ON READING NARCISSISTIC TEXTS

AN OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY VIEW
OF THE
LIFE AND WORKS
OF
SØREN KIERKEGAARD

SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the psychoanalytical concept of narcissism, and the effect that texts written by narcissistic writers have upon their readers. I use Søren Kierkegaard as an example of a narcissistic writer who produced narcissistic texts.

In order to follow through the logic of the thesis, it is necessary to explain first the Freudian idea of narcissism, and then narcissism as considered by one post-Freudian school called Object Relations theory. It is also necessary, second, to summarise a psychoanalytic model of what happens when we read any kind of text. The methodology of this thesis is usually called psychobiography, the systematic application of psychodynamic principles to the study of a life, and so, third, both the principles and some of the issues of this methodology are presented.

Having established an operational definition of narcissism, the thesis looks first at Kierkegaard's life, identifying a series of key events or stages that can be re-interpreted on the assumption that Kierkegaard was narcissistic. Three of his key texts are considered next - *Fear and Trembling*, *Works of Love* and *The Sickness Unto Death*. Each of these can be interpreted to show how his narcissism influenced his writing.

Two substantial appendices are included. The first is a comment upon the relationship between God and psychoanalysis, presented primarily to introduce the ideas of Donald Winnicott. The second is on the concept of psychopathology, a difficult topic, since it is at once both heavily value laden, but is also persistent in any analysis of psychological difference.

In conclusion I refer to several key Kierkegaardian themes, emphasising their narcissistic origins, and ask the reader to reflect upon their own responses to these issues, to consider how Kierkegaard's narcissism influences their own emotions, and how these in turn affect any cognitive understanding of Søren Kierkegaard.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A SUBJECTIVE PREFACE

Very many people have fallen under the spell of Søren Kierkegaard. Many have tried to make sense of what he said. Almost as many, I fear, have had but limited success. But what is fascinating, deeply fascinating, is how most commentators feel a need to relate personally to this writer: to comment, usually for good, but sometimes for ill, on the personal effect Kierkegaard has had upon them. So in most instances of the secondary literature, somewhere in the introduction, or in some footnote, there is a small though often large comment about how that writer first met the ideas or reputation of Kierkegaard. It would seem that Kierkegaard is not just another author, but one who somehow engages us in an unusual way. Most secondary writers have a personal story to tell, but much more interestingly, they want to tell it.

Why? What does Kierkegaard do to us that makes our relationship with him seemingly qualitatively different from other philosophers or theologians? Julia Watkin, for example, one of the most assiduous writers, scholars and bibliographers of Kierkegaard's output, tells her story of how at Bristol University:

> Dr (later Professor) John Kent, who regularly filleted the big names in religious studies like so many fish, was strangely lenient with Kierkegaard, thus arousing my curiosity and expectancy. This expectancy was not disappointed, since when I began to read Kierkegaard in 1972, I saw in a flash of illumination that I was encountering a great mind that had something to say to the problems of our time. [1]

And there is the famous story of how David Swenson, a formidable Kierkegaard scholar essentially of the nineteenth century, and the very first Kierkegaard translator and champion in the USA, encountered *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in the Minnesota University library, where in 1898 he was a teaching assistant:

> It was quite by accident that one day I picked up a Danish book from the shelves of the library, a book which seemed to have philosophical content. The name of the author told me nothing, for I had never

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[1] Watkin (1997) Preface.

heard of Søren Kierkegaard. On a venture, I took the book home. It was Saturday evening, and I did not rise from the reading begun on reaching home, until half past two Sunday morning. By Sunday night I had finished the more than five hundred closely printed pages of the book, so impossible was it for me to lay it aside. [2]

In the introduction to a very recent text, Peter Mehl likens his relationship with Kierkegaard to that with his wife:

> So too has my relationship with Kierkegaard gone: until now it is a mutually critical partnership. We will never divorce and I do not think we could. He will always be with me, yet he is not as immediately infatuating as he initially was. He now occupies a place in my consciousness that is pervasive but not all consuming. [3]

And, continuing the theme of post-nuptial surprises, the distinguished British Kierkegaardian scholar, George Pattison, admits to something similar:

> Hilary, my partner, had no ideas when she married me that she was going to have to share so much of her living space with the great Danish writer, with whom, like me, she has a love-hate relationship. Not quite a ménage a trois, but it sometimes, I fear, feels like it. [4]

But long before Kierkegaard became fashionable, or known outside the Nordic countries, it was clear that the act of reading the works of this writer had an impact on the reader. The Kierkegaard scholar P A Heiberg in his 1895 text '*Contributions towards a psychological portrait of Søren Kierkegaard in childhood and youth'* commented:

> Søren Kierkegaard's personality forces the objective scientific enquirer, by an arresting glance, as it were, to make a subjective "preface". [5]

And Henriksen, in a major analysis of the early reception of Kierkegaard's writings says:

> About him there is something physically present rendering possible an intimate reaction. Neither the passionate and penetrative spirit of production, or the shocking or mystifying aspect of his personal existence, nor what was wounding and goading in his final

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[2] Swenson (1983) p 1 (Later Swenson added '*I did not wholly understand it at the first reading, nor indeed the second or third...'* an admission that surely gives hope to us all.)
[3] Mehl (2005) Preface.
[4] Pattison (1992) xii.
[5] P A Heiberg (1895) p 2.

unscrupulous behaviour, will fully explain the force of attraction issuing from him. [6]

In my own case, involvement with Kierkegaard began with my departure for university in the early 1960's. A good friend, the local vicar, gave me a copy of *The Sickness unto Death*, saying he thought I might eventually find it a good read; it was to be some time before I would agree with him. Against advice from many [7], I went up to study psychology. At that time, psychology, perhaps surprisingly, was a less than popular subject: there were just nine of us in the first year class. [8] Our Professor was the last Freudian to be appointed to an undergraduate chair in the UK. He was a caricature of a Freudian Professor, anal retentive in the extreme [9], an authoritarian personality worthy of a case conference. Even though traditional Freudian psychology was under very severe attack from both the behaviourists on one side and the newly emerging cognitive scientists on the other, Nero-like he lectured on regardless.

The final year was given over almost entirely to Freudian theory. In the last spring term, we were required to write a five thousand-word paper on a major topic in theory, and then run a two-hour seminar with our peers under the evaluating eye of the Professor. In order to allocate topics to the nine of us, the Professor, in a still-surreal episode, solemnly tore a sheet of paper into nine squares, wrote one topic on each square, and then placed the folded notes into his upturned mortar-board.[10] We each picked out a square. Mine read '*Repression*'. This was the very last topic I wanted. Perhaps as reaction to so much Freud, or perhaps as evidence of some unresolved personal oedipal issues, I was finding both the learned Professor and the great Sigmund irksome in the extreme. Besides, at that time I was

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[6] Henriksen (1951) p 13.

[7] I still have a vivid memory of being called to see the Careers Master at school in my final year. I told him that I wanted to read Psychology. I watched, bemused, as he tried in his notes to spell the word 'Psychology'. After the third failed attempt, he put down his pen and said: '*Greenhalgh, I think you might be better off studying Chemistry*', clearly a word he could spell. So it was, at that time, that entire careers of young men were determined in the English Public School system.

[8] This compares, just a generation later, with my daughter's first year class of some nine hundred students.

[9] He collected both stamps *and* butterflies.

[10] He *always* wore a mortar board.

very influenced by the anti-psychiatry school: Rachmann, the co-inventor of behaviour therapy, had been to lecture; R D Laing was my hero. How was I to write 5,000 words on something I didn't even believe existed? So I turned to *The Sickness unto Death*. I wrote a very poor paper, and gave an exceedingly ungracious seminar, but what I gained was an understanding of why Freud's drive theory was ultimately barren. And my own affair with Kierkegaard had begun.

Immediately after graduating, the distancing from Freud continued with a second degree in neuropsychology, and I embarked on a career ostensibly remote from psychology. But as a very full and happy personal life and career began to mellow, the pull of Freud returned. Without knowing exactly what it was, I determined to come to terms with Object Relations theory, something never even mentioned in my entire undergraduate time, but which I knew was important. I found Greenberg and Mitchell's standard text [11], and read it over a weekend. I was entranced. The chapter on Ronald Fairbairn transformed my understanding of how people relate, and for the very first time gave me a model of psychopathology that made sense. The sticking point of classical Freudian theory was always with obsessive or compulsive behaviours, in the most general sense. Why do individuals consistently and repeatedly put themselves into positions of self-harm, through relationships, through actions? Fairbairn's tripartite model provided such a real and moving answer.

At the same time, I had been reading random bits of Kierkegaard, and after a particularly successful client assignment, I purchased the entire Hong set, as well as the Journals and Papers. I resolved to read all 25 volumes in order, but soon gave up the chronological imperative, concentrating instead on the Journals. The Journals were fascinating, easily fulfilling Dru's opinion that '*to read these journals is to live in the intimacy of one of the most extraordinary original men in the whole of the nineteenth century*'[12]. But a strange thing happened: I found myself responding over and over again to the detail of his life with the thought: '*this man is not well.*' It was not a

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[11] Greenberg and Mitchell (1983).

technical or clinical diagnosis, but it was persistent. I had no real label for what I was sensing, but something became apparent on almost every page. Then as my Object Relations theory reading expanded into Self-Psychology, I encountered Heinz Kohut's text on narcissism. His simple idea, that narcissism is a natural stage for us all, and that we grow out of it to a greater or lesser extent but never completely, provided a concept that avoided heavy handed psychoanalytic theory, yet was focused enough to explain what I was reading in the Journals and Papers. The thesis began to form, and immediately there was evidence of Kierkegaard's narcissism throughout his Journals and major texts. Thus armed, I completed the chronological reading task.

Years before, I had read the appropriate texts of psychiatric diagnosis, but felt then, as I do now, that much of orthodox psychiatric nosology remains in the gift of the US pharmaceutical and insurance companies, designed to increase the profits of the former and minimise the claims against the latter. So Narcissistic Personality Disorder, the classic modern diagnostic envelope for either the Object Relations ideas on narcissism or Kohut's concept, was of little help in understanding Kierkegaard. But late twentieth century developments in psychoanalytic theory were. It was the later of work of Stephen Mitchell, cutting through so much of the post-modern confusion in psychoanalysis that motivated me most. He seemed to have brought about a serious reduction, refinement and concentration of core concepts in psychoanalysis. The work of Grotstein, the wonderfully transparent writings of Patrick Casement, and particularly the revolutionary writings of Harold Searle, all emphasised the two key ideas of countertransference and projective identification, ideas that stand in such contrast to Freud's original thinking.

In Freud's original drive theory, the key processes were Repression and Displacement. These 'terrible twins' were the engines that made basic psychodynamics happen. Repression is a straightforward process, whereby the internal censor finds certain actions or events so unacceptable that the

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[12] Dru (1958) Cover comments.

memory of them is pushed below the level of consciousness. There they will remain until the process of psychoanalysis permits their release. We all have repressed material, and it makes itself known through Freud's classic routes of dreams, slips of the tongue and apparently physical ailments. Displacement refers to the idiosyncratic process whereby my personal and private psychodynamic development leads me have a set of connections for any given word or concept. The simple word '*brother*' may involve me in mainly unconscious memories and fantasies that are unique to me. Many of these will be repressed material. So when I use the word '*brother*' it has a specific set of shades of meaning or implications, most of which remain unconscious, but which affect my choice and use of the word. In short, I use the word differently, in however subtle and slight a way, from anybody else, though I may not be aware of this difference. But when *you* hear me use the word '*brother*', your own psyche and psychodynamic development results in a different set of associations, memories and fantasises, also based on repressed material.

These two concepts, it can be argued, were the foundation of the *'Death of the Author'* school in French writing in the 1960s and later. If the author, by definition cannot be sure of the private meaning they intend by the use of any word, then authorial intent can at least be questioned. And if I similarly am unaware of the meanings and associations I make to that same word, then my reading can have no privileged place either. It was this line of thinking was to give rise to the beguiling phrase from Jaques Lacan that *'the unconscious is structured like a language'* [13]

However, the assumption implicit on all of the above is that the word, the signifier, is transmitted from the author to the reader like some tiny missile, some independent object passing through the ether. By contrast Object Relations theory suggests that communication is a highly active and collaborative process, and without denying repression and displacement, both the author and the reader are real people that respond to each other in ways that are critical for hermeneutics. While the author may or may not

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[13] Lacan (1966) Ecrits p 444.

know what he or she meant by a word, and while equally I may well not know what he or she meant, nor what I mean, nonetheless, the pairing of that author with me, the act of my reading that author, is a unique and non-reproducible process. What happens when I read a text cannot easily be explained by Drive theory; for Object Relations theory this is home turf. But instead of Drive theory's actuating processes of Repression and Displacement, Object Relations theory suggests Projective Identification and Countertransference.

Projective identification is a less than straightforward concept, and it will be unravelled in some detail below. Essentially, it suggests that when we communicate, we send out from our mainly unconscious selves some part of us that, at that moment, we wish to be rid of; and we implant this, so to speak, in the reader. The reader may not want to receive this gift, but in some way it is accepted, for reasons to do with their own psychodynamics. Projective identification is essentially about the relationship, the active involvement, of the author with the reader. Words are no longer impersonal signifiers but are highly charged emotional missiles, literally leaving one unconscious and entering into another.

Countertransference can be thought of as the same process viewed from the other end. When I listen to an author, I cannot attend only to his words: the author is a person modified in my perception by my own psychodynamics, modified, in summary, into an *object* that bears some correspondence to the real author, but always an incomplete correspondence. So my response to her words are modified and mediated by my response to her, again with unconscious and repressed processes informing this perception.

It was these two concepts that finally gave the thesis real shape: Søren Kierkegaard wrote uniquely narcissistic texts, and this is why he engages us in an unusual way. This is why we feel the need to make some comment about our personal relationship with Kierkegaard. Because of his admitted style and technology - the pseudonymous authors, the use of irony, the Chinese puzzles - Kierkegaard engages us intellectually like no other author. But his narcissism arrests us emotionally, snaring the narcissist in all of us.

This is about more than his abstract ideas: Kierkegaard's writings appeal and frustrate and preoccupy us both intellectually and emotionally. Kierkegaard the writer, the person, touches something in all of us, and what he touches is our resolved or unresolved narcissism. The best way to talk about this unadmitted engagement is through the concepts of projective identification and countertransference.

So this thesis is an attempt to make sense of Søren Kierkegaard, to make sense of how we read his texts and what they do to us. Without admitting this unconscious aspects of what goes on when we read Kierkegaard, I contend that any hermeneutic is incomplete.

1 INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

This thesis is about the process of reading, but it is not a general theory of reading. It is, in Lyotard's phrase, a mini-narrative. It is about the unconscious processes that take place when we read certain kinds of text. Texts that are written by people whom I shall call narcissists (to be defined below) are unlike other kinds of texts, and affect the reader in particular ways. In order to make this idea more meaningful, I use an example of one particular thinker and writer, Søren Kierkegaard, and try to give one explanation of what happens when we encounter his ideas.

The academic question to be answered is thus: what happens when we read narcissistic texts? In particular, what happens when we read texts by Kierkegaard?

I am suggesting that, apart from the obvious cognitive and intellectual challenge that Kierkegaard poses for every reader, he also touches every reader emotionally. For most of us, those with resolved narcissism,[14] it is a transient touch that can be managed by the psychic reality of how the reader responds to these ideas. But for some of us, as unresolved narcissists, it opens a deep and terrible wound. Demonstrably, there are tens of thousands of secondary texts on Kierkegaard [15]. My claim is that every one of these may be enriched by at least a moment's reflection to consider the emotional response of the author to Kierkegaard's narcissism. For some of these secondary texts, there might be a need for the author to deconstruct their views and comments based on a more reflective perception of how their unconscious interaction with Kierkegaard has affected their ratiocination. For any reader or commentator of Kierkegaard, without a consideration of the emotional effect of Kierkegaard's narcissism, I suggest that their insights, propositions and observations may not be as profound as they otherwise might be.

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[14] To be defined below and contrasted with a resolved narcissist. Note again that these terms refer to the extremes of a spectrum.
[15] Watkin (2001).

Clearly, I first have to explain the idea of narcissism. It is essentially a universal condition, one through which we all pass in early life. Some remain forever beholden to it, unable to grow away from it for reasons to do with personal nurture; for most it remains a background set of emotions and responses, but still present, and capable of being aroused. This is a complex story, and involves first the origins of the ideas of psychoanalysis, especially drive theory, and the later development that is object relations theory. These are, for the purpose of this thesis, viewed as foundational building blocks of psychic processes, and no syndrome can be considered without reference to these concepts: they provide a language that enables discussion. But this language is a private language, private, that is, in origin, designed essentially to permit better descriptions of psychopathological processes. It is a language for talking about those suffering from what is still called mental illness. In this thesis I refer to narcissism as a syndrome, a way of being in the world, and try to avoid reference to normality and abnormality (other than for historical reasons). Narcissism is not a state of being but a way of being: it involves dynamic processes. All of us have access to these processes, but those to be called unresolved narcissists use them to a degree that resolved narcissists would find unreasonable. There are certain processes, unique in their constellation, that inform and underpin how narcissists think, believe and behave. In this sense, the narcissistic syndrome is different from any other. Only by first understanding and identifying these processes can we discuss the narcissistic syndrome.

I make the important difference between those who have resolved their narcissism, and those that have not. Narcissism begins as a universal process in infancy, [16] but for most it becomes resolved sufficiently enough that we can lead lives that we might term good-enough. [17] But for some, their neonatal narcissism is never resolved, and remains to afflict and colour every aspect of their lives.

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[16] This is a basic psychodynamic view. There are of course others. This thesis is an object relations study, and I do not consider Biosocial Learning models, Cognitive approaches or Social approaches. See Ronningstam (2005) Ch 1.
[17] The term is borrowed from Winnicott, introduced in Appendix II.

But why pick Kierkegaard as an example of the narcissist? Kierkegaard writes about topics exceptionally dear to every narcissist's heart – the self, the importance of the subjective, approaching God – and he does this with unique intensity. Can I show that Kierkegaard was narcissistic, leaving aside a few anecdotes? Can a more scientific or substantial case be made that this was how he lived his life? How can this be shown, how can it be demonstrated?

To do this, I use a methodology called psychobiography. This is not to show the true explanation of a life, but to create what is perhaps a new life, a new version of a life. Lives are not recreated through psychological analyses about causative factors, but are created in the here and now. There is not a single explanation, there is never a 'true' reading of a whole life: making sense of a life depends on *why* we want to make sense of it.

If, at the end of all this, having gone through the processes described above, and with all the caveats listed, I can claim that a very plausible way of viewing the life and work of Kierkegaard is through, as it were, narcissistic spectacles, how does this one example help our understanding of the reading process?

The unconscious of the narcissistic writer speaks directly, without conscious mediation, to the unconscious of the narcissistic reader, and we are all narcissists to some degree. There are certain psychodynamic processes that give a foundation to what happens when we read a narcissistic text. I do not claim objectivity for these processes: they are probably of our time and subject to future modification or even eclipse, but for now they are a most competent working model; they can be readily applied to Kierkegaard's life and his writings. These processes help us understand how narcissism in a writer affects what happens when we read their texts. To read Kierkegaard's texts in the light of a more profound recognition of his narcissism greatly enriches these texts, and by implication allows us a new way into reading similar texts.

The structure of the thesis is as follows.

There are three key concepts or ideas to explain. The first is the concept of narcissism, the second, the impact of psychodynamics on the reading process; and the third is psychobiography itself. There must also be an introduction to the person and persona that is Søren Kierkegaard. Further, there are two other prefaces, relegated to appendices. First I must declare my own position on the very notion of the psychologically abnormal, the mentally ill, on psychopathology. Much of the explication in this thesis uses classical medical language. And much of this is extensively, perhaps completely value-laden, and some time is spent assembling evidence for this point of view. Second I must consider the claim by Freud that religion is just a neurosis, and that hence, Kierkegaard's writings, along with those of many others, are no more than neurotic ramblings.

I look at the life of Søren Kierkegaard by focusing on a handful of key people and key events in his life. Three texts are considered in detail - *Fear and Trembling*, *Works of Love* and *The Sickness Unto Death* - taking from all of these evidence as I see it of narcissism. So here I am creating a new Kierkegaard, a new past, a new self, and one that helps us in our hermeneutic. This is not the scientific task of elucidating causes about Kierkegaard's life, but rather the hermeneutic task of trying to make sense of it. Finally, I use this evidence and the schema so far assembled to look at a handful of key themes in Kierkegaard's output, and discuss both how these can be seen as essentially narcissistic, and how we as readers must, to a lesser or greater degree, be affected narcissistically by them.

The first foundational area is Narcissism. But in order to have a language for talking about this, some consideration must be given to pertinent developments in psychoanalytic theory over the last hundred or so years. To begin, then, Chapter Two looks at narcissism from a positivist and deterministic psychiatric point of view, using the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) as a template. Diagnostic psychiatry offers few insights into whatever processes might be involved in any syndrome, concentrating instead on categorising external behaviours and symptoms. So

psychiatric symptomatology is useful as a means of enabling us to describe a narcissist in behaviouristic terms. But this is a language about symptoms and states. I need to be able to talk about processes, a persistent theme in this thesis. Freud himself developed the concept of narcissism, and so, second, proper attribution is given to his eponymous 1914 paper and surrounding derivatives. I refer briefly to Freud's insights into drive theory, and while drive theory is ultimately limited and limiting, it is important that we come to terms with a handful of key Freudian concepts useful in later discussions - concepts like the unconscious, the idea of repression, and the mechanics of drives. Third, I look at developments that began while Freud was still alive, and consider alternative and post-Freudian schools. The development of the concepts of object relations are summarised by considering the works of Melanie Klein and Ronald Fairbairn. This concludes with an operational definition of narcissism, emphasising the defence mechanisms that are in use in living a life as a narcissist. My working model of narcissism is about the extensive employment of a series of primary defence mechanisms or defence processes; the degree of use and relative distribution of these powerful processes is what really distinguishes a pathological or disturbed narcissist from the more benign narcissism of his fellow human beings. And this is the best language in which to conceptualise what happens in the narcissist's world, how they live their lives, their way of being.

The second topic I must discuss, Chapter Three, is the reading process and the effect that psychodynamics has had upon it. The very Freudian concept of repression has been used by many, but Jaques Lacan in particular has obliged us to reconsider what we understand about the acts of authorship and reading and the logical conclusions we must come to about true authorial intentionality. The ideas of reader-response theory and the arguments of Stanley Fish and Norman Holland are also considered. However, none of this helps in the task of understanding the *processes* that are involved in reading narcissistic texts, and so I turn to a closer inspection of the psychodynamics of reading, considering the twin post-Freudian ideas of countertransference and projective identification. The stages that we might go through when reading a text, any text, are described, particularly

to show how projective identification can underpin the processes taking place when we read narcissistic texts.

The third foundational area to be considered, in Chapter Four, is my methodology for examining the life and works of my chosen example of a narcissist, Søren Kierkegaard. How to examine his life and works? How to comment upon how he lived, and what he wrote, in a coherent and informed manner? If psychobiography is the methodology, what is it? How does it work? Is it an anachronism in a post-modern age? Can anything be gained from the psychobiographical approach? Many are suspicious of the more extravagant claims of psychobiography, and maintain it should have much more modest goals. In caricature, there are three main approaches or schools that comprise psychobiography. The first of these can be called, with not a little irony, *Truths for All.* This approach uses typically the Freudian-type psychoanalytic findings based on a single monolithic theory that applies to all people. So everyone has oedipal issues, the strict Freudians would maintain, and this single theory can be used to explain hugely diverse sets of behaviours and lifestyles.

On the other hand, *Truths for One*, an equally ironic appellation, wherein idiosyncratic explanations abound, offers one-off explanations for one episode of behaviour in just one person, calling on, often unsystematically, whatever theory can fit the situation. What ensues is a decided lack of consistent theory and intellectual rigour.

The third approach might be called for consistency *Truths for Some*; this uses twentieth century psychological type theory to group humans beings into broadly exclusive types, and then seeks consistent psychological theory to explain both membership and exclusivity of the type. This third approach seems to me to have enormous theoretical benefits, since the justification for both the existence of a type and the criteria for membership of it are massively supported by more or less all schools of psychology at this time – psychodynamic, behavioural, cognitive and, increasingly, neuroscience.

But there remain issues with the avowed intent of current psychobiography to reveal something veridical about any part of a life. Hence my suspicion of the word 'truths' in any of the three approaches listed above. I argue that there is no such veridicality available to us in retrospect, and we can find in a life just whatever we are looking for. The important issue is how the question is phrased: rather than asking: '*for what are you looking*', perhaps a more fruitful question will always be: *'why are you looking for something?'* Nonetheless, even with all these caveats, I can still suggest that using the ideas surrounding the concept of *Truths for Some* as a methodological basis will permit me to assign Søren Kierkegaard to the psychodynamic category called narcissism, and then draw upon the very considerable corpus of knowledge that supports this category. This is not to claim access to a fundamental truth: this is one way of looking at a life, a view, as it were, through one pair of spectacles. There are other views, other approaches - actually, other spectacles; but by taking the trouble to work through this approach, by looking at the implications of Kierkegaard living his life as a narcissist, we arrive at some interesting and it seems to me profound conclusions.

On that point, Chapter Five, I must also properly introduce my hero. What is interesting is to consider the reception of Kierkegaard over the last hundred and fifty years. For the first century or so of these, there was a distinct medicalistion of the man, almost a determination to view him as psychologically different (for many), mentally ill (for some). I review the literature to gain support for this aspect of our perception of Kierkegaard, and then consider how he has been viewed in more recent times – whether as a writer, a philosopher or a theologian. What seems to be important is that no matter how we view him, our understanding of his ideas will be enhanced by considering the effect his narcissism has on ours.

At this point I refer the reader to Appendix II, which discusses the relationship between psychoanalysis and God. This is not merely indulgent: classical theory has harsh things to say about religion, and it is proper to have a balanced view. Just as a case can be made that religion is a consequence of psychodynamics, a similar case can be made that

psychodynamics is a consequence of religion, that there is no absolute basis for making one the narrative and the other the meta-narrative. But much more interestingly, Donald Winnicott's writings on the idea of the intermediate space bring a new set of concepts and a language to talk about religious experience and religious processes. Rather than negating the concept of religion, psychoanalysis has added enormously to our ability to think and speak about it.

And I also refer the reader at this point to Appendix III, to discuss the particular language used in this thesis, the language of psychopathology. Its use is so pervasive: presentation of many of the great ideas necessarily discussed cannot be done without repairing to the historical language of mental illness or psychological deviation. This, in our time, has become a troubling issue, reflected in both the changes in the basis of psychiatry, as well as the very significant changes in meta-theory in psychoanalysis that have taken place. I use my own concept of mental illness as unwanted behaviour to try to escape the value-laden language of traditional psychiatry.

In the following four chapters, evidence is sought for narcissism in Kierkegaard's life and works. Given the enormous corpus of what he wrote, and the truly vast secondary literature on that corpus, this must be a very careful consideration. This part is not an essay on philosophy, or theology; neither is it a biography, nor a critical review of his writing. It is a psychodynamically-based consideration of his life and works, with a view to demonstrating that he was subject to one particular syndrome, and the corpus is viewed only in that light. But even having said that, I can do no more than select certain examples of his work to illustrate what is hopefully an increasingly reliable and plausible analysis. In Chapter Six, I concentrate on eight aspects of his life and relationships: with Mother and Father, Childhood and Youth, and with Regine; I discuss his sexuality, the implications of the Corsair Affair, and his relationship with the ordinary man.

The next three chapters look at three texts. *Fear and Trembling* is the subject of Chapter Seven. Kierkegaard predicted it would be the book by which he

would be best remembered, and that prediction has surely come true. It is a rattling good book, repaying multiple reads. It is also, I argue, supremely narcissistic. Kierkegaard, through de Silento, is at great pains to point out not just the moral conflict facing Abraham, but the teleological issue: Isaac is the seed from which Israel shall grow. It is not only about a father murdering his son; there is a huge political-religious-cultural imperative also. The Aqedah is really a monumental existential dilemma. This dilemma is narcissistic on a huge scale. *Fear and Trembling* can be read on a multitude of levels. The secondary industry, to quote Kirmmse [18], shows no sign of abating, with three more expository texts arriving within the last decade. But whatever else one sees in the book, by ignoring completely the narcissism so very present one would lose much of the interest, richness and humanity present in the text.

Second, I talk in Chapter Eight about *Works of Love*. This is a difficult text, and even the supporters have to pause to admit there are failings. For me, the common charges that it is acosmic and asocial are difficult to dislodge. There has been substantial analysis on this significant text of theological ethics, and I suspect this is down to the need to rationalise the essentially unpalatable nature of Kierkegaard's recommendations. It is relatively easy to make sense of what he says within the text, to demonstrate the internal consistency. But applying his rubric seems, for our time and place at least, to be very difficult. What Kierkegaard asks seems neither reasonable nor real - it does not strike a chord with the modern psyche. Why? Because this is a much more punishing and punitive text than is usually admitted. It is a text that signally fails to come to terms with sexuality, indeed with emotion in general. It is a text about intimate relations but written from the point of view of pure ratiocination. This is a text of late narcissism, when life has failed to supply all that the narcissist demands, and when depression, not uncommonly, has set in. Rather than being an ethic about how we should love each other, this, I feel, is Kierkegaard telling us how the world should love him.

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[18] Kirmmse (1996) .

Third, in Chapter Nine, I talk about *The Sickness Unto Death*. This is a psychological text beyond doubt, but not the kind of psychology we became used to in the twentieth century. Kierkegaard gives us a series of stages through which, he declares, the normal human being can pass. The problem for the modern student of psychology is that Kierkegaard's stages are no more than ideographic descriptions - they are a set of, it would seem, arbitrary stages with no real sense of how they are serially structured psychologically. That is, there is no underlying *psychological* theory; rather we have a set of states of mind that Kierkegaard relates to the subject's understanding of their relationship to God. And this leads us to the great problem with Kierkegaard's psychology. Implicit in all that he says, in this and much of his other writing, is the idea of the self coming to know itself. His analysis of what it is to be a self hangs on the idea that one can truly know exactly whom one is - the self knowing the self. But twentieth century psychology has suggested that this particular piece of knowledge is particularly hard to come by, and worse, very difficult to define. What is the true self? How is it different from an untrue or false self? How many selves are there? We are much more suspicious indeed of the idea of the single, true self, amenable and available to inspection. Current psychological thinking in particular, and much post-modern thinking in general, has it that selves are multiple - we may speak as a child, as a parent, as a sibling - and selves are, if we believe Freud at least, exceedingly difficult to get to know. We are masters not of self-perception but of self-delusion, and what the twentieth century explained to us were the processes and mechanisms that show why Kierkegaard's sequencing, while it may be fascinating, profound even, is ultimately unsound, unsystematic and unhelpful.

Chapter Ten is about what conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. There is much to be gained from identifying in the adult Kierkegaard some aspects of narcissism, and many of the episodes of his life, apparently baffling, and often dismissed or barely commented upon in much of the secondary literature, become much more comprehensible if narcissism is brought into the reader's thinking.

There was in fact a huge contradiction in Kierkegaard's life: the very authenticity he called upon in others was essentially lacking in his own life. In one sense much of his writing was a lifelong compensation for his own deeply felt shortcomings. I discuss a handful of key themes from this life and his works to show how Kierkegaard's own narcissism informs our own, and hence cements the interdependence of the writer and the reader.

In summary, this thesis is about the effects of reading texts written by narcissistic authors, and one author in particular. It suggests a praxis for reading narcissistic texts. Søren Kierkegaard can be considered eminently narcissistic in the sense that I define it, and that his texts have special effect upon his readers. For most, this effect may be benign though not insignificant. For some, it colours their view of the intellectual component of what Kierkegaard is trying to say. There has been much secondary commentary of the Kierkegaardian canon, almost without exception about the logic and reason of what the author says. This thesis is about the emotion generated within us by Kierkegaard, and asks questions about the effect of that emotion upon our interpretation the author's meaning. As such, the thesis is framed by the context between emotion and cognition; it is situated firmly within the psychoanalytic diaspora; I use the language and constructs of psychodynamics to make my arguments. All of this, I acknowledge, is of our time, and subject to modification and possible eclipse. But it offers a coherent and consistent means of talking about Søren Kierkegaard.

2 THE CONCEPT OF NARCISSISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first concept to be unpacked is that called narcissism; for if this thesis is about reading narcissistic texts, then we must be clear what being narcissistic entails, what being narcissistic is. So this is a chapter of explanation, of defining and agreeing a common language with which to speak of Kierkegaard's narcissism. Hence this chapter is not about Kierkegaard, but about narcissism. Kierkegaard's narcissism is discussed at length in Chapters Six through Ten.

What I want to achieve in this section is twofold. First, we need a shared model of what narcissism is in the sense of how it could be recognised. The psychiatric model, for all its shortcomings, does give us a crisp symptomatology - if we meet a person with certain characteristics, we can reasonably call them narcissistic; that is, we have a label for the state they might be in. But if we can recognise narcissism in an individual, how and why is it in them, part of them? Whence did it come? What happens for the narcissist? How did their state arise and how is it prosecuted? Why does it not go away, ameliorate? For this we need psychodynamic concepts and language; we need these to understand the *processes* involved in narcissism so that we can arrive at a working model of both the genesis and permanence of the narcissistic state, through understanding the key processes that permit its continuing existence.

Obviously, I will be using a particular language to talk about a set of hypothesised processes. None of the processes are 'real' of course, and the language is arbitrary. No one suggests, for example, that the anti-libidinal ego [19] is a location within the hemispheres of the human brain: it is, manifestly, a construct. Likewise the process of repression. But if the aim of hermeneutics is to give meaning to our selves and our situation, then while neither the concepts I use nor their language have any claim to permanence

or ubiquity, they do provide a useful way of conceptualising and talking. Metaphor has a long history in medicine in general and psychiatry in particular, and the metaphorical nature of mental illness, including narcissism, is discussed below in Appendix III.

So first, a general introduction. Regrettably, narcissism is both a lay concept and a technical term. Actually it is two technical terms, one from psychiatry and one from psychodynamic psychology. None of the three meanings really coincide, and there is a particular difference between the lay meaning of someone who loves themselves to the exclusion of others, and the psychodynamic meaning of someone who was not loved, and who tries forever to make up for this loss through presenting a false self to the world.

It might therefore be interesting to preface this analysis of the concept of narcissism with a consideration of the derivation of the actual term. All three versions of the term presumably take their name from a Greek myth, from the story of someone who fell in love with his own image. [20] The story is worth retelling, if only to contrast the original ideas and implications of the myth with the distortions that have come about over the last century.

The nymph Echo, a beautiful creature, was tasked with distracting Hera while her partner, Zeus, spent time in search of alternative pleasures. Echo fell in love with the equally beautiful creature Narcissus, but alas the interest and affection were not returned. As a result of this neglect and disinterest, Echo the nymph simply pined away to nothing, until only her voice was left. Nemesis, enraged, punished Narcissus by forcing him to stare at his own image in a fountain lake. Gradually, Narcissus become so enamoured and obsessed with his own image that he also pined and faded away until nothing was left of him except a small flower, one that bears his name today.

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[19] To be explained below.
[20] see Melville (1986) for the source and a discussion.

The lay use of the term, clearly derived from this tale, is quite different from its clinical use. Whereas in ordinary language we anecdotally think of the narcissist as someone forever admiring themselves in mirrors, windows, or any other reflection, the clinical use of the term has it that narcissists are not in love with themselves at all, but are continuously portraying an image that they believe will be loved, to make up for the love they never received. They love themselves, not because, as in the lay understanding, they believe themselves to be worthy of excessive love and admiration, but exactly because at some level they know they are not. They were not loved, and so love themselves, excessively, to make amends. Of course all of this is carried out at some unconscious level. As a result, their own self, their true self, is marginalised as they present instead whatever they feel will evoke the most response, the most attention, the most narcissistic supply of affection, love, and validation. So the narcissist's true self is effectively paralysed, and life is lived in order to maintain, and often at huge psychological cost, the images and the reflections that generate the most positive emotions. When this process fails, when the image is not noticed, admired or loved, then the narcissist's world falls apart, and he responds with unrealistic rage and fury at the failure of others to respond to this carefully erected image. But because of failures in early development, what the narcissist considers to be an attractive presentation of the self may well be nothing of the sort, which is why narcissists can be such difficult people to be with or to help. Their partner has the difficult task of living with what is often a very unlikeable person, while having to live with rage and outrage that follows when the love is not perceived as complete.

I want to begin by considering, but then essentially dismissing, the psychiatric notion of narcissism. The psychiatric notion is still important, however, because psychiatry has taken some of the elements of this myth and generated a syndrome, the definition of a specific mental illness actually, which has become a powerful part of psychiatric taxonomy over the last few decades. After that, I turn to psychodynamics, rushing with indecent haste through basic Freudian Drive Theory, then considering the arrival of Object Relations theory through two writers - Melanie Klein and Ronald Fairbairn. I would like to introduce Mrs Klein's three great ideas that

help make sense of narcissism - the very idea of an object, the notion of splitting, and the fecund concept of projective identification. From Dr Fairbairn, I try to emphasise his rejection of drives, and embrace his tripartite model of psychopathology that helps explain the compulsion of unwanted behaviour. With some understanding of processes of narcissism thus gained I offer an operational definition of narcissism. This draws upon the idea of the defence mechanism, and shows the palette of defences the narcissist uses, as well as the disharmonious results they can have. By this time, we will able to talk about why an individual becomes narcissistic, its psychogenesis, and also why an individual continues to behave in the way they do, what these writers would all call its psychopathology.

