middle way must be traveled at some point—either through a marriage of reason and energy or through non-action on the part of an individual who must choose to

forgo a toxic positivist construct. The sooner this path is traveled, the sooner the changing of things can be allowed to occur.

## THE FORGOTTEN GOD

“It is high time that we realize that it is pointless to praise the light  
and preach it if nobody can see it.”

--Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*

While living in Switzerland in the 1910's, Hermann Hesse was stricken with a series of personal crises that prompted him to seek out the psychoanalytical aid of Carl Jung's psychiatric practice. Over the course of the decade, Hesse was treated by Jung's assistant, Dr. J.B. Lang and developed a close personal friendship with Jung himself. Hesse came to learn of Jung's unorthodox methods of psychoanalysis (which were contrary to many of Sigmund Freud's more widely accepted methods and theories), primarily how Jungian psychoanalysis sought to foster the growth and actualization of the self through spiritual means. Hesse absorbed many of Jung's theories and applied them in his own writing. His novel, *Demian*, published in 1919, was one of the initial fruits of this period spent with Jung and J.B. Lang. It was also during this decade that Carl Jung ended his professional and, to an extent, personal relationship with Freud. His consequent confusion prompted Jung to reevaluate his own role as a creative individual and a doctor. What resulted was a self-induced breakdown of sorts, which would last Jung the following six years—a period in which he produced his infamous *Red Book*, and the "Seven Sermons to the Dead."

The focus of this chapter is a comparison of Jung's "Seven Sermons to the Dead," written in 1916 and Hesse's *Demian*, as these works both exist as "guidebooks" of sorts for overcoming the barriers that keep us as individuals from truly achieving autonomous subjectivity. Despite the obvious differences of narrative perspective, the works are conceptually similar if one considers that their respective protagonists—Emil Sinclair in Hesse's novel, and Jung himself (and/or the various personae he assumes) in his own work—are caught between two "worlds" or spiritual/(ir)rational extremes. Moreover, both Jung and Hesse attribute their works to another author—Emil Sinclair (the protagonist) in Hesse's case, and Basilides of Alexandria in the case of Jung. The primary symbol that ties both *Demian* and the "Seven Sermons" together is the "forgotten god," Abraxas.

The term Abraxas (ΑΒΡΑΞΑΣ<sup>18</sup>) was first used in the writings of an early Gnostic sect known as the Basilideans. The most relevant Basilidean interpretation or belief is that Abraxas is a godlike entity that possesses both good *and* evil qualities. Or, to put it in Judeo-Christian terminology, Abraxas possessed the qualities of both God and Satan, virtue and sin, etc. Abraxas can therefore be seen as an early spiritual dialectic—a synthesized embodiment of infinite dualities—in contrast to a static or positivist separation of opposites that one might attribute to the concepts of heaven and hell, for example. One might also interpret Abraxas as an early spiritual foundation of personality, with each of its begotten "Archons/Archetypes" representing an aspect of this primal personality. More importantly to the discussion at hand, Abraxas can represent the

deification of William Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and of Hong Meng's "primordial chaos," wherein all is synthesized and equalized through a singularity of being (e.g., from the standpoint of "absolute spirit" or "natural law") instead of becoming forever lost in a void of non-being, or worse, an unnavigable web of positivist rationality.

It is important to point out that Jung's "Seven Sermons to the Dead" were not written, *per se*, by Jung himself, but attributed<sup>19</sup> to the Gnostic teacher, Basilides of Alexandria—the founder of the Basilidean sect that held Abraxas as their supreme archetypal deity. Moreover, the work is subtitled as "The Seven Sermons to the Dead Written by Basilides of Alexandria, the City Where the East Toucheth the West." Immediately we're drawn into a rather obvious "mingling" of opposites—the East and the West, as represented by the city of Alexandria. Stephen Hoeller explains: "In [Basilides] indeed, and not only in his favorite city, East and West met, for of all the Gnostic teachers his teachings have the most distinctly Eastern flavor. . . ." (Hoeller 60). Moreover, the city of Alexandria itself existed as a center of knowledge, more or less, throughout much of its history, attracting with almost centripetal force, the thought and ideas of its surrounding continents and nations. Thus one can assume, through historical knowledge of Basilides' situation in space-time, that a "marriage" of Eastern and Western thought can be derived from Basilidean Gnosticism, and more importantly for our purposes, Jung's "Seven Sermons."

In Jung/Basilides' first sermon, two major concepts are introduced: *pleroma* and *creatura*. The speaker's explicates the idea of *pleroma* as follows: "This nothingness or

fullness we name the PLEROMA. Therein both thinking and being cease to exist. In infinity full is not better than empty." (Jung 1)<sup>20</sup> Here the writer states that the pleroma can be considered all and nothing, without discernable qualities, the infinite. *Creatura*, on the other hand, exists separately, though at the same time inseparable from the pleroma given that it exists within or as a part of it. *Creatura* represents the qualities and identities that the Pleroma does not, as the speaker states:

Distinctiveness is *creatura*. It is distinct. Distinctiveness is its essence, and therefore it distinguisheth. Therefore man discriminateth because his nature is distinctiveness. Wherefore also he distinguisheth qualities of the pleroma which are not. He distinguisheth them out of his own nature. Therefore must he speak of qualities of the pleroma which are not. (Jung 1)

Therefore *creatura* can be seen as that which distinguishes *quality* and *identity* from the pleroma—in that, simply through its nature of being distinct, *creatura* applies finite interpretations, or *laws*, if you will, to an otherwise infinite, and therefore, indistinguishable universe. Moreover, the speaker predicts harm for those who belong to *creatura* (*humans*, for example) who go against their nature: "What is the harm, ye ask, in not distinguishing oneself? If we do not distinguish, we get beyond our own nature, away from *creatura*. We fall into indistinctiveness, which is the other quality of the pleroma. We fall into the pleroma itself and cease to be creatures" (Jung 1). This particular passage relates back to Zhuangzi's "Butterfly Dream" and his proclamation that one must

*distinguish* between one's perceived reality and that of the butterfly before change either way is allowed to occur.<sup>21</sup> Thus, to completely limit one's self from the power to distinguish leads to the dissolution of *creatura* into the *pleroma*, or the infinite; for which absolute non-identity is the only outcome.

In the second sermon, the idea of God is explored. Also, here is where the figure of Abraxas makes its appearance. The concept of God is rationalized not as being “above” or “synonymous” with the *pleroma* as a whole, but as *creatura*, which in and of itself remains merely an aspect of *pleroma*. “God is *creatura*, for he is something definite, and therefore distinct from the *pleroma*. God is quality of the *pleroma*, and everything which I said of *creatura* also is true concerning him” (Jung 2). Thus we can see God as existing no differently, or separately, from all other aspects of *pleroma* (*creatura*) in that it is a distinguishable identity. Moreover, the Devil too exists as *creatura*, and is generally distinguished as God's opposite—once again harking back to our discussion of Blake's work where God and the Devil, Heaven and Hell, etc., can be seen to exist as static opposites that seek the gradual extermination of, as opposed to a “marriage” and reconciliation with the other. However, the author asserts that the one thing that is shared between opposites is their “Effectiveness” (the same holds true for Blake's Heaven and Hell). “Effectiveness is common to both. Effectiveness joineth them. Effectiveness, therefore, standeth above both; is a god above god, since in its effect it uniteth fullness and emptiness” (Jung 2). Like Blake's call for the marriage of opposites, Jung/Basilides presents a solution to the status-quo maintained by the static relationship of opposites by

implying that the “Effectiveness” of both polarities unites and overcomes the many differences that separate them and must be considered a shared quality of both.

Moreover, the author gives a name to this god: "This is a god whom ye knew not, for mankind forgot it. We name it by its name Abraxas. It is more indefinite still than god and devil" (Jung 2). Abraxas is now introduced, not as a static identity but as the embodiment of *creatura's* effectiveness relative to the *pleroma*. Hence, Abraxas could be considered, in the Schopenhauerean sense, to be the manifestation of the *pleroma's will to life*—as well as its coming to terms with what that life ends up being.

Of the remaining sermons, the third is most relevant to our discussion of the god Abraxas. The third sermon goes farther to clarify the deity’s purpose within/amongst the *pleroma*. "Hard to know is the deity of Abraxas. Its power is the greatest, because man perceiveth it not. From the sun he draweth the *summum bonum*; from the devil the *infimum malum*; but from Abraxas LIFE, altogether indefinite, the mother of good and evil" (Jung 3). Although the deity exists separately from *pleroma*, we are still unable to perceive or conceptualize such a being as we might God or the Devil, as it constantly evades positive identification—or to invoke Kant, Abraxas represents a “noumenon” or a “thing-in-itself;” a non-identity. Given that Abraxas can be seen to represent the "Effectiveness" of God and the Devil, one can assume that without such a being, the "Effects" that determine the relationship between opposites (e.g., the actions of good versus the actions of evil, or *visa versa*) would simply not exist, and as a result, such opposites could not be distinguished from each other. Typically what *creatura* is able to

distinguish becomes recorded as law or fact, despite the infinite number of alternatives that could be distinguished in its stead. That is, until such “laws” or “facts” are called into question. It is through Abraxas, according to Jung’s “Sermons,” that our ability to question the validity of a fixed identity is made possible.

\* \* \*

Now that we have a basic understanding of Abraxas as the deity pertains to Jung’s “Seven Sermon’s to the Dead,” we should now take a look at how Hesse puts the concept to use in his novel *Demian*. Like Jung, Hesse does not attribute the authorship of his work to himself but rather to his young protagonist, Emil Sinclair.<sup>22</sup> The major differences between the two works lie in the authors’ creative motivations and the discrepancies between their respective narrators, both temporally and developmentally. On the one hand, Jung wrote the “Seven Sermons” as a therapeutic way of coming to terms with his traumatic break from Freud and the elder’s growing influence upon the field of clinical psychology. Jung’s ideas, because of their heavy reliance on spiritual concepts and metaphysics, never truly reconciled with Freud’s own epistemological ideas concerning the development of human psychology. “Seven Sermons” was a means for Jung to explore the value of his own autonomous subjectivity in a field from which he found himself increasingly ostracized. Hesse’s work, on the other hand, was inspired by the Gnostic views Jung adopted and wrote about during the former’s period of association

with the psychiatrist as a patient. Hesse attempted to synthesize these radical and esoteric ideas in a way that could be applied to the spiritual and intellectual growth of a young person in Germany in the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I. As such, Hesse's novel is characterized as a bildungsroman, or a novel that follows the growth, spiritually and mentally, of its protagonist from childhood to adulthood.