There is one final preface. In our time we struggle with the medicalisation of mind, with concepts like mental illness and deviation, and see in such terminology the effects of time, place, history and culture. This is a difficult and profound topic, and one I address below in Appendix III. But for now, in summarising the great writers on narcissism, I have to use both their language and their world-view. Most of this theory was devised in the early twentieth century, when the medical model in psychiatry was at its apogee. So all writers of that period speak of psychopathology; the whole discipline is based on a comparison between the normal and the abnormal in matters of the mind. The allocation of people to one or the other of these categories is, we now see, largely a value-laden process, value-laden in a sense unimaginable to Sigmund Freud or his immediate successors. I argue below that this is exactly what happened to Søren Kierkegaard during his early reception. Discussed below in Appendix III are ideas that deconstruct psychiatric languages, ideas from Foucault and others. For now, I ask the reader to bear with me as I explain early twentieth century concepts using the language of the time.

2.2 THE CURRENT PSYCHIATRIC VIEW

Psychiatry, since the 1960s, has become obsessed with diagnosis rather than amelioration, and has given over to individual schools, and the

pharmaceutical companies, any discussion of methods of treatment. [21] This is nowhere more apparent in modern clinical psychiatry than in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, or DSM-IV [22], which is probably the basis of all psychiatric diagnosis in the US, if not the UK. For every psychiatric condition, the Manual contains a set of descriptors of how a person with the syndrome might behave or think or feel. Nowhere is there any attempt to consider the causes of the symptoms, or indeed how they might be treated. Usually multiple descriptions are proposed; exhibiting a subset is sufficient for a positive diagnosis. There is no condition called Narcissism, but there is one called Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), and, according to DSM-IV, a person exhibiting NPD shows:

> A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning in early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:
>
> a) Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g. exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognised as superior without commensurate achievements)
> b) Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty or ideal love
> c) Believes that he or she is special and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with other special or high-status people (or institutions)
> d) Requires excessive admiration

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[21] The reasons for this are doubtless many, but one particular event stands out in every history of Psychiatry, and that is the paper by Daniel Rosenhan in 1973. Rosenham and some of his colleagues wanted to test the accuracy and validity of psychiatric diagnosis at that time. So they presented themselves to psychiatric hospitals claiming to hear voices in their head. They were admitted, and from the moment of admission, told only the truth, never again referring to the voices, and changing only their names and professions. They were diagnosed, typically, as schizophrenic. When in due course they came clean about what they were doing, they were simply not believed, and could not gain release from the institution. Eventually the only way for them to be released was to agree with the psychiatrists that they were mentally ill, understand the criteria for getting well again, and live up the expectations of their captors. The publication of this paper shocked both US psychiatry and much of US medicine, and brought about the objectivisation of psychiatry, reducing it to ticks in boxes, as evidenced in DSM-IV. See Rosenham (1973).

[22] The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual remains the premier diagnostic manual in the US. It is strictly a classification manual, and makes no pretence at analytic methods or explanations. There have been previous incarnations, and we are currently up to version IV, with a text revision (TR) the latest offering. DSM-V is actively under preparation. The manual lists a very large compendium of disorders, over 400, grouped by type. Our interest is in Personality Disorders, of which eleven are listed, and in particular number 301.82 – Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

e) Has a sense of entitlement i.e. unreasonable expectation of especially favourable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
f) Is interpersonally exploitative i.e. takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
g) Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognise or identify with the feelings and needs of others
h) Is often envious of others, or believes that others are envious of him or her
i) Shows arrogant, haughty behaviours or attitudes

The same source also tells us a great deal about the incidence of the syndrome: most narcissists are men - about 75% - and it is very frequently linked to co-morbid diagnoses of substance abuse and impulsive or reckless behaviour. About 0.7% of the population in the Western world are thought to suffer from NPD, but it seems barely to be recognised in the developing world. The World Health Organisation ICD-10 did not include NPD in its 1990 revision.

To put some phenomenological flesh on these medical bones, attached is a single case study in summarised form in Appendix I.

But there is clearly a fundamental issue with this psychiatric approach. Exactly because DSM-IV tries to be independent of any particular school of theory, it simply offers a series of clinical indicators against which to match presenting symptoms, in order to arrive at a diagnosis. This symptom-matching approach is generally more helpful and accurate with physical illness, and at its best where there is to be found the minimum number of intervening variables between the cause and the symptom. So a bacterial infection is ideal – the symptoms are unequivocal and immediate, and the pathways between the infecting agent and affected organs are simple and few. Psychosomatic illnesses are less ideal: it is difficult to be sure of the pathways between a stressor and, say, an asthmatic attack. In psychiatry, the problem is magnified. It is no secret that much discontent has emerged with the whole DSM-IV approach; even its devoted admirers admit that

diagnostic accuracy may be more consistent, but at the cost of a conceptual understanding of what is actually wrong with the patient [23].

Relating to this thesis, the DSM-IV description of the narcissistic personality appears two-dimensional, and it lacks explanatory power of any kind. If we recall the phrase from one of the Braggs: *"Science is either physics or stamp collecting"* [24], it must be admitted that something is clearly missing from DSM, that it has a definite air of philately about it. That something, from the point of view of this thesis, is psychodynamics in general, and Object Relations theory in particular. Narcissistic Personality Disorder, one of the categories of DSM-IV, is just that, a simple category, devised and presented with little reference to the processes that constitute it as a constellation of symptoms. Perhaps understanding and applying the *processes* involved in narcissism will provide a much richer method of attempting to comprehend what motivated and inhibited Kierkegaard. Psychoanalytic theory, and object relations theory in particular, is wholly concerned with processes, and with those structures that support the processes. So I now turn, it must be said out of frustration with this nosology, to a very different approach indeed. [25]

2.3 PREFACE TO AN OBJECT RELATIONS VIEW OF NARCISSISM

Here I want to derive and consider the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism. This is a term for a set of processes, and narcissism thus construed need not

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[23] See Morey and Jones, Ch 15 in Ronningstam's *Disorders of Narcissism*. This is also a common theme throughout Nancy McWilliams's *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis.* (Ronningstam (2000), McWilliams (1994)). The whole issue is discussed at some length below.

[24] Ascribed to both Sir Lawrence (the father) and Sir William (the son). It is uncertain who first said it. Uniquely as father and son, they both won Nobel prizes in physics.

[25] The situation is considerably worse than this summary suggests, since narcissism has become a major focus for personality disorder investigation. The DSM-IV classification seems to many to be absurdly simple-minded, since there are generally agreed now to be at least three versions of the narcissistic personality: Arrogant, Shy and Psychopathic. Each of these exhibits behaviours based on narcissistic antecedents, but which are, externally, very different. For a detailed discussion and summary, see Ronningstam (2005) especially Chapters 2 and 3.

be seen as any kind of disease or pathology, nor even as a necessary human fault or failing. It is a way of being in the world; not always, it must be said, the easiest, or most endearing or most effective. I begin [26] with an introduction to Sigmund Freud's ideas and rapidly move to his thoughts on narcissism. Freud was a drive theorist, but this thesis contends that narcissism is only understandable through the relationships we have with representations of other people, that is, through object relations [27]. To Melanie Klein goes the accolade of being the innovator of this kind of process thinking, and I follow the development of her thought. Ronald Fairbairn, in contrast, is something of an overlooked genius, but one who provided superbly theoretically innovative and therapeutically useful concepts, and I

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[26] This section is concerned with the derivation of the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism. Psychoanalysis has evolved for itself a considerable private language, and some of this can appear impenetrable at first. Several texts can help understanding.

By far the most accessible is Charles Rycroft's *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Rycroft (1972)). Witty, sometimes irreverent, but always helpful, this is an excellent start.

Stephen Mitchell and Margaret Black have written a remarkably concise yet adequately detailed summary of a century of psychoanalytic thinking in their *Freud and Beyond* (Mitchell and Black (1995)). Sometimes the pace is a little too breakneck, but one certainly gets enough of a flavour of what Freud and the post-Freudians are all about.

A more serious text is from Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. This is essentially a dictionary of terms and their meaning, written in French in 1967 and translated into English in 1973 (Laplanche and Pontalis (1988)).

Apparently forbidding, but in fact immensely explanatory and useful, is Bob Hinshelwood's *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (Hinshelwood 1989)). This explains not only every aspect of Kleinian thinking but also compares and contrasts them with Freudian thought, by way of definition, example and commentary.

At the end of the day, the only way to come to terms with any new language, of course, is to use it on a daily basis, which is exactly what practicing psychotherapists do. Without this frequent rehearsal, the casual or novice reader may find a need for flash cards or a summary.

[27] Object Relations theory is unquestionably a large topic, but there are a few introductory guides through the concepts and terminology. Michael St Clair's *Object Relations and Self Psychology* is undoubtedly a brief introduction, but perhaps too superficial to be of much value (St Clair (2000)).

Lavina Gomez has written a somewhat larger text, but again there is often but a surface explanation of the major ideas (Gomez (1997)).

Judith Hughes *'Reshaping the Psychoanalytic Domain'* is a worthwhile, detailed, arresting and authoritative summary of three major thinkers (Hughes (1990)).

The standard text, however, remains that from Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell: *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Greenberg and Mitchell (1983)). However, do not take everything in this exceedingly well regarded text as gospel. For a truly questioning but apparently valid counter-view, the reader is urged to consider Gregorio Kohon's paper in *Free Associations*: *Objects Are Not People* (Kohon (1985)).

give due space to this Scottish iconoclast. There are very many other authors who have contributed in a fundamental way to our understanding of the processes involved in narcissism - Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut are the two most obvious. I will draw upon to their conceptual additions *en passant*. The most glaring omission is that of Donald Woods Winnicott. He is such a pervasive thinker and his ideas are used at several points during this thesis. There is also a group of lesser theoreticians who have studied some of the other aspects of narcissism - self-destructiveness, shame and humiliation, parental aggrandisement - aspects to be considered when applying the concept of narcissism to Søren Kierkegaard's life and work.

2.4 ORIGINS OF THE PSYCHOANALYTIC IDEA OF NARCISSISM

> In the voluminous literature on narcissism, there are probably only two facts upon which everyone agrees: first, the concept of narcissism is one of the most important contributions to psychoanalysis; second, that it is one of the most confusing. [28]

The term was first used in a psychological sense by Havelock Ellis in an 1898 monograph on Autoeroticism. Paul Nacke also employed the term to describe a sexual perversion. It was Johannes Sadger who brought it into common psychoanalytic parlance initially on the psychoanalysis of a homosexual in 1908. Otto Rank wrote a paper in 1911, probably the first truly psychoanalytic paper; in this he linked an essentially sexual or sensual process with psychic phenomena that manifestly were not either of these. By 1911, Freud had written a note on the genetic aspects of narcissism, and in his 1913 book, *Totem and Taboo* [29], linked narcissism with a series of other overt behaviours. Ernest Jones later wrote perhaps the first account of narcissistic character traits, and Karl Abraham first described the resistance to transference that seems to characterise such patients [30].

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[28] Pulver (1970) p 319.
[29] Freud, SE XIII.
[30] See the introduction to Freud's 1914 paper in SE XI for a summary of the pre-history of the concept.

In terms of this thesis, the great paper, the starting point, was Freud's *'On Narcissism'*, published in 1914. This highly compressed and conceptually complex paper is really about how object libido[31] can develop out of ego libido[32], how one changes from investing only in the self to investing in others. The paper also gives the frequently quoted four elements or presentations of narcissism: first, as a form of sexual perversion, as well as the basis for all sexual perversions; second, as a stage in libidinal development; third, as a kind of object choice, representing what the person would like to have been or would like to be; and fourth, relating to self-esteem.

Freud modified his views continually; the 1915 paper *'Instincts and their Vicissitudes'* [33] speaks of the move from narcissism to object love, and this is a significant shift in theory. But by 1923, Freud produced his structural model in *'The Ego and the Id'* [34], permitting a description of narcissism in a wholly new language – narcissism was the containment of all libido in the id.

This basic drive model - with its concern for the intra-psychic and oblivion to the outside world - became increasingly unsatisfactory during Freud's later life. Freud never really moved beyond a drive model; he added aggression to libido, and tinkered with a death instinct right up to the very end of his life. He acknowledged that a drive theory might be an incomplete theory, but this was really no more than what Greenberg and Mitchell call a *'strategy of accommodation'*. [35]

Essentially Freud was a biologist, a neurologist. He began famously with his scientific project, and this was the infrastructure around which he built the early theories. While he became aware of the concept of the internal object, it was a *deus ex machina* concept, one that he never really developed. But despite these limitations, Freud gave us, for the first time, a means of

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[31] libido invested a representation of another person or thing.
[32] libido invested in the self.
[33] Freud SE XIV p 109.
[34] Freud SE XIX.
[35] Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) Ch 3.

logically explaining some aspects of mental behaviour using an internally consistent and economical theory.

2.5 MELANIE KLEIN

Although Freud remained true to the drive model essentially throughout his life, in his writings he eventually admitted the idea of 'object' [36] as it came to be used in object relations theory. Much of the impetus for this maturation of ideas came from his contemplations about narcissism. Eventually Freud acknowledged that an object can affect psychic structure, something that hitherto only drives could accomplish. The idea that objects have a deterministic effect was an important turning point, and one to be built upon by all the theorists considered in this thesis. None, however, should be given more credit for radicalism than Melanie Klein. [37]

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[36] The idea of an 'object' is not particularly devious, and is not at all removed from everyday life. Perhaps an example from Greenberg and Mitchell will make the point. A patient of theirs reported that his niece and her boyfriend were to visit him for the holidays. In preparation for the visit, he had been polishing his lamps, wiping fingerprints off the walls, and in general, preparing for the onslaught of what might be thought to be intensely critical, parental intruders. His mood, as he described the preparation, matches the story; he is apprehensive, timid, and embarrassed by the living conditions his guests will observe. In the next session, following the holiday, he says that the visit went surprisingly well, except that the 'kids' who stayed with him were 'bums' and 'slobs', wanting only to lie around in bed all day, revelling in the freedom to do this away from their parents. His affect once again matches the situation as he describes it. He is haughty and contemptuous, condescending and judgmental (Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) p 10).
What is striking about this very ordinary example is how distant the reality of the visitors is from the version that the patient carried round in his head: before the holiday, the visitors were assigned the persona of parent; and afterward very much the persona of child. His perception of the same, unchanging people was determined to a very large extent by matters nothing whatsoever to do with the visitors, but instead by factors leftover from some early life experiences. So the visitors were objects - initially parental, and good, latterly children and not really so good. There was, as the authors observe, only a tangential relationship between the reality of the visitors and the model or template that the patient has of them. So it is for us all, and object relations theory explores how this splitting into versions of reality comes about, from whence objects come, and what we can do about them when the objects engender profound unhappiness in everyday life.
[37] Reading Klein is an adventure, and repays the effort. Her complete works are available in four volumes from the Hogarth Press (Klein (1975)). An excellent introduction is available from one of her students, Hanna Segal (Segal (1989)).
A collection of the most important papers can be found in *Envy and Gratitude* (Klein (1997)). The introductory texts referred to above all contain substantial chapters on the author.

There are three issues raised by Klein that are of very great importance to any consideration of narcissism. The first is the vexed question about where objects come from. The second is about the process of splitting, and the third is the process of projective identification. These will be considered in turn.

First is the matter of objects and their origins. Klein really revolutionised thinking through her analysis of children, arriving at the conclusion that the child's earliest reality is *'wholly phantastic'* [38]. By this she means that children possess innate object images, and that only later are these matched, as it were, with reality. This in turn begs the question of where these innate images come from. In contrast to Freud's formulations, where drives are things in themselves, having no initial attachment to anything, for Klein, there is a clear implication that drives possess, a priori, some kind of an innate image or representation *of what it is they seek*. In her 1932 text, [39] she summarised the early phase of her thinking from the days in Budapest, which emphasised, like Freud, the pursuit of sexual pleasure and the drive for knowledge. She argued for an extensive array of memory images present from birth, coming into existence through some unspecified process of presumably phylogenetic inheritance. So the earliest object relations of the neonate are with representations of body parts - faeces, penises, breasts, the womb - as well as aggressive mechanisms – arson and poisoning for example. The relations with these objects come into being without the child having any knowledge of the objects or processes in reality. The drives of the young child are thus towards these internal representations, and only later are they matched with reality. Strictly speaking these are phantasised objects, and not true objects.

Klein used the term *paranoid-schizoid position* to reflect the central concerns of this stage of life, as the child splits objects into their good and bad parts

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[38] 'Phantasy' is not the same as 'fantasy' in Kleinian thinking; the essential difference is that phantasies are deep, primal, unconscious, not under any kind of conscious control. Fantasies, on the other hand, carry much of the significance of the everyday term – wishes, dreams, ideas I can conjure up or end at will.

or objects, in attempt to ward off the dangers of bad objects, both internal and external, by keeping images of them separated and isolated from the self and the good objects. The child adopts a strategy that enables it to control and master persecutory anxiety situations, caused by the splitting into good and bad objects. So splitting, a concept that Klein perhaps borrowed from Fairbairn, is linked with how the early ego deals with aggression. Both the object, and the affect or mood that accompanies the object, are split, so that good and bad objects can be maintained in different spheres, as it were. Good objects - distorted internal presentations of external things or process - are completely introjected and taken into the ego to become part of the self, fused with the self. Bad objects - distorted internal representations of negatively perceived external things - are denied entry into the self and projected outwards. At its worst, with severe aggression, there are multiple bad objects that themselves can be split into part bad objects that are projected outwards, giving rise to a plethora of persecutors.

Later in her thinking, Klein emphasises more holistic issues of the person. This phase resulted in the description of the *depressive position*. Somewhere around six months, the child realises that there is in fact only one mother. The beloved person is also the one destroyed in bouts of indescribable rage during frustration and anxiety. The child now wants to make reparations, to restore what has been destroyed. This is the depressive position exactly because the ego doubts its ability to achieve this goal. [40] But crucially, the object is no longer simply a vehicle for the gratification of drives – positive or negative – but rather a genuine 'other' with whom the child maintains intense relations.

So we can see three different systems at work in Klein's overall model of both development and psychopathology. Her first phase is concerned with sexual pleasure and a search for knowledge about especially the child's mother's body. In the second, the terrifying persecutory world is encountered and

[39] Klein (1932).
[40] Her analysis of the twin positions of paranoid-schizoid and depressive is very important for all of psychotherapeutics: on this reading, every psychodynamic encounter is an attempt to shift from the former to the latter.

mastered through splitting the confusing baffling objects into good and bad components. In the third phase, object relations proper come into being, as the child concerns herself with the whole object and expresses concerns about what she has done to that object. The object, by this stage, is more than a simple a focus for a drive: it has become something significant in the life of the child, about which the child genuinely cares, one way or another.

2.6 RONALD FAIRBURN

Klein was paradoxical in that for much of her working life she was unsure about distancing herself from mainstream Freudian theory. As has often been noted, she used Freudian language, but not always in a Freudian way. It was Fairbairn alone who had the courage to break with the drive model, and it must be said that Fairbairn informed some considerable part of Klein's later thinking.

First, last, and foremost, Fairbairn [41] was against drive theory. He viewed much of the Freudian model as simply anachronistic. It was devised at a time and in a place – Germany at the turn of the 19th century – when certain models or paradigms held sway in the natural sciences. From his earliest writings, and based on clinical experience, Fairbairn rejects libido theory as pleasure seeking. Libido in his view is object-seeking. Objects are not added on but are built into libidinal energy. So libido is about objects; libido seeks object. [42]

He was undoubtedly influenced by Klein's writings, which he read in the 1930s, and he accepted Klein's concept of positions, questioned with her the explanatory power of libido, and saw that relations with internal objects had

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[41] Jock Sutherland's definitive biography is an excellent read: sympathetic, challenging, exegetic, engaging (Sutherland (1989)).

[42] Fairbairn wrote papers rather than textbooks, and these can readily be divided into three groups - Clinical Papers, his development of Object Relations Theory, and a Miscellaneous. Most of the important papers have been collected and issued by the Tavistock as *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*, originally in 1953 and later in 1994 (Fairbairn (1994)). Most of his thinking can be found in this one volume.

greater explanatory powers. But Klein had not been radical enough for Fairbairn. In particular, Freud's libido had become discredited; libido for Fairbairn was no more than an object seeking principle. Famously, he asked the simple question: '*Why did the baby suck the thumb?*' Not: '*Why did it suck anything*', but '*Why the thumb?*' The answer was obvious. In contrast to Freud, who thought of it as a need for continued oral sexual satisfaction, a need that had become detached from the process of feeding, Fairbairn saw that it was because there was no breast to suck.

> Even the baby must have the libidinal object; and, if he is deprived of the natural object (the breast), he is driven to provide an object for himself. [43]

In this process, Fairbairn has also interrelated the ideas of energy and structure. Again, this reverses Freud's 19th century ideas of the separation of structure and energy, and takes a very much more twentieth century view of their essential interrelation.

The reversal and dismantling continues. Human adult behaviour is based on a drive for relationships with others, not on a set of aimless drives seeking pleasure or tension reduction. So psychopathology (as Fairbairn very definitely described it) is very much about issues over failures in relating to objects, rather than conflicting unconscious conflicts about pleasure-seeking impulses.

In normal, non-pathological development, Fairbairn sees the goal of emotional maturation to be the achievement of mature independence. Infants live with real parents but also with internalised objects based on primary identification - the merger with the mother. The compensatory internal objects make amends for the shortcoming in the real parent. So maturity involves both a relinquishing of dependence on his real parents alongside an abandoning of his compensatory internal objects. When these internal objects are released, the splitting of the ego is overcome and integrity restored. Hence the central issue of all psychopathology for Fairbairn is the conflict between the need for emotional independence and

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[43] Fairbairn (1994) p 33.

adult relationships on one hand, and the fear of abandoning infantile ties and dependences upon internal objects, for fear of losing contact of any kind. [44]

The link between ego and object is now this: to be meaningful, an object must have some ego attached to it. The libidinal ego is that part of the child's original ego that has not given up its unsatisfied longings for dependence upon its mother. Throughout life, it remains bound up with the exciting object, forever waiting for potential contact with the mother-as-object; it remains bound to hoped-for events, promises, tantalising situations – all events that never happened. The libidinal ego longs for union with the exciting object, as an internal object relation, because the longing for real gratification from the real mother became too painful, and was internalised.

The anti-libidinal ego by contrast, is the place for all the negative feelings that follow from the frustration of libidinal longing. The anti-libidinal ego is attached to the rejecting object, the depriving and withholding internal object of mother. So the anti-libidinal ego hates the libidinal ego because it identifies with the exciting object – the potential mother. It also attacks the exciting object for its false promises, and the libidinal ego for its false hopes

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[44] It is in his work on Endopsychic structures that Fairbairn has given a richer and more complex model of model of human development, and with considerable psychotherapeutic implications.
Psychic structures and the development of the ego stem from the differing kinds of relationships that a child can have with its mother. Basically, Fairbairn posits both gratifying and ungratifying components in this relationship. The ungratifying aspect can also be subdivided into simple and blunt rejection, and rejection following hope or expectation. So Fairbairn speaks of a gratifying mother, an enticing mother and a rejecting mother. The single real mother, who is all of these things, is internalised and separated out into the ideal object, the exciting object and the rejecting object. Now, and crucially, as each of these is internalised, a part of the healthy ego or self is broken off and bound up in an internal object relationship with the object.[44] So Fairbairn proposed three aspects of the internal ego: first is the Libidinal Ego, bound with the enticing object, constantly promising relatedness; second is the Anti-libidinal Ego, bound to the rejecting internal object, constantly hostile to the idea of relatedness; and third is the Central Ego, bound to the ideal object of a loving mother, carrying with it comfort and gratification. This central ego, essentially still healthy, is also available for future mature object relations with real people in the future.

and devotion. These internal attacks are the basis of much of the self-punitive aspect of psychopathology.

This schema permits a more careful analysis of the idea of psychopathology. The degree of pathology can now be seen as the extent to which healthy ego has been bound up with internal objects as libidinal or anti-libidinal ego. How much healthy real ego is left over is the key to mature emotional life. [45]

The economy and explanatory power of this model is no more evident than in the understanding of repetition in psychopathology. Any contact with deeply distressed mentally ill patients will convince of the extent to which pain, suffering and defeat are absolutely built into the patient's life. But why? According to classical theory, man seeks pleasure and avoids pain.

Fairbairn helps us see that the child's essential striving is for contact, not pleasure. If the parent offers pleasurable exchanges, then that relationship will be pleasurable. But if the experience is of rejection, hurt and disapproval, the child will not simply ignore that parent and move on to something that is pleasurable. The child needs the parent, and must internalise those painful aspects of the relationship. This continuing attachment of the libidinal ego to the exciting object means that the child constantly hopes for a more fulfilling, satisfying relationship. The more devoid the actual real world exchange, the greater the hope and hence the power of the internalised parent. The child cannot let go of this attachment, exactly because of the childhood fear that there will be no attachment left, a fear of total isolation, of annihilation.

It is the experience of these internal objects and the projection of them onto the outside world that produces pathological suffering, especially repetitive suffering. Objects of love are selected exactly because they are withholders of love, or deny love, so as to personify the original exciting object, which promised but never delivered or fulfilled. So failure in relationships is managed repeatedly in order to continue the longing and the need of the

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[45] See his *Synopsis*, Chapter VII of Fairbairn (1994).

libidinal ego for the fulfilment of the promise of the exciting object. Darker emotions – the terror, depression and pointlessness of life - represent the ego's identifications with bad aspects of the parents which could not be handled in real exchanges, and which were split off and subsequently internalised. All of psychopathological behaviour is repetitive because of these long-standing and immutable loyalties to early significant carers and other people. Living with and re-creating these ties throughout adult life is the place from where such self-defeating pathology comes.

2.7 AN OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF NARCISSISM

Now it should be possible to summarise these ideas into a working hypothesis, an operational definition of narcissism.

From a process perspective, what all the critical and innovative thinkers so far discussed have uncovered, serially but essentially jointly, is a group of primitive psychological processes, what are usually called defence mechanisms. A defence mechanism is nothing more than what its name suggests – a means by which the self can avoid annihilation (in the worst case) [46]. Traditionally these mechanisms are divided into primary or primitive and secondary defences. Using Freud's original terminology, the primary defence mechanisms are linked to the primary process, technically to the Id; whereas secondary defence mechanisms are linked much more to the secondary process, to matters of the Ego. To put the distinction another way, primary defences are those concerned with the boundary between the self and the world, whereas secondary defences are concerned with intra-psychic phenomena, such as issues between the ego and the superego. Primary defences include such categories as denial, splitting and projective identification; secondary defences are about processes such as repression, rationalisation, displacement, reaction formation, acting out and so on. Primitive defences are few in number, but have terrible power; most people suffering from psychotic episodes use primary defences to make sense of

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[46] see McWilliams (1994) Ch 5 for a discussion.

their world, thereby making themselves incomprehensible to others. Secondary defences are multifarious and altogether more benign. Primary defences are most commonly found in the psychoses; secondary defences in the neuroses. There are traditionally [47] thought to be six primary defence processes: primitive withdrawal, denial, omnipotence, idealisation, projective identification, and splitting, and consideration of these will be central to an object relations view of how Kierkegaard lived his life and wrote as he did. But these are no more than constructs; they are not in any sense 'real' processes. They are convenient terms for speaking about the consistent ways people have of dealing with their life.

Withdrawal is the classic schizoid defence. By pretending something is not there, I do not have to interact with it. *'People who withdraw into their own mind try the patience of those who love them by their resistance to engaging on a feeling level.'* [48] However, withdrawal from the world need not entail distortion, so that those using withdrawal as a defence may still have an accurate perception of the world, and may still be very sensitive to what is happening to others, even if they do not engage themselves. Withdrawal stems directly from Freud's original model of the unconscious and repression. Withdrawal in all its forms is about avoidance, of the world, of external objects, of unmanageable internal objects.

Technically speaking, Denial is much more than everyday denial - the *'this can't be happening to me'* sensation. Pathologically it is used in the face of all common sense, in the face of all evidence. Whereas in normal life it is a common way of coping with the world, pretending that something is not going on even though the 'observing ego' knows it is, in pathology the denial in complete: the object is removed from all conscious life. The denial extends to self-awareness, with patients denying their behaviour as abnormal – there is no 'observing ego'. At the extreme this is incomprehensible.

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[47] Ibid.
[48] ibid p 100.

Omnipotence was hinted at by Klein and others but fully developed by both Kernberg [49] and Kohut [50], although in somewhat different ways. Again, there is a spectrum from the everyday use of omnipotence – exerting one's will, getting one's way – through to deep psychopathology. The omnipotence of Kernberg in particular, with its consequential rage when the omnipotence is frustrated, is a cornerstone of narcissistic processing.

Idealisation, Kohut's idealised imago [51], begins as a necessary defence against a world a child may find overwhelmingly threatening. Some kind of idealisation is a part of normal mature love, but the continuing use of this defence is pathological. The setting up of an external omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent other can act as a means of ignoring the imperfections in oneself, and through simple identification or fusion, there comes about complete denial.

Projective Identification is an initially difficult concept, as many have commented. [52] It will be discussed in more detail below. Patrick Casement, who offers the most sensitive and educative explanation, defines projective identification as '*a form of affective communication*', where he uses the word 'affect' to refer to emotion, mood, feeling:

> When projective identification is used as form of affective communication, the projector has a need (usually unconscious) to make another person aware of what is being communicated and to be responded to. This affective identification can then be thought of as being brought about projectively by the projector and introjectively by the recipient. [53]

Melanie Klein first used this concept in a coherent way, and it has since become fundamental in much recent psychoanalytic theory. [54]

And finally to Splitting, which we can define as a person expressing one ambivalent attitude while regarding its opposite as completely disconnected.

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[49] Kernberg (1976).
[50] Kohut (1971).
[51] Kohut (1978).
[52] See Ch 4 of Patrick Casement's *On Learning from the Patient* (Casement (1985)).
[53] Casement (1985) p 81.
[54] See James Grotstein's *Splitting and Projective Identification* (Grotstein (1995)).

The concept obviously derives from Melanie Klein, although we owe Fairbairn the credit for explaining the mechanisms it uses. Splitting is a fundamental process, almost a defining process, for any narcissistic person.

So how are we to use these concepts in our understanding of the psychoanalytic process of narcissism? Narcissism, from this perspective, and in the most general psychoanalytic terms, can be defined as a way of being for people for whom the continuity of a sense of the self, and the esteem attached to it, are fundamentally problematic, and these defence mechanisms are the means by which the problems come about and are maintained. Object relations theory, as it has been summarised, explains how these defence mechanisms engender narcissism.

This thesis makes a distinction between the resolved narcissist and the unresolved narcissist. Clearly these two terms are shorthand terms: there is no such thing as either. We all retain some narcissism, however magnificent our parents were in their task; and despite whatever profound damage our parenting may inflict upon us, we all can have lucid moments when our observing ego is able to reflect on the motives for our behaviour. There is a vast typology of the variations in narcissism, [55] a consideration of which will add little to this thesis; inventing more labels for states seems pointless when we can much more meaningfully explore the underlying processes that define these states.

The typical origin of narcissism can be summarised by invoking the narcissistic carer (usually, it seems, mother), herself damaged, unempathic, using the child to fulfil his or her own unsatisfied needs for praise, admiration, recognition and achievement. The child thus has problems at the separation or individuation stage, separating from the carer. This leads to a sometimes severe lack of internalisation of self-esteem, and hence a dependency upon external sources of gratification and loving. This in turn results in a highly vulnerable ego, one which defends itself through

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[55] See Ronningstam (2005).

narcissistic defences, outlined above, all of them aimed at creating the internal illusion of self-sufficiency.

Current conceptions of narcissism include many subdivisions and types. So that there is also an inverted narcissism: for every vain and grandiose narcissist, there is within a self-conscious, shamed child, just as in every depressed and self-condemning narcissist there resides an omnipotent and grandiose version of how they could be. Although there is a real paucity of data on the genetics of narcissism, the concept of 'narcissistic extension' - the use of other people to prop up the self-esteem in the self [56] - ensures that there are social and behavioural ways in which narcissism can be perpetuated, even if genetic evidence is missing.

We could also encounter the process of the family exploiting the talents of one member for their own ends, such that a narcissistic person may well have been very important to their parent, but only because of the role they performed for that parent, not because of who they actually were. What was important was their function, not their self.

We can also see that shame and envy are two of the most pressing drives within narcissists – shame at their perception of how the world sees them for their shortcomings (their failure to live up to their omnipotence), and envy at those they perceive as possessing omnipotence or who lack the deficiencies the narcissist very readily feels they posses. Although half a century apart, Klein and Morrison [57] show the relatedness of these two concepts.

Narcissists are driven by grandiosity, as Kernberg [58] in particular has described, that may be felt internally or projected. So they set up unreal goals, and either convince themselves that they have attained them (and so feed the grandiose self), or accept their miserable failure, denying human fallibility, retreating into a depressive position.

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[56] see Alice Miller (1987).
[57] Morrison (1989).
[58] Kernberg (2004).

They have very poor relations with other people, and use them exploitatively. They judge, idealise, and seem to be without care in their dealings with others. This inability to relate to others can lead to the concomitant inability to express either remorse or gratitude. Above all, real intimacy escapes them. Kohut [59] has given us the concept of the selfobject, an object used in the service of the self, with all the demeaning and depersonalising implications that follow. So there is a diminished, even absent ability to love: all energy is spent on maintaining selfobjects, and on feeding their narcissism. *'Their need for others is deep, but their love for them is shallow'.*[60]

Further, one of the most common clinical presentations is one of constant evaluation, whether positive or negative. So some develop narcissism because of a constant childhood background of criticism, of failing to be good enough, while others, as Rothstein [61] has pointed out, are perpetually over-valued, equally damaging to a realistic sense of self-esteem.

The narcissistic personality, therefore, has a peculiar sense of the self:

> a vague falseness, shame, envy, emptiness or incompleteness, ugliness, and inferiority, or their compensatory counterparts: self-righteousness, pride, contempt, defensive self-sufficiency, vanity and superiority. [62]

And in one sentence, if there is just one characteristic that summarises the narcissistic personality, it is that they feel subjectively empty: they appear with a grandiosity that defensively covers an emptiness of self, an absence of attainable ambitions, and of meaningful affirming personal relationships. Actually, Kierkegaard himself put it quite well:

> 'So I went out into life, initiated into every possible enjoyment of life yet never actually enjoying it, but instead, and this was my pleasure related to the pain of my depression, striving to produce the appearance that I was enjoying it.... That is, I had to become and did become an observer....but I was not living.' [63]

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[59] Kohut (1971, 1977).
[60] McWilliams (1994) p 175.
[61] Rothstein (1984).
[62] McWilliams (1994) p 177.
[63] *Point of View* KW XXII p 82.

This, for me, summarises the life that Kierkegaard lived. Later Chapters look for evidence for this statement when considering his life and three of this works. But the next task is to unpack my second key concept, about the process of reading, and how psychoanalysis has helped change our views of what happens when we read a text.

3 READING AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

1st Spectator:	What did he say?
2nd Spectator:	I think it was *'blessed are the cheese makers'*.
1st Spectator:	What's so special about cheese makers?
3rd Spectator:	Well, obviously, it's not meant to be taken literally. It refers to any manufacturer of dairy products. [64]

Effortlessly, Monty Python illustrates the central issues of hermeneutics: what does a text say, and what does a text mean. In this thesis I am engaging with both of these ideas, by asking what happens when we read narcissistic texts, particularly those by Søren Kierkegaard. This is a vast area, and nothing will be achieved by contemplating the entire discipline. So my analysis comes in two halves. First in this chapter, I consider the death of the author from a classical Freudian point of view, and later, review his/her resurrection through post-Freudian theory. Three topics must be discussed, germane to my ideas on reading. First is the demise of the authorial model, linked to Lacan's ideas on repression (which from the perspective of this thesis are sufficient to deny any authorial intent). Second is the idea and limitations of the Reader-Response model. Having cleared the ground, some time is spent, third, on the actual process of reading as I see it, using the twin processes of countertransference and projective identification. This Chapter concludes with a discussion of what it means to speak of a narcissistic text.

3.2 THE ECLIPSE OF THE AUTHOR

We can caricature theories of reading as those that concern themselves with the author, those that concern themselves with the text, and those that concern themselves with the reader. Author-centred criticism has held sway

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[64] From *The Life of Brian.* Columbia Pictures, 1979 (Jones (1979)).

throughout much of recorded history, and there is every reason to find this attitude plausible. The idea, the point about reading a text, is to understand what the author meant when he or she wrote that text. In order to do this properly then, one would study a variety of disciplines to aid that understanding - philology, obviously, the biography and bibliography of the author, obviously - to attempt to know the world in which the text had been written. One would learn about techniques for establishing the authenticity and provenance of any text; one would study the derivation of the target language itself.

The working hypothesis of this era was what has been called the Conduit Model. [65] There was such a thing as a meaning, and a word was wrapped around this meaning like a protective coating. The word, containing the meaning, was sent through the ether as part of a text or a spoken sentence. The hearer simply unwrapped the word to reveal the original meaning, and communication was said to be complete. So the writer takes something from his inner psychological self and puts it into the wrapper, the word. This is then received and the same inner psychology taken from the outer word. On this model, that is how communication occurs. *'You put intention in at one end and get meaning out at the other...'* [66]

The reader thus is essentially passive; things happen whether the reader wants them to or not: one's response is dictated by the author. This model also assumes a parallel lexicon or dictionary in both the author and the reader or hearer. *Prima facie*, there is no problem with this: one assumes that we all use words in much the same way. Different cultures, even different languages, can be understood using this model if only one tries hard enough – obtaining an authentic 1830s Danish to English dictionary, together with a broad historical understanding of life in Copenhagen about that time should be enough to enable one to understand precisely what Kierkegaard meant.

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[65] Reddy (1979).
[66] Holland (1992) p 115.