Developments in the field of psychology made on the part of Freud and others correlate with a boom in novels being written in the bildungsroman format during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The sudden emergence of psychoanalytic thought at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century made it feasible for authors to investigate the development of the mind in a much different way. D.H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*, published in 1913, can be viewed as an example of a bildungsroman steeped in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, evidenced by the author's use of Freud's ideas concerning the "Oedipus Complex" as a major thematic undercurrent. Another example is James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, which can be read as a powerful case-study almost begging for Freudian psychoanalysis,<sup>23</sup> as it attempts to chart the various external "stimuli" responsible for the development of a young man and his decision to ultimately become an artist. Both novels are considered to be great masterpieces of English and World Literature, and tend to make several "Top 10 Lists" of the greatest novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>24</sup>

However, Hesse's *Demian* was never met with the acclaim and respect afforded his contemporaries in the United Kingdom, much like Jung's work, which became almost completely overshadowed by Freud's growing ideological hegemony in the field of

psychology. Although Jung's struggle with his own inferiority as a result of his break with Freud is well documented, less is known about Hesse's motivation as an author and whether or not his lack of mainstream popularity (during his lifetime) had anything to do with the subject matter of his novels. Gnostic spiritual thought and the deity Abraxas became a trope for both Jung and Hesse to rationalize in their own way the validity of all concepts and manners of thinking, in contrast to the positive dialectical habit of giving credence to only a select few. *Demian* stands as the first bildungsroman of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to directly champion Jung's ideas (instead of Freud's) and charts the development of a young man who is taught to view the world not as an enclosed space of limitation and safety but as a wide open area of limitless possibility.

The novel begins with a description of "Two Realms." One realm, which is represented by Emil Sinclair's parents and home, exists as a "world of light." In this realm, all is safe, orderly, and warm; there is little need to fear in such a world, as everything that does not belong is sequestered or driven out. However, while encountering that which exists outside the "world of light" is always possible, it is never truly condoned by those who are used to operating within its safe confines. "In this world there were straight lines and paths leading to the future, there were duty and guilt, a troubled conscience and confession, forgiveness and good resolutions, love and respect, Bible sayings and wisdom. This was the world to adhere to if one's life was to be bright and pure, lovely and well-ordered" (Hesse 3). Here, the narrator describes the very strict dualistic nature of his world, where there are only two sides to a coin, and one side is

“good” and the other “bad.” As an inhabitant of the “world of light,” he is obligated to err on the side of duty, confession, respect, and Biblical wisdom in order to avoid suffering. Sinclair's childhood world of light is presented to the reader as very small, as it barely extends beyond the reach of his parents. However, because his family's home is filled with foreign objects and servants from foreign lands necessary for the maintenance of his world, Sinclair realized at an early age that he could never be completely safe from an invasion by the “world of dark.”

This other realm appears infinite in relation to the insignificant space allotted to Sinclair's world of light. "On the other hand, the other world began right in our house; it was altogether different, smelled different, spoke differently, made different promises and demands" (Hesse 3). Here in this other world lives chaos, the disorderly, and the unknown. Strange figures and sensations exist and interact with him and his family yet ultimately have no permanent place in their orderly and protected world. Further, this “other” realm permeates his family's home, making necessary the need for this world to be distinguished from the world of light, with strict rules in place to ensure their separation. Despite this separation, however, this other world both intrigues the protagonist while at the same time causing a great amount of fear and apprehension. "It was wonderful that here among us there was peace, order, and repose, duty and a clear conscience, forgiveness and love—and wonderful that all the rest existed, all those noisy, glaring, somber, and violent things, which nevertheless could be escaped with a single bound toward one's mother" (Hesse 4). Yet the mind of the protagonist remains at peace

by knowing that his mother is always within reach. Thus, Emil Sinclair is pleased in knowing that he is able to learn about or experience this other world, while still being able to count on the safety of the world of light should this other world tread too harshly upon his sensibilities.

As the novel transitions into Sinclair's life away from home as a schoolboy, we are introduced to his friend Max Demian, a peculiar but strong-willed boy who would become a foundational figure in Sinclair's intellectual maturation and a catalyst for his ability to navigate between the worlds of light and dark. He tells us that Demian "wasn't popular, he didn't take part in our games, let alone our fights; the only thing about him the rest of us liked was the self-confident, firm tone in which he addressed the teachers" (Hesse 16). Despite not belonging to any one group or clique, Demian commands a certain respect from the other students resulting from how he presents himself to teachers and the other boys; or in other words, Demian is not an "outcast" because he is forced to be but because he *chooses* to be. Sinclair finds this aspect of the other boy to be fascinating, but at the same time felt that "he was too superior and cool. . .too provokingly self-confident" for comfort (Hesse 16). However, the boys became drawn to each other, and their first meeting and discussion would revolve around a class they had both attended that day on the subject of Cain and Abel.

Typically the story of Cain and Abel is perpetuated as, more or less, a one-sided morality play. Appearing in the Book of Genesis, Cain and Abel are the initial offspring of Adam and Eve and have become one of the most archetypal representations of good

(Abel) and evil (Cain) appearing in man following the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Traditionally, this story led people to clearly view Cain as evil for murdering his brother Abel. The reasons behind the act vary across differing interpretations of the tale, with the most prevalent interpretation being an act based out of jealousy. Moreover, Cain is traditionally viewed as receiving a mark from God across his forehead that would serve to protect him from being killed by others who might seek to exact moral revenge for murdering his brother. Demian, however, offers Emil Sinclair an alternate interpretation of this hallmark religious morality tale. Instead of interpreting Cain as a villain who was ultimately punished by God for his sin, Demian sees Cain as an autonomous figure amongst his brethren who achieved an understanding, or covenant, so to speak, with his own inherent personality independently from the laws set forth by God. As a result, according to Demian, Cain was a stronger, more intelligent figure than those who came into contact with him. Moreover, Demian sees Cain's *alleged* murder of Abel as the act of a "strong man" who slew a "weaker one."<sup>25</sup> There is no evidence, in Demian's opinion, that would prove that Cain's act was an evil act, or if Abel was even his brother. He feels that it was not a mark placed by God upon Cain's forehead that kept people from attacking him, but the power and strength of his personality that caused people to fear him, and therefore dare not to approach him. Discussing what many might feel to be a "heretical" interpretation of what can be seen as one of the most primal events in the Bible strikes Sinclair with the prospect of a massive paradigm shift: "Cain a noble person, Abel a coward! The mark of Cain a distinction! It was absurd, it was blasphemous and

wicked. . . To be sure, he was a damned clever fellow, and he could talk, but all this – no –" (Hesse 19). Here, we have one of the first moments where Sinclair is forced to face the possibility that the actions of the world of dark could have some moral validity. Yet to jump to such a conclusion, or to accept such an interpretation of the story, would be too far of a journey away from the comfort of the world of light, and must therefore be rationalized as being "absurd, blasphemous, and wicked."

Later, as Sinclair's fascination and friendship with Demian develops, the latter offers another interesting interpretation of biblical scripture—this time sparked by an in-class discussion of the crucifixion. Up to this point, Sinclair had enjoyed interpreting the various biblical stories he began to reread "in a freer, more personal, less rigid, more imaginative way," prompted by his associations with Demian (Hesse 38). However, Demian's interpretation of the two thieves crucified on either side of Christ proves to be too radical an interpretation for Sinclair to stomach. Demian makes the point that the thief who ultimately repents prior to his death was ultimately included in the Bible as a "priest's fairy tale" and that such repentance, instead of being an act of strength to be celebrated, was an act of weakness that should be condemned as dishonest. The second thief, according to Demian, represents strength of character, for up to his dying moment he refused to repent for the life he had led. "[The second thief] travels his path to the end, and doesn't act like a coward at the last minute, renouncing the Devil, who must have helped him up till then. He's a man of character, and people of character generally get short shrift in Bible stories. Maybe he's a descendant of Cain. Don't you think so?"

(Hesse 38-39). Here, Demian elevates the character of a thief who refuses to “for swear the devil” as inspirational without choosing to categorize his act as being either “good” or “evil.” Moreover, though not specifically stated in the text, one could see the unrepentant thief as an analogue of sorts for Christ himself should one refrain from spiritual or moral judgment, as both men being unrepentant for the criminal actions (within a 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman legal paradigm) that directly resulted in their arrest and subsequent crucifixion.

This radical notion introduced by Demian into Sinclair’s world-view was immediately met with disdain by the latter, as the “new idea sounded awful to [Sinclair]; it threatened to overthrow concepts in [his] mind that [he] thought [he] had to retain” (Hesse 39). Demian then goes on to clarify his position by presenting the importance of taking into thoughtful consideration the merits and validity of both good *and* evil, as they both exist as two halves of the world:

But my opinion is that we should honor everything and hold it sacred, the whole world, not just the artificially detached, official half! And so, alongside service for God, we must also have a service for the Devil. . .Or else, people would have to create some new God, who would also include the Devil within Himself, one in whose presence we wouldn’t have to shut our eyes when the most natural things in the world take place. (Hesse 39)

This statement harks back to Sinclair’s own observations, prior even to meeting Demian, on the existence and merits of the world of light and the world of dark, though with one

crucial piece missing—a catalyst that would act as a bridge between the two worlds for the young Sinclair. It is with Demian's most recent assertion that Sinclair ultimately connects, albeit reluctantly, as his words "contained a note of responsibility, of the necessity to cease being a child and to stand on my own feet" (Hesse 40). We see Demian foreshadowing the appearance of Abraxas in verbalizing the necessity of creating "a God that contains the devil too." It is at this point that Demian reevaluates his own capacity for understanding the implications of what he has been saying and withdraws into himself, consciously avoiding any interaction or communication with Sinclair for quite some time.

After some time following their split, a note is left for Sinclair in class, which he assumes was written by Demian, that reads, "The bird is fighting its way out of the egg. The egg is the world. Whoever wishes to be born must destroy a world. The bird is flying to God. The god is named Abraxas" (Hesse 59). Here we have, through the use of symbolism, a strange road map for Sinclair in his quest for discovering his "true self." It is during this time that Sinclair is pondering the various "socially viable" professions he should be preparing for (e.g., a doctor, lawyer, businessman, etc.) while experiencing a recurring dream of an illuminated sparrow-hawk situated above his home, and of his mother whose face becomes replaced with that of Demian's; all signs at this juncture point towards a certain necessity for Sinclair to take a leap of faith out of the world of light and into the world of dark—to break out of the egg, if you will. The note comes at a crucial junction in the trajectory of Sinclair's personal development, should we see the

bird as Sinclair himself, the egg as his home, or the world of light that exists to comfort and protect him from the outside, and the destruction of this “world” as being a necessary step towards self-actualization through flying towards a new God that represents a divine synthesis of good and evil. Thus, by being *aware* of his options at this point, namely whether or not he should remain in the world of light and choose a suitable profession, or choose a more dangerous path towards the discovery of his true self (or perhaps a combination thereof), we see Sinclair coming to terms with all he has learned thus far from his association with Demian.

Further on in this same chapter, Sinclair comes across a church organist who goes by the name of Pistorius. Having been drawn into the church by the organist's playing, the two begin a discussion about music that leads to a discussion about Abraxas, of whom Pistorius is very much aware. He goes on to explain to Sinclair how he came to know of the god, prompting the latter to share the note from, who he believed to be Demian. Although Pistorius has no immediate reply or feedback concerning Abraxas or the note, he does seem to open up and allow Sinclair into his world as a result of their shared interests. Moreover, as their friendship develops, in contrast with Sinclair's friendship with Demian, Pistorius acts as a mentor in the sense that Sinclair's ideas could be heard and brought into clearer focus by an older, more experienced individual. Thus, where Demian represents a font of sorts where new ideas indiscriminately cascade over Sinclair for his consideration, Pistorius is more of a sounding board for Sinclair to share his own ideas and draw from the former's sizable philosophical and religious knowledge.