This author-centred approach, and a genuine belief that one could truly approach the mind and mentality of an author, gave rise to a very literal approach to literary criticism and hermeneutics. It forms the basis of the hermeneutics of Chladenius:

> There should be no difference between fully understanding a speech or writing and understanding the person who is speaking or writing. For they too have the same rule to consider as the reader and the listener. Thus the speaker or writer can be thinking of the same thing as the reader or listener when he uses certain words. [67]

or

> A speech or written work is completely understandable if it is constructed so that one can fully understand the intentions of the author according to psychological rules... [68]

and is not absent in early Schleiermacher:

> Just as every act of speaking is related to both the totality of the language and the totality of the speaker's thoughts, so to understand a speech always involves two moments: to understand what is said in the context of the language with its possibilities, and to understand it as a fact in the thinking of the speaker. [69]

And such an approach is not completely dead. A recent prominent US literary critic, E D Hirsch, says:

> I argued that, in academic criticism, the significance and use of a text ought to be rooted in its fixed meaning, since otherwise criticism would lack a stable object of enquiry and would merely float on tides of preference. [70]

Much early Kierkegaardian scholarship was carried out with exactly Hirsch's maxim in mind: the search was to find the authorial intent of Kierkegaard. Now, and certainly in the latter part of the twentieth century, the attraction of Kierkegaard is that he represents a very early example of an author who sets out to avoid exactly that kind of simple model of a text. It is now a quite plausible notion that even for Kierkegaard himself there was not a single or fixed meaning. In general, authorial intent has anyway become increasingly suspect, and the text has taken on a life of its own. In hermeneutics, this is

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[67] Chladenius J. M. from his *Introduction to the Interpretation of Correct Interpretation of Reasonable Discourses and Writings*. *156. Quoted in Mueller-Vollmer (1994) p 56.
[68] ibid p 157.
[69] Schleiermacher, F.D.E. quoted in Mueller-Vollmer (1994) p 74.
[70] Hirsch (1984)

echoed in the ideas particularly of the later Schleiermacher and Dilthey. In the twentieth century, Heidegger and Gadamer more or less completed the process of isolating the author from the text and reader. And Barthes and Foucault in their own ways each proclaimed the death of the author. For Barthes:

> I read the text. This statement, consonant with the genius of the language (subject, verb, complement) is not always true....I do not make the text undergo a predicative operations called reading, consequent upon its being, and I is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, which will deal subsequently with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of infinite codes, or more precisely, codes whose origin is lost. [71]

Hence the vast majority of students of texts have moved beyond attempting to understand authorial intent - this is such a troubled and troubling process that little can be gained from it. As an adjunct, it remains useful, but in terms of pure theory of reading, most would consider it a dead end; twentieth-century hermeneutics has shown the impossibility of entering the mind of an author of another age.

But, actually, why? What are the mechanisms that underpin this assertion? Why cannot we enter another mind? Why is our conscious interpretation of a text so suspect? How is it, in Barthes' language, that the 'I' approaching a text is already a plurality of other texts? To discuss the idea that the text has its own life, as it were, I turn to the ideas of Jacques Lacan [72]. The reason why Lacan is nearest to the spirit of this thesis is his understanding and use of Freud's concept of Repression, and his further use of Displacement and Condensation as methods by which repressed meaning changes, producing the never-ending chain of signifiers. Up until his presentation of the process, while other individuals may have alluded to how repressed signification operated, there was no clear statement. (For anti-Lacanians, the theory

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[71] Barthes (1970) 16-17.

[72] This notoriously difficult to approach author is well served by introductory texts. Malcolm Bowie's general introduction is rewarding on every level (Bowie 1991). For a faster-paced summary, and an emphasis on the person, Stuart Schneiderman provides an immensely engaging study (Schneiderman (1983)). For an understanding of the clinical insights that the Lacanian psychoanalytic process

relies completely on Freudian ideas, and is little more than a packaging of seventy year-old concepts. But, as is so often true, the repackaging makes all the difference.) Clearly there are very many other approaches to textual independence, but Lacan's ideas seem to deal with critical issues about reading. Note that Lacan was a clinician as a well as a theoretician, and his language (and hence mine in this short exposition) is that of the normal and the abnormal, the pathology and the symptom.

It was one of Freud's early patients, Anna O (actually Bertha von Pappenheim), who coined the phrase '*the talking cure'*, referring to how amelioration of physical symptoms (in her case hysterical) came about through language alone. Lacan was to rephrase this later:

> Whether it sees itself as an instrument of healing, of formation, or of exploration in depth, psychoanalysis has only a single medium, the patient's speech. [73]

For Lacan, it is not just that the symptom is brought out of the unconscious to the conscious; it is that it is *made word.*

In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Freud had at some great length discussed the difference between the manifest dream text and the latent dream thoughts. The manifest dream text is the summary of the dreaming process that the subject assembles on waking; the latent dream thoughts are those underlying the dream, never allowed into consciousness. Lacan's insight was that the dream content, what we report on waking, is a transcript of the dream thoughts, but, crucially, presented in language.

Lacan refers to Freud's twin concepts of displacement and condensation frequently. Definitions are helpful. Displacement is:

> the fact that an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations. This phenomenon, though particularly noticeable in the analysis of dreams, is also to be observed in the formation of

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provides, Bruce Fink has provided an excellent text (Fink 1997). However, by far the best study, although twenty years old, is that from Ellie Ragland-Sullivan (1986).
[73] Lacan, Ecrits 247/40 (Lacan (1966).

psychoneurotic symptoms, and in a general way, in every unconscious formation. [74]

Whereas in Condensation:

a sole idea represents several associative chains at whose point of intersection it is located. From the economic point of view what happens is that this idea is cathected by the sum of those energies which are concentrated upon it by virtue of the fact that they are attached to these different chains. [75]

Condensation is the process of dialectically incorporating elements of the dream thought so to present to the internal censor (the precursor of the super-ego) the manifest dream that will be allowed into consciousness. Condensation is literally that - the taking of a myriad links between signifiers, and reducing, incorporating, altering, exaggerating, diminishing them into a dream story that can be told in a few lines or sentences. This is the seduction of first reading the Freudian theory of interpretation: a short dream is drawn out at length – endlessly it would seem – by Freud to show the underlying connections, the displacements that have taken place to produce the dream. The dream, as Freud said, is over-determined, endlessly so, possessing a myriad of connections with other elements in the thoughts of the dream:

The dream-thoughts and the dream-contents are presented to us like two versions of the same subject matter in two different languages. [76]

Displacement, on the other hand, involves the transfer of psychic energy from one thing to another. Displacement invests an innocent and apparently unrelated idea or impulse with all the energy of the repressed wish. In so doing, the original idea, the original signifier, may be lost, and all we have (Lacan's insight) is a chain of signifiers, with no anchoring point.

We can thus say that dream work proceeds by finding elements that are acceptable to the censor and which can consequently be put in the place of the ones that are unacceptable. The pressure of pre-conscious surveillance obliges the unconscious to resort to circuitous representation, to find

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[74] Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) p 121. See also Freud SE I p 350, 366ff.
[75] Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) p 82. See also Freud SE IV pp 293-295.
[76] Freud, SE IV p 277.

signifiers capable of concealing or disguising their signifieds, while at the same time speaking for them. Thus the dream is a product of an interaction between both the primary and secondary processes, what Freud called a compromise, fulfilling to some extent the wishes of both.

Condensation and displacement are thus agents of distortion and disguise. They reformulate the repressed wish (or wishes) in such a way as to be acceptable to the psychic censor:

> The conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone. [77]

That is, a 'thing' presentation could not attain consciousness without being bound onto a 'word' presentation. This binding helps to explain the difference in volume and depth and intensity between the dream thought and the dream content. The richness of the unconscious language is strapped by the poverty of the conscious language.

> The dream is, as it were, differently centred from the dream thoughts - its content has different elements as its central point. [78]

Coming directly from Freud, this idea of 'de-centring' has been used by Lacan in his theory of language and the unconscious.

Saussure differentiated between the concept and the acoustic image that became partnered with that concept. He equated the concept with the signified and the acoustic image with the signifier. [79] Whereas Saussure gave priority to the signified over the signifier, Lacan reverses this, and diagrammatically sets out the signifier as partitioned from the signified by a bar: this bar represents *repression*. Rather than the signifier in some sense representing the function of the signified, for Lacan, signifiers are all we have. Lacan's use of the bar, to mark a barrier between signifieds and signifiers, is critical. Without repression, language would operate exactly as the linguists say it should; but repression causes metaphoric use; it causes, as Lacan puts it, a rent, or tear or snag in the fabric of language. Thus we

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[77] Freud, SE XIV p 201.
[78] Freud, SE IV p 305.

have two parallel chains of associations - the conscious known signifiers, and the unconscious, and unknowable signifieds. Each sparks along independently.

Using this model [80], we can see how the integrity of the author is compromised. What the author means by a word is a function not only, or even mainly of his or her conscious intent, but of his chains of signifiers which in turn arise from his or her unconscious chains of unknowable signifieds. However hard the author tries to find the right word for a clear concept, repression will have its way, and the text will result from sliding signifiers. Thus, language speaks man or woman. And thus the text has reached a stage of having independence from its author, for it is not a single, one-to-one matching of concept to word or sound. Because of displacement, there is huge indeterminacy, over which the author has no control. So neither the reader nor the text now have a fixed determinacy, and any reading of the text depends upon the same processes of displacement and condensation in the reader. The likelihood of authorial intent ever being truly divined by a reader is thus doubly unlikely.

However, none of this means that we must abandon investigation into what the author intended *unconsciously*. We may have to agree that we cannot ever arrive at a single truth, a unitary explanation, a unique causal chain. But just as Freud unravelled dreams, so we can unravel what might have been dominant in the motive for a text; whereas Freud found a meaning for a dream that made sense both for the analyst and the analysand, so we can find mechanisms of authorship that chime and resonate with what we know of Kierkegaard the author, and ourselves his reader.

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[79] de Saussure (1986).
[80] see *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud* in Sheridan (1977).

3.3 UNDERSTANDING THE RESPONSE OF READER

Barthes, Derrida, Eco, Lacan, Iser and Fish all encompass some kind of acceptance of the importance of the role of the reader in understanding texts, and I want here to consider as an example of this approach the Reception Theory model of Stanley Fish, whose Reader-Response theory effectively denies the relevance of the author and the text.

For Fish, there are only communities of readers, who have in common a set of canons, or ways of being in the world; and depending on which way of being is operating, a text will be read in one way rather than another. These ways of being are barely within our control. Depending where we are in the world will determine how we read a text, and neither the author, nor indeed the text, has much to do with it.

The work of Fish is widely seen as a reaction to the New Critical school, [81] which held that there was objectivity in a text. This objectivity is denied by Fish: there is no meaning independent of interpretative strategies by individuals. Meaning, in other words, does not exist 'out there', but is a product of the reader, or to be more exact, a community of readers. For Fish, the meaning of a text *is* what it does to its reader.

At the extreme then, Fish might have to acknowledge the similarity between reading a text and interpreting a Rorschach ink-blot: there are interpretive communities in each case. [82] He can say all of this because of his view that we are always culturally and historically isolated, that we can never access previous cultures and therefore previous authorial intentions. Instead we have a total disjunction between the author and the reader/interpreter.

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[81] In New Critical Theory, two essays by prominent Yale professors in the 1950s underlined the separation of text from either author or reader. Wimsatt and Beardsley argued, with immense influence, that neither the working of the mind of the author of a text (the Intentional Fallacy) nor the workings of the mind of the reader (the Affective Fallacy) should have any bearing on the meaning, value or worth of a text (in their case particularly poetry).
[82] For a discussion, see Scholes (1985) Ch 9, especially pp 149-154.

Speaking of a dialogue with a critic with whom he profoundly disagreed, Fish says:

> If what follows is communication or understanding, it will not be because he and I share a language, in the sense of knowing the meaning of individual words and the rules for combining them, but because a way of thinking, a form of life, shares us, and implicates us in a world of already-in-place objects, purposes, goals, procedures, values, and so on. [83]

> ...their interpretive practices are not free, but what constrains them are the understood practices and assumptions of the institution and not the rules and fixed meanings of a language system. [84]

But he rejects the charge of relativism, that any reading is possible and there is no basis for distinguishing them:

> The point is that there is never a moment when one believes nothing, when consciousness is innocent of any and all categories of thought, and whatever categories of thought are operative at a given moment will serve as an undoubted ground. [85]

This idea, that there is never a moment when one believes nothing, is at the heart of any psychoanalytic approach to reading. We bring endless baggage with us, our repressed unconscious, and sorting out this baggage is part of the process of reading that I want to consider below. This baggage, and our response to it, lies at the heart of projective identification and countertransference.

However, Fish appears to be incomplete: he, too describes states but not processes, that there are communities but not how or why. His colleague, Norman Holland, on the other hand has produced a more detailed model, with implication for process. Holland, building on Fish, suggests a three-tiered hierarchical model. [86]

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[83] Fish (1980) p 303.
[84] Fish (1980) p 306.
[85] Fish (1980) pp 319-20.
[86] Norman Holland, along with Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser, were known at Yale in the 1970s as 'The Holy Family'. Holland is a prolific writer. Holland, especially in his early writing, was heavily influenced by David Bleich. See Bleich (1978). Holland's key texts are Holland (1985) and Holland (1975). A more polemical version of his thought can be found in Holland (1992).

At the lowest level are the neurophysiological invariates - processes that are a consequence of how the brain is wired, how it works; these are independent of culture or, he would argue, history. If we are human, then we share these invariates. One up from here are cultural invariates, interpretations that are not hard-wired, but to which, at any given time and in any given culture, most members would subscribe. So these are culturally invariant elements of interpretation, or codes. Every member of a culture would interpret a signifier in the same way, would invoke the same code. Above that, Holland's top level, are the communities, probably equivalent to Fish's use of the term. One community will interpret a text in the one way; different communities will interpret the same text in different, but consistent ways, each way being an example of a 'canon' in Holland's terminology. Holland gives examples [87].

His point is that some aspects of reading, presumably the very act of 'seeing' the letter 'a' for example, depends on neurophysiological invariants. [88] But making sense of words is at best determined by the culture within which I reside, and will entail both codes and canons. Interpretive communities will not differ at the physiological level, but may at the level of code and certainly will at the level of canon.

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[87] See Holland (1992) Chapter 7. Working from the bottom up, in terms of invariant neurophysiology, he recalls the pioneering work of identifying individual neurones that respond to edge, to contour, to movement. The famous early work on the Visual Cliff indicates how primitive these neuronal structures are, and how invariant they are throughout all civilisations, indeed, it would seem, throughout most mammals. Codes, by contrast are cultural; they differ between cultures but not within them. They refer to culturally agreed ways of recognition. So in the UK, most people would recognise a red outline triangle on a road sign as implying some kind of prohibition; in US culture the corresponding shape is an octagon. In Scotland it is agreed that the Saltire is the Scottish national flag, although in other cultures (eg naval flag signalling) the same signifier means something else.
Above these invariates are canons. These are invoked by sub-groups within a culture. So deciding whether a wine is medium dry or medium sweet can be, literally, a matter of taste. Arguing that a dominant seventh should be followed by a tonic resolution would be common sense for a classical musician, but not necessarily for a jazz musician.
[88] The likes of Chomsky would have it that it goes far beyond recognition of letters to recognition of elements of sentences, something he claims is uniform throughout all languages. See Chomsky (1986).

But in a sense none of this really helps: the problem with Holland, and hence with Fish, is that they are still both concerned with state rather than process. Holland, to be sure, fleshes out Fish's high level ideas, but still fails to approach the critical question: why are there different codes and canons? Why do I belong to this sub-culture rather than any other? What has happened to make me apparently choose to be part of one interpretive culture rather than another? Holland simply moves the question out by one degree, without giving any more of an answer than Fish. This is the real issue: why, within the same general human community, does a sub-set, a faction, a ginger group appear? Why are there sub-groups at all? Why do any of us, brought up in essentially the same community, read a text differently? The answer, I believe, *au fond* is psychological, and indeed can best be expressed in the language of psychodynamics. In the final analysis, communities of readers are formed to a significant extent on the psychodynamic processes that happen when readers read. The community of readers that finds *Works of Love* offensive share some psychodynamics, whereas those that find it beautiful and revelatory share a different set of psychodynamics. These two communities (in Fish's language) can be thought of as two different types (in the language of psychology and psychopathology). Of course there is no simple dichotomy: there are endless shades of interpretation in the middle. But if I emphasise the bipolar extremes to make my argument, I would argue that the extreme types to which they belong might be called resolved and unresolved narcissists, and the extent of the different readings is based on the extent to which the normal narcissistic processes have or have not been contained, managed and resolved. So this is about more than being a member of an overt community, sharing visible and external codes and canons. This is much more private, much more internal, much more psychodynamic. The psychodynamic type called narcissist has many sub-divisions – it exists as a distribution of some sort. But at the extremes, there are those for whom narcissism has essentially been managed, and those for whom it has not. These subdivisions co-exist within communities, and their differences may or may not be overt in day-to-day living; but they certainly become apparent upon reading certain kinds of text, narcissistic texts.

But even after all of this, I am still left with the problem of the mechanisms that permit these different psychodynamic responses. Lacan has given us a potentially nihilistic model for the reading process. Fish and Holland could be criticised for stopping their explanation just when it becomes interesting – why are there different communities? I must therefore address the detail of the process, the 'how' of why different interpretative communities come into being, actually the mechanisms of reading narcissistic texts.

3.4 THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF READING NARCISSISTIC TEXTS

This section considers what happens when we read any text, but particularly what happens when we read what I will define as narcissistic texts. And I want to go through the physical act of reading using as a template the processes known as Countertransference and Projective Identification. These are first introduced; then, following recent convention, it is suggested that they can be seen as two sides of the same coin. I then look in some detail at the psychodynamics of the act of reading, and suggest how we might recognise the projective identification taking place. This section is concerned with general principles, and I save until the final chapter discussion of what happens when we read the particular texts of Søren Kierkegaard.

Going along with current practice, it is suggested it makes sense to use countertransference as something of an all-embracing concept, a catch-all, for the entire response that might be felt by the analyst in the therapeutic process with the patient. Empathy, congruence, simple identification would all be present. Empathy is about putting oneself in a mode or state of mind where the words and emotions of the patient make sense, can be understood, can be responded to. Congruence would be about trying to understand the place in the world, the world-view, the outlook of the patient, without specifically focussing on any particular issue. Simple identification might be about being reminded of an event in one's own life that mirrors that in the patient - the death of a pet, moving home, whatever. So the single concept of countertransference is capable of logical, systematic and

sequential subdivisions. [89] Countertransference is thus defined as the therapist's total response to the patient, including both conscious and unconscious elements:

> The totalist view of countertransference requires the therapist to direct… his evenly suspended attention not only to the patient but also to the full range of his own thoughts and feelings, even if such thoughts and feelings at first blush seem irrelevant, inappropriate, or unacceptable. The therapist is encouraged to treat all thoughts and feelings as potentially important sources of information about the interaction with the patient…. The therapist strives to appreciate the ways in which he is being acted upon by the patient. [90]

Paramount among these responses is Projective Identification. It is customary to begin any exposition of Projective Identification with Melanie Klein's original definition, and so I shall not disappoint. In 1946, she wrote:

> Much of the hatred against parts of the self is now directed towards the mother. This leads to a particular form of identification which establishes the prototype of an aggressive object-relation. I suggest for these processes the term "projective identification" [91]

Some time later, Hanna Segal gave a more rounded summary of what projective identification entailed:

> In projective identification parts of the self and internal objects are split off and projected into the external object, which then becomes possessed by, controlled, and identified with the projected parts. Projective identification has manifold aims: it may be directed towards the ideal object to avoid separation, or it may be directed towards the bad object to gain control of some source of danger. Various parts of the self may be projected, with various aims: bad parts of the self may be projected in order to get rid of them as well as to attack and destroy the object, good parts may be projected to avoid separation or to keep them safe from bad things inside or to improve the external object through a kind of primitive projective reparation. [92]

Projective identification has come to be a psychological process that fulfils several functions: it is a type of defence, a mode of communication, a primitive form of object relations, and pathway for psychological change.

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[89] Tansey and Burke (1989). See Ch 3 for a discussion of terms.
[90] ibid p 41.
[91] Klein (1946) p 102.
[92] Segal (1973).

It begins as a primitive, and perhaps the only, means of communication open to the neonate. The infant is faced with an extremely confusing and complicated barrage of stimuli, many of which are utterly frightening. What kind of defence is available to the child? With, in Winnicott's phrase, the help of the good enough mother, the baby can organise his experiences into dangerous, painful and frightening experiences, as opposed to comforting, soothing and calming ones. Supporting this kind of internal organising, Klein hypothesised that the infant can use fantasies about ridding himself of aspects of himself (projection) and taking into himself aspects of others (introjection). This helps the process of separation. So projective identification begins as a means of keeping what is good at a safe distance from what is dangerous. Aspects of the infant can, in fantasy, be deposited in another person.

Projective identification is also a means by which the child can make his mother feel what he is feeling. The infant cannot verbalise these feelings, and so must induce feelings into his mother. It is further a means of beginning true object relations, and shares something with Winnicott's idea of the intermediate object: projective identification is a transitional form of object relations that lies between the stage of what we might call the subjective object and true object relatedness.

Finally it is a means of psychological growth. It was mainly through Bion's concepts of the container and the contained that the fourth function of projective identification gained credibility. As Bion put it:

> One of the consequences of this process is that, by projecting the bad parts (including phantasies and bad feelings|) into the good breast, (an understanding object) the infant will be able - insofar as his development allows – to reintroject the same parts in a more tolerable form once they have been modified by the reverie or thoughts of the object. [93]

In other words, the wholly unmanageable object is projected out, introjected and contained by, in this instance mother. The 'other', the 'container', takes in the projection, contains and processes it, and then again releases it in a

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[93] Grinberg et al (1977) p 29.

modified and altogether more benign state. Thus the individual, infant or adult, can see that these hitherto wholly bad and fearful objects may not be so bad after all. And hence psychological growth.

The concept has undergone much change since Klein's initial introduction, but remains, in the UK at least, a cornerstone of theoretical understanding and clinical practice. The essence, though, has changed little: the analysand puts some part of himself into the therapeutic space, and this is then accepted by the analyst. The thus projected parts are usually bad parts of the self, something to be got rid of; and the analyst may be surprised at the intensity of what he introjects or allows in. Once the introject has been managed and contained by the analyst, it can be discussed, interpreted, reflected on by the analyst, and thereby reintrojected in a safer, less dangerous form. So these are the three steps of projective identification: initial projection by the analysand, introjection and containment by the analyst, and subsequent re-projection and re-introjection of the modified part object by the analysand.

In the case of the living analysand, this is a straightforward process. When dealing with a text, it is more difficult, in that there is no third step. That is, the text can as it were project bad parts of the author; the reader can introject these parts; but, save putting the book momentarily to one side and having an imaginary conversation with the author, it is not otherwise possible to require the author to reintroject the contained and modified projection.

Actually, I suggest, we do have short or momentary imaginary conversations with the author. We do pause, perhaps scratch our head, and comment under our breath that the author just doesn't understand something, or that he is mistaken, or presumptuous, or deluded or whatever. Often - usually - these are on technical points, points of logic, points of understanding. They are rational responses to what we are reading. But beyond the conversations of which we are aware, there is still a process that deals with issues about which we have only disturbed feelings, not points of logic, rather issues of emotion, self and being, matters not easily couched in language. So our

response to these engendered feelings tends not to be language based, but the effect on the reader can be at least as powerful as points of logic. All of this accords with common language and experience. When we speak of a text, we use two languages. One will be formal, critical, will compare this text to peer texts, to other foundational texts, and will comment on its internal logic. But another kind of response speaks of our being disturbed, or moved, or touched, without an adequate basis for explanation. We speak of a very powerful book. Books can be memorable, and almost certainly not because of their internal logic. Texts are powerful because they speak to our emotions; and while empathy and simple identification play their part, the process by which they largely do this, I am suggesting, can best be described by the concept of projective identification. The author puts something of themselves into the text, something bad or something good; we read the text and accept and internalise the output from the author. This is a qualitatively different process from intellectually grasping or rejecting the cognitive content or import of the text.

3.5 PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION IN READING

Let me now analyse the process of reading to show how Projective Identification might occur and how we respond to it. [94] There are, on this model, three phases, and in the process of reading they parallel the processes encountered with a living patient or analysand. The first, the reception phase, is about how the analyst can be receptive to any signals from the patient that may induce countertransference; the second phase, called internal processing, is concerned with how the analyst understands the meaning of the transference induced within him; and the third phase is about how the analyst communicates back to the patient, and what the transference has meant for the analyst and patient. Within these three phases, there is a series of sub-phases, which from a clinical point of view are extremely helpful in identifying processes. They can also seem overly

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[94] This follows the strategy outlined by Tansey and Burke. Tansey and Burke (1989) Chs 5-7.

analytical, since the whole process of a projective identification and a response to it can be a fleeting moment of revelation, and the idea that such a process is ponderously subjected to time limited computation is obviously nonsense. So this is a theoretical schema, but one which I think is exceptionally helpful in helping us understand what happens when we read narcissistic texts.

Using this schema, let me describe one model of what happens when we read a text. I am not here suggesting that this is how we should read texts, or that this is the only way to read any text, nor Kierkegaard in particular. But I am suggesting that some part of the process described below can happen for some readers of Kierkegaard's text, and I am particularly suggesting that these processes are much more likely to happen for those called unresolved narcissists. But before starting this, there is one particular issue that must be addressed: who is the analyst and who the analysand? Is Kierkegaard projecting onto us, or are we projecting onto Kierkegaard? The answer is clearly going to be that some of each is taking place. But the general assumption is that we receive communications from Kierkegaard – we read his texts, and in that sense he is the analyand and we the analyst. We have to try to interpret the overt and covert messages he is sending us, and reflect on the internal changes that occur within us as we read these complex texts and 'hear', consciously or through his and our unconscious, his message. (It must be said that there is an alternative view, that of Kierkegaard as the dangerous writer. For some, he is so overwhelming, so capable of taking over our judgements and thoughts as to make the act of reading more like an act of submission, whereby all his ideas are consciously accepted, leaving behind a whirlpool of unconscious resentment and emotion that has to be worked out in due course. I am presuming that this is not the primary process for the modern reader of Kierkegaard, although some of this may be present for all of us.)

The first phase of reading Kierkegaard is the reception phase, when we settle down in a quiet room, decide how much of which text we intend to read in the time available, and conscientiously begin at the beginning and continue through until it is time to stop. Alas, reading rarely happens like that.

Spence [95] has pointed out the sheer difficulty of listening to a real patient, and by extension of reading a real text. One is consumed with so much trivia that continues to intrude onto consciousness - how the day is going, the seat upon which one sits, whether one's glasses are comfortable, the noisy interruption of the outside world. But above all, we have previous responses to having met Kierkegaard before. We never come to Kierkegaard without preconceptions, as I will show in later chapters - he is forever the melancholy Dane in our pre-conscious. What is called for when reading such texts is a freely hovering attention, attention directed towards both what the text is saying, and how we respond to it. Such a situation is difficult to attain, but without it, we run the risk of ignoring responses within ourselves that give clues to what Kierkegaard is trying to communicate. To paraphrase Sandler, we are aiming for 'free-floating attention' which allows all sort of thoughts, day-dreams and associations to enter consciousness while at the same listening to and observing the text. [96] Thus, Sandler is suggesting, the focus of attention should be a compromise between reflecting on the reader's own wishes and desires, and the desires and emotions stirred up by the text.

Straight away this leads to the concept of the therapeutic alliance or frame, a concept taken for granted in the psychoanalytic literature, but rarely explored in theories of reading [97]. It is important, when reading an author such as Kierkegaard, to keep faith with his writings as it were, to make a promise to oneself to try to understand what it is the author is attempting to tell the reader. If one begins the text with a cynical or thoroughly disapproving attitude, then little of what Kierkegaard has to say will come across. So, for example, even though one may find, early on in *Works of Love*, many of Kierkegaard's attitudes to be troubling, even repulsive, one must as it were keep faith that there is something important here to be understood. Of course one is permitted to give up and discard the book! But I am suggesting that narcissistic readers of Kierkegaard's text do not, exactly for narcissistic reasons.

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[95] Spence (1982) especially Ch VI.
[96] Sandler (1976) p 44.

It is important, if we are to be true to our emotions, to be receptive to Kierkegaard as we read him and to be aware of how the incidents of day-to-day living can affect our attention, and distort our perceptions. But that is just a preamble. At some point or other, on this theoretical basis, we experience an emotional response to reading Kierkegaard. It may be one of admiration at his style, frustration at his circumlocutions, a genuine attraction to an idea, or a repugnance to an attitude. We must retain an openness to being emotionally influenced by Kierkegaard, and not succumb to too early a shutting down of any emotional responses coupled with a rationalisation of how we feel about him. We must be open in this way because of our need to be receptive to the unconscious messages, the unworded ideas, that Kierkegaard is putting across, to the induction of projective identification. If we fail to be open, we fail to allow the introject to come into us. If we are open, then we can well experience what Balint calls 'therapeutic regression' . [98]

If, then, we remain open to Kierkegaard's effect upon us, we reach a stage where we can have introjected a communication that exerts a modifying influence upon our experience of self in our interaction with Kierkegaard: he has awakened something within us. Let us follow convention and call this a 'signal affect'. [99] The job of the reader at this point is to continue with this openness, and to retain the idea that he has made some kind of introjection, emanating from the text, and that some kind of emotional change is taking place.

So to summarise the process of reading so far as defined by this theoretical stance. First, in reading empathically, the reader must be able to clear their mind of external stimuli and influences in order that he can properly listen and be attuned to the messages – conscious and unconscious - within the

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[97] The term was actually used by Freud, and has become increasingly important as psychotherapy and counselling have become more widely available and accessed. For a recent exposition and summary of the concept, see Gray (1994).
[98] Balint (1968) p 146.
[99] This concept is discussed at length by several authors. See, for example Olinick (1969) or Beres and Arlow (1974).

text. Second, the reader must remain sensitive, susceptible even, to both literal and figurative, reasoned and emotional interactional pressure from the text, so that Kierkegaard has the opportunity to transmit all of his messages, those he intended to transmit as well as those he did not. And third, the reader must be willing to accept his emotional responses to the text not just as an emotional knee-jerk, but also as what we have called a signal affect, a stimulus attached to emotion, that is capable of analysis and understanding, revealing potentially valuable underlying meanings. Once this has been observed, and properly contained as opposed to being rejected, it is then possible to approach the next phase in which this multiplicity is processed, and sense made of it all.

The second stage has been called Internal Processing. [100] The task of the reader here is to hold, in the sense that Bion used that term. [101] The introjection discussed above, and thence separate out what belongs to himself, and what to the patient. A failure at this stage would be the inability to hold all of these thoughts and feelings, and immediately to reject those that belong to us as unacceptable. Since we cannot tolerate the emotions stirred up by the introjection, we deny them. But if we are to manage and investigate the emotions thus stirred, we need some kind of psychological distance from our immediate situation, we need to reflect on what it is the book is doing to us. So we have to ask 'what am I feeling now? Why is this book doing this to me? And crucially, what purpose does this serve for the author to make me feel as I do?'

There are two answers to these questions. The first derives from Fliess [102], and the second from Ogden. [103] Fliess emphasised the importance of being able to tolerate the negative emotions reading might bring about by emphasising the need to suspend super-ego criticism. Although couched in classical theory terms, this remains: exactly what the powerful text does is awaken unconscious criticisms, derived from early years, and internalised

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[100] Tansey and Burke (1989) p 85.
[101] Bion (1959).
[102] Fliess (1942).
[103] Ogden (1979).

through whatever process, so that we become our own worst critic. This remains for us all, but is infantile, always negative, and Fliess merely emphasises the need to be able to recognise this and manage or contain it. We must be able to view ourselves, temporarily, in an unfavourable light as we read a powerful text. The text is not pointing up a permanent truth, however, just reminding us of our archaic psychological development. So this is not a permanent threat to self-esteem or self-awareness: it is temporary; it will pass. We must not throw the book down, literally or metaphorically at this moment. What Ogden is asking us to do is remember that we are the author of our own feelings, that others can engender unsettling feelings within us, but that ultimately we retain authorship and ownership. It is, in classical language, about shifting from the experiencing ego to the observing ego.

I suggest at this point that Kierkegaard, does not want us to do this [104]. His entire thrust is about engaging us, certainly intellectually and necessarily emotionally, so that we remain, while reading him, in the experiential state. His gives us little room to step back and reflect, observe, what is happening to us as we read his words. He demands an experiential response from the reader. The danger, thus, in reading Kierkegaard, is that we remain all too aware of the strong feelings he induces within us, but not aware of what they might *mean*. The experience of self that Kierkegaard induces can be taken too literally, and perhaps should be tempered by asking what feelings Kierkegaard himself is enduring that he feels the need to project them out onto us, his reader. As Tansey and Burke summarise it:

> This sense of inadequacy is experienced as an enduring actuality rather than as a temporary and induced identification signalling something potentially important about the patient. [105]

It was Greenson who first used the term 'working model' in conjunction with projective identification. [106] He was referring to the 'internal replica' of a

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[104] Throughout this discussion, Kierkegaard is used as the example of reading a narcissistic author, simply because he is my chosen exemplar. There are doubtless very very many others, and much of what is suggested in this Chapter can easily be adapted to the works of others.
[105] Tansey and Burke (1989) p 88.
[106] Greenson (1960).

patient that the therapist builds up over time. It consists of the patient's 'physical appearance, affects, values, fantasies etc.' [107] This is a most powerful idea. For it will help us understand to a much greater extent our own responses to reading Kierkegaard. Greenson asks that we put ourselves in the situation of the writer, of Kierkegaard. As he explains with a very real example, [108] the intention is not to put one's self into Kierkegaard's situation, but to try to imagine being Kierkegaard in Kierkegaard's situation. Patently, this is not easy. We are dealing with a long since dead man. But we respond anyway to some version of Kierkegaard when we read him; that melancholy Dane image just won't go away. At this point I am asking no more than that we try to imagine being whatever it is that we conceive of as being Søren Kierkegaard, 'our' Søren Kierkegaard, and then imagine why he has said the words that are causing us such emotion. If such a process can be effected, much begins to become clear. We can see both how much of the emotion belongs to us, and how much to Kierkegaard, based upon our imperfect model of him.

So we have two processes to manage, and in parallel, if we are to be true to, and able to analyse and understand our emotional responses to Kierkegaard's texts. We must first try to isolate and make sense of the emotions that Kierkegaard generates within us when we read, recognising some of the negative (and positive) emotions as transient, and the need for careful reality testing against what remains our genuine and authentic self. But at the same time must try to image why the person we know as Kierkegaard wrote what he did and how he did, such that emotion of this intensity has been generated within us. Here we are truly in the hermeneutic circle [109]. We approach a Kierkegaardian text with some understanding of the author. Our pre-understanding modifies our reading of the text, but our response to that particular text also modifies our understanding of the author. I will never reach the 'true' understanding of Kierkegaard, but I may refine an understanding that makes sense for me, his particular reader. I generate the past of Kierkegaard here in the present, here in the act of

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[107] ibid p 421.
[108] ibid p 421.
[109] A key concept in hermeneutical theory. See Thistleton (1992) Ch VI et seq.

reading. But that model, conscious or not, and whether I like it or not, informs my every understanding of what he wrote.

The third stage in projective identification is that of re-projecting the part object and its associated emotion back to the analysand. In our case, we cannot project anything back to an inanimate text, and our author is dead. Our options might seem limited. But this remains a valid and valuable ultimate process, for it completes something. The problem is with how conscious we allow this process to be. As was commented above, the most common and immediate response to any stirring of emotion by a text is a rational denial, coupled with a cognitive downgrading of the author. A more sensitive approach will permit the reader to reflect on what is going on, what the author has engendered, and what state of mind the author might have been in to put such emotion into the text, what Fliess calls a 'taste' of the author's emotion [110]. While there is no possibility of a dialogue with the author, there is the possibility of a spoken, though usually unspoken summarising of the episode just encountered. Whether in uttered or unuttered words, the reader can organise and verbalise the hitherto unspoken emotions. This typically obviates the need for a negative cognitive response, and permits a richer understanding of the points the author was trying to make, as well as allowing the reader to access more of the author as a person.

But this is a difficult process, for there is no basis for evaluating the validity of the analysis and summary that the reader may come up with. The process is liable to take one into consideration more of one's own emotional situation, disregarding that of the author. [111] Throughout, the general hypothesis should be that the author, in some way or other, unconsciously needs the reader to feel some form of what he is feeling, and that this serves some purpose for the author. [112] Further, it should be viewed as an effort by the author to communicate to the reader in a way that is potentially much

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[110] Fliess (1942).
[111] Sandler (1976).
[112] Tansey and Burke (1989) p 121.

more effective and powerful than using words alone. [113] And remembering Lacan, we can conjecture that the author is doing this because some things cannot be said in words, that the transition from repression means that whatever words are used, the intended meaning is lost.

So on this reading, the author is not yet quite dead (even though, in this instance, he actually has died). Authorial intent may be difficult to support, but the idea that the author can never communicate some intention through emotion to the reader, is, I suggest, not yet proven. Something happens, if we allow it to, when we read texts, and something very special happens when we read narcissistic texts.

3.6 THE CONCEPT OF THE NARCISSISTIC TEXT

So far, then, we have a mechanism for understanding how the narcissistic author speaks to the narcissistic reader. But can a *text* really be narcissistic? At first sight surely it quite literally cannot. A text, at least in the sense of a printed text, or straightforward derivatives thereof, is no more than a series of marks on paper. It requires a reader for it to become intelligible. But any reader, certainly any human reader, will be subject to the similar laws [114] of psychodynamics as the author. [115] As Lacan describes, and as was discussed above, the signifieds in the unconscious of the author spark the signifieds in the unconscious of the reader, and the text is the medium through which this sparking occurs. The essence is Lacanian: the narcissistic author, driven through his signifieds, puts signifiers down on paper, and upon the act of being read, these signifiers stimulate similar chains of signifieds in the repressed of the reader. Lacan has shown how these marks contain meaning from the author, but not necessarily any meaning the author intended. We cannot be sure what these signifieds are, for they remain unspoken, unworded. The passage from unconscious concept to conscious word changes the signifieds forever, and it must

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[113] See Grotstein (1995) and Ogden (1979).
[114] actually, of course they are constructs.
[115] This is a fundamental assumption of all of psychodynamic theory.

remove purposeful meaning. On Lacan's view, we are left, worse case, with a set of signifiers which neither the author nor the reader can manage or decode or manipulate in any conscious way. Texts read us.