While Pistorius does not create new ideas for Sinclair's consideration as Demian does, he remains an important mentor to guide Demian's personal and spiritual growth. For example, in one of their final discussions, Pistorius speaks of Abraxas for the first time since their initial meeting:

My friend Sinclair, our god is named Abraxas; he is God and Satan; both the bright world and the dark world are contained in him. Abraxas has no objection to any of your thoughts or any of your dreams. Never forget that. But he'll abandon you if you ever become faultless or normal. Then he'll abandon you and look for a new pot to cook his ideas in. (Hesse 71)

It is at this point that Pistorius completes his role as a catalyst for Sinclair's self-actualization by giving him a tool (Abraxas) to imbue his own autonomous subjectivity with value and meaning. However, in order to maintain this "tool," one must cease making judgments based on any existing or self-created moral code. Once having "graduated," so to speak, to this higher level of thinking under the guidance of Pistorius, Sinclair could then move forward with the confidence and independence needed to traverse both the world of light and the world of dark freely, though cautiously.<sup>26</sup>

As with Blake and his "Marriage of Heaven and Hell," I feel that the key aim of Hesse's work is to find a point wherein the artificial barriers that separate opposites can be dissolved for the benefit of the individual's autonomy in an increasingly objective world. By restricting oneself to Hesse's "world of light" or Blake's "cavern of reason,"

one essentially gives up their ability to experience all the finite world has to offer, much less the infinite possibilities of one's autonomous subjectivity.<sup>27</sup> Hesse's central metaphor of the sparrow-hawk that breaks out from the confines of an egg and flies towards Abraxas perfectly illustrates this point. The metaphor, in a nod to Jungian psychoanalysis, presents itself in Sinclair's dreams. This is perhaps how he ultimately comes to terms with the ideas Demian shares with him, given that he is unable to incorporate such ideas into his conscious world view. One can draw a comparison here with Zhuangzi's "Butterfly Dream," where the sage imagines he is a butterfly only to awaken and ask whose reality he was living—that of a human, or that of a butterfly. Like Sinclair, the dream allowed him to face a new realm of possibility that may have seemed ridiculous or irrational prior to having the dream.

In almost direct opposition to the positivist dialectics that cast both Jung and Hesse as marginalized practitioners of their craft, through Abraxas, they come to the following conclusion: nothing is always in the process of becoming something, and that something will always defy universal distinction. It is the *unknown*, or the infinite expanse of non-identity that scares us from leaving the organized "worlds of light" we inhabit—where all things are identified *for* us by individuals who claim to have our best interests at heart. Recall the several instances in the beginnings of Sinclair's relationship with Demian and his fear of accepting, or even giving credence to the possible validity of, the latter's often radical interpretations and claims. Abraxas, when introduced into Sinclair's world-view, becomes the ideological source for Sinclair to "reason" his way

out of the “egg,” so to speak. Or in other words, to bring down the walls that are keeping him from assimilating the voices of those whose beliefs and assertions may not fit within his carefully constructed moral/spiritual reality. Thus, by introducing the *idea* of Abraxas into one's autonomous world-view, it becomes less difficult for the individual to critically review what he or she considers to be “right or wrong,” “different or familiar,” etc. without experiencing the cognitive dissonance caused by the reliance upon fixed moral codes or positivistic thought. As a deity or metaphor, the “forgotten god” gives conflicted individuals, such as Emil Sinclair, who ultimately realize that their autonomous subjectivity is being stifled by the safe confines of the “world of light” or “cavern of reason,” an opportunity to venture out—to break the egg—and explore the cosmos of possibility that exists without.

## THE MALIGNANT ASCETIC

“Man would rather will nothingness, than not will.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*

As I conclude my literary investigation into individual autonomy and non-identity in world literature, I will look at how real or perceived limitations placed upon autonomy can recast the individual as a malignant force within a social context. Such limitations are, for the most part, impossible to overcome for reasons, natural or otherwise, that would end the life or the allotted freedoms of one who seeks to exercise a certain idealistic level of subjectivity. Moreover, the knowledge of such limitations is then used to fashion an ascetic ideal that subordinates the autonomous thought and beliefs of others to those of the ascetic individual or group. An example of this might be recasting the effects of a terminal disease into an opportunity to free one's self from having to experience reality in a fixed way; another might be the subjective reality of an artist who feels that the strength of his or her creativity hinges upon the degree to which he or she defies the law or moral code of society. Two literary works deal with these scenarios respectively. First, the 1947 German novel *Doktor Faustus* by Thomas Mann, whose protagonist, the fictitious 20th century composer Adrian Leverkühn, contracts a terminal case of syphilis and must somehow achieve greatness with his art before the illness takes his life. Second, the celebrated 1931 short story “Sonata Appassionata” (광염 소나타

[*Gwangyom Sonata*] by Korean author Kim Tong-in, whose protagonist, also a composer of music, commits crimes of increasing magnitude and immorality upon realizing the cathartic effect such actions have when exercising his creative ability. Both works present “malignant ascetics,” or individuals whose lives have reached an existential point where the achievement of an ascetic ideal becomes an all-consuming obsession. Moreover, both works were written during the reign of two malignant regimes that, despite being distinct in their socio-cultural circumstances, would dictate the universal ambitions of their subjective social ideals and would infamously act upon their goals of assimilating, often through egregious acts against humanity, all that failed to conform to said ideals (non-identity). In the end, where the ascetic individual merely exchanges the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure for that of his or her own unique, though benign or in some cases benevolent ascetic ideal (e.g., Kierkegaard), the malignant ascetic represents the more nefarious possibilities of non-identity and individual autonomy, and the harmful effects such an ideal could have on that which exists outside of its doctrine.

Mann’s work *Doctor Faustus* examines the dangers of the ascetic ideal and how the autonomy and freedom of the individual could, in some cases, have disastrous consequences for humanity. The work was written as response to what he believed to be German culture’s demise in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as evidenced by the rise of Adolf Hitler and the growing influence of the radical twelve-tone method in music espoused by German composer and pedagogue Arnold Schoenberg. Although the novel is more widely known

as an allegory for the former, his inclusion of Schoenberg's technique as an invention of the novel's protagonist speaks to the author's own discomfort regarding the sudden shift away from humanist values in the arts during his time. Schoenberg's system and its rising influence among musicians of the period represented a unique exercise of individual autonomy that many cultural humanists, such as Mann, were not prepared to accept into their traditional world-view.<sup>28</sup> Despite the reservations many had concerning Schoenberg's system, critical theorists such as Theodor Adorno welcomed the composer's contributions to music as a true musical "non-identity" to rise up against the familiar tonal identity of Western classical music.<sup>29</sup> However, what supporters of Schoenberg frequently avoid in their unyielding respect for the composer is the destructive consequences such a sudden shift in epistemology could have for those, like Mann, who promote, or even prefer a cultural identity rooted in humanist values. Despite his own humanistic aims, Mann invites the reader to decide for his/herself whether or not the creative genius/subjectivity of the individual, no matter how nihilistic, is a viable form of expression in a social context, and whether or not the substantive results of such freedom should be respected as the creative product of the individual or consigned to the dark pit of history as a curse upon the collective.

As a humanist, Mann's ideals were often marred by various "sicknesses" he observed being suffered by human culture in the 20th century. Mann's fixation upon the idea of sickness as a subjective experience presents itself in a number of his works. *The Magic Mountain*, for example, features a protagonist who achieves a heightening in the

understanding of himself and the world as a result of his battle with tuberculosis, where *Death In Venice*, on the other hand, highlights an artist whose secret obsession with an aesthetic ideal in the form of a young Polish boy only gets stronger and more careless just before succumbing to a terminal bout of cholera whilst in Venice. *Doktor Faustus*, in many ways, continues Mann's lifelong literary investigation into illness and its affect upon individual subjective experience.<sup>30</sup> This is brought into further focus by the story's protagonist, Adrian Leverkühn, who falls ill as a result of contracting syphilis and subsequently participates in a bargain with the devil wherein he must relinquish all aesthetic pleasure and joy in order to achieve his ideal of creative genius.<sup>31</sup>

Mann creates a dichotomy in his body of work between the individual who meditates upon the potential for happiness or aestheticism within a paradigm of sickness (e.g., to test the boundaries of one's capacity to enjoy oneself before death), and the individual who uses illness as a reason to instill an absolute value into subjective ascetic ideals that must be achieved before time runs out. In the Kierkegaardian sense, illness in the latter case becomes the acute realization of one's mortality: the despair of having to live in a paradigm of "sickness unto death." Many manage to avoid the despair of such a realization by, as Kierkegaard prescribes, devoting one's life to a benevolent ascetic ideal such as one's individual service to the Christian God.<sup>32</sup> This stands in contrast to others who wage war against the inevitable by channeling their despair into the pursuit of a malignant ascetic ideal that holds the promise of their immortality even beyond the point of death. More in line with the latter scenario, Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* presents the

possibility of the individual using sickness in an ironic play for greatness that would forever be tied to an inherently nihilistic paradigm: the diabolically ordained rule that Leverkühn would have only 24 passionless years to pursue his creative greatness before succumbing to his illness completely. It is obvious, then, that Adrian Leverkühn's rise and fall as a creative individual would draw comparisons to the brooding German intellectual character of the early 20th Century and its possible complicity with the rise and fall of National Socialism in Germany. However, it is less obvious, but of equal importance to consider, that the novel's narrator and friend of the protagonist, the humanist Serenus Zeitblom (a proxy for Mann's own idealism), must also take responsibility for merely standing by while malignant darkness overtook his friend, and later, his country. One can then view *Doctor Faustus* as a response of sorts to the collateral damage caused by those who might seek greatness within a fixed period of time denoted by their inevitable mortality, as well as to those who stand idly by while the former group destroys themselves and those around them.

Of course, it is also no coincidence that Mann would use the invention of the twelve-tone system by Leverkühn within the confines of his novel as a blatantly direct allusion to Arnold Schoenberg's invention of the same system nearly 40 years prior. There is something particularly provocative about Mann's allusion in the sense that it suggests a great narrative of German music that began with Bach, was developed by Beethoven, and brought to a climax by Wagner—only to have Schoenberg rage against the dying of the German "light" towards its conclusion. On the one hand, Schoenberg is

rightly considered to be one of the most innovative German composers of the 20th Century, whose development of the twelve-tone technique would strive to, in the words of the composer, “ensure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years” (Stuckenschmidt 277). On the other hand, Schoenberg’s technique, like the illnesses that affect the actions and proclivities of Mann’s protagonists, is essentially a destructive force. It takes the tonal system, which had been the undisputed musical paradigm in the West for centuries, if not millennia, and seeks to create a new, essentially *negative* musical schema that not only seeks to gradually dismantle the tenets of tonality but replace the tonal system altogether. Unlike the “marriage” espoused by William Blake, or the “effectiveness” of bringing two opposing concepts together, Schoenberg’s system seeks no truce with the tonal system and instead seeks to “emancipate dissonance” from the shackles of tonality by effectively destroying them.