Writing is undoubtedly about projection. The author projects onto his texts issues about his own life. Events, people, motives, themes from a life become presented in the text. This need not be other than a healthy process, even healthily narcissistic. Writing is undoubtedly for many writers a narcissistic crutch; it is a verbal artificial prop for the self. In this sense, writing always courts another; it always wants to be read; it is, if you like, a means of augmenting an anxiously depleted self by the supplement of the word. Writing produces for the author a recognition that mitigates against everyday narcissistic fears.

But desire needs an other, and there is a corollary, and that is the reader. As readers we also project onto a text. Innocently, we project our lives, our significant characters, our motives and our themes onto the apparently already populated text; we appropriate the text to act as a narrative for our lives. And there is narcissism here too; we gain esteem and self-recognition by being part of the author's plot, modified to accommodate our own life and issues.

Hence we have an interesting reciprocity. The author desires power through the projected engagement of the reader, while the reader gains power from the projecting onto the text. All this is commonplace [116], and all this is benign. But truly narcissistic authors, and their reading counterparts, take this process to extremes. This is all a matter of degree, but whereas narcissistically content authors use projection as their main mechanism in writing, narcissistically damaged authors use projective identification. Again the distinction between these two processes can be blurred, but in essence true narcissistic writers use their texts in order to project ideas, emotions, and partial objects which need to be removed from the self. Usually these are negative emotions; sometimes not. But there is a need, a real

psychodynamic urgency for this more pathological projection to take place, exactly because such internal wishes and emotions threaten the self. Projection in this instance is not just an authorial option, an intellectual amusement, a nicety, a felicitous turn of phrase, but a desperate, sometimes a raging need to be rid of internal excruciatingly persecutory objects and their attendant affect. And the narcissistically damaged author must locate these projected objects into another, who must assume ownership and thereby responsibility. This is what our narcissistically damaged reader does: the very ideas that torment the author torment his reader, and these ideas are accepted: the reader identifies with the projection and takes them onboard as his own. So the narcissistic way of being of the author directly awakens the narcissistic way of being of the reader. This is not projection: in the benign situation, the reader more or less chooses which parts of his life to project onto the characters or situations in the novel. In the case of the damaged narcissist, the intention, if not the result, is that such an option is managed by the author.

Narcissistic authors engender much more closely defined emotions in their readers. We know from psychiatry the overt behaviours, the symptomatology of the narcissist: seeking admiration, expecting undeserved respect, feeling and acting special and so on. And we know from the descriptions of primary defence mechanisms what might be going on in the narcissistic to engender the behaviours and states. Hence when a narcissist speaks unto a narcissist, we have more than random interactions. The emotions, the primary defences of the one speak directly to the emotions, the primary defences of the other, and we can see how projective identification in particular would be the process by which this transfer takes place.

So to call a text narcissistic is a shorthand term for a complex process. A narcissistic text contains canons, in Holland's language, that are shared by other narcissists. And these are based not upon common cultural sharing of road signs, or wine or naval flags, but on much more private and idiosyncratic events from childhood. The terrible insult acted upon the infant

[116] For discussions, see for example Berman (1990); Layton and Schapiro (1986);

self that developed into our author has in some sense also been acted upon his reader, upon us, albeit to a lesser or greater extent. The detail of that insult must vary from person to person; these early processes are and must be unique: psychoanalysis is based on such a tenet. But there would seem to be enough commonality that we can speak of unresolved or resolved narcissists [117], that even though the detail may be remarkably different, the processes used in response to the insult, and hence the behaviours and states that result, are similar. And hence there is indeed a community of readers. A narcissistic text thus contains both evidence of the insult carried out, and the processes used in response to it. When meeting this evidence, the narcissistic reader cannot be other than affected. The text is the medium for this process. The text transmits the narcissism. [118]

Alcorn (1994).

[117] See the discussion on narcissism in Ch Two above.

[118] An analogy may be made with current electronic digital recording of texts. Up until one hundred years ago, a text had to be represented as some kind of marks on a medium, available for immediate visual inspection with no intermediary. (I appreciate the existence of the oral tradition, but that does not affect this argument.) Electronic recording however added several degrees of complexity. Take any of the currently miniature devices – say the stick. It is easy to load the entire Bible into such a tiny device. Does it then 'contain' the Bible? To answer this we have to consider Information Theory, first described by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver over fifty years ago. They suggest that any act of communication involves seven elements: a source, an encoder, a transmitter, a channel, a receiver, a decoder and a recipient. So to write the Bible onto a stick, we need all seven elements to be right; and to 'read' the Bible from the stick, similarly we need the exact parallel technology. Without it we would never know what the stick contained. With it, all becomes obvious. There is a similar situation with narcissistically encoded texts. The narcissistic author encodes and encrypts his messages (not necessarily consciously), but unless the receiver, decoder and recipient (all constructs within a single person) are similarly tuned, there will be a failure of communication – the narcissistic message may not be heard. (Shannon and Weaver (1947)).

4 THE IDEA OF PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

> The world loves to blacken the radiant and drag the sublime into the dust. [119]

There is a problem with organising any review of psychobiography, since it assumes large parts of personality theory, as well as taking a view on theories of history: there is no likelihood of considering either of these in this chapter (other than on an 'as-needed' basis). For a review of attempts to organise psychobiography theory, see a recent summary by William Runyan in Hogan's reference text *Handbook of Personality Psychology*. [120]

In reality, psychobiography is little different from much modern biography. It is a rare contemporary biography that refrains from making some enquiry into the motives of principal actors, from trying to link early life events with later life decisions, or from seeking to identify consistencies and similarities in the way a life is lived or challenges dealt with. [121]

So the difference between common-place biography and psychobiography is probably more a matter of degree. Whereas most biographies make use of some – often unstructured – psychological theorising and psychological ideas, the psychobiographer is really concerned with the use of psychological ideas as a primary tool in writing about the subject. Hence in psychobiography there is always substantial use of psychological theory and research. Whereas a biographer will consider a whole life, and attempt a rounded summary of how a life was lived, the psychobiographer by contrast might be much more concerned with specific events or episodes, not always attempting to relate these to the whole life. [122]

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[119] From a poem by Schiller, '*Das Madchen von Orleans*', quoted by Freud at the start of his Leonardo paper, SE XI p 63.
[120] Hogan (1997) Ch 2.
[121] W T Schultz - Personal Communication. See his *Handbook of Psychobiography* Schultz (2005) Ch 1.
[122] ibid Ch 1.

Runyan gives a measured definition of psychobiography:

> The explicit use of systematic or formal psychology in biography.
>
> Three aspects of the definition should be noted. First, the field is defined by the use of psychology, which may or may not be psychoanalytic. Second, the use must be explicit or visible, in order to distinguish psychobiography from all those biographies which make implicit use of commonsense psychology. Third, the definition refers not to the application of personality theory but to the use of psychology, which is intended to include within psychobiography those works drawing upon the full range of resources from the field of psychology, including psychological concepts, data, methods, as well as theory from developmental, social and personality psychology.[123]

For the sake of completeness, mention should be made of psychohistory, which refers to the application of psychological theory to historical events; it is sometimes called the science of historical motivation. It is the understanding of history though the motives of individual personalities. Psychobiography is more the attempt to understand life through understanding the motives of individual personalities.[124]

Probably the very first psychobiography was therefore by Sigmund Freud: his original treatise on the life and motivation of Leonardo da Vinci [125]. Following this initial attempt, there was a flurry of similar psychobiographies – Shakespeare, Richard Wagner, Socrates, among others. [126] This outpouring continued throughout the early half of the twentieth century, with writers and politicians being the favourite victims – Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Moliere, Goethe, Nietzsche from the former camp, and Caesar, Lincoln, Napoleon, and Alexander the Great from the latter. Much of this corpus was of very uneven quality, with many '*psychoanalytic*' studies being carried out by writers with little or no psychoanalytic training. Some notable products appeared around the mid-century, and the entire area has become extremely popular, at least in terms of output, in the last quarter of the twentieth century. For a recent survey of the *oeuvre*, see Runyan's summary.[127]

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[123] Runyan (1984) p 202.
[124] ibid Ch 1.
[125] Freud SE XI.
[126] many of which are summarised in Dooley's paper (Dooley (1916)).
[127] in Hogan (1997) Ch 2.

This thesis must have its own view on what psychobiography is about, its purpose, as well as exploring how it goes about its business, its method. Defining the goal of any discipline linked to psychology is difficult, but Levy suggests:

> The primary goal of psychology is the development of generalisations of ever increasing scope, so that greater and greater varieties of phenomena may be explained by them, larger and larger numbers of questions answered by them, and broader and broader reaching predictions and decisions based on them. [128]

There is also an epigram from Kluckholm:

> Every man is in certain respects a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, (c) like no other man. [129]

So merging these, I can suggest, with Runyan [130], that the goals of personality psychology are three-fold: to discover what is true of all human beings; what is true of groups of human beings; and what is true of particular human beings. Psychobiography uses these three sorts of truths in its search for meaningful analyses of its heroes and heroines. This of course is psychological truth, or truth used in a psychological sense. Such a usage of the word does not stand up well to any kind of post-modern inspection, but we are in the world of the psychobiographers, and I shall stick with their usage. This is, at best, an ironic use of the term 'truth'.

What is true for all human beings is an arena not much inhabited by psychologists. The realisation of the importance of nurture and culture in individual development led to psychologists making decreasingly broad pronouncements during the latter half of the twentieth century. Pronouncements about developmental or cognitive psychology are frequently surrounded by caveats pointing out that the process under consideration may not be universal.

An exception to the abstinence of psychologists declaring truths for all people, perhaps typically, was Sigmund Freud, and it was one of the major

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[128] Levy (1970) p 53.
[129] In Kluckholm (1953).

articles of faith for him that he was writing a science of the mind that truly applied to everyman. [131] Few would agree that psychoanalysis has achieved that status, and his later writings admitted increasingly to the difficulties in this project. But his 1910 '*Leonardo*' monograph is an excellent example of psychobiography through universal truths. Freud develops, on the hoof as it were, new aspects of psychoanalytic theory to explain processes in Leonardo's life, aspects that are nevertheless presented as being applicable to all of humankind. But let us note his method: the basis for these universal truths is clinical information gained as a practitioner of psychoanalysis. And the continuing practice of psychoanalysis provides the evidence for the validity of these universal truths. It is easy to see why the anti-psychoanalytic movement complained about this inherently circular process.

At the other end of the spectrum lies *Truths for One*. This approach or school is characteristic of a large amount of recent psychobiography, which concerns itself with as many determinants of specific behaviour during a life as it can, but typically emphasises idiosyncratic events, and uses the idiographic method. [132] This is not to the exclusion of all others, but in essence, the idiographic approach entails a careful analysis of the interaction between the person and the life events that surround them often on a piecemeal basis: the primary intention is to make sense of a part of a life, effectively on a stimulus-response basis. The hero of the psychobiography behaved (or spoke, acted, thought) in a certain way essentially because of a psychological precursor. Such an approach is highly attractive, but lays itself open to charges of superficiality as well as a lack of proper rigour: if we concede the ideas of a more or less permanent sense of self, then should not episodes be considered within this continuous self?

The middle approach of psychobiography - truths that apply to some – is a much more sober approach. Perhaps the majority of experimental work and the subsequent theory in psychology for the last century has been about

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[130] Runyan (1984) p 7.
[131] See for example his '*Project for a Scientific Psychology*' SE I p 281.
[132] Runyan, ibid Ch 9.

finding differences between groups, in some sense or other. The underpinning methodology is important, and I will explore this in more detail later in this chapter. But for now let us note the basis of the approach. *Truths for All* can be criticised for being too blunt an instrument; *Truths for One* can be wonderfully illuminating, but intensely inefficient in that enormous amounts of time must be spent uncovering truths that, ostensibly at least, have absolutely no application to anybody else. But I am trying in this thesis to point out that there is a group of people whom I shall call narcissists, and that the way of being in the world of any one narcissist will be echoed to a greater or lesser extent in the life of any other. *Truths for Some* offers that ideal middle, as long as we can be sure that the 'some' in question truly share things in common, and that truths can be generalised from small sample to entire subsets of populations.

The history of *Truths for Some* in psychology is more or less equal to the history of the theory of types in psychological theory, which has progressed through three eras: simple labelling, reflecting not much more than a phrenological approach to differences; factor or trait theory, which spent much of the last century arguing as much about form as about content; and the process approach, evidenced by the arrival of cognitive psychology in the mid-century on one hand, and forming the basis of much post-Freudian psychodynamics on the other. Just as psychological types have become commonplace in the psychology of everyday life, so too in psychopathology, psychological types have been devised and developed. Thus we have the Schizoid personality, the Paranoid personality, the Narcissistic personality: each has a distinct way of being, and each a distinct psychopathology.

These three approaches -*Truths for All, Truths for Some* and *Truths for One* - can be viewed as paradigms of how psychobiography has been carried out over the last century. Manifestly, they are not mutually exclusive, and although Freud may have steadfastly translated any idiosyncratic event that befell poor Leonardo into a process that he felt applied to all of humankind since the beginning of time, few would dream of such temerity at this point in the history of the subject. Any means at all - pure theory, sub-theory based on groups or types, and idiosyncratic life events as precursors - all are

nowadays called into play to explain, to make sense, of either a partial or a full life.

4.2 OBJECTIONS TO PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY

Attacks on the psychobiographical method began as early as 1924 [133], and reached something of a crescendo during the anti-psychoanalytic movement on the 1950s and 60s. Writers such as Hans Eysenck [134] criticised the entire integrity of psychoanalysis as both a theoretical model and a therapeutic method, while Karl Popper [135] conducted his own attack based on the lack of scientific rigour involved in psychoanalysis and its inability to entertain refutation. This writing necessarily spilled over into evaluations of psychobiographies, since, then as now, the underpinning psychological process model of choice was the psychoanalytic method. (It should be mentioned that there are other underlying theories that can be used as the basis for psychobiography; in practice, it would seem that biography as an analysis and understanding of the effects of past life on present actions usually utilises some psychodynamic method as underpinning theory.)

Consider, then, the standard set of criticisms of psychobiographies that use the psychoanalytic method. Erik Erikson, author of a highly respected substantial psychobiography on the young Martin Luther [136] was anxious about the process. His *Daedalus* essay of 1968 [137] most clearly indicates his preoccupations. His key concern is the need for self-awareness and disciplined subjectivity, alluding to a prior self-analysis as a pre-condition of undertaking any psychobiography [138]. He cautions psycho-historians not to:

> immerse themselves in the very disguises, rationalisations, and idealisations of the historical process from which it should be their business to separate themselves. [139]

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[133] Whilbey *The Indiscretions of Biography* (1924).
[134] See as just one example of a large and vituperous outpouring: *What is wrong with psychoanalysis* in his *Uses and Abuses of Psychology* (Eysenck (1962)).
[135] His most quoted text is *Conjectures and Refutations*, Popper (1963).
[136] Erikson (1958).
[137] Erikson (1968).
[138] Erikson (1958) p 20.
[139] Erikson (1968) p 709.

Criticisms of a more strident nature abound; perhaps none is more direct than Stannard's 1980 critique:

> from the earliest endeavours to write psychohistory to those of the present, individual writings of would-be psycho-historians have consistently been characterised by a cavalier attitude toward fact, a contorted attitude toward logic, an irresponsible attitude toward theory validation, and a myopic attitude toward cultural differences and anachronism. [140]

Moving beyond the hyperbole, there are clearly issues to be addressed; prime among these is the use of inadequate evidence:

> The psychohistorian who wishes to use psychological materials in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of a historical figure, or in the reconstruction of historical events, is, however, confronted with major problems of evidence. In conducting a psychoanalysis, the investigator has only to wait, and he is likely, through the process of free association, interpretation and working through, to obtain systematic data concerning his patient's past history, motivations, conflicts and ego strengths. To be sure, resistance and the ego defences distort, but this very distortion can then be the subject of further analysis and validation. When we try to apply these psychological methods to a historical figure, we have no such cooperation and no analogous systematic way to obtain information. [141]

Stone put it more bluntly:

> Freudian psychology has not been much use to the historian, who is usually unable to penetrate the bedroom, the bathroom or the nursery. If Freud is right, and if these are the places where the action is, there is not much the historian can do about it. [142]

It would be foolish to pretend there is no substance to these complaints. Anyone who has been anywhere near to the clinical psychotherapeutic situation, whether looking up from the couch or down at it, cannot deny the importance of the existence, and of the presence, of the *other* in the process. It is exactly in this encounter that so much of the exploration of analysis takes place. It is in encounter that the apparent serendipity and creativity of the therapeutic process can happen. And it is in encounter that truth is shown to be lies, and lies to be the truth. No amount of effort of empathy and congruence can make up for this existential process. This is because it

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[140] Stannard (1980) p147.
[141] Mack (1971) p 153.

is *'the talking cure'*. Freud's basic insight was that when allowed to free associate, people eventually stopped. And this stopping was, he postulated, due to something or someone stopping them. Exactly at this moment, and not before, the interesting things began to happen: the patient has encountered an *other* through the presence of the analyst. And learning new truths about this other is the journey that is psychoanalysis.

But manifestly this method of discovery is impossible for the psycho-biographer. Any inference lacks response, lacks denial, lacks resistance, indeed lacks the very stuff of psychodynamic encounter. We are also in danger of ignoring most of the challenges of the last century that warn us of the peril of attempting exactly this sort of psychological reconstruction. Around 1819, Schleiermacher [143] was able to suggest there are just two things needed to understand the writing of a previous author: an appreciation of what was actually meant by the words the author used (the subject of philology), and an appreciation of what was going on inside the author's head (the subject of psychology). Subsequent to these optimistic prescriptions, there has come into being a whole set of barriers to both of these precursors, especially the latter. The entire hermeneutic movement has manoeuvred itself into a position whereby comprehension would appear to be at best arbitrary. Nietzsche, the phenomenologists, Gadamer, and especially Derrida, have challenged the place of ratiocination in the understanding of verbal or literary intention. But perhaps the biggest challenge came from Sigmund Freud himself. It was he, almost at the same time as writing about Leonardo, who showed us the treachery that is motive reported through language. Through postulating his twin fundamental processes of condensation and displacement [144], Freud demonstrated mechanisms whereby the authors themselves may literally not know why they write as they do. Derrida and Lacan, especially, have seized upon this idea. [145]

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[142] Stone (1981) p 53.
[143] quoted in Mueller-Vollmer (1994) Ch 2.
[144] These are the two particular concepts that emerged while he was writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*. They were defined and discussed above.
[145] see Mark Krupnick's Introduction in his *Displacement: Derrida and After* (Krupnick (1983)).

There is also a major issue with reconstruction. Many, including Erikson, have made the mistake of reconstructing childhood events from adult behaviours, and then positing them as given. [146] This is a most common error, carried out often to surprising degree. The prize must go to Bishop Agnellus of Revena, who wrote a ninth century biography of his predecessors:

> In order that there might not be a break in the series, I have sometimes composed the life myself, with the help of God and the prayers of the brethren. [147]

The complaint of reductionism is also common, in that psychobiographers emphasise often pathological psychoanalytic processes and ignore anything at all to do with the society in which the subject lived, or indeed their creativity. As Meyer puts it, many works are guilty of:

> emphasising the basic concern with abnormality leading to the conclusion that what psychoanalysis has to offer to an understanding of the lives of great men consisted mainly in a documentation and explication of their foibles and follies. [148]

4.3 DISCUSSION

How then to respond to such trenchant criticism? My own view is that there is no real answer to their key claim, that psychobiography is an inexact science. When investigating an other, there is no right answer, no single psychological cause of any behaviour. We need to rid ourselves of this need to reduce ambiguity, and to rid ourselves of the persistent if naive idea of some psychical veridical camera that has recorded all we have thought and all we have done. We have no access to any such permanent accurate record, and we should cease pretending that we do; even if it were there, it is not amenable to access by psychoanalysis or any other method. The uncertainty, the ambiguity is complete. Pasts are not recreated, but created *de novo*; and pasts serve whatever purpose we choose.

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[146] see Erikson (1958).
[147] Clifford (1962) p x.

But psychobiography still has a purpose, although it is more arbitrary than its staunch proponents might claim. It is a tool to help generate a view, a model, an optional re-presentation of a self. No psychobiography can claim ultimate accuracy, authenticity or genuine validity. So all psychobiography can do is inform a narrative, help tell a story, offer support to one hermeneutic out of many. In short, psychobiography is indeed concerned not with elucidating causes about a life, but with making sense of a life.

But even accepting all of that, the frustration of the *Truths for All* approach is that a very few ideas - the oedipal issue, stages of sexual development - are used as the sole explanation of hugely disparate behaviours in every person that has ever lived. Such a scope necessarily suggests that generating antecedents from such a few principles lacks plausibility and validity - I just do not believe that Kierkegaard's life and works can be explained in exactly the same way as the life of any other Danish writer of the same period. If there are psychological antecedents in common between two people, they are so general as to be meaningless.

And I cannot go with the idea of viewing Kierkegaard's life as a serial sequence of events, each capable of its own explanation but with no underlying theme or reference. In that Kierkegaard was so clearly concerned with the idea of unitary self, urging us to become *'one thing'*, it surely behoves us to look for some unity in his life.

Notwithstanding the criticisms against truths for all and truths for one, there is value in the third way, the middle road, that concerns itself much more with processes than with descriptions, and that genuinely helps us understand the 'how' as much as the 'why' inherent in any analysis of motive. '*Truths for Some'* gains support from much of recent personality theory and the general psychological theory of types. By assigning a person to a type, we can access a body of theory that categorises that type, thus ensuring genuine membership and true exclusivity, as well as helping to explain *why* they are of that type. And we can further access a body of

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[148] Meyer (1972) p 373.

theory about the mechanisms that underpin the peculiarity of that type, thus helping to explain the *how* of that type's behaviour. All of this assumes basic type theory in psychopathology, as well as an understanding of defence mechanisms that all the schools of psychodynamics accept.

4.4 TRUTHS FOR SOME

The methodology is deceptively simple: devise or otherwise obtain a logically supportable series of ways of being in the world; let each of these be called a Type. Then assign the individual in question, the hero of the psychobiography, to the appropriate type, and then use the *in extant* theory surrounding that type to give a consistent explanation for how a life was lived. There are still caveats: this is not to claim the only explanation, or the 'correct' explanation. But it can offer a consistent basis for discovering a new version of a life. Clearly, from the preceding sections, I propose to place Søren Kierkegaard into the category called 'narcissist'. But I must also explain the family of types to which narcissism belongs, and prior to that, the logical basis for the psychological theory of types.

The early approaches to personality theory were no more than examples of taxonomies; but both psychology and psychopathology need taxonomies. A good taxonomy will permit efficient communication and efficient research, and will lead to the establishment of concepts capable of manipulation, concepts that are primarily analytical instruments for the intellectual mastery of empirical data. For many, a poor taxonomy is better than none at all. But in the final analysis, this is no more than labelling.[149] And if we recall our basic statistics, categorisation is clearly measurement on a nominal scale: one category is different from any other, but there is little or no sense of gradation or incremental change. 'Schizoid' is different from 'Obsessive' as 'France' is from 'China'; each pair belongs to the same family, but beyond that there is little by way of increased understanding.

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[149] See Frances (1990) and (1993) for a review of this approach.

Many have been very critical of this approach, claiming that dealing in states or categories must be replaced by a series of process models if better understanding is to follow. Perhaps the primary mover in this debate was Thomas Szasz. [150] He questioned the value of either a categorisation model or even a factor model for anything to do with psychopathology. Only by understanding processes will we appreciate how and why we can summarise complex behaviour into relatively simple categories. Without the underlying understanding of the processes, we will arrive at the potentially contradictory situation when several distinct categorisations can be used to explain the same behaviour. He pointed up examples - the replacement of the thing called phlogiston by the process called oxidation is just one - as evidence of the increased economy and power in explanation of processes over states.

This process model can be applied to narcissism. There are generally agreed [151] to be nine types of personality psychopathology. They are: psychopathic, narcissistic, schizoid, paranoid, depressive, masochistic, hysterical, obsessive and dissociative. And each of these types comes about because of the differential effects of the defence mechanisms described in the previous section: primitive withdrawal; denial; omnipotence; idealisation; projective identification; and splitting. Hence this approach enables us to describe any of the character types using any of the languages of the schools, but using a basic set of processes. Note that the names of the nine types are nothing more than labels. They should not be considered for reification. They could just as easily be letters of the alphabet or colours of the rainbow. They are a label for a consistent and unique constellation of use of defence mechanisms, consistent throughout life for any person properly assigned to the type, and consistent among the community that makes up that type.

While these nine types are by no means mutually exclusive, it is possible to give quite clear descriptors of each type such that different interviewers meeting the same type will tend to agree on their classification or diagnosis.

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[150] He wrote over 30 full texts and several hundred papers on more or less the same topic before his death.
[151] See McWilliams (1999).

So a schizoid described in drive theory processes still exhibits more or less the same behaviour as a schizoid viewed from an object relations viewpoint. And so with an obsessive, or a narcissist. We can propose our hero as belonging to one of these character types, and then use any of the theoretical models to explain or predict his behaviour. We are thus able to talk about truths for a group of people, in this instance those normally described as narcissists. Having made the proposition, we have to hand a plethora of process models for various aspects of his behaviour. Note that there is a clear possibility of refutation in the Popperian sense: a Schizoid is very different from an Hysterical personality, and a Narcissist very different from an Obsessive [152]. So there is a clear opportunity, as it were, to get it wrong. If little or no supporting evidence, from life and work, can be found that can be described and explained by the appropriate processes, then the hypothesis must be rejected.

Where this approach has benefits over and above the *Truths for All* approach is that we are not condemned to using very broad-brush theory that offers little by way of detailed and differentiated explanation of a life's course. And compared with the *Truths for One* approach, neither are we obliged to find singular antecedents for every significant life event. By assigning a psychopathological personality type, we can predict that certain pathological responses will follow certain stimuli, and if necessary show the underlying processes that account for that behaviour, whether in terms of development or defence.

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[152] Placed in a room together, the Schizoid would tend to withdraw, to avoid contact, to become internally confused. The Hysteric would do much the opposite, and externalise anxiety, allowing internal fears to become public. The Obsessive, presumably, would tidy the room.

5 APPROACHING SØREN KIERKEGAARD

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter discusses why I use Søren Aabye Kierkegaard as my exemplar, my model of what happens when we read narcissistic texts. Two immediate questions arise: why an exemplar at all, and why this one?

The history of psychoanalysis in its most catholic sense is replete with the case study, the vignette, the observation that informs the development of theory. The language of psychoanalysis is dense, obtuse and sometimes one fears asymptotic to meaninglessness: hence the case study is so much more than just a reality check. If we agree with Peter Fonagay's [153] description that psychoanalysis is the most profound exploration of human subjectivity consistent with systematic study, then there is a balance to be struck between the systematic and the subjective aspects. By using an example I am respecting this balance.

But why Søren Kierkegaard? He offers that rare combination – a profound intellectual output, coupled with a high degree of personal revelation. That the personal revelations are dubious, incomplete, perhaps deluded and sometimes mendacious means that he is no different from the typical client coming to psychoanalysis. The challenge is to see how we can weave a coherent story about his life and being, just as one would with any analysand. The detail of his life and three of his works will be considered below. But the critical precursor question is: how do we come to Kierkegaard? How do we meet him? What are our preconceptions? In terms of the hermeneutic circle what *Weltanschauung* do we bring to the details of what he says and who he was? In answering this, I want first to consider his reception in the first hundred years following his death. Second, I want to consider the more recent academic appraisals of who he was and what kind of writer he was, differentiating between Kierkegaard the man of letters, the philosopher and the theologian. Finally, I give my own views on why he

presents such a splendid example for understanding the process of reading narcissistic texts.

So, when we first encounter Kierkegaard, what are we meeting? Do we arrive *tabula rasa*? What happens in that first encounter? For all but the most naive reader, when we meet Kierkegaard for the first time he comes with an introduction, a preface or a synopsis that contains elements about his life, and elements about his psychopathology. Biographies, early and late, give credence to some kind of psychic difference, psychological disability or frank mental illness. This perception, this metaphor for how he lived his life, has turned into myth, and is established in our time. I want to question this prevalent assumption, by identifying the sources for some of our beliefs about the state of Kierkegaard's mental health, that is, by considering briefly some biographies and psychological studies of the man. It will be clear from Kierkegaard's reception over the last one hundred and fifty years that scholarship has a set of assumptions about him, and these assumptions amount to essentially a medicalised model. In turn, this medicalised model then gives us the freedom and authority to have a privileged view when thinking about his writings. Because, on this view, we are normal and he is sick, we bring a plethora of assumptions about what he wrote and how these writings and thoughts affect us.

We meet, in short, a medicalised author, and thereby we are able to contain many of the difficulties his writings engender. Kierkegaard, it has been suggested [154], is a dangerous writer, and much effort has been expended to manage this danger, as the early reception shows. By medicalising Kierkegaard, by making him the subjective patient, we thereby become the more objective therapist, and hence we have a means of negating some of Kierkegaard's most challenging ideas. They thus are reduced, and he also. But to make this case I must first race through more than a century of responses to Kierkegaard.

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[153] Fonagay (2007) p 917.
[154] Adorno's notoriously complex 'Kierkegaard' (Adorno (1989)) more than makes the point.

5.2 KIERKEGAARD'S EARLY RECEPTION

There has always been a fascination about Kierkegaard's motives, and evidence for this can be seen from the very earliest reception. [155] Perhaps the first psychological analysis of Kierkegaard comes from one Erik Bogh (1822-99). His chosen title (*Søren Kierkegaard and the Saint Søren Cult*) [156] indicates too much about the contents. The text offers a psychological, even medical analysis of the motives of the man:

> Søren Kierkegaard was, as is well known, both a hypochondriac and an affected man [157]
> (his) entire intellectual career was a confused sysiphus-battle in order to reflect the fervour within himself... [158]
> Søren Kierkegaard was not merely a man of genius, but he was unfortunately a sick man as well. [159]

And about the Journals, which were just becoming available to the general reader at this time following Barfod's editorial efforts:

> they are generally unreliable....Now they are an expression of self deception, and now an experiment in the deception of others. Most often it is both parts together.[160]

Some have taken Bogh's offering as an unfortunate portent of much of the Kierkegaard industry that was to follow.[161] The chief culprit, in the eyes of such critics, is the writing of Georg Brandes.

Brandes gave a series of lectures around Swedish Universities in 1876; the outcome of these was the publication of his '*Søren Kierkegaard – A Critical Exposition in Outline'*.[162] This major text follows a biographical-psychological approach, evaluating the successive stages of life through which Kierkegaard passed. Brandes suggests [163] that two emotions drove much of Kierkegaard's

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[155] The earliest reception given to Kierkegaard's work has been detailed by two major sources: Aage Henriksen's prize winning essay of 1951 (Henriksen (1951)) and Habib Malik's later compilation (Malik (1997)).
[156] Published in Copenhagen in 1870.
[157] Bogh p 6.
[158] ibid p 4.
[159] ibid p 4.
[160] ibid p 5.
[161] see Malik (1997) p 218-19.
[162] *Søren Kierkegaard: En Kritisk Fremstilling I Grundrids* (Copenhagen 1877).
[163] ibid p 35.

adult life - *Pietet* (in the sense of reverence, respect and veneration) coupled with *Foragt* (in the sense of contempt and scorn). But as Henrikesen points out in his commentary, and most interestingly from our point of view, reverence and contempt do not define character, but relations:

> Reverence leads him away from his ego in sincere devotion, but in his contempt there is a double current, a cold one directed towards the outside world, and a warm one flowing towards his own person. [164]

In fact, Brandes' analysis is extremely penetrating, considering that it was written a quarter of a century before the ideas of psychoanalysis became popular. The author sets up a series of claims about Kierkegaard that have, for good or for ill, become part of our conscious and indeed unconscious perception of him. Thus: Kierkegaard was a product of an early gloomy childhood; his father forced piety upon him; his physical frailty as a child incurred the teasing and anger of fellow schoolmates; his natural intellect developed into an intense sarcasm that he used to retaliate against his school day persecutors; the use of indirect communication and the use of pseudonymous authors, stem from Kierkegaard's fear of contempt and further torment were he to claim the writings as his own.

It was Brandes who first isolated the trinity of life events that have served so many psycho-biographical essays of Kierkegaard so well: his relation with his father, his engagement to Regine, and the Corsair affair. In seeking evidence, Brandes is the first writer to interpret parts of Kierkegaard's writing that were never admitted as being autobiographical to be in fact just that. Brandes was the first to suggest that Kierkegaard's 'thorn in the flesh' was sexual impotence. And the aftermath of the broken engagement was the reason for Kierkegaard's increasingly vociferous critique of the State, the Church and the Present Age.

Brandes has been roundly criticised for having a rationalist-positivist agenda.[165] Henriksen even suggests that Brandes admitted in his 1888 letter to Nietzsche, no less, stating that 'his aim writing the treatise on Søren

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[164] ibid p 24.
[165] see Aage Henrikesen: Methods and Results p 28-30 (Henriksen 1951) and Malik (1997) p251-6.

Kierkegaard was to free the Danish people from his influence'.[166] But for all that, there is great insight: in a piece of remarkable psychological reasoning from 1877, Brandes suggests:

> There was a cleavage in his life. Before the Christian tradition and its ecclesiastical and poetical apostles he prostrated himself, before those who were outside it in their literary and political activities, he had only the deadliest scorn. In his reverence he waived part of his legitimate critical rights. To make up for this he claimed a place apart from the ordinary run of men in other respects. [167]

This is a most excellent description of the narcissistic process.

For a different and more focused summary of the reception accorded to Kierkegaard during the first hundred years following his death, Aage Henriksen's *Kierkegaard Studies in Scandinavia* is a valuable source. Published in 1951, it is a detailed analysis of the themes that drove the perception of Soren Kierkegaard during two remarkable half centuries.

Henriksen considers, under the heading of Biological Psychology, an evaluation of Landmark's *'Interpretations of Kierkegaard's Early History'*.[168] This contains perhaps the first reference to Kierkegaard and Oedipus, with Landmark's strenuous attempts to identify the Great Earthquake described in the journals with the awareness of the state of his relationship with his father. Another major work considered by Henriksen is from Hjalmar Helweg, one of Denmark's most eminent psychiatrists in the first half of the last century. His *'Søren Kierkegaard: Enpsykiarispsykoloisk studie'* (Kierkegaard: a Psychiatric-Psychological Study) was published in Danish in 1933. It was Helweg who added theoretical weight to the common view that Kierkegaard suffered from endogenous manic-depressive psychosis – what might now be called a bi-polar syndrome. Helweg points to the family incidence of the syndrome, and draws extensively on the then current psychiatric obsession with linking Kretschmer's body types to psychopathology. So, according to Helweg, Kierkegaard's build was 'pycnic', and his nature was 'syntonic'. But published about the same time, and in

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[166] ibid p 23.
[167] Brandes (1877) p 33.
[168] Henriksen ibid p 112.

the same light, was John Bjorkhem's *'Søren Kierkegaard I psykologisk belysning'* (Soren Kierkegaard in a Psychological Light).[169] This is a neat counter-argument to Helweg, and suggests that Kierkegaard was of Kretschmer's asthenic-schizothymic type [170].

Mention might also be made of two texts that concentrate on Kierkegaard's alleged deformity, his hunched back. R Magnussen's 1942 text *Søren Kierkegaard set udefra* (Soren Kierkegaard viewed from without)[171] makes much of Kierkegaard's physical deformity. This, the author maintains, is the real cause of the severe melancholia that afflicted Kierkegaard. About the same time, Theodor Haecker wrote a short but similar text with the very non-politically correct title *'Kierkegaard the Cripple'*, probably in 1943, although it was not published until 1947 [172].

Helweg was unambiguous in his diagnosis that Kierkegaard suffered from a manic-depressive psychosis, and it is against this certainty that Ib Ostenfeld set out to give his own psychopathological analysis [173]. Even though it was written at the end of the 1960s, when psychiatry was undergoing by far its most radical change [174], the text has a dated air about it, as well as presenting arguments that appeal more to common sense than anything to do with psychiatry. In a nutshell, Ostenfeld suggests emphatically that 'it is

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[169] Henriksen ibid p 123.

[170] The early part of the last century was awash with theories linking mental and physical attributes. None was more assiduous in this theory building than Ernst Kretschmer. His major text was translated in 1925 as *Physique and Character*. Odd as this might seem now, intense effort was dedicated to this linkage, and a vast taxonomy of body types came into being. A fair but unkind caricature of the ideas of this movement would be contained in the dictum: *'fat people are jolly, thin people are miserable'*. If this ever were true in the 1930s, it certainly is not true today, for mainly cultural and medical reasons. Not surprisingly, such an approach is now very much out of fashion.

[171] Henriksen (1951) p 127.

[172] Haecker (1948).

[173] Ostenfeld (1978).

[174] It is difficult for us now to recall that only fifty years ago, the armaments at the disposal of the average psychiatrist were minimal. For all of the first half of the twentieth century, the options were: electro-convulsive therapy; a handful of essentially inorganic compounds, such as paraldehyde, with which to stultify the patient; the terrifying unanaesthetised use of insulin as shock therapy; and latterly psycho-surgery. Otherwise, the options were restraint, always physical, and usually, to modern perceptions, brutal. The arrival of chlorpromazine as the first psycho-active drug in the late 1950s was the start of a truly remarkable change.

impossible to find manic-depressive features in his writings'.[175]

Kierekegaard's melancholy is not identified with depressive tendencies, but rather is

> a complex phenomenon, partly an expression of fragility of mind not uncommon among members of a manic-depressive family who have not themselves inherited the disposition, and partly the result of violent influences from the environment. [176]

The primary and overwhelming influence on Kierkegaard's life was, according to Ostenfeld, his father. It was a wish to obey his father throughout his life that led to the problem with the engagement, and the Corsair:

> His father was the only person toward whom Søren could express his feelings freely and openly both in life and in death.[177]

Ostenfeld's analysis of the later years and the crisis in Kierkegaard's life revolve around the themes already expressed: the underlying irrevocable attachment to his father, the extreme social sensitivity, the resulting inner conflict, and his resulting uncertainty about his place in public life:

> All these private difficulties were his real motivations in the Church struggle which was only indirectly an attack on the existing church. It became a symbol of his personal dilemma in all these areas that he could no longer control....There is a straight line from his experiences in childhood to the uncontrolled outbursts of this final phase. [178]

In summary, then, I suggest we can see in the early reception a broad agreement that Søren Kierkegaard endured some kind of psychopathology. The extent, the name, and its relative impact for his life and works are given different degrees of importance. But essentially the early biographies make culturally standard assumptions: that there is a medical model of psychopathology, and that Søren Kierkegaard, in some sense, suffered from it.

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[175] ibid p 49.
[176] ibid p 5.
[177] ibid p 11.
[178] ibid p 42.

5.3 KIERKEGAARD IN THE ANGLO SAXON WORLD

In the 1930s, the Anglo-Saxon world was introduced to the ideas and life of Kierkegaard through two authors: Alexander Dru, who translated parts of the Diaries[179] into what was to become a long-standing best seller; and Walter Lowrie, who translated almost everything else. Lowrie's *Kierkegaard*, a full and detailed analysis of the man and his ideas, appeared in 1938.[180]

Lowrie is responsible for much of our current and often unconscious imagery of Søren Kierkegaard. It is a commonplace to refer to him as 'the melancholy Dane'. The English-speaking world owes this to Lowrie. There is an oft-repeated tale in the secondary literature that Danish mothers admonish their children 'not to be a Søren' [181], again a debt to Lowrie. More importantly, there has come about a set of biographical assumptions about Søren's early life, repeated by the majority of English language biographies and other secondary sources, that we owe to Walter Lowrie, but about which, from a psychological point of view at least, there is real ambiguity.

Lowrie posits many key issues, based entirely on components of Kierkegaard's writings, and presented by him as in no way autobiographical, as actual biographical fact - the walks round the living room, [182] anecdotes about early school days taken from Judge William [183], the gloomy religious childhood and the obsession with sado-masochistic elements in Christianity [184]; and the matter of Father's rape of Ane Lund. [185]

The romanticisation of the Kierkegaardian story continued throughout much of the mid-century. In the biography by Josiah Thompson [186], we encounter a certainty about putative autobiographical events taken to extreme. So sure

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[179] Dru (1938).
[180] Lowrie *Kierkegaard* (1938).
[181] although ask any modern Copenhagener, and they will probably not know what you are talking about.
[182] *Fragments*, KW VII, pp 118-125.
[183] *Either/Or II*, KW IV.
[184] *Fragments*, KW VII pp 127-8.
[185] *Stages,* KW XI, pp 250-252.
[186] Thomson (1973).

is this author of the validity of questionable inserts he is able to treat them in novella form:

> The boy knocks. From within a voice answers. As the boy enters the drawing room the old man puts down his book, shifts his spectacles, and turns to see what it is he wants. "Father, may I go out?" The shadows are already creeping up the walls of the houses across the square; it must be getting on towards six. "No, it's too late," the old man answers. "Dinner will be ready soon…But if you like we can take one of our walks in here." He rises from the chair, lays his spectacles across the open book, and gently takes the child's hand. Together they begin to walk up and down the drawing room. [187]

There is simply no way of knowing whether anything like this actually happened, but it makes for a wonderful yarn, and adds to the cryptic personality that is Søren Kierkegaard. It is a rare reader who does not *want* to believe that they are reading autobiography.

James Collins' popular and influential *The Mind of Kierkegaard* [188] was originally published in 1953. Although primarily an introduction to the thought of Kierkegaard, Collins begins with the traditional biographical discussion and analysis, all of it essentially conservative. Collins repeats many of the quasi-biographical anecdotes first unearthed by Lowrie and sees them as fact, sometimes with a little embellishment of his own.[189] In that this text has been a primary Anglo-Saxon source for perhaps a generation of students wishing to come to terms with Kierkegaard, it is hardly surprising that the images, anecdotes and persona of the melancholy Dane are so firmly fixed.

There have been a few demonstrably psychoanalytic investigations of the mind of Kierkegaard, pre-eminent of which is Sylviane Agacinski's *Aparte.* [190] For the most part, this text is a series of comments, explanations, amplifications, refutations, extensions, and exaggerations of Kierkegaard's themes. On the issues of Kierkegaard's melancholy, Father's guilt and the absence of Mother in any of the writings, the author writes:

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[187] ibid p 30.
[188] Collins (1983).
[189] so the 'walks around the drawing room' story is added to: 'Friends would be greeted, gossip exchanges, obstacles avoided' etc (Collins (1983) p 5).

> Could the mother's rape scene represent for K's unconsciousness the father's secret? Is the son's unconscious hearing some unspeakable confession in the enigmatic words of the father, something like, "I raped your mother"? Had this been the case, such a message could not have registered completely; first of all because it would have destroyed the son's image of a father loved and admired like a god, and further because such a crime would have brought to light the father's betrayal ("It wasn't you I wanted, seduced, violated…"), and finally, because the son would have had to recognise the origin of his own birth in this scene….. This is because not only would it intersect with the inexpressible desires of the son regarding his mother, but even more importantly because it would unleash his jealousy of her, though not without the scene's being able to satisfy at the same time the son's desire to occupy his mother's place in it. [191]

More recent biographies, particularly that from Garff, have been much less certain in their psychopathology, and hence much more in tune with any modern psychological biography. There has been a noticeable softening of the allocation of Kierkegaard to the ranks of the partially insane. We have in recent times felt the force of Derrida and others on Kierkegaard's work. [192] The outcome of this approach has been a recognition that it is both easy and profitable to play with sections and segments of the corpus in order to gain specific insights, and we have seen how Agacinski's adds much to our perspective of both the life and the writings of Kierkegaard using such a post-modern approach, as the above quotation indicates. Many of the plethora of recent analytic papers on Kierkegaard's titles nonetheless use some biographical statement or inference in support of an argument. [193] But none of this takes away from the unconscious perception I maintain most of us carry around, based very much on these early biographies and analyses. [194]

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[190] Agacinski (1988).

[191] ibid p 252.

[192] see as just one example of many, the essays in Houe and Marino (2003).

[193] The easiest place to find these 'micro-biographies' is in the International Commentary Series, eg vol 13 : The Corsair Affair (Perkins (1990)).

[194] Perhaps a telling anecdote: when I informed a neighbour of mine, a retired University Principal, that I intended to attempt a PhD on Kierkegaard, he replied: 'You have my deepest sympathy.'

5.4 CURRENT APPROACHES TO KIERKEGAARD

Kierkegaard is still enigmatic in our time, even if our wish to pigeon-hole him medically has largely dissipated. We now have problems pigeon-holing him intellectually. Perhaps these are two sides of the same coin, a continuing need to manage, to reduce. Now, in this section, I want to make it clear that however one views Kierkegaard, from whatever intellectual discipline one comes to him, my thesis about reading him as a narcissist still carries force.

How are we best to characterise Kierkegaard? A Philosopher? A Theologian? A writer, a man of letters? He was of course all of these and more, and no easy categorisation process works: many have tried to present a summary of Kierkegaard's thought, only to find themselves shoehorning a wide-ranging and eclectic thinker into one or more arbitrary boxes, leaving far more out than they manage to get in. Perhaps the most immediately tempting approach of all is to view Kierkegaard as a frustrated autobiographer, who wants nothing more than to tell the terrible story of his own life, but is both too embarrassed and too intellectual to spell it all out as nothing more than a chronology? So we could, like Josiah Thomson discussed below, see the Kierkegaardian output as '*no more'* than an extended biographical conundrum. All his insights and ideas, all of his writing, less so perhaps the veronymous texts, have their basis in Kierkegaard's life and his relationships, and our task is to solve the conundrum, to relate life events to works of writing.

It is a truism that all individual output is in some sense nothing more than a response to one's being, to one's nature and nurture. But this generalisation, if not analysed further, could be facile, and would do nothing to explain either the complexity of methodology or of output of Kierkegaard. But there have been those who have followed this approach, at least around the middle of the last century. Such a tacit assumption I suspect informs far more secondary works on Kierkegaard than might be thought. The problem for this thesis is that such an approach is too simplistic by a long shot.

Many people, for example, have called off their engagement but without producing the kind of writing that Kierkegaard produced. So why he? This is an instance of the major problem with the *'Truths for All'* school of psychobiography, defined and analysed above. What is missing is an examination of the *exact* mechanisms in place that, activated by say the breakup with Regine, helped to produce *Fear and Trembling.* Or *Works of Love, mutatis mutandis.* This straightforward biographical approach is now perceived as overly simplistic, and while an understanding of the psychology of any writer is helpful and sometimes essential, any psychological understanding can only be limited, speculative and never definitive.

And in someone who is as subtle and frankly devious as Kierkegaard, we must guard against taking him at his own word. Taylor, for example, in dismissing the biographical approach, claims:

> It is simply incorrect to regard the pseudonymous works as fundamentally concerned with Kierkegaard's own existence. His interest is rather with the existence of the reader [195]

Well, perhaps; but that too would be a simplistic view of a personality and an intention, just the kind of error of which Taylor accuses the biographers. I fear it is just not that easy. As has already been said, and to be developed further, selves are not there to be re-discovered, but to be created. The idea that any biographical approach can, without question, rule in or rule out a psychological explanation for an action or a process has become essentially unacceptable in this, our time. We can create many pasts, and thereby many selves. Ideally this creational process is best carried out with a living person, when conjectures can be refuted by memories and attitudes. The same process applied to the dead cannot give much in the way of refutation, and as was pointed out, we have very little independent contemporary information about Kierkegaard.

At the simplest level, of course Kierkegaard was a writer, a critic, a man of letters. Littering his output are references to, and theories about, the artistic

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[195] Taylor (1975) p 29.

and the aesthetic. We have reviews of literature [196], of plays [197], of music [198]. We have his well-documented association with the literary and theatrical circles of Golden Age Denmark [199]. His fascination with theatre is everywhere in his pseudonymous works: *Either/Or*, *Repetition*, *Stages on Life's Way* – all have extensive descriptions of matters theatrical and a perceptive contemplation on the psychological processes that occur during theatre. We have essentially a theory of the artistic [200].

We could, further, think of Kierkegaard as essentially a writer of novellas, whose main ideas are wrapped in a literary casement. The predominant supporter of such a view is Louis Mackay, and his *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* [201] stands among attempts to turn this thinker into a writer. Attractive as the idea is, it is surely limited. The thought of treating the more obscure and contradictory parts of the Kierkegaardian canon as pure poetry is, it must be admitted, very tempting sometimes. But to view Kierkegaard as no more than a literary author surely does not ring true for the majority of readers.

Kierkegaard certainly experimented with writing. He was inventive, demonstrably prolific, and defined a use of the Danish language that had hitherto been absent. He pushed language to the limit, and remained fascinated by what lay beyond that limit, the end of language, as it were. [202] As part of the Golden Age, he shared with others in that circle both the desire to be excellent, and the *rejouicement* that came with a recognition that

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[196] One of his earliest works was a critique of Hans Christian Anderson (*From the Papers of One Still Living* reviews, at great length, Anderson's *Only a Fiddler*).
[197] for example, *A Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress,* KW XVII.
[198] His fascination, not to say obsession, with Don Giovanni is everywhere in his early writings and diaries, but most obviously in Either/Or Part 1. There are well over one hundred references to Don Giovanni in Kierkegaard's work.
[199] The circle of friends included the Heibergs, Sibbern and Moller among many. For a detailed analysis see Stewart (2003).
[200] For a very clear summation see George Pattison's chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard.* Pattison (1998).
[201] Mackay (1971).
[202] Several texts explore Kierkegaard's view of the limitations of language. See, for example, Shakespeare (2001) or Hale (2002).

something very special was happening in Denmark at that time. [203] He mixed with that special set, and seemingly, at first at least, very much enjoyed it. He enjoyed being seen as the equal of other learned intellectuals; he enjoyed more being the centre of attention, of being *primus inter pares* with the great and the good of Copenhagen. His later work incorporated social theory, politics, theories of justice and ethics, and obviously psychology. It would take no effort to categorise Søren Kierkegaard as an eminent man of letters in the early part of the nineteenth century. However, the academy of today is rarely satisfied with such an old-fashioned and essentially unaccountable categorisation. For much of the twentieth century, the debate was about whether Kierkegaard was a philosopher or a theologian, and the debate has swung back and forth.

The biggest problem with considering Kierkegaard as a philosopher seems to be what he himself says about both philosophy and his view of it. The issue is about the role, the importance, of the religious imperative in Kierkegaard's self-confessed Christian commitment. His particular understanding of religion required him to deny that its claims were open to scrutiny by human understanding. So, *a priori*, Kierkegaard rules out reason, the basis of philosophy, as a means of analysing his theology. Philosophy is thus condemned from the beginning.

But the case for Kierkegaard being a philosopher has been well summarised[204]. First, the subject and practice of philosophy is essentially a cumulation of philosophical thinking; like common law, there is a set of foundations from previous practice that guides current thinking. Kierkegaard is clearly part of that 'cumulative index', as it were. Kierkegaard became part of modern European philosophical thinking at a particularly crucial time – the mid-nineteenth century – and Kierkegaard is essentially part of that turbulent time. Philosophers of many colours feel obliged, sooner

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[203] for a detailed discussion, see the first part of Kirmmse's *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Kirmmse (1990)).
[204] see for example Pattison (2005) or Dupre (1963).

or later, to write what Pattison calls their '*statutory Kierkegaardian essay'*.[205]

And further, Kierkegaard did indeed write texts ostensibly about philosophy. Amongst many, Evans has argued that Kierkegaard's two key philosophical works, *Fragments* and *Postscript,* contain primarily philosophy and very good philosophy at that. [206] Titles can be misleading of course, and it all depends what you mean by philosophy. But at the very least, just as modern analytic philosophy after Wittgenstein is very much concerned with divining the proper language for any given topic of analysis, so too Kierkegaard was very much concerned about the demarcation of, in his terms, spheres of existence, and the proper language for talking about them, *Fear and Trembling* being the most spectacular case in point. If modern philosophy, post-Wittgenstein, has become particularly concerned with language, then Kierkegaard can easily claim a place in the history of ideas about language. It is his attempts to address us as thinkers that marks him out as a singular philosopher, attempting, much like the later Wittgenstein, to enable us to change how we think, not just to present arguments that result in different conclusions. In this sense, Kierkegaard *can* be seen as very much concerned with his single reader, and his meiotic method is very much aimed at developing and improving our thinking habits. Although, I have to add, that may not be the whole story: his motivation for engaging the single reader may well not be all he claims, or what commentators have assumed. There are different ways of being concerned or obsessed with that single reader, and this thesis maintains the engagement is in part at least narcissistic.

Kierkegaard was centrally interested in the idea of the self. This has assumed paramount importance in recent philosophy and theology. It would be absurd to ignore a writer who added enormously to the millennia-old debate about the idea of the self and its relation to philosophical thinking. Pattison efficiently summarises Kierkegaard's definition of the self's responsibility in Kierkegaard's thought:

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[205] ibid p 8.
[206] Evans (1983) p 4.

> I am who I am and as I am, and there is no parallel universe into which I can escape. I am infinitely responsible for the self that I am and there is no one else who is or can be responsible for it in the same way. [207]

While writers and artists had hinted as much for these millennia, Kierkegaard's was a remarkably concise and highly innovative statement of a very modern view of self.

But labelling Kierkegaard as a philosopher can be performed only in spite of his own best efforts to prevent this. The categorisation problem has perplexed most of those who have attempted any kind of intellectual biography of Kierkegaard. Alastair Hannay in particular has struggled with the intellectual characterisation of Kierkegaard [208]. George Pattison, likewise, over many years has considered Kierkegaard's disciplinary loyalty [209]. Perhaps there is no clear answer, not least because of Kierkegaard's very own statements: he dismissed most academics; he denied the value of philosophy; he eventually damned the Church and most of its theologians.

Was Kierkegaard, then, a theologian? There is a problem of definition here, since the inclusion of post-modern theology would stretch the boundaries of what theology might be. If we take a conservative view of theology as the methodological interpretation of the content of Christian faith [210], then Kierkegaard only just fits into the category of theologian. For as Gouwens points out [211], he is not concerned with systematic observation and translation of faith's content from, as it were, one language into another. Kierkegaard's concern is very much more that of enabling the individual reader to make sense of what it is to be Christian and what is in the gospels. Whereas many mainstream theologians would actively work to translate, to make easier the understanding process, Kierkegaard steadfastly accepts the difficulty, even the impossibility of the gospel message, and tries to empower

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[207] Pattison (2005) p 93 See also Pattison (1992) and Pattison (1998).
[208] See Hannay (2001), Hannay (1982). See also Hannay (2003).
[209] Pattison has provided several texts considering the life and works of Kierkegaard including *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (1992).
[210] Tillich (1967) p 15.
[211] Gouwens (1996).

the single individual nevertheless to make sense of it. So Kierkegaard can say, without resorting to a pseudonymous author:

> The importance [of my pseudonymous literature]...... does not consist in making any new proposal, some unheard of discovery, or in founding a new party and wanting to go further, but precisely in the opposite, of wanting once again to read through solo, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of the individual human existence-relationships, the old familiar texts handed down from the fathers. [212]

But this does not make Kierkegaard a theologian based on the above definition. Not only did he not do what my definition would have theologians do, he probably would have found such a translation project heretical. The idea, for Kierkegaard, is not to make living Christianity easier or necessarily more comprehensible. The idea is to enable us to engage with the eternal message of the gospels.

So Kierkegaard is perhaps not a theologian in the sense that he is concerned with dogmatics, with the correct presentation of Christian belief. He is concerned with how the concepts of Christian belief are used, and hence what they mean. In this he is often linked with the later Wittgenstein, and there is a considerable literature on the parallels between these writers. [213] As Kierkegaard said over and over again, his intention was to require of the reader a personal response to his writings, one that engendered reflection on the part of the reader: he was not out to increase the amount of academic scholarship:

> Scholarship more and more turns away from a primitive impression of existence...One does not love, does not have faith, does not act; but one knows what erotic love is, what faith is. [214]

A case has been made by both Pattison [215] and Gouwens [216] for seeing Kierkegaard as a religious writer, as a Christian author. Evans, too, makes a case for seeing him as a writer and psychologist whose ideas were deeply informed by Christianity. [217] So such a view would not see Kierkegaard's

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[212] KW CUP p 629.
[213] See Holmer, (1978), Creegan, (1989), Bell and Hustwit (1978).
[214] KW p 250.
[215] Pattison (1999).
[216] Gouwens op cit.
[217] Evans (1990).

writings as novellas or literature, but as writings, technical if you like, about the nature of humankind and Christianity, and such a view would make them easier of access. I would want to agree with this view, that Kierkegaard is a 'kind' of theologian, a theological writer, one who is primarily concerned with the 'how' of Christianity, perhaps at the expense of the 'what'. [218] Or in Hans Frei's phrase, Kierkegaard is essentially concerned with the *'logic of coming to belief'*. [219]

My thesis is that whatever view one takes of Søren Kierkegaard, as writer, as philosopher, as theologian, any hermeneutic is incomplete without an understanding of his motives. His artistic critiques, his theory of artistic reception, his analyses of Don Giovanni, these are made more understandable by considering Kierkegaard's way of being in the world, what I shall call his narcissism. Likewise his philosophy, his appeal to the individual, his recasting of truth, his version of religious ethics, these attain a different level of comprehension when considered in the light of his narcissism. And his unnerving and demanding theology, his defining of God as infinitely qualitatively different, and the incarnation as an offence and a paradox, all of these ideas can be enriched by seeing how they are underpinned by his narcissism.

Gouwans perhaps best makes the case for this view of Kierkegaardian writing when he says:

> For more readers than care to admit it, there is something deeply opaque and troubling in strategy and spirit about Kierkegaard's thought, for he is a writer who calls attention to the resistances against primitive reading, and he can make one ashamed of one's own thoughts and passions.....What Kierkegaard desired - and deserves - above all is readers (and writers) who attempt to "think with" (and "against") him, to enter into the concerns and issues he raises with philosophical eros and passion. [220]

While wholeheartedly agreeing with this sentiment, the aching omission is the question 'why'. Why does Kierkegaard do this to us? And in exploring the

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[218] Gouwens op cit p 12.
[219] Frei (1992) p 54.
[220] Gouwens op cit p 2.

question and giving an answer, of course I must address the other question of 'how'.

In this thesis I am not concerned to add another medical diagnosis about the life of Kierkegaard. The implication of such a process is to give gravitas to the perception that we the observers can then inspect, from the outside, and with all the objectivity we can muster, his life and thereby his work. Rather, my aim is to show the dependence of the work on the life; that objectivity about his work is impossible, that we cannot read Kierkegaard and maintain this subjective/objective dichotomy. This, I argue, is not just for the reasons and methods that Kierkegaard himself defined and utilised. This is because of how we function when we read his texts: we cannot be objective, because reading narcissistic texts is different from reading other kinds of texts: we cannot avoid some kind of identification – positive or negative – with the author.

6 NARCISSISTIC INFLUENCES IN KIERKEGAARD'S LIFE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

> In the hunt for the real Kierkegaard people frequently overlook the
> fact that mystification, mummery, and fiction are constitutive features
> in Kierkegaard's production of himself – and that this is precisely why
> these things help to reveal the "real" Kierkegaard. [221]

This section is concerned with an evaluation of the life and some of the
works of Søren Kierkegaard, inspected and discussed with a view to
discerning evidence of narcissism. This, Chapter 6, looks at key aspects of
his life; the following three chapters look respectively at a particular text:
Fear and Trembling, Works of Love and *The Sickness Unto Death*.

In all of what follows in this section, the fundamental issue, fundamental to
whether or not the section makes any sense at all, is what we are to take as
indicative of narcissism, what evidence is to count in favour, and what
against. There are several options. First, we could take the literal indicators,
the symptoms from DSM-IV. These were enumerated above as: a grandiose
sense of the self, fantasies of unlimited power or success, a sense of being
special, having a need for excessive admiration, a great sense of entitlement,
being personally exploitative, lacking in empathy, displaying great envy, and
showing arrogant, haughty behaviour.

The problem is that these behaviours can be precursors or consequences of
any number of underlying states. As Kernberg accurately but somewhat
unhelpfully illustrates:

> For example, social timidity, social phobia or inhibition, may
> contribute to a diagnosis of either a schizoid or an avoidant
> personality, but may in fact reflect the cautiousness of a deeply
> paranoid individual, the fear of exposure of a narcissistically
> grandiose individual, or a reaction formation against exhibitionistic
> tendencies in a hysterical individual. [222]

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[221] Garff (2005) p 101.
[222] Kernberg (2004) p 5.

The limitations of the DSM-IV categories were discussed above, and their limitations seem to me to be so great that, alone, they provide no aid to understanding. But as a checklist, a symptomatology, they have a superficial attraction, and I shall refer to these symptoms as we consider Kierkegaard's life and works in some detail.

A second approach would be to ignore the symptoms and think instead of types of narcissist. So, briefly, we could consider which of Bursten's four types [223] (craving, paranoid, manipulative and phallic) best fits the personality of Søren Kierkegaard. Or we could take Millon's six categories [224] (normal, unprincipled, amorous, compensatory, elitist, and fanatic) and repeat the process. As I have previously suggested, thinking in types is also useful as shorthand, but does nothing to help understand the underlying processes. And few individuals fit perfectly into any one of these categories.

As a strategy, much better is to consider the psychodynamic processes that underpin narcissism. These, also, were discussed in Chapter 2, and Otto Kernberg provided a summary. He suggests eight primitive defence mechanisms are always involved: splitting, primitive idealisation, devaluation, projection, projective identification, denial, omnipotence, and omnipotent control. The problem we have here is that some of these are exceptionally difficult to discern without access to the living person, without, that is, indulging in the therapeutic hour. One can infer such defensive processes, but such an inference is always speculative, and manifestly lacks corroboration. However, understanding processes rather than states is always, I contend, a more profound method of coming to terms with motivation, and identifying these defence mechanisms is a critical part of understanding Kierkegaard's narcissism.

While none of these is perfect on its own, I will use all three approaches - looking for DSM symptoms, considering what type of narcissist Kierkegaard might have been, while constantly looking for evidence of these psychodynamic processes. Beyond that, we can also look for the existence of

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[223] Bursten (1973).

the primary underlying instinct, the one foundational process that begets all kinds and shades of narcissism - rage. This, fortunately from a biographical point of view, is such a clear emotion, such a basic and difficult to disguise personal process that we should be able to spot it both in the diaries and in the published works. It may not always appear as rage, of course, but it should be possible to trace a direct path back from the observed behaviour to the emotion.

Why rage? Because rage is the fundamental affect linked to aggression, one of the two drives with which psychodynamics is concerned. Affect can be defined as an inborn, constitutionally and genetically determined mode of reaction, triggered first by various physiological and bodily experiences, and later, by the development of object relations. [225] So rage is the affect of aggression: aggression shows itself as rage.

The purpose of rage is to control, defeat or obviate a source of irritation or pain. At the same time, rage can be seen to eliminate barriers to gratification, and this latter purpose is the prototype for later functions of rage as a means of destroying bad objects, objects that stand between the self and the gratification of the self. This is the primary and basic essence of rage. But accompanying rage are two other affects – hatred and envy.

Hatred is a derivative of rage, but rather than remaining a primary process, it evolves through development. So in due course, the wish to destroy the bad object becomes instead a wish to inflict pain, to make the bad object suffer, so that we arrive at the sadistic aspect of narcissism. Later again, the wish is neither to destroy the bad object, nor to make it suffer, but to control that object through domination, through power over the object – this, so that the persecutory aspects of the object can be nullified and managed. And as we all know, hatred has its counterpart – revenge. The purpose of hatred is to effect revenge over the bad object.

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[224] Millon (2000) Ch 9.
[225] see Kernberg (2004) Ch 2.

Envy is a more complex process, and we must look to Klein for the analysis of this seemingly contradictory emotion. Envy, for Klein, is the need to spoil, to destroy, to murder, the very object that is needed for survival and wellbeing. We both want, and want to negate, the object of envy. If we begin with the original frustration of the absent breast, this breast is viewed as withholding itself, as a punitive breast, as a wilful and denying object. The resulting rage is transformed into hatred, so that the infant wishes only to spoil, to murder or destroy this punishing breast. But this is also the loving breast, the comforting, feeding breast: this is the source of life, sustenance and happiness. This conflict of hating the most the thing one loves the most is carried on into later life [226].

There is no one-to-one correspondence between rage and narcissism; it is a necessary condition but not a sufficient one. Other severe personality disorders have a component of rage about them. But there is a clear retrospective path from overt narcissism back to rage, and there is a particular constellation of rage, hatred and envy that is unique to narcissism. So in what follows below, I will note overt behaviours, but attempt to relate these back to the primary processes of rage, hatred and envy. As we have seen from the literature, rage is rarely evident in early years, or through the golden age of youth that many narcissists experience. But it is there, and invariably emerges as the impossibility of the narcissistic project becomes apparent.

6.2 SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

We have essentially four sources of evidence about the kind of life lived by Søren Kierkegaard. The first, the best, but the most minimal is the contemporaneous accounts. As has been pointed out [227], there are barely 6,000 actual words from a handful of his exact contemporaries, and there particularly is little about his childhood or early life.

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[226] And this concurs with everyday life and language. We say, of an envied object: 'either I have it or nobody does!'
[227] Kirmmse (1996).

The second set of sources is his Journals and Papers. These are tantalising. It seems clear to the majority of recent biographers and commentators that not everything in these papers can be taken as a true and faithful sentiment from Kierkegaard. And terrible things were done to the early source papers by Kierkegaard's brother and first agent, leading to an arbitrariness of much of the dating of Kierkegaard's remaining papers, as well as considerable uncertainty about what has gone missing. [228] Fenger has given a description of the magnitude of the problem, which can hardly be bettered:

> Anyone willing to spend a couple of hours at the Royal Library, looking at Kierkegaard's early papers, will see how hopeless it is to try to bring order to their ranks....
>
> I closed my eyes and chose a packet of Kierkegaard papers...It turned out to be A, Package 41, Folder 2, which contains notes from the Journal FF with the dates September 13th 1836 to August 18th 1836, although enclosures 5-6, 25-26, 29-30, 38-40, 51-54, 69-70 and 97 are missing. One finds a whole stack of identical transparent envelopes, each containing small slips of paper, usually with handwriting on both sides. On each envelope there is annotation in India ink as to where these pieces are located in the edition of Heiburg and Kuhr. It is difficult to determine how much of the work of these editors is owed to Barfod, including the pagination in pencil, the crossings-out, the pastings-over. [229]

Everywhere there is evidence that the diaries were actively being written more for posterity than as an absolutely accurate record of his day-to-day living and thoughts. [230]

The third source must be entries and commentaries in his published works, making a distinction between the inserted anecdotes and the works themselves. Large sections of some of the pseudonymous canon have been thought of as autobiographical. Parts of *Either / Or*, certainly *Repetition*,

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[228] This is a detailed story that cannot be repeated here. See Fenger (1980), especially Ch 2 for a detailed exposition of just how much we do *not* know about Søren Kierkegaard.

[229] Fenger (1980) p 50-52.

[230] It would seem for the biographies that critical psychological analysis of Kierkegaard's motives is relatively recent. Certainly the early biographies, as was discussed in Chapter 3, present a benign view of the papers, taking them very much at face value. It is only the more recent biographies, Hannay (2001) and especially Garff (2005) that have attempted a systematic psychological analysis of Kierkegaard through his papers.

whole sections of *Stages on Life's Way* - all of these and more have been the subject of intense scrutiny, and sometimes truly fabulous interpretation. More locally, there are many anecdotes or adumbrations that begin something like ' there was once a brilliant young man...' or 'there lived a specially gifted child...' spread throughout his texts, usually inserted to make a point, as an illustrative vignette. There is simply no way of knowing for sure whether or not these anecdotes, seemingly casually inserted, are anything other than literary invention, placed there to make or emphasise a point, or whether they are systematically placed clues to his character, left for posterity to discover and debate. But it is important to have a view on the distinction between the entries in the Journals and those in published works. I want to suggest therefore that as a general rule, incidents reported in the Journals are essentially true, they probably did happen, there is a basis in real experience, or they are genuine recollections, even though they may have been modified by time and thought. Incidents in the published works on the other hand, including those intended for publication, may well be narcissistic fantasies, about what could or what should have happened. They may not be based in fact or recollection but in narcissistic desire. They portray the world as Kierkegaard wishes, or feared, it had been.

So the walks in the drawing room would be a perfect instance of narcissistic fantasy. Although father would not permit the child to go out, he would devote his time and attention, without distraction or competition, to creating the world in the drawing room. The wholly good object that was father dedicated himself without reservation to the son, and more, was choreographing how the world worked just for the son. The son's most desired selfobject organised and manipulated the entire world for the son's personal use. For narcissists, it doesn't get much better.

Cursing God on the Jutland heath, on the other hand, locates the badness of the bad object that is father quite exactly, and without the possibility of redemption. There was just father and God, no intervening variable, and no excuses. For the religiously inclined narcissist, it can't get much worse.

The reason for inventing the detailed description of the thing that didn't happen is to portray one of two things. Either it is about the kind of attention the young Søren wishes he had received from Father, or it is to demean and diminish, effectively to punish Father for his lack of persistent narcissistic supply towards his son. The one elevates, temporarily, Father to the ideal, the true source of fantasised supply; the other punishes Father for his inability to supply what is needed.

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The fourth and weakest source is the very many biographies. Many of these make excellent inferences about his life, but in the final analysis they can be based in nothing more than the same contemporaneous accounts, the entries in the Diaries, Journals and Papers, and his published works: they are indeed no more than inferences [231].

6.3 MOTHER

In almost any theory or model of child-rearing, throughout history, the child's relationship with mother has always assumed a paramount position. In the century since Freud began publications, this has to a significant extent been formalised. But in the case of Søren Kierkegaard, we have a double conundrum: he makes effectively no reference to his mother in any of his writings; and we know very little about her.

Her family, another poor Jutland peasant family, it seems owned one cow and four sheep; her father was a convivial man, and the family all respectable and honourable people in their station. There were six children in Ane's family, three of the girls were called Ane. As the youngest she was

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[231] We must guard against an overly saintly view of the man. Perhaps this view has faded, given the more realistic psychological analyses to be found in some of the recent biographies. But it was a recurrent approach for the middle part of the last century, and these perceptions take time to disappear. The essence of this 'Søren-Centric' approach is that he was indeed a genius; that he was a prophet before his time; that those who did him wrong were later shamed by history. The trouble with this approach is that it is very unhelpful in making inferences about how Søren Kierkegaard felt at the time, or what the social dynamics, let alone his own psychodynamics, might have been. Kierkegaard himself may have been utterly

therefore 'little Ane'. We have almost no contemporaneous information about her, other than that she was in service in Copenhagen working for a Hosier named Janus Pallesen Thorning, a neighbour of the Royen family, before working as maid to Michael's first wife. Henriette Lund's memoirs, privately published originally 1880, say of Ane:

> I do not remember her at all, but she was referred to in the family as a kind little woman with an unpretentious and cheerful turn of mind. Her sons' development was a bit over her head; their high-flying appeared to her worried heart to be a flight way from the level on which she felt comfortable, and on which she would so much preferred to have kept them. And she was therefore never more in her element than when a passing illness forced them ever so slightly back under her jurisdiction. She was especially gratified when she could get them peacefully into bed, since then she wielded her sceptre with delight, cosseted them and protected them like a hen her chicks. Her motherly inclinations also agreed with the grandchildren in the family. Her plump little figure had only to appear in the doorway of the nursery, and the cries and screams would give way to a hush; the rebellious young boy or girl soon fell sweetly asleep in her soft embrace. [232]

And that, really, is it. The rest is conjecture. Even this reasonably informative portrait is, in the majority, about Ane as grandmother, not mother. It is surely a commonplace of everyday family relationships, let alone psychodynamics, that a dearly loved, idealised grandmother can all too easily have been a tyrannical or damaging mother in her younger years.

Those biographical studies written during what has been called the 'blunt reading' era – around the middle of the twentieth century – tend to make a harsh judgement on Søren's mother. She could read a little but could not write, and had been through little education. She was, according to this approach, almost irrelevant in Søren's life. Walter Lowrie's 1938 biography suggests that mother 'counted for little in the household' [233] while Grimsley [234] comments that his mother 'played a shadowy part in his upbringing'.

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convinced that history would show he was a true genius long after his death. But there is very little evidence that other people shared that conviction at the time.
[232] Kirmmse (1996) p 152. But note Kirmmse's caveat about Jette's revisionist agenda. See p 317.
[233] Lowrie (1938) p 24.
[234] Grimsley (1973).

Others, Thompson [235] for example, in a biography otherwise inventive on an heroic scale, mentions her only simply as his mother, almost nothing more than a biological entity.

Given the lack of information, such broadly negative conclusions are not unwarranted. But from a psychodynamic point of view, we cannot possibly let it rest at that.

There are really just two linked questions to answer at this point. First, did Kierkegaard really never mention his mother in all his writings? And second, if that is the case, why not? I suggest there are three possible reasons for the absence of mention of mother. The first is that he did indeed mention her, perhaps often, but that the entries were removed either by brother Peter, or by editor Barfod, or by both. This would account for the complete absence of reference. But, reading the six thousand nine hundred and sixty nine entries in the Hong edition of the diaries and papers, it is impossible to believe that Kierkegaard would have written only neat, delineated entries entitled 'Mother'. The idea of 'mother' would have permeated his writings; no editor, surely, would have been able to remove every hint, every subtle reference, every adumbration to her.

So I suggest that the Papers are essentially representative, and we must assume that he chose not to write about her. The second reason for the omission is that one simply did not write about mother in diaries at that time and place, that this is a cultural omission. This is plausible, if unlikely, though Watkin's [236] apologetic would support this view: Ane indeed was barely literate, but that was of little importance, she suggests. The primary role and influence of father was in the arena of intellectual discussion, of dialectically argumentative debate, of ratiocination. The anecdotes about father and the two sons engaged in endless theological or philosophical interchange do not make mother irrelevant: rather they define her place absolutely as in a different sphere - literally, the mother. There is no surprise for Watkin that mother is not mentioned, since the primary output

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[235] Thompson (1973).

of Søren's life is cognitive and intellectual; she played no part in that particular part of his life, and therefore she is not represented in his writings.

But there is a third possibility. In diaries one writes about the things that occupy one. Presumably openly criticising one's mother would have been a difficulty for Kierkegaard; but to ignore her totally approaches denial. That is, the complete absence or mention suggests the failure of any admitted relationship with her, although there clearly was one. Father, by contrast, was all sorts of things, and Kierkegaard could admit, deny and discuss many of them, certainly in his Papers. But the denial of the existence of mother suggests something much darker, and *shame* would be the obvious affect. We are not silent about things that make us angry, and we are not always silent about matters of guilt – we wish to expunge the guilt, to rationalise it. But shame speaks from the very centre of being – it is the most private emotion. It is something about which we dare not speak.

So why might Kierkegaard have been ashamed of his mother? I do not know, and there is so little information on which to make assumptions or build a case. One possible reason is simply social: her lack of obvious intelligence compared with her husband, and indeed her sons. We are told that her hand had to be guided when making a signature. Is this why he denied her? Was he ashamed to admit his mother because of her education?

Perhaps instead it involved his mother's pre-marital sexual involvement with his father. It is interesting that although he talks around and about his father's sins, he never mentions mother's role in that sinfulness. Was Kierkegaard deeply misogynistic, hating women exactly for their sexuality? Is the problem that the fault, in Kierkegaard's eyes, was not with his father for seducing, but with his mother for being the seducer? I suspect this is nearer the mark. In terms of sexuality, male narcissists tend either to be rampant users and abusers of women, the phallic narcissist, or else the fearful, resentful denyer of female sexuality. Female sexuality calls for and demands

[236] Watkin (1997) pp 7-8.

masculine sexuality, for transgression of the self. Much of Kierkegaard's relationship with Regine Olsen can be seen as a response to the very threat of her sexuality. His own sexual self was too poor, too fragile and much too limited to permit the transgressions of intimacy. How much of this was a transferred object, from how he viewed mother, we can never know.