Simply put, Schoenberg’s system is based on a sequence of twelve distinct tones known as a “tone row,” which is then used as cipher of sorts for encoding a piece of music.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the tonal system, which relies on the repetition of various tones in order to maintain a piece’s tonality, the twelve-tone system requires that *no* tone be repeated until each tone in the prescribed tone row has been sounded—a requirement that theoretically ensures the predominance of atonality in the music. However, similar to the tonal system, Schoenberg’s technique relies on a strict set of rules that must be followed above and beyond the simplified requisites detailed above. Schoenberg structures his technique using the basic syntax and vocabulary of the tonal system, which includes, but

is not limited to notes, rhythm, accidentals, equal temperament, and the list goes on and on. Moreover, as musician Jacques Delaguerre observes, “It's all well and good to proclaim a *theoretical* emancipation from the tyranny of consonance and major/minor triads. The *practical* result [of Schoenberg's technique] is enhanced prominence of fourths and tritones with attendant fatigue to the ear” (Delaguerre). Therefore, one can consider Schoenberg's zeal to subvert the last several centuries of musical epistemology as a fool's errand that lacked the charisma and originality needed to convince others to adopt his method as a feasible alternative. Moreover, like Leverkühn in Mann's novel, Schoenberg's system is made irrelevant by the fact that it is a “system” and not a spontaneous utterance of difference in relation to the overarching tonal identity of music. His goal to achieve greatness as a composer and as a German national is then made impossible by the fact that his cacophonous “system” must then be adopted en masse in order for it replace the existing one based in tonality; thus, the twelve-tone system was bound to forever be relegated to the margins of Western music.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, Adorno, an extremely vocal supporter of Schoenberg's technique, was a primary advisor on musical matters to Mann as he was preparing *Doktor Faustus* for publication. Despite Adorno's contributions to the work as an editor, there is no evidence to suggest that the theorist made any sort of judgment regarding Mann's literary assertion that the twelve-tone system contributed to the decline in German cultural influence. This is perhaps due in part to Mann's almost superfluous thanks for Adorno's assistance and knowledge pertaining to the musical aspects of his novel, and that the novel provided an

interesting mediation of conflicting ideologies, as Evelyn Cobley explains: “By integrating Adorno’s interpretation of Schoenberg into *Doctor Faustus*, Mann invites an interpretation of the novel that is split between his own bourgeois-humanist paradigm and Adorno’s trenchant critique of it” (Cobley 182). Despite Adorno’s life-long devotion to Schoenberg’s radical new musical paradigm, Mann recasts the twelve-tone system as a flaw in the German cultural/intellectual character—a flaw that, like that of the Faustian archetype, is rooted in the concept of misguided ambition.

Ultimately, the persisting theme that aligns Mann and Adorno’s divergent opinions regarding music and the value of cultural humanism is the rise of Fascism in Germany and how, in a so-called enlightened world, humanity’s most irrational nightmare could come to fruition. The most volatile difference, however, between Mann’s humanism and Adorno’s negative philosophy is that the latter would claim that the possibility of National Socialism was at the very core of humanist and identity-based idealism: “In the innermost recesses of humanism, as its very soul, there rages a frantic prisoner who, as a Fascist, turns the world into a prison” (Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 89). Mann, on the other hand, would never break from the positivity of his humanistic ideals, and as Cobley states in her essay on Adorno’s contributions to Mann’s work, even critics themselves “tend to privilege [Mann’s] long-standing investment in cultural humanism at the expense of Adorno’s deconstruction of its illusory assumptions” (Cobley 182). In other words, the ascetic assumption that an *a priori* body of rules exist that set humans apart from nature was and still is predominantly accepted, even by critics, as self-evident

truth—a position that Adorno polemically stands against in much of his writings. However, in an effort to maintain his humanist viewpoint in the face of unimaginable atrocity, Mann relegates the rise of National Socialism to the symptoms of an illness that would engender and/or strengthen the obsessive ambition of a subjective body seeking to force into existence its own uniquely derivative ascetic ideal.

Despite being written over 20 years later, one could view *Doctor Faustus* as a continuation of sorts to Hesse's *Demian* in the sense that the former supplants the seemingly benign Dionysian conjecture of a young Max Demian with the malignant ambitions and ideals of an adult Adrian Leverkühn. Moreover, as briefly mentioned earlier in the chapter, Mann's work is a bildungsroman told from the viewpoint of a narrator, Serenus Zeitblom, whose own story is intrinsically linked with that of the protagonist—also a close childhood friend. Both Zeitblom and Hesse's Emil Sinclair represent an Apollonian/humanist viewpoint through which the actions and admissions of their friends, Adrian Leverkühn and Max Demian respectively, are filtered and ultimately judged in relation to their own moral/ethical propensities. However, where Hesse's work attempts to reveal an attractive ideological toolset for a rising generation of youth to subjectively question the status quo, Mann presents how this new-found autonomy could be used by a mature individual or group to ensure the greatness of their own ideals over all others, often to the detriment of humanity as a whole.

The ascetic ideal is an important concept when considering the motivations of Adrian Leverkühn in *Doktor Faustus*, or when considering Mann's corpus of work in

general. Friedrich Nietzsche, whose philosophical writings had a profound influence upon Mann and his fiction, had the following to say about the ascetic ideal and its purpose: “The ascetic ideal has an aim—this goal is, putting it generally, that all the other interests of human life should, measured by its standard, appear petty and narrow; it explains epochs, nations, men, in reference to this one end; it forbids any other interpretation, any other end. . .” (Nietzsche, *GM* 776). Hence, the ascetic ideal can be looked at as a vacuum of sorts, similarly to the vacuum of reason described by Blake in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, wherein all non-identity or contradictory energy gets sucked up by the centripetal force of its identity. The only chance non-identity has of escaping the void is by expanding, transforming, or completely dissolving the ideal that seeks to neutralize it. However, given that the ascetic ideal, by its very definition, has no basis in proof or experiential evidence, it therefore must be considered a subjective ideal, and a dangerous one at that when combined with the impetus of another Nietzschean philosophical tenet: the will to power.

One finds in Mann’s earlier works, such as *Death in Venice*, that the ascetic ideal is prominently displayed as the subjective experience of their respective protagonists, and does in fact benefit them in some fashion. Through the inner-monologues of his characters, Mann explores the non-identity of the human subject, or those unconscious thoughts and desires that fail to surface due to an existential block that keeps his protagonists from acting upon them. Therefore, the social taboo of pedophilia (as an act) is avoided by Aschenbach’s ascetic connection to Apollonian rationality and the practical

necessity of bringing his more Dionysian desires and proclivities under control. Such asceticism remains benign (to all but the individual, whose own desires are squelched so that others need not suffer) and perhaps “preferable” as a control upon extremely destructive impulses of the individual. However, the ascetic ideal can have the opposite effect in that the individual’s will to achieve his or her ideal has malignant consequences for others. In other words, the *malignancy* of an individual’s will to “x” (where “x” represents an individual’s unique ascetic ideal) is evidenced by the practice of assimilating the wills of others (including one’s own), by force or otherwise, to an individually or collectively devised ideal. This is typically done in spite of the infinitely myriad possibilities of individual subjectivities that exist in relation to it. Using Ashenbach as an example once more, the protagonist’s desire to “possess” Tadzio (as an *aesthetic* ideal) could have had malignant consequences for the young boy should Ashenbach have had the will to act upon it. Asceticism, in this case, could be seen to have a positive humanistic impact, in that it keeps an individual with malignant tendencies from acting upon them.

In *Doktor Faustus*, Adrian Leverkühn is relatively unconcerned with achieving an ideal sense of beauty with his music and instead participates in a Faustian bargain with the devil so that his supreme ideal of greatness among others could be achieved within the very limited amount of time he has left to live. However, before moving further, how do we view Leverkühn’s ideal as being malignant, or even ascetic? The ideal itself is the achievement of greatness, similar to the ideal Schoenberg hoped to achieve for his own

system and German music in general. The ideal becomes ascetic due to the fact that, as outlined by Leverkühn's discussion with the devil, he must sacrifice his ability to love and desire (or the aesthetic/Dionysian aspects of life) to a force that promises him the eventual achievement of his ideal. However, unlike the rise of Nazi Germany, to which much of Mann's work is linked, Leverkühn's ideal does not necessarily pose a direct risk to others. However, like Schoenberg's hope that his own system might dominate music theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, there is a certain domineering impulse in Leverkühn's turn to extreme ascetic rationality in his music. Moreover, his attraction of cohorts towards the end of his life hints at the possibility that the composer's progressively malignant ideals might take on a life of its own, which, like the rise of National Socialism in Germany, could have serious consequences for individuals and groups that do not conform to such ideals.

Mann formulates the course of Leverkühn's ultimate ascetic aim in Chapter XXV, the novel's climax, wherein Serenus Zeitblom begins transcribing a document written by the composer concerning his encounter with the devil—a document written in an archaic form of German known as "Reformationsdeutsch," or an attempt at the German vernacular as written during the Lutheran Reformation (Orton 70). A substantial portion of the chapter details the devil's rationale behind his materialization before Leverkühn:

"Statt aus meiner Informiertheit zu folgiern, dass ich nicht  
leibhaftig bin, solltest du lieber schliessen, dass ich nicht nur

leibhaftig, sondern auch der bin, duer den du mich die ganze Zeit schon haeltst” (Mann, *Doktor Faustus* 303).

[“‘Twere better to conclude, not that I am not here in the flesh, but that I, here in my person, am also he for whom you have taken me all the whole time” (Mann, *Doctor Faustus* 123)].

Unlike the often fantastic visions of the devil that crop up in more cliché invocations of the Faustian bargain in literature and art, Mann is quick to associate Leverkühn’s vision of the devil with the initial manifestations of his mental decline, while at the same time, giving credence to the possibility of its reality, if only in Leverkühn’s subjective interpretation thereof.

As their discussion continues, the devil’s proposition is made apparent:

“Zeit verkaufen wir, -sagen wir einmal vierundzwanzig Jahre, - ist das abzusehen? Ist das eine gehoerige Masse? Da mag Einer leben auf den alten Kaiser hin wie ein Viehe und die Welt in Erstaunen setzen als ein grosser Nigromant durch viel Teufelswerk...”

(Mann, *Doktor Faustus* 309).

[“Time we sell—let’s say XXIV years—can we see to the end of that? Is it a good solid amount? Therewith a man can live by rack and manger like a lord and astonish the world as a great nigromancer with much divel’s work. . .” (Mann, *Doctor Faustus* 126)].

Here is where the devil appeals to Leverkühn's will to achieve his ascetic ideal by offering him 24 years to do so before ultimately succumbing to his illness. Given that the whole episode and subsequent pact is based upon Leverkühn's syphilitic regression into madness, Mann inextricably links the resulting "countdown" of Leverkühn's 24 years of genius with the past. This is shown particularly in how Leverkühn's illness and consequent rise to become a "great nigromancer"<sup>35</sup> resulted from the workings of a devil with dubious ontological origins who, in a vying effort for the composer's soul, ultimately took credit for a moment of sexual indiscretion in the protagonist's past, thereby rationalizing a completely new genealogy of events that would inevitably lead to their discussion. Such an ideal is purely individual, based entirely on a history that was experienced by Leverkühn himself, and becomes a rationalization for his future plans and actions, to be executed within the short amount of time he has left alive. Hence, the devil can be seen as an acute realization of Leverkühn's impending mortality, and the harbinger of the composer's 24 year time limit to achieve his ascetic ideal.

Moreover, in the case of Adrian Leverkühn, and in one of Mann's most blatant allusions to the rise of Adolf Hitler and National Socialism in Germany, the composer's decision to surround himself with like-minded, death-obsessed intellectuals hints at the eventual execution of a clandestinely-devised ascetic ideal that would have malignant implications for society itself. The narrator and Leverkühn's close friend, Serenus Zeitblom, recognizes the "demonic" nature of the individuals with whom Adrian

associates and views the composer's magnum opus *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* as the ultimate artistic catalyst to the realization of the group's Fascist ideals:

“. . .Ich meine: zu dem Erlebnis der Entstehung eines befreundeten Kunstwerks, – befreundet mir durch seinen Schoepfer, nicht durch sich selbst, das darf ich nicht sagen, dazu eignete ihm zu viel fuer meinen Sinn Befremdendes und Aengstigendes – eines Werkes, das, einsam dort in dem allzu heimatlichen laendlichen Winkel fieberhaft schnell sich aufbauend, mit dem bei Kridwiss Gehoerten in eigentuemlicher Korrespondenz, im Verhaeltnis geistiger Entsprechung stand.” (Mann, *Doktor Faustus* 493)

[“. . .I mean the birth of a work of art very near to me, near through its creator, not through itself, that I may not say, for too much belonged to it that was alien and frightful to my mind. In that all too homelike rural retreat there was being built up with feverish speed a work which had a peculiar kinship with, was in spirit a parallel to, the things I heard at Kridwiss's table-round." (Mann, *Doctor Faustus* 202)]

Here, the narrator alludes to Leverkühn's new circle of friends, each with their own distinct personality and intellectual/artistic pursuit, led in their ascetic ideals by the art collector and expert Sextus Kridwiss.<sup>36</sup> Zeitblom finds their discussions to be full of a type of cold intellectualism that further severs any affinity the group may have with the

world outside of their “rural retreat.” Leverkühn’s *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* becomes the musical aesthetic for the group’s incubating ideals, and as its title would suggest, these ideals are nothing short of destructive and apocalyptic in scope. Their work then becomes at odds with the empowerment of the individual, given that such empowerment could lead to the rejection of the group’s quest for greatness through violent domination. Zeitblom’s own reaction to Leverkühn’s music and the group’s ideals proves that their sinister ideals will never be freely adopted as truth or considered great on a universal scale, as T. J. Reed explains in his book on Thomas Mann’s uses of tradition: “Theirs [the Kridwiss circle] is already that total rejection of truth which Mann summed up as the German Will to Legend, in full flower after 1933” (Reed 378).<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Leverkühn and his circle, in their fevered pursuit of greatness, are left with no other choice than to plan for the forced adoption of their ideals through violence and an end to all individual autonomy that might conflict with the achievement of said ideals. This willingness to accommodate a specific ontological “need” for the achievement of an ascetic ideal suggests how the malignant asceticism of an individual or group could easily spread beyond the confines of the personal body and into the social body—ultimately leading to an entire society’s collapse into barbarism.

\* \* \*

Nearly 30 years before the publication of Mann's work, in Japanese-occupied Korea, a young Pyongyang-born author by the name of Kim Tong-in (김동인) would make his own polemical stance against the growing influence of intellectual didacticism in Korean literature. As in China, and much earlier in Japan, the state of Korean culture during the first half of the 20th Century was marked by a certain impassioned scramble to "catch up" with the West. This was done by attempting to augment (or replace) traditional social thought with the various empirical "breakthroughs" in science, philosophy, and nation-building spurred on by the inherently positivist outcomes of the Western Enlightenment. Kim Tong-in, in an attempt to rescue Korean literature and art from this impending utilitarian fate, established the underground literary journal, "창조" [*Changjo*], or *Creation*, in 1919 in an effort to provide an outlet for literature without a directly didactic agenda. This publication, among several others, became one of the only outlets for authors to pursue their craft independently from a ready-made moral and social paradigm.<sup>38</sup> The journal would showcase the works, literary or otherwise, of artists who would be characterized as belonging to "예술지상주의" [*Yesul jisang juui*], or the "Art for Art's Sake Movement," which asserts the importance of art remaining a distinct product of an individual's unadulterated subjectivity and not as a vehicle for educating or swaying the masses towards the adoption of a hegemonic paradigm or ideology (i.e., propaganda).

Kim Tong-in is typically viewed by historians and literary scholars as being in direct conflict with another major literary figure of his time, Yi Kwang-su (이광수), whose own philosophy of literary didacticism would be adopted by a majority of Korean authors in the years leading up to the end of the country's occupation by the Japanese in 1945. Yi Kwang-su's most revered work, *무정* [*Mujung*], or *Heartless*, is considered to be, among other things, the “first major modern novel in [Korea]” (Shin 248-49) and stands as perhaps the most sustained polemic against Korean traditionalism. In its place, the novel calls for a new sense of national solidarity, devoid of emotional attachments to the past, through the adoption of the so-called enlightened rationality of the West. Published serially in the puppet government-run news magazine, *매일신보* [*Maeil Shinbo*] (*The Daily News*), the novel's success proved to be unprecedented for literary works written in Korea during the second decade of the 20th Century, and it did a great deal to convince many Korean intellectuals to adopt the cold empirical standards of the West, often at the expense of their own individual ideals and traditional values. Kim Tong-in responded to Yi's literary didacticism by writing: “It is proper to show readers defects of past customs, but it signifies the fall of literature if the novel *teaches* solutions. A novelist can reflect the paintings of life, but he should never become a function to direct society” (Song 33-34; italics mine). Kim's zeal in fighting against the presence of didacticism in literature would prompt him, in league with other like-minded authors to establish the *Creation* in response—at only the age of nineteen.

Kim Tong-in would continue his polemic stance against Yi Kwang-su's call for didacticism in literature for the next 30 years, despite his waning influence towards the end of his life. In an attempt to set his own ideology apart from that of Yi Kwang-su, Kim writes the following about his own work:

“I tried to find the identical point of the two contradictory elements—virtue and beauty. I tried to have everything under the control of beauty. My desire, all of it, is beauty. Beauty is beauty. What contradicts beauty is also beauty. Love is beauty, but hatred is also beauty. Virtue is beauty while vice is also beauty. If there is anything contradictory to this extensive concept of beauty, that is an unworthy existence. This kind of devilish thought began to bud. Thus began my wild thought and my wild way of life derived from them” (Song 33).

The quest for beauty in life, as an aesthetic principal, would nearly consume Kim's tumultuous career. In stark contrast to Yi Kwang-su, who had successfully attempted to induct the occidental ideals of secular humanism into Korean social discourse, Kim Tong-in sought to free the artist from the obligations of positivist morality in favor of pursuing one's own subjective ideals as an autonomous being. Although a majority of Kim's writings follow or deal in some fashion with the tenets of “art for art's sake,” none of his work interfaces with the idea of beauty being raised to a standard above the moral categorical imperative more radically than in his short story “광염소나타” [*Gwanggyom*

*Sonata*”], which is perhaps best known in English as “Sonata Appassionata.”<sup>39</sup>

Written nearly a decade after the collapse of Kim’s short-lived, though historically remarkable literary magazine *Creation*, “Sonata Appassionata” would ultimately be published in a relatively popular general interest magazine 삼천리(三千里) [*Samch’unri*]<sup>40</sup> in 1930. Like Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, the story is about a rogue composer of music who goes to great lengths to maintain the progressive flow of his creative genius. However, Kim Tong-in’s work differs from Mann’s in a more sinister fashion. Where Adrian Leverkühn represents the malignant ascetic whose dreams to greatness come only at the price of his own body and soul, while only hinting at the negative social implications of his lot, Kim’s protagonist, Paek Song-su, develops an ascetic ideal for his music that can only be fed by breaking the law and committing progressively heinous acts.

The story is told from the view point of a third-person narrator, known only as K, who is a music critic and a close friend to Paek’s late father, whose own drastically Dionysian lifestyle as a composer saw an early end to his life following the birth of his son. Unlike Serenus Zeitblom in Mann’s work, however, K is much more liberally-biased towards the actions of Paek Song-su as being necessary for the creation of pure and autonomous art that transcends mortality, and that the various crimes he committed to achieve the goals of his creative genius are insignificant in comparison to the artistic outcome. K can be more fruitfully compared with Sextus Kridwiss, the art expert and leader of Adrian Leverkühn’s ascetic circle of friends, who believes that the rights of the

individual are negligible compared to the importance of achieving great ideals. Therefore, where Serenus Zeitblom can be considered unreliable due to his staunch humanist stance when considering and judging the actions of Leverkühn and his circle, one must also consider the narrator of “Sonata Appassionata” to be unreliable and biased towards a destructively ascetic view-point where the creation of art is concerned.

Despite this willingness on the part of the narrator to condone the acts of a creative sociopath, Kim Tong-in inserts a third character, a social education advisor in the grand didactic tradition of Yi Kwang-su, who listens to K’s tale and provides his own rationally-biased perspective upon Paek Song-su’s extraordinary career as a composer. Unlike *Doktor Faustus*, which only presents Zeitblom’s point of view, Kim Tong-in’s short story is structured as a moral/artistic discussion between two intellectuals with wildly divergent occupations and opinions. This works to provide a sort of Nietzschean balance of the Dionysian (represented by K’s viewpoint) and the Apollonian (represented by the positivist social/legal view point of the education advisor), despite the extraordinary tragedy of the story itself. *Doktor Faustus*, on the other hand, is told only from the moral/humanist position of its narrator when considering the rise and fall of Adrian Leverkühn. However, given that the story of Paek Song-su is told in its entirety from the viewpoint of K, the ultimate opinion and judgment of the education advisor is subordinated (consciously or otherwise) to that of the narrator and the implied author.<sup>41</sup>

The plot of “Sonata Appassionata,” as mentioned, is told and developed by the music critic K, who relays the story of Paek Song-su to a social education advisor in an

attempt to ultimately reach a judgment upon the controversial composer's life and creative output. However, unlike other artists who have stood the test of time by going down in history for their great contributions to the humanities, Paek represents a unique problem in the sense that his acclaimed compositions resulted directly from committing some of the most morally reprehensible crimes imaginable. While celebrated figures such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven are almost universally viewed as paragons of Western music, largely due to their having produced great works of art while living a relatively positive or benign social existence, Paek Song-su represents the artist who produces sublime works of art on par with the two aforementioned masters, but can only do so by becoming a progressively malignant force within society.