But of an earlier age, why then was there no mention? Before puberty, he must have had a loving relationship with her from all we can read; but there is no written mention from one whose very life was defined through his writing. A model for this omission could be constructed: the early narcissistic injury was so great that the anti-libidinal ego would not permit any joyful relationship with the enticing object that was mother, so that to engage with mother as an adult would be to risk repeating the infantile injury to such an extent that it was best not to engage in the first place. But the scant information we have about Søren clinging to his mother's skirts gives the lie to anything so draconian.

I can only wonder why Søren was too ashamed to speak about his mother. Perhaps, in the end, all of the two million words written by Kierkegaard are just one enormous Freudian slip: in the words of the old joke, he wrote about one thing, and meant a mother.

6.4 FATHER AND BROTHER

About one end of father's life, Kierkegaard observed: '*My father was born on the due date.*' [237] About the other, he wrote in his Journal:

> My father died on Wednesday the 8th at 2.00 am. I so deeply desired that he might live a couple of years more, and I regard his death as the last sacrifice of his love for me, because in dying he did not depart from me, but he died for me, in order that something, if possible, might come of me. [238]

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[237] Garff (2005) p 13.
[238] JP 5335.

Even though this latter entry was written only days after the death, the narcissistic tone is immediately apparent, and it is this tone than can be found throughout much of Kierkegaard's recorded writings about his difficult, melancholic father. It is, actually, a remarkable statement, almost blasphemous. As Søren sees it, his father gave up his life in order that the son might make something of his. This raises all sorts of questions about the perceived nature of the inhibitions and impediments to Søren's life that belong to Michael, and what sort of object Father really was.

Beyond the birth and death of Michael Perdeson Kierkegaard, we actually know very little. The bald facts of familial history have been outlined; we know something of how an ageing son wrote of his father and his upbringing [239], although some of this must be viewed with suspicion as being revisionist writing; we also have, as was mentioned above, a series of incidents related in the pseudonymous canon that beg biographical interpretation - the walks around the living room, the cursing of God on the Jutland Heath, the sight of the image of the crucifixion - but I have suggested we really cannot be sure they ever happened. Beyond some descriptions of the externals of the man, his dress, his demeanour, there is little else to say. He was regarded as a true thinker, and was admired for his reading and intellect. His poor background seems to have been of no consequence: all in all, he was a welcome member of Copenhagen's intellectual middle class.

One question is worth asking: did he suffer from depression, and was this depression passed on? Beyond a moody temperament, there is nothing in the scant contemporaneous account to suggest he did. His energy, effort, attention to detail, care and punctiliousness are all contra-indicators of clinical depression. The attribution of melancholy seems to stem mainly from the son, who then assigned it to himself. And anyway, the Danish word '*tugsindighed*' suggests a heaviness of mind, rather than depression [240]. There is probably no basis for suggesting technical depression, and there is little point in speculating whether it was transmitted. The depression that

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[239] to be discussed below, but principally in *Point of View.*
[240] for a discussion see McCarthy (1978) p54 et seq.

the son encountered, and that he describes in later life in detail, was, I suggest, in reaction to narcissistic failure.

In terms of father's sexuality, there is no reason to doubt the man's love for his wife. Watkin suggests that the Moravians, with whom father was affiliated, took a particularly dim view of sex in marriage; as late as 1820, marriage partners were decided by the casting of lots in the community, and the sexual element in marriage was '*demoted to the level of indifference*' [241]: Michael hardly seems to have been indifferent to Ane.

But in reality, the dynamics of the household seem very much more to involve an all-male triple - Father, Eldest Son and Youngest Son - Michael, Peter and Søren. Søren's relationship with Peter, although much less discussed, is equally crucial to understanding Søren's narcissism:

> Søren was confirmed on the 20th and received my watch, and I received father's. [242]

Peter was the eldest son, and in Golden Age Denmark, then as now, he appears to have attributes that modern popular psychology would ascribe to any eldest child - conscientious, hardworking, dutiful, slightly boring. Much more fun, then, to be the youngest - with little sense of responsibility, and leaving obligation, sobriety and sensible thinking about the future to others. In the parlance of popular psychology, the difference is about requiring the eldest to grow up and take their place as an adult, contrasted with denying the youngest that freedom to grow up.

From what evidence there is, young Søren perhaps deserves some sympathy in his dislike of his brother. Consider the letter written by his Headmaster, Professor Nielson, in September of 1830 on leaving the Borgerdydskol to begin University. It runs to about five hundred words. The first hundred or so are an introduction, possibly displaying more about the teacher's erudition than anything about his pupil. But immediately the boy's name is mentioned, it is linked to his father, his family and his upbringing:

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[241] Watkin (1997) p 9.
[242] quoted in Kirmmse (1998) p 24.

From the very beginning he was steeped in his parent's seriousness and in the good example of their strong sense of religious reverence, devotion to God, and moral responsibility.'

Shortly thereafter:

...so that one may certainly hope that he will be his brother's equal, since he is equal in talent.

The remainder of the letter is essentially about the virtue of Søren's father:

His father's wisdom and goodness can be seen in all of his circumstance.

Because his father's home is thus such a model of industriousness, patience and moderation...

He (father) has taught him...He has done everything to awaken the boy's love for scholarly culture....

It continues to the end:

This young man, who has been raised and educated in this manner, in keeping with the customs of our forebears and with the discipline that will promote the welfare of state – and not in the rash and rebellious spirit of the times – I recommend to you, learned men, in the highest fashion. [243]

From a contemporary point of view, this is a poor reference; the poverty clearly stems from the lack of appreciation of the individual in question: it is not about the child but about perceived influences upon that child. Indeed, who is the child? I will discuss below the ideas of Winnicott and Laing, about the true and false self. For now, I suggest that Søren's true self was in permanent danger within his family of being denied in favour of a false self, a self that matched up to Peter, a self that tried to come out of Peter's shadow. Søren was, on this reading, an appendage to Peter, a contrast, a dialectic. Perhaps this has been an issue for youngest sons since time began: how to assert oneself against the favoured, much more worthy sibling, whom father, doubtless, loves best.

There is some evidence from contemporary sources of fraternal rivalry, fraternal spite, though perhaps nothing more than might be present in many such relationships:

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[243] all from Kirmmse (1996) pp15-18.

in the second form, SK's Greek teacher was his brother, the later
bishop. It was clear and often striking to us that he (Søren)
deliberately made things difficult by bringing his relationship to his
brother into the classroom situation on various occasions, and it
seemed to us that he was teasing him. [244]

And the Journals and Papers contain a fair sprinkling of brotherly spats. As
late as 1848 he wrote: 'My brother's petty-mindedness and envy are all my
family has done for me.' [245] And in the same year:

It is dreadful to see the carelessness, indifference, and unconcern
with which children are brought up – and yet by the age of ten every
person is essentially what he will become. Yet almost all bear some
damage from youth which they do not heal by their seventieth year;
furthermore all unhappy individualities usually have a background of
a faulty childhood.

O, wretched satire upon the human race, that providence has so
richly equipped almost every child, because it knew in advance what
it means to have been brought up by "parents", ie, to be messed up as
much as is humanly possible. [246]

That was written when he was 37, but in reality already an old man. In the
absence of any more contemporaneous accounts of his childhood, we must
infer that this is Kierkegaard's considered judgement on the childhood
influences upon him from his mother and father.

But we must return to Father. Apart from God, father claims the most
entries in all of Kiergaraard's writing - over ten thousand appearances [247].
Fortunately, there is an abundance of repetition in these entries, and it is
easy to discern how Kierkegaard thought of him, particularly in later Journal
entries.

He was at once a loved father and a despised father. So what did
Kierkegaard know of the man? For all the secrecy about his father's alleged
sins, the great earthquake, the tantalising hints from Solomon's dream, the
clear allusion to inherited guilt, what did Søren really know of Michael? I

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[244] From Frederik Welding's letter, quoted in Kirmmse (1996) p 8.
[245] JP 6106 Note the Hong's comment that by 'family' Søren meant Peter, the only
surviving member' (Note 1762 JP vol 5 p 555).
[246] JP 1171.
[247] McKinnon (2001).

suggest that out of these thousands of entries we have an image of a man that fitted what Kierkegaard needed from him, rather than being any particularly accurate representation of what he was. He was split object, and the goodness of the good object knew no bounds, likewise with the bad object, *mutatis mutandis*. At best father was responsible for all that was good in Søren - he even died for his sake. At worst, he prevented Søren from engaging in the real world, in real life. One object was the source of the genius, the uniqueness, the glory that was Kierkegaard's view of himself; the other the cause of all of Kierkegaard's utter misery. Søren never really knew Michael - a not uncommon state of affairs in families – and so spent much of his life alternately appeasing and punishing his father, seeking but never finding object constancy.

Two influences remained with Kierkegaard until his death: Regine and Father. Regine, I suggest below, became an accommodating object, and Kierkegaard was essentially at peace with her. But father, until the end, remained a conflicting influence, and the failure to resolve the conflict begat not only the early pseudonymous and devotional writings, but also those - bitter, enraged and singularly unhealthy - of his late years.

6.5 SØREN'S CHILDHOOD

We are indebted to Bruce Kirmmse for his aggregation of what little exact evidence there is about Kierkegaard's chilhood [248], and to Joachim Garff for his insights upon this modest collection [249]. Here is a partial list of quotations from exact contemporaries, obviously written many years later. To begin, the source of the anecdote about his nickname – the fork:

> What would he most like to be? 'A fork.' Why? 'Well, then I could spear anything I wanted on the dinner table'. But what if we come after you? 'Then I'll spear you'.[250]

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[248] See his *Encounters with Kierkegaard* Ch 1 Kirmmse (1996).
[249] see Garff (2005) Ch 1.
[250] Kirmmse (1996) p 3.

And a revealing one-liner from Christian and Thomas Svendson, contemporaries of Søren:

> As usual, Søren sat in a corner and sulked. [251]

And

> Søren was a rather ill-tempered child. He was not well liked by his cousins... He was not without a certain teasing mischievousness.... Søren's classmates resented his clever dialectical argumentation with which he triumphed over everyone... consequently one day, when school was over, Søren was forced up onto a table, where two of his class mates held him by the arms, two by the legs, and the rest gave his behind a vigorous working over with rulers, book-straps etc. [252]

Or Leibeberg's

> he was a quiet, peaceable, industrious boy who drew little attention to himself. [253]

But more serious information comes from a letter by Frederik Welding, written in 1869.[254] A substantial quotation is given below:

> there were surely only a very few class mates who understood Kierkegaard or came to be on close terms with him in the way typical of others of that age. S.K did not reveal his character in the way that boys and young people of school age usually do. He went his own way, almost self-contained, never spoke of his home, and neither brought class mates home with him nor visited them in their homes. To the rest of us, who knew and lived a genuinely more boyish life, SK was a stranger and an object of pity.
>
> We all viewed SK as someone whose house was shrouded in mysterious shadows of strictness and eccentricity. SK's schooldays passed quietly and, it seemed, without joy. He worked more out of fear and compulsion than out of desire or any happy industriousness.
>
> Grades were important to him.
>
> As far as I can remember, he was not friends with any other of the boys....In most of his contacts with us he showed that he was so foreign to our interests that we quickly broke off contact with him., and he often displayed a superior and teasing attitude...He could never keep from teasing others with nicknames he had heard, with laughter and with funny faces even though it often earned him a beating. I do not recall that his language was ever genuinely witty or

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[251] ibid p 3.

[252] ibid p 4-5.

[253] ibid p 6.

[254] ibid p 6-9. The veracity of this letter is attested to by another contemporary who read it, Edvard J Anger. Anger also confirms that SK *'was a tease, and his 'foul mouth' cost him many bloody noses.'*

cutting, but it was annoying and provocative, and he was aware that it had this effect even though he was often the one who paid for it.

These outbursts of passion for teasing seemed to be absolutely unconnected with the rest of his otherwise silent and unspeaking existence among us. During these outbursts, his most remarkable talent was the ability to make his target appear ridiculous, and it was especially the big tall and powerfully built boys whom he chose as the objects of his derision.... And thus he became even stranger and isolated from the rest of us.

When I look back on things, it seems to me that, in general, as a boy SK usually had a good eye for people's weak points.

After I left University, SK visited me frequently in the summer at Frederiksborg. On these trips he found it amusing to encourage his peasant travelling companion to reveal his innermost thoughts. He mentioned this once in a remark to me: 'Peasants and children are the only reasonable human beings with whom it is relaxing to spend time'.

There is another attribute of the schoolboy Søren that several contemporaries attest to; typical is Peter Lind's letter:[255]

When it was time for him to give recitations which he was to have learned by heart, he was unusually talented in reading with his book concealed under his desk, without attracting the attention of his teachers.... No one knew anything about his unusual talents. We did not have the least suspicion that he would one day come forth as a great opponent of his times....

The teachers acknowledged that SK was unusually gifted, but were not always satisfied with him.

The same sentiment comes from H. P. Holst's letter:

I was his classmate for many years...In his boyhood years, SK was not the object of great expectations. I don't think he was even seen as especially bright. [256]

Similar points are made by Edvard Anger and Frederik Welding [257]. Perhaps the school report puts it best:

A good mind, open to everything that requires first-rate attention, but for a long time he was very childish and quite lacking in seriousness. He had a desire for freedom and independence, which was expressed in his behaviour in the form of a good-natured, sometimes amusing

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[255] ibid p 11.
[256] ibid p 13.
[257] ibid pp 6-9.

lack of constraint, which prevented him from getting involved with anything or from showing any great interest in things that would keep him from being able to withdraw into himself again. His irresponsibility rarely permitted him to bring his good intentions to fruition or to pursue a definite goal in a sustained manner. [258]

What can we make of all this? Garff sums it up through a paired series of adjectives:

quiet, strange, joyless, cowed, withdrawn, thin, pale...contradicted but also psychologically supported by....terms such as teasing, witty, impudent, irritating, and provocative. [259]

There is no picture of a happy-go-lucky, popular, endearing child. There is little that indicates future greatness. There is something to suggest an aggression, however. The small, thin boy picks verbal fights with others, to his own detriment. Why would he pick such a fight? What was the purpose of the teasing?

We simply cannot know the events, the mood, the *Weltanschuaang* that pervaded No 2 Nytorv. There is a quite tantalising, yet probably suspect, much later description of how Father's melancholy and religiosity hung around the home and its inhabitants:

From childhood on I have been in the grip on an enormous depression... My only joy from almost as far back as I can remember was that no one could discover how unhappy I felt. As a child I was rigorously and earnestly brought up in Christianity, insanely brought up humanely speaking – already in earliest childhood I had overstrained myself under the impression that the depressed old man, who had laid it upon me, was himself sinking under... [260]

What might be inferred from this is the guilt the child felt about the father. The child felt responsible for the well being, for the very life of the father. If we agree, with Fairbairn, that the loss of the relationship with the carer is the most annihilating fear of the child, then what Søren felt was laid upon him was not just Christianity, but the total responsibility of keeping a sinking father from sinking completely. So the wholly good object became compounded with the imminent fear of its literal disappearance. No wonder,

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[258] A school report written in 1830 when Soren KIerkegaard was 17, by Professor M Nielsen. Quoted in ibid p 14.
[259] Garff (2005) p 20.

then we have the joyless, cowed, withdrawn child. The very thing that provided love and nurture, the good internal object that was father, would only remain loving and nurturing, indeed would only remain at all, if the child took the burden that father was carrying. Rather than being son to the father, Søren was also obliged to act as father, as carer. On this reading, Søren's was a desperate situation, desperate for any child; in this sense, the childhood of Søren Kierkegaard was appalling.

For every good object there is a bad one; in this case, not only was the bad father punishing, uncaring and diminishing, it also demanded some nurturing and succour. For if Søren didn't provide this, father would cease to be. While the wish with bad objects is to punish, to seek revenge, to murder, the additional guilt makes for unusually complicated object relations. Father was therefore split into a wholly good object, that Søren owned, and that he sought to please; the wholly bad internal object that was Father, unacceptable in consciousness at that time, was projected out into the world, and onto his fellows. The fact that Søren's aggressive behaviour to his peers resulted in aggression back towards him just confirmed the accuracy of his projections: his victims were persecutors, justifiably bad objects.

So we see a lonely child, a stranger, driven to academic success rather than enjoying it. This sense of being driven was to permeate all of Kierkegaard's adult life. But what is missing from this small amount of recollected evidence is anything to do with his home life, his relationship with his mother or siblings, anything about what motivated him. All we can see is a troubled, indeed angry small boy, using his aggressive verbal skills to maintain his sense of self, along with his place in a world. But early aggression generally does not bode well for later peace of mind.

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[260] Point of View, KW XXII p 79.

6.6 THE YOUNG MAN

Søren Kierkegaard left Copenhagen on June 17th 1838 to travel and stay, still courtesy of his father's loans, in the fishing village of Gilleleje, at the north of the island of Zealand. The journal entries from that time have a particular importance for the Kierkegaardian myth, and they stand as a cornerstone in the Kierkegaardian hagiography. They are often quoted as the start of Kierkegaard's lifetime output, [261] and contain the famous basic question that allegedly was to inform and drive his thinking and writing throughout his life:

> ..the crucial thing is to find the truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I am to live and die. [262]

The above-quoted phrase occurs as a diary entry from this two-month tour. It was allegedly written on 1st August 1835 of the same year, and later transcribed into the journals [263].

The problem with the famous entry is that it is too easy to alight on the striking, memorable, challenging question, without paying any attention to the solution to the challenge that Kierkegaard suggests for himself. What he does suggest is a wholly negative solution, about what he should not do. And from an object relations point of view, it is disastrous advice that he gives:

> But in order to find that idea, or - to put it more correctly – to find myself, it does no good to plunge still farther in the world. That was just what I did before. [264]

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[261] For example, Lowrie, in his *Kierkegaard*, suggests: 'the journal of this tour...contains the fullest and most perspicuous account of his state of mind that he ever wrote in his youth'. Lowrie (1942) p 81. Similar sentiments are expressed by virtually every biographer.
[262] JP 5100.
[263] There are questions about whether this was really a letter, or part of a work of fiction Kierkegaard was contemplating. The remainder of the Gilleleje entries undoubtedly have a novella aspect to them, and there are inconsistencies in timings and locations, making them perhaps less than wholly accurate diary entries. And in the earlier Lund letter, it is not entirely clear that this was truly a letter written to be sent; there is the notation 'nonnulla desunt' - 'a good part missing' - an odd thing to say in a letter. Fenger suggests that these pages were in fact written in Copenhagen a year later. See Fenger (1980) p 96.
[264] JP 5100.

So studying law, though tempting, is dismissed. So is being an actor, although he speaks with some feeling: '*so that by putting myself in another's role I could, so to speak, find a substitute for my own life.*' [265] (This is interesting: Kierkegaard was to have a lifelong fascination with the theatre, both formally, in terms of his identification with the process of acting [266] and observing acting, and in an informal sense, in that he was very much an actor, thwarted or otherwise. [267])

But the issue here is a denial of the value of entering the real world, of forming adult internal objects that possess constancy. Finding oneself, the object relations school would contend, is about coming to the realisation that splitting real objects into unreal, internal opposing objects is not a valid way to lead a life. The two internal objects are representations of a constant real external object, and we must strive to meet the reality of the world as much as we can. Kierkegaard, it seems to me, has already decided that he, if not humankind, cannot stand too much reality. The remainder of the Journal entry is written on the assumption that his chosen path will lead to enlightenment about the self:

> One must first learn to know himself before knowing anything else. Not until a man has inwardly understood himself and then sees the course he is to take does his life gain peace and meaning; only then is he free of that irksome, sinister travelling companion, - that irony of life. [268]

Of course, the two-fold process Kierkegaard here suggests - self-understanding followed by engagement with life - misses the point that is object relations theory. Self-understanding *is* engagement with life, the proper engagement with constant objects. One cannot achieve any real degree of self-awareness without testing and modifying the faulty internal objects that are the inheritance of childhood for us all.

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[265] Ibid.

[266] see *Repetition,* KW VI p 154 et seq for a revealing insight into how the theatrical process appealed to this putative narcissist.

[267] This will be discussed *inter alia,* but for example, Kierkegaard suggests that many if not most of his books be read aloud. His desk (now in the Municipal Museum in Copenhagen), a high, standing desk, gives some impression of the maestro standing before an audience.

This diary entry can either be seen as the passionate outpourings of a passionate young man, or as an invention, a planned novella, and in that sense something that taps quite nicely into the author's unconscious. In either case, we have from Kierkegaard a resolution to close the door on engagement with the world, and retreat to the interior, as if this would truly help the self to define the self. So far from being a defining statement about Kierkegaard's existentialism, on this reading it is the first defining statement about his narcissism.

But these early adult years of Kierkegaard, around 1836, were in general typical golden years for any narcissist. He was of independent means (his father simply paid his bills); there was no pressure on him to complete his degree; he entered into the intellectual set of Copenhagen and found some considerable narcissistic support therein. His involvement with the likes of J. L. Hieberg and Poul Martin Moller were sources of considerable narcissistic joy. But in and among the joy would be the beginnings of the failure of this supply. [269] Nonetheless, Kierkegaard succeeded in gaining admission to the 'charmed circle' of Copenhagen intelligentsia centring on the Heiberg family. But even here, we can see the narcissist's problem. Any given source of supply eventually is no longer sufficient. So it was with the Heiberg group. Being admitted was initially gratifying, but this soon palled. And even though he might be master of wit at a meeting, this was eventually not sufficient to maintain the mirror of unconditional and incomparable praise – he still had to share the platform with others in the circle. We see this in the oft-quoted but rarely commented upon diary entry:

> I have just come from a gathering where I was the life and soul of the party; witticisms flowed out of my mouth; everybody laughed, admired me – but I left, yes, the dash ought to be as long as the radii of the earth's orbit --------------- and wanted to shoot myself. [270]

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[268] JP 5100.

[269] see Garff (2005) p 67 for a discussion of an attack on the young Kierkegaard.

[270] JP 5141. But note that at least one commentator (Emanuel Hirsch) views this, along with a great deal written about the same time, not as autobiographical but as part of a series of pseudonymous letters (see JP Vol 5 note 245). I would apply the same logic as suggested above: either this is truly autobiographical or it represents a fiction which itself has access to K's unconscious. Either way, I see this an evidence of narcissism.

This is usually taken as evidence of Kierkegaard's incipient or permanent depression. I disagree. There is virtually no evidence of clinical depression to be found anywhere in the diaries and papers. None of the symptoms either as presented in DSM-IV [271] or as described in common experience apply: he rarely suffered from debilitating apathy; he very much cared about his own appearance and well-being; he almost never seems to have been lacking in energy for his writings. (And as discussed above, it is a moot point whether father was any more a depressive than the son.) But in the case of this son, neither depression nor melancholia fit the bill. We are seeing the other side of a narcissist, one whose supply is failing. The overt emotion is rage, and the covert emotion is shame. Why would a narcissist want to shoot himself after such a successful evening? No matter how much praise and reward there had been, he knew he would always need more, and saw the impossibility of his position. Narcissistic supply has to be endless, unlimited, and of course no real person can supply that. In other language, the anti-libidinal ego, formed through the failure of early object relations, begins again its inexorable task of doubting the worth of the exciting object. '*You are not worth all that praise*' runs its mantra. The introjected bad object from the early splitting comes out of repression, into consciousness, and repeats the truth from so long ago: '*sooner or later they will cease to love and admire you*'. It was true for the child; and since, as Freud says, time means nothing to the Id, it is just as true and potent for the man. At the very moment of newly discovered joy, the narcissist is simultaneously reduced.

6.7 REGINE OLSEN

This is ground over which many have picked, and there is a daunting amount of reading for anyone wishing to say anything original about Søren's love affair with Regine. We have Kierkegaard's contemporaneous accounts

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[271] DSM-IV defines depression as involving: sleep and appetite disturbances, lack of energy, poor self esteem, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, hopelessness (DSM IV, pp 339-345).

[272], and we have some autobiographical notes recorded by a possibly geriatric Regine [273]. There has recently come to light her alleged diary [274], although this is widely regarded as fraudulent. We even have a novel about their relationship [275]. But above all, we have interminable speculation from the biographers and virtually every secondary commentator. Understandably, perhaps: this is, after all, much too delicious an opportunity to miss. For an author whose life is manifestly intermingled with his writings, it would be sinful not to relate his star-struck romance to his literary output.

We know from the Regine's memoir roughly when they met [276]; we know only a little about Counsellor Olsen's daughter [277]. We have what appear to be frank representations of the emotions that Kierkegaard felt for the young lady [278]. We have a set of letters, not perhaps typical love letters, but letters that display the wax and wane of an infatuation [279]. And we have evidence in later writings of an insistent mind-set that keeps referring to their affair, long after Miss Olsen became Mrs Schlegel [280].

There is no point in rehearsing the biography or retelling the chronology. Much of it is speculation, for both Kierkegaard and his executors seem to have wanted to keep some truths from posterity. There are perhaps just three fundamental questions that concern this thesis. Why did Kierkegaard become engaged to the young Regine? Why did the engagement terminate?

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[272] The Journals and Papers, especially the autobiographical volumes in the Hong set, and Kierkegaard's Letters (volume 24 of the Hong set) are the obvious source, although many of his pseudonymous works have allusions to a relationship much like his own. *The Seducer's Diary*, for instance, seems to contain far too much information to be dismissed as pure invention, or of no relevance to Kierkegaard's own psyche.

[273] See Kirmmse (1996) Ch 3.

[274] Regine Olsens Dagbog, (Regine Olsen's Diary), Hobjerg, Denmark: Hovedland Press, 2001. (Not referenced).

[275] Anderson (1974).

[276] See Kirmmse (1996) p 34.

[277] Garff (2005) pp 176 et seq.

[278] These are scattered throughout the Journals after their first meeting. The early insights follow from JP 5477.

[279] See *Letters and Documents*, KW XXV pp 61-88.

[280] References are scattered liberally. See, for example, Point of View, as well as a dozen Journal entries between JP 6132 and JP 6476, and especially the octave of entries to JP 6488.

And why did he retain his obsession with her for much of the rest of his life? The answers can be summarised quite quickly: Søren Kierkegaard was not ready for marriage, or anything like it. Leaving aside for now the matter of his sexuality and their sexual relations [281], object relations theory would contend that he had almost no knowledge of the real person that was Regine. He had in his consciousness an idealised object before the proposal [282], and a very much less than ideal object immediately afterwards [283]. As time and distance affected the possibility of any kind of object constancy, Kierkegaard once again allowed the idealised object to resurface and predominate, so that he could write at the end of his life, speaking both of his father and Regine:

> the two people whom I love most, to whom I owe whatever I have become as an author; an old man – the errors of melancholy love; a very young girl, almost a mere child – the lovable tears of her misunderstanding. [284]

6.7.1 THE INFATUATION

When Kierkegaard met Regine he was of marrying age. But, truth be told, he never should have married. Søren Kierkegaard should have remained single, with a housekeeper and a secretary: a confirmed bachelor, and none the worse for that. He could have enjoyed the occasional dalliance, the ladies of the night near to Tivoli if he wished, perhaps even an affair. But marriage was not for him, and all the evidence is that he knew it. So why did he propose marriage? There are but two answers: social or family pressure, and faulty object relations. The former we can discount, for there is nowhere even the most indirect allusion to any obligation upon him.

At this time in his life, his father had died, as had his mother; most of his siblings, too, had died. His first infatuation was in fact with Bolette Rordam,

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[281] discussed below in Section 6.9 'Kierkegaard's Sexuality'.

[282] See JP 6472: 'Even before my father died my mind was made up about her'. At this stage Kierkegaard knew almost nothing about her. See Fenger (1980) Ch 6 and Garff (2005) p 177.

[283] '..the next day I saw that I had made a mistake. Penitent that I was, my *vita ante acta*, my melancholy – that was sufficient. I suffered indescribably during that time' JP 6472.

[284] Garff ibid p 191.

and his early diary entry, a mixture of ecstasy and frank panic [285], refers to her, not Regine, something Kierkegaard tried unsuccessfully to hide in his Journals. When it came to Regine, Kierkegaard fell in love, not with this beautiful and charming young woman, but with something else. The most important object relations issue that stands out from the diary pages is the extent to which Kierkegaard never knew the person that was Regine Olsen. If ever there was a selfobject, here it was. She was an invention of his imagination, and he never enabled himself to know her. He fell in love with, and proposed to, an ideal good object, one that would bring him eternal happiness, amend the narcissistic injuries he had suffered, and would give him the praise, regard, admiration and narcissistic succour he craved. None of this was either understood or mentioned by him, but it was assumed – that was the reason for his infatuation. This is not to deny any erotic attraction, for the detail of *The Seducer's Diary* indicates something of what he might have been feeling [286]. But Kierkegaard immediately made the poor child into something he needed, without in any sense allowing himself to know and understand the person. Prior to the engagement, Regine was without flaw or fault, and this unreal object would exist in his life to serve him in his needs and save him from his frailties. All the criticisms and failures in life, the rebuttals, the hurt, the cutting remarks, the inabilities to see his greatness and brilliance, all these would be obviated by this pubescent child. She would make up for all of life's failures, including whatever initial failures of loving and caring there might have been. Regine was wholly good, wholly bountiful, without criticism or denial. She was the original good breast.

And of course she was nothing of the sort. She was a healthy, intelligent, sexual young woman who wished from her relationship with her suitor what any similar person would wish – a mixture of the erotic, the intellectual, passion mixed with caring and respect. But there had to be a mixture.

Sadly, Kierkegaard could only provide some of these requirements. Kierkegaard's was a world of the interior, whether or not he wished to admit

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[285] see JP 5219 and 5220.

it, and there was little else to commend him. As I discuss below [287], narcissists have extreme issues with intimate sexual relationships, not least because sexual intimacy demands a fusion of the self with the other. When the self is chronically fragile, such a fusion is threatening to the point of annihilation. Beyond sexuality, it is extremely difficult for narcissists to cope with criticism. Kierkegaard's reactions to poor reviews of his works rapidly turned to rage. Regine Olsen, as a real person, was never going to permit her beau to imagine himself without flaw or failing, just as she knew her own irritations and lacunae. But up to the moment of the engagement, for Kierkegaard the libidinal ego was in the ascendancy. That part of the original ego that stayed with hoped-for primary fusion, that craved the denied original bliss, sought it in Regine. Here, at last, was the chance of regaining what had been denied all his life. His infatuation was not for this living person, but for some hoped for return to a lost state of perfect happiness. And it was not to be.

6.7.2 THE END OF THE ENGAGEMENT

Kierkegaard describes the proposal with some clarity and candour. [288]
But the day after proposing he knew something was wrong. Now, Søren Kierkegaard was not the first young man to wake up with dreadful misgivings the morning after proposing matrimony. But what matters in such a situation is what you do next. For many there is a period of rationalisation or denial, and Kierkegaard certainly went through that. His later recollection tells in some detail how he suffered [289]. But the overnight conversion from the good object to the bad object is a classic case of split objects, of a false self being brought to heel by a terrified true self, and of a persecuting anti-libidinal ego asserting itself.

[286] see, for example, *Either/Or I* KW III p 411.
[287] See Chapter 8 on *Works of Love.*
[288] JP 6472. Note that this is a late recollection. This entire long entry, the basis of much biographical information about Kierkegaard and Regine, seems much too clinical an account of his early relationship, written perhaps with posterity rather than *veritas* in mind.

His immediate narcissistic task was to distance himself from her, so that despite protestations of love, he could gradually return to his previous existence, safe from the threats of intimacy, sharing and self-revelation. First, anything erotic was banned; as he was later to write:

> The greatest possible misunderstanding between man and man about the religious life occurs between a man and a woman when the man wants to impart religion to her, all the blessedness implicit in being before God, and then he becomes the object of her romantic love. [290]

Being the object of anybody's romantic love was fine in the abstract – narcissistic supply at its best. But when that love laid claims on the narcissistic self, when it cannot be controlled but demands a portion of the self, then it becomes intolerable. Suggestions of this inability to tolerate are there in his first letter after the engagement, dated by some as September 23rd 1840. This is the one with the drawing of the man on the bridge looking through a telescope. He writes that:

> ..the spyglass itself has a unique characteristic...so that...one sees something quite different from what is seen by all the other people about one.. Only in the proper hands and for the proper eye it is a divine telegraph; for everybody else it is a useless contrivance. [291]

This, I suggest, is the narcissist reasserting himself after the crisis of the engagement. Only the right person can use this spyglass: the right person can see things no other can. Kierkegaard is at one end of the spyglass, but he already knows that Regine is not at the other. So soon after proposing marriage, he cannot even look at the real, the true person that is Regine, let alone contemplate any kind of intimacy.

Slowly, over the months, the Wednesday letters become more and more strained, increasingly irrelevant to their supposed state of love. There is no mention of the importance of the other, their endless fascination, the loving retelling of shared moments. They take on an uncomfortable tone of preaching and remonstration, probity and rectitude [292]. Regine, it seems was blind to this, remaining deeply in love with him, and oblivious to his

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[289] JP 6742.
[290] JP 1370.
[291] JP 5478.
[292] Kierkegaard regularly read Mynster's sermons to her. See Garff (2005) p 183.

distancing and his inner turmoil and fear. When the end of the engagement came, she was shocked, completely surprised, distraught. But Kierkegaard had been planning this escape for over a year.

> So we parted... I spent the night crying in my bed. But in the daytime I was my usual self, more flippant and witty than even necessary. [293]

Even here, in extremis, he cannot resist the narcissist's riposte.

6.7.3 THE LEGACY

In one sense, the engagement as it had been for Kierkegaard never ended. His infatuation with this unreal object continued for the rest of his life. The fact that his fiancée married another, and that attempts to make contact with her in later life were rebuffed, meant relatively little. Kierkegaard was in fantasy. Instead of having to contend with a very unreliable and potentially impossible real woman, he instead contentedly concerned himself with an ever perfect and totally manageable imaginary one. Once or twice, reality burst in, and the libidinal ego was, again, momentarily hooked. But with time, this all passed, it all healed, and he could leave to posterity a wonderful story of true but blighted love, a tale of undying but unfulfilled passion, to match those of the great loves of all time - Abelard and Heloise, even Romeo and Juliet. All this, from an object relations point of view, is sadly a long way away from the truth.

After the end of the engagement he went to Berlin - 'fled' is a favourite word of biographers. Between there and Copenhagen he wrote *Either/Or*. Traditionally viewed, this is a tale to convince Copenhageners that he was a scoundrel and that Regine was better off with out him. And further, Regine herself was to read into the various components of this text the message that he really had loved her, but that he could not go through with marriage since he was destined for higher things, that he was in some sense already spoken for, that she must sacrifice her own happiness just as he sacrificed his. These were things she would immediately understand and appreciate. I

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[293] JP 6472.

would rather suggest that this text was a narcissistic response, designed above all to show off his brilliance, to deny the injury from the engagement, and to restore his narcissistic self-esteem. It is not by chance that we first meet the pseudonymous authors - several of them [294]. Nor is it by chance that Kierkegaard reveals something of his own sexuality in the detail of *The Seducer's Diary* [295]. And Judge William's wholly unconvincing defence of the state of marriage [296] is, perhaps unconsciously, as ironic as anything written by Kierkegaard. No, this was not for Regine, or even Copenhagen. This was to show the world that a star was in the ascendancy, that the petty requirements of the social do not apply to all, and that if you are special enough, you can rise above it all. No wonder he was desperately concerned about the reviews.

Reality did burst in. As a single instance of his lack of empathy, consider his disastrous misinterpretation of the nod from Regine during Bishop Mynster's sermon in the Frue Kirke on Easter Sunday, 1843. Kierkegaard's was a human response to an estranged lover - she whom one had loved might still have feelings. And in many ways doubtless she did. But the diary entries around this time are again a mixture of delight and panic:

> At vespers on Easter Sunday… she nodded to me. I do not know if it was pleadingly or forgivingly, but in any case very affectionately. I had sat down in a place apart, but she had discovered it. Now a year and a half of suffering and all the enormous pains I took are wasted; she does not believe I was a deceiver, she has faith in me…. The higher we go the more dreadful it is. And yet I cannot live solely for her, cannot expose myself to the contempt of men in order to lose my honour. [297]

At this point a page is torn for the Journal (always a suspicious sign in any diary). Then he continues:

> I have done everything in order that she may not suspect that she perhaps bears a little of the guilt herself….I ran her aground – she deserved it, that is my honest opinion…[298]

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[294] Apart from A and the Young Man, Johannes the Seducer and Judge William, we have B and Victor Eremita. See Chapter Ten below for a discussion of the narcissistic role of pseudonyms.

[295] to be discussed immediately below.

[296] Garff (2005) summarises the criticisms and his responses. The Hong's Introduction to *Either/Or* is also enlightening.

[297] JP 5653.

[298] Ibid.

All this from a nod. We see the ambivalence: Kierkegaard both desires and dreads the re-emergence of the real woman demanding real involvement. For Kierkegaard, this wordless, emotionless nod was an instance of the abiding libidinal ego, always looking for the impossible and perfect fulfilment, catching him off guard, and re-kindling primal hopes. For Kierkegaard, the anonymous, uncued, ungrounded nod was all he needed for a vast set of emotions - positive and negative - to come into consciousness and into play. For Regine, in all probability, the nod was no more than an instance of, well, nodding.

Months after this Regine married, causing much heartache in the final writing of *Repetition*. But once she was safely out of reach, Kierkegaard could play the narcissist's game of relating to an internally ideal but externally unattainable object. The absence of reality in such narcissistic fantasies permits an endless supply of succour and supply. From time to time, the supply seems sterile, as indeed it is, and at such times narcissists will make attempts to make contact with the object of their unreal affection. And we see this more than once.