Paek first realizes the connection crime and amorality have to his creativity following an act of revenge carried out against a local tobacconist. Spurred by the desperation of poverty and the responsibility of having to care for his ill mother, Paek noticed money lying unguarded on the tobacconist's counter and consciously made the choice to steal it. However, Paek was caught red-handed and would have to spend the next six months in prison—only to have his mother pass away in destitution during his prison sentence. Upon his release, Paek returned to the tobacconist's shop and, in a desperate act of vengeance, set the building on fire. Obviously, these two initial instances of crime committed by Paek have to do with a combination of desperation and vengeance and not as a means to furthering his creativity, nor as a prescribed outlet for his own repressed urges. Instead, his unsuccessful attempt to rob the shopkeeper resulted from a

“chance” he took while no one was looking, and the subsequent burning of the shop was done purely as an act of revenge for the death of his mother, which occurred as a result of being sentenced to prison for his initial crime. However, following the arson, Paek sought asylum in a local church, where he was able to siphon his emotions into a piece of music he titled “Sonata Appassionata.”

Paek’s “compositions” for the piano only exist in their purest form at the moment of conception. In other words, Paek Song-su fails miserably at his attempts to reproduce the creative power of his musical works as they were initially performed. When asked to perform them later by memory or through the aid of musical notation: “He tried five or six times, but the melody I heard was nothing but noise without regularity. Wildness, energy, and that haunting quality were no more heard. There was only the ashes of emotion” (Kim 22). The music critic K would later analyze this peculiarity in Paek’s creative output in a quasi-psychoanalytic fashion, positing the strict sense of morality instilled into him by his late mother as the reason for his aggression: “She brought him up to be as good as possible. Because of this good education, the furiousness [sic] and wildness bestowed on him by nature could not find any outward expression” (Kim 24). Hence, like the moment of autonomy or “spontaneity” that led the protagonist to commit his first crime, the authenticity of the music he creates can only be seen to exist within the moment of emotional release made possible and amplified by a lifetime of repression. However, even though free will factors into Paek’s decisions to break the law, as he begins realizing the benefit such acts have upon his creativity as a musician and

composer, breaking the law no longer becomes merely an act of free will but a malignant action with an ascetic purpose: namely, these transgressions become the steps Paek feels he now *must* take in order to express himself creatively. Like Adrian Leverkühn, Paek's newfound asceticism becomes tied to an inherently aesthetic art form, which further denotes the irony that both characters must shun the autonomy of others (in relation to their own) before they can create. However, unlike Leverkühn, Paek is less concerned with achieving greatness as a composer and more with achieving an ideal level of beauty and expression with his music.

Nietzsche, in his *Genealogy of Morals*, claims that the asceticism of the artist typically alternates between signifying “nothing, or too much” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 717). He invokes the Hegelian artistic/philosophical equilibrium achieved in the works of Goethe and Feuerbach as an example of the former. He explains this equilibrium as being representative of an asceticism that strives to promote a self-disciplined paradigm of sensual humanism tempered by transcendental ideals and moral codes, all without promoting the absolute validity of either. To Nietzsche, Goethe and Feuerbach's works signify a “healthy” neutrality that signifies “nothing” simply because they present difference, or non-identity, as a means to inspire change in static identity. Goethe's *Faust* (and by association, Mann's *Doktor Faustus*) exemplify this by presenting Mephistopheles (or the “Devil”) as the figure who charms Faust to life and the pursuit of happiness without incorporating the Christian ascetic morality that so permeated prior versions of the legend in art and literature. This dubious asceticism, as a

result, fails to live up to the requirements of an ascetic ideal that demands the renunciation of all distractions from its achievement—with the ascetic act itself inherently propelled by a certain “will to nothingness.”<sup>42</sup> Instead, such an ascetic overcomes nihilism, or the “will to nothingness,” by relying on contradiction and compromise, which, according to Nietzsche, works to “allure one to life” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 719) as opposed to repulsing one away from it. Therefore, the ascetic ideal for artists in this case pertains only to the development of their skill through self-discipline and sensibility, which translates as such in their works of art. In this way, the artist’s ascetic ideal is frequently benign, or in many cases, an act of creation in and of itself, as it is confined to the relationship the artist has with his or her work of art and the process of bringing said work of art into being.

On the other hand, Nietzsche feels that an asceticism that strives to signify “too many things” belongs to the truly ascetic artist, in the sense that there *is* a complete renunciation of aesthetic sensuality followed by a complete embrace of morality and/or other pre-established symbols, beliefs, and ideals set forth by the priests, artists, and philosophers of the past. They, in effect, are labeled by Nietzsche as “valets of morality or philosophy or religion” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 723). The revolutionary operatic composer Richard Wagner would come to embody this particular ascetic artist for Nietzsche, who originally glorified the composer for his stance on “music for music’s sake,” only to become swallowed by anti-Semitism and the growing call for a strong German nationalism.<sup>43</sup> This shift in focus served to influence much of Wagner’s

asceticism in his later years, with the composer's final opera *Parcifal* capsulizing the ultimate ascetic ideal for himself, and by association, the German people.<sup>44</sup>

Paek Song-su initially fits the mold of the “independent” artist that Nietzsche calls for in his assertion that “artists have for a long time past not taken up a sufficiently independent attitude, either in the world or against it, to warrant their valuations and the changes in these valuations exciting interest” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 723). In other words, artists don't pry themselves away from the “rules” long enough for them to be considered truly independent from that which already came before them or that which is/was sanctioned as “true” art by the world-at-large. Indeed, Paek's initial reliance upon chance as an impetus for artistic expression corresponds nicely with Nietzsche's “independent” artist whose art retains the essence of spontaneity without having to consciously rely upon the works and codes set forth by those who came before, or even by the artist himself. However, it does not take long for Kim's protagonist to lapse into a particularly nihilistic ascetic paradigm as he begins to realize or convince himself that immoral and criminal activity have become his primary *means* towards creative genius (an ascetic ideal) with each crime he commits needing to be more abominable than the last in order to maintain his creativity: “So, finally, I reached the stage of murder. One piece of music was produced every time a death occurred. So the few pieces produced since then each represent the life of one victim . . .” (Kim 205). Hence the original essence of spontaneity that was so rooted in the composition of “Sonata Appassionata” would become subordinated to Paek's newly devised malignant ascetic ideal—an ideal

that would claim the responsibility for countless atrocities as well as the composer's ultimate arrest and institutionalization.

The music critic K asks the social advisor the following after detailing the progressively heinous crimes committed by Paek and the music that was produced as a result: "If some *chance* led a certain person to commit crimes as well as discover his genius, should one curse that chance or be thankful for it?" (Kim 205; italics mine). Here is where Kim Tong-in's story turns into a philosophical and moral debate between the music critic and the social education advisor. On the one hand, K claims that Paek's works are "precious jewels which will light up human culture forever" (Kim 206). However, he contradicts himself by admitting that the strict restrictions of musical composition limits the meaning and artistic power of the work, as evidenced earlier by Paek's inability to capture the initial "aura" of his music when asked to reproduce it on paper or with repeat performances. How then can Paek's work "light up human culture forever" if future performances of the work can only pale in comparison to those initially given by the composer at the moment of conception? Given this apparent actuality, one cannot reasonably imagine a mutually beneficial relationship between what Paek *takes* from humanity and what he then *gives* back in the form of culture, simply because the world outside of the composer and the music critic will never experience the full creative power of his work first hand. Hence, similar to Adrian Leverkühn and his later circle of nihilistic cronies, there is a certain narcissism and predilection to nihilism that permeates the music critic's judgment of Paek Song-su's art and the actions taken in order for it to

come about. Even though the social education advisor, in his rejection of Paek Song-su's art, takes a stance similar to Serenus Zeitblom in Mann's novel, we find that his viewpoint is terribly overshadowed, almost to the point of being an afterthought, by the opinion and narrative power of K, not to mention Kim Tong-in himself as the implied author.

In an effort to provide a counterpoint to my argument for bringing non-identity and individual autonomy back from the margins of positivist thinking, I've presented two distinct, malignant ascetics: Adrian Leverkühn, a German composer who offers his soul to the devil so that he may produce great works of music over the course of his 24 remaining years, and the Korean composer Paek Song-su, whose own call to greatness would come at the expense of his own station in society, as well as the lives and well-being of countless others. Both protagonists experienced extreme traumas—the contraction of syphilis for Leverkühn, and for Paek, the death of his mother—that served to recast their life-affirming artistic paradigm into one of extreme nihilism. To these characters, such a shift worked to negate the importance of life and the autonomy of others in relation to the importance of creating the ideal work of art or, perhaps more ironically, achieving fame and greatness in the eyes of those they consider expendable. It is easy for such artists and their followers to rationalize the ideal work of art as being worth the destructive measures taken to achieve them. However, these malignant ascetics ignore that the basic foundation of their freedom as an individual to pursue their ideals is intrinsically shared by those individuals they destroy or disempower in the process.

Therefore, aside from the creation of abstract cultural artifacts of indeterminate value on an all-inclusive scale, Adrian Leverkühn and Paek Song-su essentially cannibalize their own freedom by forcefully taking away the freedom of others—creating a paradox that not only exacerbates the crisis of individual autonomy but further sequesters non-identity to the farthest regions of a dominant social identity their malignant actions only serve to reinforce.

### CODA

Too soon we embrace that  
Impermanent appetitive flux,  
Humorous and hard, which adults fear  
Is real and right, the irreverent place,  
The clown's cosmos.

W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety*

Now, more than ever before, the advent of simplified global communication and transportation has become a realistic means for peoples of the world to experience cultures other than their own first hand, and, in many cases, to become ideologically absorbed or marginalized by those who seek to profit by asserting dominance over others. There are those who live comfortably within the confines of carefully constructed positivist codes, as well as those who, by choice or otherwise, cannot operate under these codes, and instead try to change them—or at worst—go against them. Standing between these two camps are the humanists: those fearless individuals who see the world not as an oyster or a leviathan but as a place where all individuals have a genuine opportunity for the first time in human history to come together as brothers and sisters to devise ideals that would make the world a better place for every sentient being, not just a select group. Yet for each of these idealistic bodies, their hopeful world-view is consistently clouded by the prospect of failure or complete and utter destruction from without.

For Theodor Adorno, these groups are as correct as they are incorrect in their idealism. His *Negative Dialectics* teaches us that difference is not something that can be stamped out or brushed off to the side, and that if human history teaches us anything, differences only continue to become a greater aspect of human progress as space-time continues to expand and evolve. The many horrors we have witnessed over the course of human history often resulted from the positivist “objectivity” of those who see the difference that is borne from individual choice and subjectivity as an irrational danger in need of being controlled, marginalized, or wiped out completely. To these groups, identity is not only the key to maintaining strict control over the propagation of difference within their sequestered worlds but a powerful means towards an ideal of so-called progress that serves the interests of a select group of those belonging to a shared identity, leaving those who don’t belong, by choice or otherwise, to fend for themselves in an increasingly dangerous world that no longer considers their interests as being valid or even acceptable. Adorno, throughout most of his professional life, stood firmly against such non-inclusive positivist ideology, which had its roots firmly planted in the system of dialectics brought to prominence by Georg Frederic Hegel. Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* would not only subvert Hegel’s foundational philosophy but also provide a means by which the voices of those silenced by the “law” of a dominant identity/ideology could be heard. In other words, where proponents of positivism might consider such “voices” or non-identities as being the procedural “waste-product” of forming newer, more substantial identities, negative dialectics complicates the validity of positivism by stating

that such voices still exist and must be heard in constellation with already established “identities” in order to reflect the changing views and attitudes of each individual and not just the apocryphal “whole.”

William Blake struggled with what he saw to be the rationalization of religious and scientific absolutes in his time. Sparked by the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, who sought to reduce the entirety of Christian theology to a battle between the two opposing forces of heaven and hell, Blake wrote his famous long poem “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” as a response to what he saw to be the hypocrisy so inherent to the construction of static dualities. In the same breath, Blake also responds to the similar antagonistic systems of reason and energy being set up in the sciences following the advent of the European Enlightenment. In the poem, Blake calls for a “marriage” of heaven and hell so that the destructive war between empirically-constructed opposites could be called off in the name of mutually-obtained progress and peace. Blake crafted the poem as a satire of Swedenborg’s magnum opus *Heaven and Hell*, which attempts to set up an empirical argument for the separation of heaven and hell into two opposing entities based on the “objective” experience of having such information revealed to him by God. In Swedenborgian fashion, Blake uses “empirical” examples of his own from John Milton and other Christian texts to prove that “Heaven” and “Hell” have not always been at odds with each other, and in fact, the “Energies” of Hell have often been used by the “calm Reason” of Heaven to further its own agenda. Blake also pokes fun at Swedenborg’s “experiential” evidence of heaven and hell by using himself as a “tourist”

of the latter throughout much of the work. In the end, it is evident that Blake's problem is not with the concepts themselves but with being forced to accept the static opposition of empirically-constructed concepts as self-evident reality when the "facts" that make up such empirical arguments are flawed, unverifiable, and often ridiculous (e.g., being revealed by an unverifiable source such as God or the Devil). Therefore, Blake's poem acts as a polemic against what the author saw to be the increased hegemony of positivist reason over inherently abstract concepts (such as religion and science) that had traditionally been left for the free and autonomous interpretation of the individual.

In slight contrast to Blake, the Chinese Daoist sage Zhuangzi saw the danger in allowing the preponderance of empirical rules and definitions to overtake the base importance of periodically returning to natural law—or a "clean slate," if you will. Using the parable of the civic leader Yun Jiang's meeting with the wandering sage Hong Meng, Zhuangzi explains that the governing individual or body often allows empirically-constructed laws or determinations to cloud their perception of the *dao*—or the hidden natural force that determines our core relationship as humans with each other and with the natural world. One could view Zhuangzi's stance as being a mirror image of Blake's, not in the sense that their philosophies clash, but in that Zhuangzi could be seen to be an advocate for the most basic "Reason of Heaven" while Blake could be viewed as a proponent for the "Energy of Hell." I come to this conclusion based upon Zhuangzi's implied preference for maintaining law and order (by making distinctions) at its most basic and natural form, and Blake's (or the Devil's) admitted preference for irrational

energy and chaos as a means to continuously break down the stifling walls of reason that keep energy from moving the world forward. However, what both authors can be seen to agree upon is the validity and the necessity of reason and energy working together hand-in-hand to break the inevitable stalemate brought about by the war between empirically-constructed opposites.

My readings of Carl Jung and Hermann Hesse continued along the lines of looking at the individual's capacity for thinking and acting autonomously in an effort to gain an understanding of that which a positivist world-view often all too quickly rejects from consideration. Jung's "Seven Sermons to the Dead" and Hesse's *Demian*, in a manner similar to Blake's poem, deal with the idea of unifying reason and irrational energy so that the voices that were unfairly silenced by the positivist rationale for progress could be heard. In other words, Jung and Hesse use Gnostic ideas on the transience of identity to show that difference and contradiction will *always* exist between the cracks of a hard-lined empirical system (regardless of whether or not such a system is based in empirical fact or purely fictitious), and that the many "truths" we take for granted within such a system can, and should always be questioned. In reference to Gnostic theology, Jung establishes a dichotomy between our ability to distinguish "things" (Creatura) from the infinite expanse of all "things" (Pleroma). This dichotomy, similar to Blake's "marriage" of heaven and hell, is then harmonized by the deity Abraxas, who ensures that neither Creatura nor the Pleroma remain dominating identities

but are in constant negotiation with the other—mutually dependent upon the changes, or “Effects,” being brought about by such a relationship as a result.

Hesse’s *Demian* applies this ideology in order to gain additional perspective upon what some might consider to have been the “real world” issues of identity facing Germany at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Written as a bildungsroman from the view-point of the novel’s narrator Emil Sinclair, Hesse explores alternative interpretations of concepts and beliefs that had traditionally been held by many as unquestioned truth. Examples brought into existence by his friend Max Demian, such as his morally liberal interpretations of biblical stories, bring to light for Sinclair the cognitive dissonance that exists in his mind when considering alternative truths behind biblical scripture. The Gnostic god Abraxas is then introduced into Sinclair’s theological consciousness as a way to, at the very least, consider the possibility of all possibilities existing at once and not just those determinations set forth by the so-called followers and disciples of a Christian god. In the end, Emil Sinclair is able to expand his world-view to accommodate the very strong differences in opinion shared with him by Max Demian at the beginning of their relationship. However, his acceptance of all difference is cut short by his involvement in World War I and the atrocities he witnessed on the front lines—leading Sinclair to decide that some possibilities are best kept from ever being considered by mankind.

In my final chapter, I introduced the concept of the “malignant ascetic,” or a person who forgoes all extraneous distraction from an end-goal in a way that has

malignant consequences for the world around them. I began with a discussion of Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus*, which presented a protagonist who, upon realizing he had contracted syphilis, "experiences" a meeting with the devil and offers his soul in return for 24 additional years to pursue his goal of becoming a celebrated composer of music. Mann uses the German avant-garde composer Arnold Schoenberg as a model for his protagonist, Adrian Leverkühn, who strives to destructively "emancipate" dissonance from the rules and regulations expanded upon for centuries within the consonant tonal system in Western music. The resulting music is described as jarring and unlistenable by the narrator of the novel, Serenus Zeitblom, whose humanist tendencies mirror those of Mann, who in turn saw Schoenberg's twelve tone system as a direct attack upon the humanistic potential for German music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, Leverkühn's work during this period catches the attention of a particularly malignant individual by the name of Sextus Kridwiss, who then invites the composer to become a part of his ascetic circle. As an apparent analogy for what Mann witnessed in those who espoused the ascetic role of National Socialism in 1930s Germany, Leverkühn becomes a tool of his own unavoidable fatalism and that of a circle of malignant individuals whose ascetic goal becomes the destruction of bourgeois humanist sensibilities by returning Europe to a state of pre-medieval barbarism.

The Korean author Kim Tong-in also explores how the will of the individual could have malignant consequences for society. His short story details the troubled life of composer Paek Song-su, whose gifted talent for music is turned into a rationalization for

committing some of the most atrocious crimes imaginable. Following his imprisonment for petty theft, and the subsequent death of his impoverished mother as result, Paek chose to become a chaotically transgressive force within his society—committing acts of arson, murder, and rape as a means of inspiration when attempting to compose music at the piano. However, unlike Nietzsche’s definition of the ideal independent artist who relies on spontaneity to create new and original works of art, Paek’s process as an artist immediately turns into an ascetic one. Almost like an addiction, the composer becomes reliant upon progressively atrocious acts against his fellow man in order to be creative. All else that fails to conform to the requirements of this “addiction” is then marginalized or removed from consideration. Similar to Adrian Leverkühn of *Doktor Faustus*, Paek Song-su sacrifices his humanity and appreciation for beauty in life for a particularly malignant form of creative nihilism—using art as a mere excuse for his coldly violent acts against innocent people. For this reason, Kim Tong-in’s protagonist joins the ranks of Adrian Leverkühn and his circle as malignant ascetics, as they place the importance of achieving their own autonomous ideals above those of all others.

Literature, for time immemorial, has been an outlet for us to not only celebrate our heroic aptitude and success, but perhaps more importantly, to detail and lay bare our struggles to actually become human. For many, literature is the only means to privately exercise one’s autonomous subjectivity in a world that systematically ensures that certain voices remain silenced in an individual or collaborative context. Each author discussed thus far struggled in some fashion with the rise of a dominant group or ideology that

threatened to decimate their own subjective outlook on life. They, in essence, were, and in many cases still are the “non-identities” whose value within various monolithic structures of positive identity (e.g., canons of literature, history books, medical journals, etc.) has been determined to be too “dangerous,” “infinitesimal,” or “irrational” to be considered or taken seriously by the world-at-large. Thus, like so many who have cried out in silence, using literature as their only means of being heard, our “positive” dialectical outlook on the way things “are” and “need to be” almost certainly ensures, for many, that their voices will never be heard or taken into consideration by anyone other than themselves and their immediate circle. Many are able to cope with such a circumstance, living out their lives in quiet sorrow, knowing that the dreams they have or had for themselves or their kin might never come to fruition. Yet there are also those who lash out in anger, hoping to destructively bring down the dominant identity which forces their own into shackles, thereby harboring a predilection towards malignancy that, in many cases, knows only the bounds of an ascetic ideal.

In conclusion, my hope for a more universal understanding of Adorno’s world-view as a constellation of the infinite possibility and not just a tower constructed from finite positivist epistemology is bolstered in many ways by changes occurring in the world as we speak—where the voices of those once sequestered to the silent confines of iron houses are at last beginning to mouth their own words on the outside. This has become a reality because of those who have decided to free themselves through resourcefully defying an overarching identity that sought to silence them forever. Those

who fend off the natural call for an end to their own self-imposed greatness and entitlement materialize before us as malignant ascetics, whose goals towards an ideal that is shared with no more than the individual or group who benefits from it continue to welcome, and in many cases, instigate the destruction of those who subjectively choose to disagree. Through a carefully optimistic consideration of the world as a series of constellations that connect and intertwine in infinite variations so that all things matter in a constantly evolving universe, it is my hope that one day the positivist systems that work tirelessly to subjugate the autonomy of the individual will be shed in favor of the joy that comes with collaboration, compromise, and a renewed sense of infinite discovery.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I mention *will* here because even if a “categorical imperative” is sensed by the individual, he or she might will his or herself to ignore it, e.g., cognitive dissonance.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Redmond’s web-only translation of Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* does not have page numbers. It is being utilized in the place of existing translations of the work because it currently stands as the best, most informative translation currently extant. Also, the abbreviation ND will be used to distinguish citations from other works by Adorno.

<sup>3</sup> See Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety* and Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* for a more contemporary application of Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy regarding anxiety. Sartre developed Kierkegaard’s concept of existential despair into the concept of anguish, or vertigo. “First we must acknowledge that Kierkegaard is right; anguish is distinguished from fear in that fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anguish is anguish before myself. *Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over*” (Sartre 65; italics mine).

<sup>4</sup> Theodor Adorno contends that Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative can never be shared universally as a be-all, end-all to human law given that humanity and its potential for infinite experience is always in a state of becoming (e.g., the possibility that murder might become a moral act, despite the contemporary absurdity of such a possibility in Western morality): “The true origin of moral categories is registered in them with greater power than Kant’s intention is able to handle. Thus the famed variant of the categorical imperative from the Foundation: ‘Act so, that you always use the humanity in your person, as much as in every other person, at the same time as an end, never merely as means,’ then ‘humanity,’ the human potential in human beings, may have been meant only as a regulative idea; humanity, the principle of human existence, by no means the sum of all human beings, is not yet realized” (Adorno, ND).