On the 25th June 1849, Regine's father died. This seems to have set in train a considerable amount of retrospective analysis and justification. He wrote:

> Counsellor Olsen is dead. This will certainly lead her to think in a special way of her relationship to me. [299]

Note the lack of concern here for how she might be thinking about the loss of her father; instead we have the typically narcissistic reorientation of the external event to within the self. There follows, in the Journals, a series of entries concentrating on what happened with Regine. There is much detailed and retrospective analysis, even to the point of dividing the course of the relationship into five clinical phases [300]. But throughout these twenty or so entries, there is a constant tension between allocating the blame to himself and to Regine. And throughout, placing blame upon himself is narcissistically done. So Regine is elevated then demeaned, praised then cursed; she is innocent, yet she carries a burden of responsibility:

[299] JP 6453.

..she has suffered for my sake. [301]

She forgets that two months prior to the decisive break she received a disengagement letter worded as humbly as possible for me... [302]

She does bear a great responsibility. [303]

I should and must have my freedom...she herself ought to have understood this a little and made my situation a bit easier... Alas, but she was so young, and she was so lovingly devoted to me.. [304]

Basically she had taken possession of me with her tears. [305]

My basic guilt is to have swept her along. [306]

Yes, but she also has a great responsibility toward me because of her misuse of pious entreaties. [307]

Among all these are insights that almost certainly were not present while the relationship was taking its course.

but I am continually afraid of her passion. [308]

but however much I loved her, it seems I continually wanted to conceal from myself how much she actually affected me, which really does not seem appropriate to erotic love. [309]

Suppose I had married her. Let us assume it. What then? In the course of half a year or less she would have been unhinged. [310]

And he continues with the narcissistic illusion that her marriage is fragile, and that he has only, as it were, to click his fingers for her old passion for him to return. He was convinced she could not resist his charms:

A marriage will not bind her if her passion is kindled again. [311]

..if she finds out that I was motivated in the past by considerations of religion and suffering, I run the risk of her suddenly yielding to despair over her marriage. [312]

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[300] JP 6482.
[301] JP 6470.
[302] JP 6472.
[303] JP 6740.
[304] JP 6479.
[305] JP 6476.
[306] JP 6482.
[307] JP 6544.
[308] JP 6454.
[309] JP 6470.
[310] JP 6488.
[311] JP 6470.
[312] Ibid.

And he projects his own fantasies onto her: ' ..the achievement of historical fame which is sure to be hers.' [313] And:

> My life will unconditionally accent her life, my literary work is to be regarded as a monument to her honour and praise. I take her along into history.

The whole tone is unreal; he presumes he is still at the centre of her thoughts and desire. There are many repetitive recitatives, thought experiments as it were, about hypothetical interactions between them.[314] But always there is the presumption of a continuing loving devotion, complete devotion on Regine's part. And much self-justification on his:

> Certainly getting my freedom was also the only suitable thing for her. [315]

> But the marriage vow obligates me to be completely open, convicts me if I do not do so, demands that I lead her into my deepest inner self; well, at that moment the relationship will be an absurdity, and she will be completely wasted on me. [316]

Throughout, he retained the most fabulous view of himself:

> she wholeheartedly would put up with everything and still thank me all her life for the greatest of blessings, her relationship to me. [317]

He never wanted her to forget him; his actions he always believed were of the highest and special.

> To trot alongside a girl whose love I truly did not reject but was force to make it seem as if I, humanly speaking, rejected it: yes, this is the task for me. [318]

So in the end, he wrote to Regine via Schlegel on 19th November 1849. The letter was returned. This permitted, after yet more introspection, what no doubt seemed at the time a genuine closure:

> But now the affair is really ended. *And never have I felt so light and happy and free about this matter, so totally myself again, as just now*

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[313] ibid.
[314] Entry 6488 has that telltale mark of perhaps too much self-revelation, the page torn form the journal.
[315] JP 6480.
[316] Ibid.
[317] JP 6488.
[318] Ibid.

after making this sacrificial step! For now I understand I have God's consent to let her go and to take care of myself, complying only with her last plea: 'to think of her sometimes," in this way keeping her for history and eternity.* [319] (Kierkegaard's emphasis).

At the same time he gives us the perfect fantasised summary of the whole relationship:

> If the period of writing aesthetic literature were not long past, or if a recreation of that nature ever were to be allowed, I would like to write a book which would be entitled:
> Conversations with My Wife
> In the preface, the author will say that his wife was nineteen years old the day of their marriage, that the conversations, as we will see, stem from the first half of their marriage. They should be dialogues, I would portray the humorous side of this relationship, the husband is intellectually superior and yet genuinely in love, the feminine figure charmingly naïve. [320]

Alas, Kierkegaard was reckoning without the power of the unconscious, for thoughts of Regine continued into 1850 and beyond [321].

Eventually, Regine became almost iconic and saintly, a person about whom he knew less and less, but to whom he attributed more and more. Along with the Common Man [322], Regine became an unreal wholly good object, in contrast to the rest of humankind. As his narcissistic supply crumbled, as the bitter realisation of his failure to match his impossible narcissistic expectations took hold, and as the rage against all of society intensified, opposing the all-consuming bad object that was Christendom was just one small child - the wholly good Regine. He retained the illusion that she never forgot him, that he remained the most special person in her life.

> Up to this day I have unconditionally kept my resolve to pray for her at least once every day. [323]

Whatever he felt in writing these words, whatever the degree of honesty with which he wrote them, it sadly remains that this relationship was one of fantasy and of need, born out of incomplete love as an infant, and a lifetime

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[319] JP 6539.
[320] JP 6584.
[321] entries are to be found as late as 1854 (JP 6906).
[322] to be discussed below.
[323] JP 6470.

of battle with largely imaginary foes (his projected bad objects). It was matched by the elevation of someone he by now hardly knew into something approaching a saviour, a source of complete narcissistic supply, and, probably, a perfectly nurturing mother. Very late on, he considered dedicating a book to her:

> To RS – with this little book is dedicated an authorship, which to some extent belongs to her, by one who belongs completely to her. [324]

The lie is that Kierkegaard belonged to a totally unreal version of Regine, to an internal object simply and privately constructed for his own well being and own happiness, invented to overcome early narcissistic injury, bearing little or no resemblance to that real human being, and hence completely incapable of any real interaction with him. Was there ever such a tale of woe, indeed.

6.8 KIERKEGAARD'S SEXUALITY

This is now an appropriate time to consider Søren Kierkegaard's sexuality. The task is both enormously important and enormously difficult. The claim for importance is justified if the axioms of psychoanalysis are to be taken seriously as they are in this thesis. The claim for difficulty can be summarised by what is perhaps the only written evidence from Kierkegaard himself that refers to an overt, physical, sexual act on his part:

> The bestial sniggering... [325]

This is not propitious. About any other part of this private sexual life, we know nothing. There are implications that he lived a somewhat bawdy life as a student, but these come from secondary sources and perhaps inventive biographers. In his own papers there is nothing; none of the contemporary sources suggest much above smoking cigars and drinking at student bars in his youth. We know nothing about visits to bordellos, to individual sex

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[324] JP 6675.
[325] JP 5176. Note that the remaining text of this entry is actually missing. All we have is this entry in Barfod's list of key words, but without the relevant text. See JP vol 5 note 241 (p 481). There is no certain date, but it is probably mid-November 1836.

workers, certainly nothing to suggest homosexuality or any of the sado-masochistic perversions that some biographers favour. We know nothing about the shape of his penis, even though some biographers claim to.

At least, that is, he tells us nothing directly. But there are hints: there is a reference to a visit to the Doctor. And from time to time his writings – *The Seducer's Diary*, for example – suggest an acquaintance with some elements of lust that surely beckon further investigation [326]. Then there is the matter of '*the thorn in the flesh*', a Freudian phrase if ever there was one.

But let us begin by considering what we know about his upbringing. He was brought up in a household with three sisters. The realities of female anatomy and physiology must have been known to him. He must have been aware of the schoolgirl passions of his older sisters. He also had older brothers, whose own adolescent physiology would have been very apparent to him. Did they share rooms, the boys? Did they share sexual secrets, as brothers often do? Schoolboys, then as now, surely told dirty stories; the childish and adolescent fascination with bodies, excretory processes and emerging sexual physical characteristics must have been as present for Søren as for any other boy. Copenhagen in this Golden Age had prostitutes and brothels; contemporary accounts of European cities suggest a sex industry on a scale that we might find unimaginable. The household in which Søren was raised may well have been refined, strict, cerebral in the extreme; but it is difficult to believe it was an environment in which sex and sexuality were totally absent. Mother presumably was at least content with her own sexuality, producing seven children at fairly regular intervals; indeed the very origin of her relationship with Søren's father was extra-marital sex. Father, despite his own upbringing and whatever social and psychological pressure he may have felt, nevertheless fathered these seven children – presumably not an onerous task – including one when he was in his 50s. We have no idea of the extent to which overt physical sexuality was ever present or observed by Søren in the household. We do not know how physical or affectionate father was with mother in the presence of any of the

children. But the epitaph on Ane's grave suggests a caring, loving relationship between husband and wife [327]. The other siblings married and the sisters procreated, albeit tragically for two of them. All in all, this does not sound like a household in which sex and sexuality were denounced or denied.

But we know nothing of what was going in Søren's head. Did he have sexual fantasies? He must have. Did he masturbate? He surely did. At the height of his love affair with Regine, what lustful thought did he take home to his private room from their encounters? Was he so unmoved by her teenage body? Did he ever kiss her passionately? While in proper Copenhagen circles little more than kissing would be permitted or expected during an engagement, what was the basis of his physical attraction to her?

Some answers come from *The Seducer's Diary*. One could suggest that this essay is pure invention, or suggest instead that every author calls on their own experience when inventing. I would like to suggest the latter, and despite the claims that the hero of the *Diary* is based on the reputation of the critic Peder Ludvig Moller [328], I believe that the details, the intimate, manipulative, voyeuristic, wholly narcissistic details, must have come from within Søren Kierkegaard himself. One reading is that the *Diary*, allegedly produced after the break-up as an invention to convince Regine how much of a bounder he really was, in fact may have produced that very result but through its verisimilitude. One could well strike out the word 'Seducer' and replace it with 'Narcissist', and reprint the text, for this is a chilling description of just how narcissists view their conquests. Cordelia is a pure object, one to be manipulated, one with whom to play out long distant imagined afflictions and sufferings [329].

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[326] There are many references to white bosoms, creamy bosoms, heaving bosoms, and bosoms in general.

[327] Ane Kierkegaard aged 67 has 'gone home to the Lord…loved and missed by her surviving children and friends, but especially by her old husband'.

[328] see Watkin (2001) p 405.

[329] There is easily another thesis here. The text is full of suspect psychodynamics that Kierkegaard puts into the mouth of Johannes. For instance: 'Cordelia hates and fears me. What does a young girl fear? Intellect. Why? Because intellect constitutes the negations of her entire womanly existence' (KW E/O I p 362). Here Kierkegaard

This is not to say that Kierkegaard had no insight about his issues of sexuality. Famously, he went to visit his doctor [330].

> I therefore asked my physician whether he believed that the structural misrelations between the physical and the psychical could be dispelled so that I could realise the universal.[331] This he doubted. I asked him whether he thought that my spirit could convert or transform this relation by willing it. He doubted it; ..

> From that moment I have made my choice. I have regarded that tragic misrelation, together with its suffering (which no doubt would have driven to suicide most of those lacking sufficient spirit to comprehend the utter wretchedness of the agony) as my thorn in the flesh, my limitation, my cross; I have looked upon it as the high price at which God in heaven sold me a mental-spiritual capacity unequalled among my contemporaries. [332]

If, as I suggest below in some detail, sexual intimacy is abut the transgression of boundaries, especially the boundary of the self, then if that self is less than robust, is fragile for whatever reason, sexuality becomes a threatening process. So Kierkegaard the man admits to his understanding of his potential inability and failing, and Kierkegaard the narcissist consoles himself with the idea that he is special, chosen by God, and unequalled among men. Narcissistically, this is an excellent arrangement - troublesome and threatening sexuality is traded for a profound sense of grandiosity. Of course, there remains insight:

> - but O, what would I not have given, especially during my younger days, to be an ordinary person[333] for just half a year! [334]

Though even here, in the admission of another life that was never to be, Kierkegaard still adds the narcissistic twist:

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sets up femininity as something to be envied, in the Kleinian sense. He displays a fear of women, and a need to destroy their potency.

[330] As Alan Bennett put it: *'For men, there are two kinds of visits to the Doctor: those that involve taking down the trousers, and those that don't.'* Much ink has been spilt trying to establish which of these it was.

[331] by 'the Universal' he means marriage and procreation.

[332] JP 5913.

[333] This can be translated as either 'person' or 'man'. From our point of view, there is a major difference in inference.

[334] JP 6500.

> Had I been an ordinary human being, the danger no doubt would have been something else, that of being taken too much with women, and I possibly could have become a seducer. [335]

So, no ordinary *'ordinary human being'*, then, but a seducer! For narcissists, it is ever thus.

And as for the thorn in the flesh, this occurs throughout the diaries. Despite some esoteric interpretations [336], the most common conception is that Kierkegaard used this term to refer to his own, perceived inadequacies as a sexual human being. It is a suitably vague term, and is used in several ways. It sometimes refers to *'frightful mental depression'* [337], his relationship with his father [338], or as a synonym for suffering in general [339]. It is sometimes used defiantly:

> At times I am buoyed up by the thought that the thorn I have in the flesh… will itself be or will help me be a thorn in the eye of the world. [340]

At other times, he uses the term simply to indicate he is set apart from ordinary men [341]. But in general, whatever it is, there is a mixture of regret and pride in how he refers to it. A typical entry is entitled 'God's Special Upbringing':

> It probably goes something like this for a man who is the object of this special upbringing. At an early age he is bound to a suffering which is a thorn in the flesh to him, places him outside of the universally human. Thus hinders him from being able to enjoy life – and forces him into a God-relationship as the only consolation and salvation. [342]

I suspect that Kierkegaard was not much given to sexual introspection, and that the thorn in the flesh, whatever it referred to when it emerged in the consciousness of a young man, soon became a much less somatic and much more cerebral concept.

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[335] JP 6500.
[336] see Garff (2005).
[337] JP 6659.
[338] JP 6906.
[339] eg JP 6532.
[340] JP 6492.
[341] JP 6021.

If there had been a visit to a bordello to precipitated the comment about *'bestial sniggering'* in his diaries, I would suggest that this one encounter would be more than enough sexual involvement to last Kierkegaard a lifetime. In reality, we have a complete instance of Freud's defence mechanism of sublimation, the transformation of libido into intellectual activity. Of course, this is not quite as nature intended, so we must not be surprised to find that his life contains a very great deal of real misery, something that psychoanalysts would not hesitate to ascribe to his lack of direct sexual involvement and activity.

6.9 THE CORSAIR AFFAIR

The essence of the Corsair Affair is contained in two documents: the first is a review, essentially of *Stages on Life's Way*, but really about much of Kierkegaard's output to date. This was written by Peder Ludvig Moller and published in the so-called Yearbook *Giea* in December of 1846. Moller, it will be remembered, has been suggested by many [343] as the role model for Johannes the Seducer in Part I of *Either/Or*. Moller's review, entitled *A Visit to Soros,* is undoubtedly vituperous, but retains an at least superficial respect for Kierkegaard's intellect. Moller was associated with Meir Goldschmidt, who owned *The Corsair*, an influential satirical paper, read by more or less all of the intelligentsia of Copenhagen, ruthless in its exposés of sham and self-delusion.

In Moller's review, Kierkegaard's philosophy and style are the subject of deliberate denigration:

> Writing and production seem to have become a physical need for him, or he uses it as medicine, just as in certain illnesses one uses blood letting, cupping, steam baths, emetics, and the like.....he does not care about the reader, for he writes for his own comfort. [344]

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[342] JP 4654.
[343] The earliest suggestion seems to have come from Frithiof Brandt. See the Hong's Introduction to *The Corsair Affair*, KW XIII.
[344] *The Corsair Affair*, KW XIII p 100.

Moller particularly attacked Kierkegaard's attitude to women, quite openly accused him of abusing Regine. The defence of Regine is performed through an attack on Kierkegaard:

> Here one meets a masculine individual who has lost everything that constitutes personality. Feeling, understanding, will, resolution, action, backbone, nerve and muscle power – all are dissolved into dialectic. [345]

He parodies *Guilty/Not Guilty* in just 170 words (in the Hong's translation), and a vicious parody it is. Moller speaks of Kierkegaard putting *'the feminine nature on the experimental track',* and:

> If you regard life as a dissecting laboratory and yourself as a cadaver, then go ahead, lacerate yourself as much as you want to...But to spin another creature into your spider web, dissect it alive or torture the soul out of it drop by drop by means of experimentation – that is not allowed... [346]

And Kierkegaard's religiosity is not spared:

> Despite his intelligence, reflection for him has become a severe sickness; his religiousness....appears to me to be a pusillanimity at which our Lord and the angels must laugh. [347]

Moller concludes:

> Meanwhile I am glad to acknowledge him as a intellectually gifted author, but he appears to me to be a decrepit old man, or more correctly an unusually intelligent man with a sick imagination....If he had lived under conditions that had forced him to concern himself with something other than his own whims, he no doubt would have developed his talents to a higher degree; but now he stands like an ironisation of irony. [348]

For Kierkegaard this must have been terribly wounding. Moller systematically criticises and undermines Kierkegaard's presentation of his philosophy, the relationship with Regine, his religiousness, and his physical person. Each of these, for Kierkegaard, is a carefully erected mirror that essentially hides a truth. And Moller had revealed those truths to all of Copenhagen.

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[345] ibid p 101.
[346] ibid p 102.
[347] ibid p 104.
[348] ibid p 104.

Kierkegaard immediately wrote a response, published in *The Faedrelandet* on 27th December. It is a long-winded piece, but concludes with the oft-quoted last paragraph in which two things happen. Kierkegaard states his wish to be talked about in the Corsair, and reveals, to a Copenhagen that perhaps knew this truth but chose not to talk about it, that Moller was the editor of *The Corsair*. The implications of the first were to be beyond Kierkegaard's worst nightmare; the implications of the second would be particularly damaging for Moller, since to be associated with the magazine effectively scuppered his opportunities in the world of the academy.

Before considering why Kierkegaard made these two points, both of which had terrible consequences in very different ways, I want to ask why Moller's review had such an effect on Kierkegaard. There had been other reviews - poor, lukewarm, indifferent, offensive, aggressive even. So why did this one cause such pain? I would like to suggest that Moller was in a very special situation in terms of Kierkegaard's object relations. Moller was the sexually proficient object that Kierkegaard was not and could not be. In Kohutian terms, Moller was an idealised imago, set on a pedestal, revered, but also identified with. Moller was the hero of *The Seducer's Diary*, and that text is a particularly revealing presentation of Kierkegaard's own narcissistic views on women: Moller was the sexual being that Kierkegaard wishes he had been. So here was a very special wholly good object. But when the good object attacked Kierkegaard, it was immediately denigrated and replaced by the bad object, whom Kierkegaard now wanted to punish, even to destroy. The anti-libidinal ego, as ever, won out against the exciting object, and whatever secret ambitions Kierkegaard might have had in the sexual arena were utterly quashed by this process. Hence Kierkegaard's fury, his rage, and his need for revenge. That which was wholly good was now wholly bad, beyond redemption. No punishment was too severe, no fate too terrible.

The response was complex. On the one hand, Kierkegaard knew [349] that the revelation about Moller's editorship of the Corsair would be damaging, and

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[349] see Poole (1990) p 149.

this was the straightforward revenge. On the other, we have the curious invitation for parody in the Corsair.

> Would that I might only get into the Corsair soon. It is really hard for a poor author to be so singled out in Danish literature that he...is the only one who is not abused there. [350]

Why? Rationally, he must have been aware of the possible outcome: he must have calculated the risk. To invite parody in this organ was to be assured of parody. I suggest he did indeed calculate the risk, but not the risk of ridicule. What positive outcome might come of his invitation to the Corsair? Might it soberly apologise, run an editorial on the special attributes of Mr Kierkegaard? Rationally, there was not the slightest chance of this happening. To invite parody would be rewarded with just that.

We have to move to object relations to understand the spat. At the moment of writing and submitting his response to Goldschmidt, the magazine became a bad object against whom Kierkegaard raged, wishing to control, to punish, to destroy. The omnipotent Kierkegaard defied the bad object that was *The Corsair*, the bad object, introjected from father and now projected out on to the newspaper. Simultaneously, the wholly narcissistic Kierkegaard truly believed that *The Corsair* would have to admit his omnipotence. The false self that held up a mirror for the world to like and admire while hiding his true self behind it, the very part of Kierkegaard that truly believed he was special, he was omnipotent, this self believed *The Corsair* would retract. Having revealed Moller for what he was, the paper would back down. This was an appeal not to *The Corsair* but to the town, the country, the world, to acknowledge who he, Kierkegaard, was. But just as had happened at school with the school mates who were similarly taunted, the bad object retaliated, not this time with a bloody nose or a thrashing on the arse, but with an immensely more damaging punishment - ridicule. At their most omnipotent, narcissists cannot begin to imagine the process of ridicule (although for those around them and who suffer them it is the most obvious and tempting response). Ridicule is barred from consciousness because it immediately performs that very task that narcissism exists to

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[350] *The Corsair Affair,* KW XIII p 46.

prevent - the realisation, the admission, of the poverty of the self. Narcissism and narcissistic responses are there only because the true self was deemed to be unacceptable by some primary carer, and a false self was instituted in its place. Ridicule, of any kind, circumvents all the narcissistic defences and permits visibility of that one thing the narcissist needs to hide.

From another point of view, Kierkegaard's engagement with the Corsair was an instance of maintaining narcissistic supply. Shortly before this spat, a case can be made that life for Kierkegaard was becoming uneventful. His publications were selling fewer and fewer copies - nothing matched the sales of *Either/Or*; the reviews were usually negative; his finances were getting worse; personal relationships continued their downward spiral. Above all, Kierkegaard was in danger of being ignored. As Oscar Wilde put it, 'there is only thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about'. [351] For the narcissist, the only thing worse than bad narcissistic supply is no narcissistic supply. I suggest that the incursion with *The Corsair* was not so much a catastrophe that happened to befall an essentially innocent victim, but rather a plan that went wrong, a plan executed by a narcissist with the purpose of maintaining public attention and attraction. It was a means of keeping himself within the public consciousness, at a time when all of his phenomenal output seemed to be failing to achieve that. Nowadays, one would appear on reality TV. When life has not gone to plan for the narcissist, when narcissistic supply is dwindling, there is always the appeal to the great public. In psychodynamic terms, this equates to an appeal to a truly unreal good object - the common man, the true patriot, the trusting soul - a terribly vague but potentially supportive fiction. Just as on 'The Jerry Springer Show' the wronged narcissist secretly hopes the entire audience - nay, the entire watching world - will arise and acclaim him, so Kierkegaard's entry into dispute with *The Corsair* was meant to result in an acknowledgement of all within him that was great and special.

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[351] *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Ch 1 (not referenced).

But it didn't. Kierkegaard was to be lampooned, caricatured and ridiculed. He, of course, never got over it, and much of his output from this date, literary as well as private, can be seen as a narcissistic response to the helplessness and resentment within him.

6.10 KIERKEGAARD AND THE COMMON MAN

In the period after the Corsair affair, Kierkegaard systematically demeaned and devalued those of the establishment who were once his friends: they no longer provide him with the sense of specialness he needed. When the Corsair affair broke, none of the coteries came to his defence. So from being a special and cultivated group to whom he, Kierkegaard, felt he naturally belonged, the establishment became the enemy, and a worthless, derided, devalued enemy at that.

In their place he put the common man, the simple classes, now identified as his true friends, now a source of anticipated future endless adulation. But this is a complex substitution, since in reality the common man had already turned against him as a result of the Corsair affair. So I suggest we can see in his Journals how he splits the common man into two objects. The first is a true friend, but one who has been corrupted by the press and the establishment, but is still an essentially good object; the second is the evil common man, who taunts and harangues him, but who will suffer retribution, clearly a very bad object.

This involvement with the common man was not only to do with psychodynamics. Kierkegaard lived through a period in the economic and political history of his native Denmark that was to see profound change, essentially from an absolute monarchy to a democracy with widespread male suffrage [352]. Many, including Kierkegaard, have referred to this as the 'age of the common man', and this identification of a new political and social class

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[352] Bruce Kirmmse has provided a most thorough and complete description of the changes that the country underwent during the century following 1750. See his *Kierkegaard and Golden Age Denmark* (Kirmmse (1990)).

affected Kierkegaard, both in his conscious writings and in his psychodynamics.

The relationship with the common man makes its appearance throughout the 1840s. Consider this entry, probably written in September 1846:

> .. it has saddled me with a crowd of riffraff with whom I do not have and do not care to have any fellowship. Things I can laugh at so heartily in the company of, for example, Carl Weiss, I cannot really laugh at in the company of Jewish peddlers, shop clerks, prostitutes, school boys, butcher boys, etc. [353]

Or this from January 1848:

> For example when I have sought recreation by driving twenty or thirty miles away, and I step down from the coach, and it happens that I am received by a mocking assembly; and some of these present are even nice enough to call me names; it has a very powerful effect on my physical well being…. I have the ability to make any man listen to reason. But I cannot talk to a crude boor, much less three of them that have been given their marching order by the press. [354]

But at the same time we have, in December of 1847 this:

> Never in my life, not even when I was most preoccupied with an idea, have I ever been so busy that I did not have time to stand still if I were being addressed by a poor person.. [355]

And at the end of a long entry, this:

> This is also the source of my almost exaggerated sympathy for the simple class of people, the common man. And therefore I can become depressed and sad because they have been taught to laugh at me, thus depriving themselves of the one person in this country who has loved them most sincerely.. [356]

We have an analysis of Kierkegaard's relationship with the Common Man through Jurgen Bukdahl's eponymous book [357]. It must be said that this is a very sympathetic reading of the life of Kierkegaard, and perhaps falls foul of Kirmmse's own strictures that there is very little real evidence on which to base conclusions about his life and living. For example:

> People doubted Kierkegaard's sincerity (as they still do) and he was suspected of conducting psychological experiments – which, in good

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[353] JP 5937.
[354] JP 6105.
[355] JP 6085.
[356] JP 236.
[357] Bukdahl (2001).

Socratic fashion, he did in fact carry out with his more sophisticated contemporaries. But in matters concerning the common man, Kierkegaard's sincerity was absolutely fundamental..... In matters concerning the common people, he was direct, without ulterior motive or condescension.....He had a rare capacity for sharing his thoughts of other people, for entering into their mental universe, whether it was Bishop Mynster or a coachman. [358]

Bukdahl quotes just two sources [359] for this psychological summary: a letter to his brother Peter's second wife Jette, who had been bed-ridden for much of her adult life; and the memoirs of Hans Brochner ('incidentally these are the only recollections about Kierkegaard that are fully trustworthy.')

I want to consider the fifty paragraphs of Brochner's memoirs. They do indeed read as if they might be authoritative and trustworthy. The really positive and supporting memory comes in a relatively short passage in paragraph 8:

> He had his own way of greeting at a distance with a glance. It was only a small movement of the eye, and yet it expressed so much. There could be something infinitely gentle and loving in his eye, but also something stimulating and exasperating. With just a glance at a passer by, he could irresistibly "establish a rapport" with him, as he expressed it. The person who perceived the look became either attracted or repelled, embarrassed, uncertain, or exasperated. I have walked the whole length of a street with him while he explained how it was possible to carry out psychological studies by establishing such a rapport with the passer-by. And while he expanded on his theory he realised it in practice with nearly everyone we met. There was no one on whom his gaze did not make a visible impression. On the same occasion he surprised me by the ease with which he struck up conversations with so many people. In a few remarks he took up the thread from an earlier conversation and carried it a step further, to a point where it could be continued again at another opportunity. [360]

This, I suggest, is actually the mark of the narcissist. Making eye-contact with all he meets, engaging them, seeking the immediate rapport, these are very much the signs and symptoms of one seeking constant, new admiration. Narcissists easily strike up conversations with many people. They need new people for a continuing narcissistic supply. But these

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[358] ibid p 85.
[359] ibid p 86.
[360] Hans Brochner' *Recollections of Kierkegaard*, para 8 quoted in Kirmmse's *Encounters with Kierkegaard* p 229 (Kirmmse (1996)).

meetings, these instances of rapport, were indeed psychological experiments; they were about establishing new objects who potentially would refill the ever-emptying well of admiration. The very act of treating strangers in this way shows the state of Kierkegaard's object relations - rather than encountering and getting to know a true individual, Kierkegaard meets and exhausts the object during a stroll.

There is another source on this topic: one Andrew Hamilton, a surely unimpeachable source. [361] His account of something over a year spent on Denmark includes the following:

> Kierkegaard's habits of life are singular enough to lend a perhaps false interest to his proceedings. He goes into no company, and sees nobody in his own house, which answers all the ends of an invisible dwelling; I could never learn that anyone had been inside of it. Yet his one great study is human nature; no one knows more people than he. The fact is he walks about town all day, and generally in some person's company; only in the evening does he write and read. When walking he is very communicative, and at the same time manages to draw everything out of his companion that is likely to be profitable to himself.

> I do not know him. I saw him almost daily in the streets, and when he was alone I often felt inclined to accost him, but never put it into execution. I was told his 'talk' was very fine. Could I have enjoyed it, without the feeling that I was myself being mercilessly pumped and sifted, I should have liked very much. [362]

In that Mr Hamilton admits not having spoken to Kierkegaard, we can only presume that he has gleaned his character evaluation from others. What is interesting is the implied common perception that Kierkegaard used those walks and conversations to gain things – information, data, knowledge, wisdom – profitable to himself. *Mercilessly pumped and sifted* are strong words. Those who had walked and talked with Kierkegaard must have been the main source for such an evaluation.

Consider this, from Kierkegaard's earlier years:

> At the beginning of the forties, K took a trip to his father's birthplace on the west coast of Jutland. He told me of a typical little incident from that trip.

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[361] He was a Scotsman.
[362] Quoted in Poole's *Kierkegaard* p 169 (Poole (1993)).

They went to a local school where Kierkegaard's father had made a generous endowment to the school.

> When (Kierkegaard) was ready to depart, he drove past the school. There stood the schoolteacher with all the children lined up to sing a song the schoolteacher had written in SK's honour. The teacher, who was about to direct the song, had a copy in his hand, and was about to give the signal to begin when K's carriage (came to a stop) next to him. SK leaned over with his friendliest smile and took the copy from his hand as if to read it though, and at the same moment gave the driver the sign to drive on.... SK rolled down the road, nodding and waving, inwardly amused at the teacher's disappointment. [363]

And what emotion did Kierkegaard engender in the schoolteacher or the schoolchildren in his father's home village? In honour of a visitor, a song had been composed and rehearsed, much effort expended to put on a small rural school show. Kierkegaard took this opportunity to show his grandiosity and his indifference, to show how great he was compared with the pathetic efforts of these young citizens. 'Inwardly amused at the teacher's disappointment.' Where was compassion? Where was empathy? Where was any sense of valuing what the teacher and children had done and were presenting? The word 'cruel' does not seem too strong; 'revenge' is better, revenge against external objects onto whom Kierkegaard projected the disdain and shame that he internalised from his father. Both teacher and children were devalued objects, used simply to reassert the specialness of Kierkegaard, devalued objects used as part of his unending need for narcissistic support and feeding. This, I suggest, is a pure example of the deep rage that all narcissists hide; their fury at the original narcissistic injury, and their eternal need to seek revenge on the original withholding internalised object. These poor children became the focus of Kierkegaard's hatred, and he lived this hatred by spoiling their efforts and by wholly demeaning them as people.

These memoirs would seem tell us as much as there is about Kierkegaard's relationships with ordinary people. There is simply no other contemporaneous collection of fond anecdotes of a gentle, kind, concerned human being, pausing to speak, as part of his everyday life, to the common

man or woman. It may have happened, but nobody appears to have noticed it enough to mention it in any memoirs. But we do have snippets of anecdotes somewhat to the contrary[364]:

> One trait emphasised by all of them was his delight in jokes – and mockery. Yet there can be no mistaking the fact that his nature also contained the need to mock.

> ...his pretentions were unbounded and his demands were extremely difficult to satisfy if one refused to make oneself into a blind admirer and parrot of his own view.

> I must say that K was a thoroughgoing egocentrist...

Kierkegaard around this time lost objectivity, and object constancy was impossible for him. Things were to get worse:

> It seems to me that it cannot be long before death makes an end of the matter….. I am not complaining, even though it might seem to be a hard fate that I – who, had I lived in any other country, would have earned a great fortune, would have been counted among the most eminent geniuses, and would have enjoyed wide and pervasive influence – by having been born in a demoralised provincial town, have quite predictably achieved status as a sort of local madman, known and insulted by quite literally every guttersnipe, even by convicted criminals. And all the while the envious upper classes were quietly amused and enjoyed their triumph… For three years everybody has maintained absolute silence while this has continued daily…Only a dead man can stop and avenge such infamy, in which an entire nation is more or less implicated. But all you who have suffered will be avenged!….Retribution is coming. [365]

Oral rage indeed. Note how one by one whole groups are involved in the plot until the entire nation is seen to be at fault. This was written in early 1849; here is clear evidence of the totality of splitting: nobody is now a good object. What is more, primitive emotions are coming to the surface. It is no longer possible to forgive the (bad object) common man because of his ignorance, or collusion by other groups against the (good object) common man and Kierkegaard. Now it is time to punish all those who stand against him. The world has become a bad object.

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[363] Kirmmse ibid p 236.
[364] ibid, all in Ch 10.
[365] JP 6382.

7 NARCISSISTIC INFLUENCES IN *FEAR AND TREMBLING*

7.1 PREFACE

The next three chapters look at three major works out of the Kierkegaardian canon – *Fear and Trembling, Works of Love and The Sickness Unto Death*. These are chosen not only for their influence throughout Western thought and Christian theology, but also as being paradigmatic of the state of Kierkegaard's narcissism at the time of their composition. In all of what follows, I am speaking of these three texts as narcissistic texts, a concept defined above in Section 3.6

In considering the texts, I am not concerned to add to the very large body of secondary analysis that seeks to elucidate their 'true' meaning, nor to make philosophical or theological comment on any part of them. Rather, the concern is with applying what we have learned so far about the nature of narcissism, and how it has been identified in Kierkegaard's life, to these volumes. I will argue that they are part of his narcissistic response to life events that preceded each respective composition; they are just another part of a way of being that Kierkegaard generated to preserve his false self.

Fear and Trembling, along with *Works of Love* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, are thus being presented as stimuli onto which we, the reader, project whatever we will. At the risk of overstating the case, they are akin to Rorschach ink-blots. While Kierkegaard's texts possess enormous intellectual content, and ink blots none, in terms of what we might project onto them, they are much more similar. *Fear and Trembling* is based on the myth of Abraham, and myths serve as projective stimuli *par excellence*. So I am not trying to draw out another or different philosophical reading of these texts, but to present some instances of the kinds of projection that resolved and unresolved narcissists might put upon the texts.

In this Chapter I want to argue two points that relate to narcissistic influences in *Fear and Trembling*. First, the entire text is in fact about

grandiosity and omnipotence; apart from any undeniable philosophical importance, the text is a narcissistic response to recent life events for Kierkegaard, and that his choice of Abraham as hero is quite explicable from the point of view of a wounded narcissist. Second I look at the all-important role of the idea of silence in *Fear and Trembling*, and in Kierkegaard's life around this time and later.

7.2 APPROACHING *FEAR AND TREMBLING*

Kierkegaard was not the first to pick up on the importance of the Genesis story of Isaac's binding, the *Aqedah*. Unmentioned by Kierkegaard are the biblical commentaries on the story. There are some sixteen references that condemn child sacrifice as an abomination before God. There is commentary on the *Aqedah* in Hebrews 11:17ff, James 2:21ff, Romans 4:2ff and Galations 3:6ff. Augustine [366] discusses the story, as does Abelard [367], and Aquinas [368]. There is a large amount of commentary dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly from England [369]. And it is not as though Kierkegaard was the first and only person to appreciate the challenge of the Abraham story. Jewish scholars had long since puzzled over the complexity, not to say contradictions, that seems inherent in the tale. Moses Maimonides, a remarkable medieval Jewish scholar, in particular gives an analysis with much of the Kierkegaardian insight, but written in twelfth century [370].

Nonetheless, Kierkegaard's text remains the most widely known, and perhaps the most psychologically analytic of all exegeses. It was written well over half a century before Freud's first writings began, yet it contains a significant amount of psychodynamic appreciation of human motives.

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[366] Augustine *City of God* Bk 16, Ch 32.
[367] Abelard *Ethics* Ch 3.
[368] Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, 94.
[369] that has been summarised and evaluated by David Pailin. See Pailin (1981).
[370] In *The Guide of the Perplexed*. For a very amenable summary of the Jewish approach to the Aqedah, see Louis Jacobs contribution in Perkins (1981) (Jacobs (1981)).

This is a text, I will argue, based on relationships and communication, or rather, the almost complete lack of both. It draws on some thirty-nine of the fifty chapters of the Book of Genesis, all concerned with the life of Abraham. It involves a large number of *dramatis personae*, all of whom can be seen as metaphors for the state of Keirkegaard's narcissism: Johannes de Silento, the name of the author; God (but not any God, rather the God of the Old Testament, the God of Abraham and Isaac); Abraham himself; and Abraham's son Isaac. Non-speaking parts [371] given to Sarah, who at age 90 becomes the mother of Isaac; and to Hagar, the maid of the household, who was the mother of Abraham's first son Ishmael (this conception happened according to the custom of the time, and when Sarah doubted God's promise that Abraham would be the father of a great nation).

Beyond this, we have a series of characters making brief appearances, nearly all drawn from classical literature. They are: the Commoner and the Princess (an invented fairy tale to illustrate the idea of Infinite Resignation); Agamemnon, used to portray the idea of a Tragic Hero; Jephthah, from the Book of Judges, similarly utilised; and Lucius Junius Brutus, First Consul of Rome, ditto.