<sup>5</sup> See Adorno and Horkheimer’s ideas on counter-enlightenment in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

<sup>6</sup> Adorno uses the example of the post-Auschwitz world to explain how malleable and subject to positivistic change the categorical imperative truly is: “Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative upon humanity in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thinking and conduct, so that Auschwitz never repeats itself, so that nothing similar ever happen again” (Adorno, ND). Positivism’s reactionary response to “evil” often works against itself by further limiting the freedoms of individuals so that a very specific instance in history can never repeat itself, often by adding more “rules” to the definition of a universal categorical imperative (thereby recasting the term as inherently positivistic). This can be seen to have the unintended opposite effect, where one could speculate that the imposed limitation of freedom (an extreme example being the state of Germany immediately following the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles) is directly proportional to the level of future atrocities committed as a result (the rise and rule of Hitler and the Nazi party). Auschwitz may not repeat itself, but the possibility of something far worse occurring can never be forecasted or preempted through the use of reason or an “adjustable” categorical imperative.

<sup>7</sup> I am careful not to confuse this ideal with an “aesthetic” one, which raises the pursuit of pleasure and sensuality to a higher level than that of ascetic “discipline.” In Mann’s work, the protagonist is obviously ascetic in his pursuits simply because his pact with the devil forces him to forswear all sensuality and pleasure in his life and work. Likewise, in Kim’s work, it is apparent that his acts, albeit Dionysian and perhaps “aesthetic” in nature, are indeed ascetic due to the fact that he derives no pleasure from them, and instead relies upon them as one would a drug for the creation of his art.

<sup>8</sup> The term alludes to a passage from W.H. Auden’s epilogue “The Age of Anxiety,” which will be quoted in full later in my thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Also “speculative reason”—or the belief that a certain “sum total” of reason exists *a priori*.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin expanded upon the concept of the “messiah” as a historical concept in his aphoristic essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

<sup>11</sup> A similar method of titling can be seen in the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible, where many of its books are simply named after the prophets or apostles central to the texts' creation.

<sup>12</sup> Translations are mine; cross-referenced with an old, public domain translation of the work titled "The Writings of Chuang Tzu" (1891) by James Legge located on the same web site. The Chinese text is taken from the following source per the website: 《莊子譯注》曹礎基, 中華書局, 2002年.

<sup>13</sup> The name is a play on words; on the one hand, it can mean "Silly Goose," and on the other, it can mean "Great Cover-up."

<sup>14</sup> Unlike the "Inner Chapters" (內篇 [nèi piān]), which are attributed directly to Zhuangzi, the "Outer Chapters" are attributed to his students and/or other similar thinkers of the period.

<sup>15</sup> This word can also mean "breath," the most basic unit of energy.

<sup>16</sup> One of the more renowned passages of the *Daodejing* directly challenges the suitability of language when trying to communicate complex concepts, such as the *dao* itself: "道可道, 非常道.

名可名, 非常名." The Way that can be described is not the true Way. The name that can be named is not the constant Name."

<sup>17</sup> The root word (渾沌, or *hùndùn*), which is repeated poetically in Chinese, literally means "muddled confusion," but is used to represent "primordial and central chaos."

<sup>18</sup> The direct pronunciation from Greek would be "Abraxas," which remains the most correct pronunciation. However, Jung and Hesse both use the more popularized pronunciation of the name. Therefore, for the purposes of my thesis I will follow suit.

<sup>19</sup> The attribution of writings to various historical personae he believed to be "unconsciously" channeling was particularly prevalent in Jung's works during this period, especially in his *Red Book*.

<sup>20</sup> Because the online source does not include page numbers, I have cited the number of the sermon from which the quotation was taken.

<sup>21</sup> Adorno discusses the necessity of distinction as well in his *Negative Dialectics*: “Without it the synthetic function of thinking, abstractive unification, would not be possible: to aggregate what is the same means necessarily to separate it from what is different” (Adorno, ND). Without distinction all would either be the same or different, thereby making thought unnecessary.

<sup>22</sup> The novel was actually published under the pseudonym “Emil Sinclair.”

<sup>23</sup> Freudian psychoanalyst and critic Jacques Lacan wrote extensively on the psychoanalytic potential of James Joyce’s literary works, particularly *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Through using examples from Joyce’s life and work, Lacan was able to develop his psychoanalytic concept of *sinthome* (derived from the French word for “symptom”) (Loose).

<sup>24</sup> The list I am referring to is the famous list of “100 Best Novels in the English Language” put out by Modern Library. This list can be viewed online here: <http://www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/100-best-novels/>

<sup>25</sup> Here we see the obvious influence of Nietzsche’s philosophy, particularly his ideas concerning the “will to power” (Cain) and his distaste for those who blindly adhere to “ascetic ideals” (Abel). These, along with other aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy will be discussed later.

<sup>26</sup> The outbreak of World War I leads Sinclair to join the military to help with the war effort. It is during this period that he is able to see the tragic result of a system of dominance that went on to ravage his nation and the whole of Europe. This experience not only opens Sinclair’s mind to the unlimited potential for evil and malignancy in the world, but that thought and careful consideration is necessary to avoid similar catastrophes in the future.

<sup>27</sup> It’s interesting to point out Hesse’s use of the concept “world of light” as an analogous metaphor for the conservative thought illustrated by Blake as the “cavern of reason” and much earlier by Plato in his “Allegory of the Cave.” The use of an almost opposing conceptualization of the “cave” as the “world of light” shows how terminology can often confuse how we associate meaning.

<sup>28</sup> Austrian composer Gustav Mahler (a strong component of the humanist cultural movement in German art during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) took Schoenberg under his wing as a protégé during the early stages of the latter's career. Mahler supported and "watched over" Schoenberg even when he could no longer understand or appreciate the younger composer's music. Mahler was considered to be one of the few traditionalists, if not the only one, to appreciate Schoenberg's aspirations, and often wondered what would become of the younger man after his death (Stuckenschmidt).

<sup>29</sup> "And it is true that Schoenberg's music demands from the very beginning active and concentrated participation, the most acute attention to simultaneous multiplicity, the renunciation of the customary crutches of a listening which always knows what to expect [e.g., tonality], the intensive perception of the unique and specific, and the ability to grasp precisely the individual characteristics, often changing in the smallest space, and their history, devoid of all repetition" (Prisms, 149).

<sup>30</sup> Where Hermann Hesse's work could be seen as being influenced by the more liberal ideas of Carl Jung, Mann belonged to the generation of German authors who became profoundly influenced (and perhaps worried) by the classification of subjective human experiences into several so-called "objective" categories of mental illness and health devised by Sigmund Freud and his circle.

<sup>31</sup> It's important to consider that the entire work is told from the viewpoint of the narrator and friend of the protagonist, Serenus Zeitblom. Zeitblom, like Mann himself, is a philosophical foil to Leverkühn's dark asceticism and observes his decline into madness from the perspective of a humanist who disagrees with the protagonist's destructive obsession with achieving greatness before death takes him. However, as readers, we must consider Zeitblom's viewpoint to be biased and therefore unreliable.

<sup>32</sup> However, religious connotations aside, Kierkegaard's renowned "leap of faith" is described by Adorno as an imaginary means to freedom for the subject: "The philosophic leap, Kierkegaard's Ur-gesture, is itself the caprice by which it imagines to escape the subjugation of the subject under being" (Adorno, ND).

Therefore, instead of being a solution to despair, such despair is merely pushed off to a later point, to be reconsidered when the act of “being” becomes unbearable once more.

<sup>33</sup> The strict adherence to this technique would later be formalized under the category of “serialism” or “serial music.”

<sup>34</sup> What Schoenberg did succeed at doing was creating a viable antithesis to tonal music—a “heaven” to the “hell” represented by tonality, if you will: “For Schoenberg, the method of composition in twelve tones was charged with a deeply spiritual significance. By subjecting music to a single unifying idea which, nevertheless, allowed for an astounding variety of compositional possibilities, it offered an ‘absolute and unitary perception’ which opened up a musical space in which ‘as in Swedenborg’s heaven. . .there is no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward” (Stuckenschmidt 10).

<sup>35</sup> Literally: “black magician” in Latin.

<sup>36</sup> The name is an apparent play on the German word *kreideweiss*, or “chalk-white.”

<sup>37</sup> Reed goes on to compare Zeitblom’s reaction to Kridwiss’ cynical ideals with Mann’s reaction to those of German historian Oswald Spengler, whose work is considered to have influenced the rise of National Socialism in Germany: “[Spengler] outdid Nietzsche in pronouncing Europe decadent and accepted future catastrophe with a fatalism which provoked Mann, as the Kridwiss circle’s fatalism provokes Zeitblom” (Reed 378).

<sup>38</sup> The idea of having to surrender one’s own intellectual findings as an autonomous Korean individual to a “ready-made” set of empirical determinations made by the intellectuals of an occupying force (Japan, and by proxy, the West) was a major theme in several works of Korean literature written during the period.

<sup>39</sup> Given that no translations currently exist with a different title, this is actually the *only* title currently used in English. I personally find it to be a derivative and somewhat inadequate translation of the Korean title, which has a more sinister and complex meaning—something more akin to “destructive chaos” or “psychosis.” The word “Appassionata,” aside from being an obvious reference to Beethoven’s famous

piano sonata (Op. 57), doesn't carry the connotations of uncontrollable destruction and insanity of the Korean word "gwangyom."

<sup>40</sup> Literally: "Three Thousand Ri," where *ri* (里) is usually used in Chinese written language to express a generic unit of long distance, similar to the "mile" in English.

<sup>41</sup> Just as Serenus Zeitblom's humanist perspective can be seen to represent Mann's own, the music critic K's belief that great art absolves the artist of the crimes that were committed in order to create it implies Kim Tong-in's own stance on the subject.

<sup>42</sup> One could say that the ascetic ideal does not exist, but is always in the process of *becoming*. Hence it is nothing (at any given present moment), and all is nothing in relation to it.

<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche's critical essay "Nietzsche Contra Wagner" spells out in great detail the disappointing artistic and life choices made by Richard Wagner over the course of his career—decisions made on the part of the composer that led Nietzsche to completely shift his once glowing impression of Wagner's music and artistic philosophy.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche's words concerning Wagner's final opera and its overt glorification of the ascetic life were harsh to say the least: "For it seems at any rate that [Wagner] eventually wished to *change his teaching* on [the subject of sensuality] . . . and not only is that the case with the Parsifal trumpets on the stage: in the melancholy, cramped, and embarrassed lucubrations of his later years, there are a hundred places in which there are manifestations of a secret wish and will, a despondent, uncertain, unavowed will to preach actual retrogression, conversion, Christianity, medievalism, and to say to his disciples, 'All is vanity! Seek salvation elsewhere!' Even the 'blood of the Redeemer' is once invoked." (Nietzsche, GM 721)