In Problema III, Johannes introduces three romantically involved couples, and one other character, to discuss the need to remain silent when *'in an absolute relation with the absolute'*. The first is the Delphic Bridegroom, from Aristotle's Politics; the augers promise a disaster if he marries his bride: what is he to do? The second is a legend, certainly Danish and possibly found elsewhere: Agnete and the Merman, a tale of the lust of a creature of the deep being tamed by the vision of purity and loveliness that is Agnete. Third is the unhappy pairing of Sarah and Tobias from the Book of Tobit in the Apocrypha. Sarah's previous seven bridegrooms have died in the bridal chamber: should she confess this to the eighth? And the final character is an old friend of Kierkegaard – Faust, who is here presented as *'doubt personified'*.

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[371] It is very tempting to reflect on the imputed silence of these women, and link this

The whole story is told by Johannes de Silento, who repeatedly confesses that he is not a man of faith and cannot understand Abraham. As many secondary commentators have pointed out[372], this puts Silento's commentary outside of faith, and permits a considerable discussion about understanding faith from the inside, having faith, as opposed to from the outside, and not having faith[373].

7.3 THE NARCISSISTIC ATTRACTION OF THE AQEDAH

In choosing Abraham, Kierkegaard chose a major topic. This is not just any myth, but one *'central to the nervous system of Judaism and Christianity'.* [374] Jews recite Genesis 22 at the service of Rosh Hashanah; reciting the same passage is common during Christian celebrations of Easter week; Muslims re-enact the event on the most sacred day of the Muslim calendar. Apart from being venerated, the story resonates in popular culture also. [375] But it is still a myth, transmitted orally and edited repeatedly for many hundreds of years before it reached its present form. Speigal gives an appropriate perspective:

> Scriptures are not only a record of the past but a prophecy, a foreshadowing and foretelling of what will come to pass. And if that is the case, text and personal experience are not two autonomous domains. On the contrary, they are reciprocally enlightening; even as the immediate event helps to make the age old sacred text intelligible, so in turn the text reveals the fundamental significance of the recent event or experience. [376]

So why did Kierkegaard choose this myth as the central issue in *Fear and Trembling*? I want to suggest there are three reasons, all aspects of his narcissism.

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to Kierkegaard's silence about his own mother.
[372] See Lippitt (2003) for a catalogue.
[373] Thus we necessarily have to confront the idea of pseudonymity, as was discussed in the previous chapter.
[374] Spiegal (1969) p xvii.
[375] Bob Dylan wrote a song about it; Woody Allen made a comedy sketch about it; the Peanuts strip cartoon even makes reference to it.
[376] Speigal (1969) p xvi.

First, the mythical tale is about omnipotence: the power of God to command Abraham to sacrifice his son, and the power of Abraham to attend single-mindedly to this command. Kernberg defines omnipotence:

> (It) is based on the identification with an idealised and powerful good object and consists in the denial of other internal and external aspects of reality.
> It is related to projective identification in that it includes a tendency to exert control and mastery of external objects.
> Contempt experienced or expressed towards objects often accompanies omnipotence. [377]

Fear and Trembling can be read narcissistically as Kierkegaard identifying with Abraham. This narcissistic identification permits the intense omnipotence of God to be related directly to oneself, in this instance to Kierkegaard. The story is about a man alone on a hillside with God; there are others involved, but they are mere ciphers. So this is a narcissistic fantasy – the absence of competing others, siblings, parents, whomever - with the sole concentration of the omnipotent other on this self. Through this identification, Kierkegaard was making himself unquestionably unique. Perhaps Rothstein's model of 'failed perfection' best describes Kierkegaard's particular narcissism. As Rothstein says:

> The cognitive component (of narcissistic perfection) is expressed in ideas of omniscience or omnipotence. A subject or object may be thought of as all knowing, most powerful etc. What is common to all is a superlative designation such as "most", or the number "one" or the "one and only". [378]

In complex ways, Kierkegaard repeatedly both projects omnipotence onto Abraham, and then introjects it into himself. The story of Abraham is one of being special, of being chosen, of being the father of a race and nation, being the most venerable man in three monotheistic religions. For the religiously inclined narcissist, and leaving aside Christ as perhaps too blasphemous a candidate, there is no better, no more laudable person with whom to identify than Abraham.

Second, the story of Abraham is about non-disclosure. Because, as I argued above, Kierkegaard was neither man nor gentleman enough to explain his

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[377] Kernberg (1985) p 33.
[378] Rothstein (1984) p 18.

true predicament to Regine, he remained silent, deluding her, and to a significant extent himself. The social stigma of his behaviour in middle class Copenhagen in 1833 would have been significant, [379] and he was at pains to find an excuse, or more accurately a rationale, for his behaviour, that maintained his narcissism, his false self. For the first time, following the end of the engagement, he had been obliged to consider his own behaviour and reflect upon his motives. The narcissistic response is always to deny personal wrongdoing, and blame any other agency. Accepting personal blame is to risk destroying the narcissistic mask that has been so carefully erected and maintained. Hence at this time Kierkegaard was in search of a suitably authoritative and impressive analogue or parallel to his own predicament, in order to remove any blame from himself and demonstrate that others, even greater than he, had faced a similar dilemma and resolved it in much the same way. The story of Abraham is perfect. Abraham is venerated, unique, and close to God; but, as Kierkegaard explains in Problema III, Abraham never talks about his motives and the events on Mount Moriah. He does not speak because he *cannot*. What has occurred is in some sense private between God and Abraham, is outside the universal [380], and hence cannot be communicated. God chose Abraham, and no other, to be part of this conversation. This excuse, this narcissistically perfect rationale, was what Kierkegaard needed to explain to the world why he treated Regine the way he did, and why he remained silent about it. By telling the story of Abraham, and allowing the reader to link Abraham's situation with that of himself, he narcissistically believed others would excuse him as he invited the reader to excuse – actually to admire – Abraham.

Third, Abraham's story demeans other, intimately related human beings. For many, this is the most difficult aspect of the Aqedah story. [381] As Delaney asks:

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[379] See Kirmmse (1990) or Kirmmse (1996).

[380] Most of the discussion of Problema III is about Abraham's need to remain silent. See *Fear and Trembling*, KW VI pp 82-120.

[381] Delaney (1998) is a text wholly critical of the patriarchal underpinning of Abraham's story.

> Like that knife eternally raised in mid air, several questions should be held in the mind of the reader. Why is the willingness to sacrifice the child the model of faith? What is the function of obedience? Why so little attention to the betrayal of the child? Whose voice counts? [382]

Narcissistically, the very denial of the legitimacy of the views of both Abraham's son, Isaac, and his son's mother, Sarah, in his decision to follow God's (private) command and sacrifice his son, is quite reasonable. The previous analysis of the narcissistic personality has repeatedly emphasised the absolute need to remain totally self-centred, to reduce everything to a self-object, the absolute danger of admitting other viewpoints, other realties. By denying their voice, Abraham's story denies them reality. The narcissist can thus continue in his false self without having to accommodate the awkard reality of significant others. Kernberg says of narcissistic intimate relationships:

> For the narcissistic partner, life proceeds in isolation; dependency upon the other is feared insofar as it represents acknowledgement and gratitude for the dependency; dependency is replaced by self-righteousness. Resentments are resolved by splitting disparate experiences from each other. In a worst case, a stifling sense of imprisonment and persecution by the other evolves. [383]

As was described above, almost immediately after proposing marriage to Regine, Kierkegaard was engulfed in a very private narcissistic crisis. With Regine having initially been elevated and idealised, having become in part a Kohutian idealised imago, the only possible narcissistic response to the crisis was to devalue and demean her. Kernberg again: 'if an external object can provide no further gratification or protection, it is dropped and dismissed'. Poor Regine was thus devalued. Despite many claims to the contrary, I maintain that any secret message of *Fear and Trembling* is not aimed at Regine at all, for she now has little significance for Kierkegaard's false self. The text is aimed at the world, at middle class Copenhagen to be exact, to reassure them that he had not treated his fiancé badly at all, but rather that they, ordinary Copenhageners, shared their town of a very special human being indeed, one that could at the very least be compared with Abraham.

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[382] Delaney (1998) p 14.
[383] Kernberg (1995) p 144.

All of this came out of rage. Kernberg says, of the narcissist struggling with any intimate relationship:

> the incapacity to experience gratitude, the sense of humiliation at needing the other person, and the deeper difficulty of facing the intense guilt over having destroyed a potentially good relationship with another makes for very pathological object relations.' [384]

I suggest that Kernberg's description is precisely what was happening for Kierkegaard: the guilt and fear and humiliation, unacceptable to the narcissist at the best of times, become overwhelmingly intense in intimate relationships, and sooner or later these emotions must be rejected and projected onto the beloved. Narcissistic rage remains behind. One has to find a reason for why the beloved is unworthy, unfaithful, simply not good enough. Kierkegaard set up a humanly impossible condition for a girl to be in love with him, thus relieving him of any obligation to love her.

7.4 NARCISSISTIC SILENCE

As a concept, *silence* has a long history [385], and serves a purpose in many aspects of critical theory. We could agree with Bauman[386] that modernity as opposed to post-modernity is concerned with the repression of indeterminacy, contingency and ambivalence. Language and linguistic classification are thus part of the modernistic process of imposing order and reducing chaos. Silence, by contrast, increases ambiguity, reduces fixedness and changes boundaries. Psychoanalysis, including object relations theory, has as its goal the unifying of parts of the self through the talking cure, the removal of silence. Freud's early work demonstrated the conflict that exists in the unconscious, while his later model posited a structure that defined the conflict. Psychoanalysis therefore works by enabling the process of verbalisation about these conflicts, so that the underlying unity can be perceived. Transference is just a means of making the concealed conflicts

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[384] Kernberg (1985) p 145.
[385] I am concerned only with aspects of silence that relate to psychopathology.
[386] Bauman (1991).

evident; hence silence is the indicator of the conflict and of the disparate and unreconciled aspects of the self. Freud's process of analysis, as is widely known, simply invited the patient to say the first thing that came into their head. In all cases, the patient eventually fell silent. The silence was the symptom of the conflict, repressed and unconscious. Talking - removing the silence - led to the cure [387].

So why is Kierkegaard so concerned with silence in this book? Why does he choose Abraham's silence as such a key idea? Actually, even a superficial reading of Genesis 22 suggests that Kierkegaard's premises (or is it de Silento's) are not necessarily sound. Problema III asks: *'Why was it ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Elizer, and from Isaac'*. But nowhere does any verse of this chapter state or imply silence on Abraham's part. To be sure, neither does it give verbatim accounts of what Abraham did say. But Kierkegaard's case is built around what Abraham left out of his dialogue with Isaac and the others. The exact dialogue in Chapter 22 is:

> v7: 'And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father and said, My Father: and he said here I am my son. And he said Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

> v8: And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

None of the three key figures are mentioned by name again in the chapter. From this, Kierkegaard presumes an active omission towards the three individuals, even though the Genesis story gives no inkling of the lines of communication that might have happened between these four.

The motivation for Kierkegaard's line of argument does not follow from a logical analysis of Abraham's actions, but is deeply narcissistic. The Genesis story is surely neutral. Leaving aside any of the already mentioned omissions from the text that have accrued over the ages, there is still no necessary reading of the chapter that implies secretiveness on Abraham's

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[387] Not all would agree with this; Lacan, in particular, used silence as part of the therapeutic process, and insisted that silence in psychoanalysis was more complex than the above representation suggests. See Lacan, J. and Wilden, A. (1994).

part. With a stimulus as sparse and hence as arbitrary as this, any response is possible. So what did Kierkegaard see in it, and why? He found there Abraham's silence – arbitrarily – and in Abraham's silence justification for his own silence towards Regine, and that these were found because he was still dealing with the affront to his narcissism that the break with Regine engendered.

Kierkegaard did not speak after the ending the engagement. Famously, he went to the theatre within half an hour of ending the relationship[388]. The Journals speak of little other than relief that it is over[389]. Over the period almost from the very start of the engagement to the formal breakup, the Journals speak increasingly of his permitting Regine to escape from the relationship. Kierkegaard did not speak, nor did Abraham:

> Abraham remains silent – but he cannot speak. Therein lies the distress and anxiety. Even though I can go on talking night and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself understood when I speak, then I am not speaking. [390]

> Abraham cannot speak, because he cannot say that which would explain everything; that is an ordeal such that, please note, the ethical is the temptation. [391]

The issue for Abraham is whether communicating with Isaac would have destroyed Abraham's second movement of faith. Kierkegaard's repeated point (see the long paragraph in FT p119) is that Abraham did not speak because the truth he knew made no sense to everybody else. How could Abraham say that he was both about to kill his son, and that God would give him his son back, by virtue of the absurd? How could he tell Isaac that he was about to be murdered, but he would not die. This is not comprehensible, Kierkegaard maintains. Hence Abraham's' silence. The temptation, de Silento maintains, is to give in and tell all to Isaac; but in doing so, Abraham would be acting from the ethical and not from the religious.

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[388] see Hannay (2001) Ch 7 for a comprehensive description of the breakup
[389] see for example JP 5548, along with any of the other letters to his friend Emil Boesen.
[390] FT p 113.
[391] FT p 115.

The issue for Kierkegaard is that he had never loved Regine. He loved her only as a self-object. When the narcissistic crisis resolved itself, shortly after the engagement was announced, the false self had won, and he was left with the uncomfortable process of dealing with reality. Ethically, he had treated her shamefully, maintaining the deceit of an intimate relationship long after he knew there was none. Ethically, he dared not speak, for that way would lead to the crumbling of the false self. So he identified with Abraham, promoting a religious motive for his actions, a motive above the ethical. He did not need to communicate it, since none would understand.

There is more. Even though Problema III discusses the ethical issue surrounding Abraham's silence towards his son, his wife and family, having headlined this as the problem, Isaac and Sarah are barely mentioned again in the discussion that follows. Presented in the Genesis story, and more tellingly, as presented in three of the four Expectorations, Isaac is quite clearly, in object relations terminology, a self-object. Crucially, Isaac's voice is not heard – effectively he is silent. He is valued only insofar as he is part of, and enables, Abraham's trial. As a person in his own right, he is a cipher. Even the one version of the four Expectorations in which Abraham lies about his motives, it is still to the greater glory of Abraham, that he acts to enable his son to retain his faith. So what of Isaac? What did the youth feel or imagine during the journey? What did he feel during the binding, as the knife was raised? What did he feel when his father never talked to him about the whole episode? Where was the relationship? What kind of father does this make Abraham? Father of faith, doubtless; but father to his son? From Isaac's point of view, his ordeal was initiated and perpetrated by his father, and then prolonged by continued silence.

The presumption, certainly on Kierkegaard's part, as for many commentators on the Aqedah, is that there was unity of will between father and son, much as is presumed between God and his Son [392]. But in the case

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[392] This issue, often referred to as 'prefiguration' has been discussed at length. See Ch 6 of Delaney (1998), Ch 6 of Lippitt (2003) and especially Ronald Green's Chapter *Developing Fear and Trembling* in Hannay and Marino (1998) (Green (1998)).

of the former relationship, both are depicted as completely human, and hence we have the right to doubt and question why there should be such unity of will. How was Isaac to understand what was going on? Is not the power of the story that Abraham was asked to sacrifice not an object but a real person? But to be a real person there has to be independence of will, a will that cannot be manipulated. Instead, the enciphering of Isaac is everywhere in the Genesis story: Isaac was, even for God, a symbol of a promise kept; for Abraham, he was a vessel in the trial of faith. He truly is an undervalued, demeaned self-object. His very existence serves only to enable Abraham's relationship with God (in Old Testament language), or with an idealised parental imago (in Kohutian language).

I suggest that this is how Kierkegaard came to think of Regine: that he wished she could be silenced and enciphered in the same way as Isaac. The story of the Aqedah is doubtless but a myth, and Kierkegaard's deep analysis of the psychological internals of this myth is very revealing about Kierkegaard's motives. The silencing, the demeaning, exactly this obedience is what any narcissist demands of the other. To go against the will of the narcissist is to invoke intense rage. An unreal other, a self object, can be as silent as one wishes, and is thus a much more comfortable entity with which to relate.

The purpose of silence for Kierkegaard is thus to conceal: to conceal one's relationship with God, to conceal one's changing inner self. It is about avoiding communication, which in turn is a means of avoiding confrontation, either with the significant other, or with the false self, exactly as Freud described. In a poignant effort to maintain a hopelessly narcissistic self, Søren Kierkegaard identified with the most powerful man in the history of Christianity. He projected his own inner conflict on to Abraham, found silence (where perhaps none existed), and through this concealment of self and motives, sought reflected redemption.

But in this our time, while we respect silence, and while Winnicott helps us understand the critical importance of silent play, and the impossibility of making external what is in the intermediate space, nonetheless we require

that communication is attempted. We are defined by relationships, and the way we encounter relationships can only be through communication. Certainly one unconscious speaks to another, without words being uttered; and we know the treachery that can be language, or assumptions about shared language. Nonetheless, we try, we struggle to turn unspeakable thoughts into sentences, to communicate the incommunicable. For us, here lies the essence of an intimate relationship, that we try to explain to the other what we feel, with all the impossibility thereby entailed. The point is that the success of the attempt is not in the accuracy with which indescribable states of mind are described, but in the very act of trying, of keeping faith, of not giving up and losing hope. In our time, it is not clear that there is any imperative higher than trying to communicate with others.

Above, I have tried to draw out a psychodynamic interpretation of but two themes from *Fear and Trembling*. There are very many more themes, as the voluminous literature indicates, and endless psychodynamic interpretations of them. This thesis is concerned with how we respond to these themes, with what the text does to us. For some readers, Kierkegaard's notion of the teleological suspension of the ethical makes complete sense, both cognitively and emotionally. Others may not feel so comfortable with this absolute. Kierkegaard's treatment of the people in the myth and the justification of silence, while cognitively coherent, may make little sense in terms of relationships for some readers. Others may see the story as no more than myth, and not be concerned with the issue relationships. Neither of these views is any more correct or perceptive than the other. And there are very many other issues that can be drawn out - *Fear and Trembling* truly is a projective stimulus. But this thesis is arguing that the state of our narcissism will tend to push us toward different responses to this text. The response may seem entirely rational, but this rationality is founded upon our own way of being in the world, our own narcissism.

8 NARCISSISTIC INFLUENCES IN *'WORKS OF LOVE'*

8.1 INTRODUCTION

> It is up to my own dear reader to discern whether Kierkegaard's depiction of love was his own evasion – whether due to fear of intimacy he increased the requirement beyond his and our possible reach. [393]

It would be difficult better to introduce the key question raised by an object relations study of this text from Kierkegaard. Written by one who is essentially an apologist for *Works of Love*, Amy Hall's question is quite perceptive. But her incorporated answer is incomplete. It was not fear of intimacy alone that fuelled much of this text: it was also a narcissist's response to a crumbling public life and a recognition of his own motives. The mirror had by now cracked, and this text is in part a plea from a depressed and humbled man for mercy, for love and for pity. It is a book about the way in which Søren Kierkegaard now wants the world to love him.

Ostensibly, *Works of Love* is simply about the Love Commandments. [394] The book, in David Gouwens felicitous phrase, is 'an extensive grammar that examines and tests the quality of human love in the light of divine love.' [395] It is widely quoted, is viewed as pivotal in the Kierkegaardian canon, and has been the basis of much ethical debate. [396]

But the text has not been well received by everyone. Karl Barth had strenuous objections to it. He summarised *Works of Love* as 'unlovely, inquisitorial, and terribly judicial.' And censuring Kierkegaard's concept of love as duty, he hissed:

> it is not the case that a love which is imposed and enforced as a duty - however it may be understood - can ever be more than an eros with its back to the wall, as it were. [397]

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[393] Hall (2002) p 10.
[394] Usually taken to be Matthew 22:39.
[395] Gouwens (1996) p 197.
[396] see for example *Kierkegaard after McIntyre* for a discussion of Kierkegaard's contributions to ethics. Davenport and Rudd (2001).
[397] p 782 in Barth (1978).

Theodore Adorno's criticism centred on Kierkegaard's obsession with the interiorisation of love:

> K is unaware of the demonic consequences that his insistence on inwardness actually leaves the world to the devil. For what can loving one's neighbour mean, if one can neither help him nor interfere with a setting of the world which makes such help impossible?' [398]

> Perhaps one may most accurately summarise Kierkegaard's doctrine of love by saying that he demands that love behave toward all men as if they were dead. [399]

Martin Buber has criticised much of this text. His thesis is that to reach and attain God through the renunciation of objects in our lives would necessarily turn God into another object. As he famously charged: 'God wants us to come to him by means of the Reginas he has created, and not by renunciation of them.' [400] As he sees it, Kierkegaard's view on the essentially exclusive relationship to God makes for the irrelevance of others in creation.

Peter George condemns the text for its exclusion of preferential love, and its reduction of all relationships to the God-relationship. This is not, he concludes, a social text at all, but a remnant of the earlier pseudonymous emphasis on the single individual:

> For a relationship to be genuinely social, it has to be interactive and reciprocal. It requires more than the self to relate to the other person; the other person must also relate to the self. [401]

And finally, in a highly influential critique, endorsed by Alasdair McIntyre among others and first published in Danish in 1956, Knud Logstrup savagely summarises Kierkegaard's ethic:

> ..the relationship to God is meant to serve as a way of liberating people from having anything to do with others. Love of one's neighbour must be used, in the most efficient way, to keep people at a distance. Works of Love is a brilliantly thought out system of safeguards against being forced into a close relationship with other people. Not least when the relationship threatens to become intimate. [402]

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[398] Adorno (1939) p 420.
[399] Adorno (1939) p 421.
[400] Buber (1965) *The Question to the Single One.* p 52 in Smith (1965).
[401] George (1998) p 74.
[402] Logstrup (1997) p 232.

The admirers and the apologists of the text also have to accept its difficulties. Ferriera, whose views I will quote consistently throughout this chapter, confesses that:

> I have gone out of my way to offer a charitable reading of *Works of Love*, not because it is a work by Kierkegaard, but because the hermeneutical principle of charity seems to me to be the most fruitful one to use with any text. [403]

Amy Hall, in a text that is also essentially sympathetic, and already mentioned, admits:

> Kierkegaard's writing style is often self-superior in the extreme. (He) writes at times down from the pinnacle of philosophic wisdom, expressing disgust for the self-deluded reader. He…includes himself among the self-sacrificial saints, seeing himself as the one, persecuted truth teller in an otherwise iniquitous world. [404]

The book is in two parts, delivered separately to the printer, the first in April 1847 and the second in August of the same year. A frequent topic in secondary texts is whether *Works of Love* was indeed a work of love for Søren Kierkegaard. The Hongs in their introduction suggest that the chapter on *Mercifulness* was written with his crippled Nephew Hans Peter in mind; and *The Work of Recollecting One Who is Dead* the Hongs ascribe to an act of filial piety towards his dead parents [405]. Undoubtedly, this is a much more direct book than any before: there is no pseudonymity; there is much direct instruction; above all, we see the beginning of the emphasis on works, and on action, and the whispers of disagreement with Luther about whether justification by faith, without action, is enough. Luther's sentiment:

> In this faith all works become equal…. For the works are acceptable not for their own sake but because of faith, which is always the same and lives and works in each and every work without distinction. [406]

can be seen to be less and less sufficient.

It is a commonplace among commentators that this text sits midway between the intense interiority of the pseudonymous works, and the call to

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[403] Ferreira (2001) p 258.
[404] Hall (2002) p 10.
[405] *Works of Love*, KW XVI p xiv.

radical action in the last polemical works. [407] This book is also a transitional text in that it was written by a narcissist in transition. We have left behind the golden years of youth, of idealism and idealising, of certainty and confidence. The grandiosity, not to say arrogance, that gave Kierkegaard the ability to write *Fear and Trembling* is here replaced, following *The Corsair* affair, by the realisation of psychical vulnerability. The sense of omnipotence has been well punctured, and all the narcissistic damage that has been so carefully contained over thirty years and more now seeks expression.

As a transitional text, it thus reflects two conditions or phases of narcissism. The initial grandiose phase we have met and discussed in the previous chapter: what we might see as Abraham's outrageous contempt for the social and the moral is typical of the omnipotent narcissistic phase, and I have previously suggested Kierkegaard's motivation in using this story. The second phase is one of crisis and catastrophe, the ending of the impossible narcissistic dream, and the terrible hurt and pain that follow from this crisis. It is the misfortune of most middle-aged narcissists to have to come to terms with reality. So the parallel presence of both of the two aspects of the syndrome accounts for what can only be described as the contradictory nature of the book. All the critics quoted above are accurate in their attribution – Kierkegaard does say all these things and in his own name. But the apologists are also correct: he also always says more or less the very opposite. [408]

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[406] Atkinson (1971).
[407] The International Kierkegaard Commentary, vol 16 is dedicated to *Works of Love* and contains some thirteen essays, some of which will be quoted in this chapter. (Perkins (1999). Also, the 1998 volume of *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* contains a series of relevant essays. (Cappelorn (1998)).
Another collection, this time of twelve essays, with many of them directly relevant, is that edited by George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (Pattison and Shakespeare (1998)).
Further, there are several important essays in other compendia. Of note is Philip Quinn's *Kierkegaard's Christian Ethics* in the *Cambridge Companion* (Quinn (1998)).
[408] Ferriera in particular presents a most comprehensive account of how even the most apparently direct and uncompromising statement can be modified to mean something quite different in the light of contextual reading. Edifying though this is, one is left with the feeling that Kierkegaard's position on any of the key points I raise in this chapter is ambivalent at best and contradictory at worst (Ferriera 2001).
C Stephen Evans largely agrees with both Hall and Ferriera. See especially Ch 9 of his *Kierkegaard's Ethics of Love* (Evans (2004)).

In order to demonstrate some compatibility, we could view this text as having been written, as it were, by a dissociative, one with a dissociation disorder, one in two states of mind [409], by someone quite unsure of what they really feel. The text does contain the old, frequently exceedingly disagreeable Kierkegaard, simply telling us how to lead our lives. But it also contains a damaged, depressed and humbled Kierkegaard, who is asking for our pity, for our compassion, and for our love. On this reading, Kierkegaard mingled two texts: the first written as a retiring member of the obnoxious narcissists' club, and the other written as a probationary member of the association for humbled narcissists. The manifestations of both motives, and both perceptions, are present on almost every page. The very real contradictions that trouble so many critics can thus be seen as no more than a side-effect of Kierkegaard's changing object relations.

All of this relates directly to us, his reader. Many if not most of us will be beyond the early youthful phase of narcissism, and we are all coming to terms with our mortality. What Kierkegaard gives us in this text, then, is a set of vignettes and narratives, against which we can reflect on and gauge our own view of love. He states, often with shocking clarity, the logical implications of our sometimes woolly notions of what we think it is to love someone. Beyond that exposition of what it is to love, there remains another agenda, a narcissistic agenda: how we respond to the implicit narcissism expressed in his text is of course an indicator of our own narcissistic state.

I begin the remainder of this chapter by considering the difficult question of self-love in *Works of Love*, and then contrast Kiekegaard's view with an object relations view of sexual love. Then I consider Kierkegaard's systematic undermining of the 'you' in any relationship, and finally consider whether

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[409] see McWilliams Ch 15 for a general introduction. A dissociative disorder is one in which a person can be in two states of mind. The lay understanding of schizophrenia – a split personality – is if course quite wrong: the splitting is from reality, not from another person or self. The dissociative, by contrast is indeed in two minds, each split from the other. This can be a benign condition, or can extend as far as the fictional Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde. This latter example is probably truly a Fugue state, derived from the Latin 'to flee'. The alternate selves usually exist apparently independently of the other, alongside a geographical dislocation

much of the motivation of writing the text stems from Kierkegaard's sense of shame and humiliation. I conclude with some thoughts on what happens when we read *Works of Love*. In all of this, I am not concerned with ethics as such. The focus as always is on Kierkegaard's motivation, and the explanation of his actions through object relations theory, and my contention that he lived his life very much as a narcissist. As in the previous Chapter, I am anxious to draw out the basic psychodynamics of Kierkegaard's ideas, in order that we his readers can consider the effect of Kierkegaard's narcissism on our own reading of his texts.

8.2 THE PROBLEM OF SELF LOVE

Since a psychiatric definition of narcissism is that it is largely about self-love (albeit not in a lay sense), and in that self-love preoccupies Kierkegaard throughout this entire text, this would seem to be fertile ground for a real confrontation of ideas. In fact Kierkegaard is surprisingly vague about what self-love is, though not vague about how it is to be condemned. In the early part of the text, he makes several statements about the need to be loved, the value of being loved and the general desirability of love in one's life: 'life without loving is not worth living' (WL p38) and 'how impoverished never to have loved...' (WL p 63, 101, 175.) Further, we cannot be secretive about love that we feel: 'Others have the right to the expression of our love if in fact we love them.' And '..whoever is an object of your love has a claim upon an expression of it.' Along with 'the emotion is not in our possession but belongs to the other; the expression is your debt to him' (WL p 12). So some kind of loving is desirable, necessary and good.

The problem is self-love, loving of the self. The nearest he comes to a definition of self-love is:

> To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbour correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing. (WL p22)

Dissociative disorders are surprisingly common, and the two views of the self (or the two selves) can happily coexist.

In fact he postulates two forms of self-love. The first is the selfish and exclusive love of self, which essentially ignores the good of the other. The second is the proper love of the self, which encompasses the good of the other; the measure of the love for the other is also the measure of the self-love. But there does not really need to be another involved:

> As far as thought is concerned, the neighbour does not even need to exist. If someone living on a desert island mentally conformed to this commandment, by renouncing self love he could be said to love his neighbour. (WL p21)

In all of this, Kierkegaard is concerned with the distinction, easily seen in the Danish language, between sexual and preferential love (*Elskov*) and spiritual love and friendship (*Kjerlighed*). It would seem that Kierkegaard has some difficulties with *Elskov*; he never expands on what sexual love is, but defines it as selfish, and then attributes selfishness to it: 'passionate preference is actually another form of self love' (WL p 52-53). Any unselfish act cannot be the product of *Elskov*, he claims, but must be a result of *Kjerlighed*. Having set up this tautology, there is little point in our trying to argue with him; but we might already be wondering if this uncompromising approach is not the result of a mixture of fear of intimacy and, as George suggests, sour grapes. [410]

Further, the beloved loved in *Elskov* is viewed by the lover as 'the other self, the other-I' (WL p 66). And by defining the beloved in *Elskov* as the other-I, from this it follows that in loving the beloved we are loving the self. Kierkegaard repeatedly states that *Elskov* is selfish because it is preferential, because it is selective.

Object relations theory would have considerable trouble responding to this, as have very many commentators. [411] The philosophical issue is whether a non-selfish act can occur within preferential love – is Kierkegaard's definition or axiom debatable? The psychological issue is whether erotic love can ever be other than selfish, can ever be other than about projecting the needs of

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[410] George (1998) p 71.
[411] for supportive arguments, see Green and Ellis (1999).

the self onto the beloved. Of course this occurs (though not unremittingly) for all of us in erotic love. But it is not pathological: it would seem to be, from an object relations point of view, how the world works. And rather than condemn it, we should accept that in part this is what it is to enjoy sexual love. There is a very selfish 'I' involved in erotic passion, and there are very good psychodynamic reasons why this is so. But it does not follow that erotic passion must always be selfish and that it is incapable of unselfish acts.

What is Kierkegaard's objection to preferential erotic love? Apologists would maintain that he is at pains to preserve the validity, the alterity, of the other in the relationship, to ensure that the other is neither subsumed nor submerged. [412] Selfish love, erotic love denies in part or in whole the uniqueness of the other. Neighbour love, by contrast, is the only way we can be sure that the other is not reduced to an other-I. Note that Kierkegaard is not suggesting that the two loves are additive or complementary or even in opposition; nor is he suggesting any kind of supplementing of neighbour love with erotic love. He states quite clearly: 'there is only one kind of love, spirit's love' (WL p 143). He talks at length about the need to wrest self-love from us, about the need to take away preferential love. He asks that we locate and remove 'the selfishness in preferential love' (WL p44). Preferential love necessarily involves making judgements and choices, essentially about people who are or are not like us. But critics [413] maintain that he has set up a quite unreal version of erotic love in order to condemn it.

It is difficult to avoid some sense of confusion in reading the early parts of *Works of Love*. Is erotic love actually different from neighbour love? [414] Can one love both as a neighbour and a preferred lover? [415] Is erotic love condemned? [416] I want to suggest that this apparent confusion is the mark of the depressed narcissist. Having moved from omnipotence and grandiosity, he has reached a stage where he has some insight into the impossibility of his fantasies, and is confronted by the crushing realisation

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[412] see Ferreira p 91-2.
[413] George (1998) p 73.
[414] see WL p 60.
[415] see WL p 61.

of his inadequacies, of how pathetic he must seem. Privately, it would seem there has never been sexual love for Søren Kierkegaard, and there is now envy of all those that enjoy it. This envy is easily translated into resentment, and hence to early narcissistic omnipotence: you shall not enjoy sexual relations.

From an object relations point of view, Kierkegaard's analysis of this is too simplistic, even, perhaps, suspicious. I suggest that Kierkegaard is in fact deliberately destroying the concept of the sexual self, of the erotic self. He is denying sexuality and intimacy, he is negating the 'I' in the erotic 'I-you' and especially the 'I-Thou' relationship. To discover why, to continue this analysis, I need to compare Kierkegaard's approach with an object relations view of the human sexual response, for that is what is specific about preferential erotic love.

8.3 THE SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

Where does sexual desire and a sexual response come from? I suggest, along with the vast majority of writers on sexuality, that four elements are involved in the development of sexuality: the diffuse excitability of the skin from birth [417]; early attachment behaviours [418]; the sexually exciting qualities of the erogenous zones [419]; and the cognitive imprints of unconscious fantasy developments, linked to intense pleasurable affect activation [420]. All of these lead to the specific cognitive-affective experience of sexual excitement.

But there is a difference between sexual excitement and sexual or erotic desire, and the former is transformed into the latter through the choice of an object. (Sexual excitement too has an object, but it is a primitive part object, remaining from symbiotic days and the wish for fusion. [421]) For most object

[416] see KW WL p 267.
[417] see for example Bancroft (1989).
[418] see Fonagay (2001).
[419] see Freud SE VII.
[420] see Kernberg (1995).
[421] see Kernberg (1995) Ch 2.

relations writers, erotic desire is sexual excitement linked to a particular kind of object, an oedipal object. I will not rehearse the theory here. But it leads to questions about the anatomy of erotic desire. The four elements of sexual excitement may be clear, but why is such excitement translated into, and why does it remain as, a specific desire, a desire for a single individual, for a preferred individual? There are, following Kernberg [422] and others, three components.

First is the search for pleasure, to penetrate or be penetrated, a search for closeness; we can relate this to Melanie Klein's insights. The desire for penetration begins as simple erotic attraction, essentially instinctive, and is about the obvious sexual characteristics of the other - breasts, buttocks, shape, face etc. But it is grounded in a sense of personal closeness, and personal mutual attraction.

Second is identification with the partner's orgasm, so that one becomes at that moment both genders, with a feeling of intersubjective transcendence. Here is where we see the remains of the oedipal situation. This is a clear case of triangulation, of fulfilling the oedipal wish. (There are, as Freud famously said, always four people in the sexual bed: the two partners, and their respective oedipal objects.)

The third element in erotic desire is the transgressions that are thereby involved: nudity, breaking of taboos, and violating oedipal inhibitions - a defiance of, and a triumph over the oedipal rival. This is an intensely personal and preferential process. Our erotic partner must have some semblance of the oedipal object for the taboos to be broken. We are close to the areas of private fantasy, even of fetish: this is as preferential as it can get. As Kernberg puts it:

> The body of the beloved becomes a geography of personal meanings [423]

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[422] Kernberg (1995).
[423] ibid p 26.

So in psychodynamic terms, the sexual object is always, in essence, an oedipal object, and the sexual act is a symbolic repetition and overcoming of the primal scene. The wish is to be the triumphant, preferred, unique and exclusive love object of one's sexual partner.

Apart from these three very immediate components of erotic passion, there is perhaps a background process of idealisation. As Chasseguet-Smirgel [424] suggests, the state of being in love enriches the self and increases the libidinal investment in the self because it fulfils an ideal state of self and because the relation of the exalted self to the object at that point reproduces the optimum relations between the self and the ego ideal.

All this is driven, from the earliest sexual encounters, by the oedipal longings in children, the unspoken feeling of an exciting, forbidden and gratifying relationship that links the parents and correspondingly excludes the child. Because of this childish longing about forbidden knowledge, envy, jealousy and curiosity maintain the active search for the idealised oedipal object. Later, in mature sexual love, the early idealisations of the body of the loved other, and the later idealizations of the total person of the other, evolve into the idealisation of the value systems of the love object – an idealisation of ethical, cultural, and aesthetic values – a development that engenders the capacity for romantic falling and staying in love. Thus sexual passion spills over into the whole of a couple's relationship - into the sexual, object relations, ethical and cultural spheres. In passion, self-love and object love fuse: *'I sexually love you because in so many ways you are like me.'*

So how can we relate all of this to Kierkegaard's views on erotic love as selfish love? In the sense that he writes about erotic love, he is correct: sexual love is highly preferential. It is, *au fond*, highly selfish. Of course it is. How could it be otherwise, the object relations theorist would ask? It is about overcoming our own personal oedipal conflicts through involvement with one significant other onto whom we project unresolved issues with the hope of resolving them. The process of resolution is highly personal,

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[424] Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) p 38.

exclusive, is certainly preferential, and carries the highest possible risk to the self. We cannot normally complete this process with other than one person at a time (although we can, it would seem from the divorce rates, attempt this process repeatedly sequentially).

Why does erotic desire involve profound risk? Passion is about crossing boundaries. The most important boundaries crossed in sexual passion are those of the self. The process of merger with the other also replicates and regenerates, however unconsciously, the forceful penetration of that dangerous interior of the other's body (actually of mother's body) as described by Klein; we are in the realm of primitive projected aggression. Merger is therefore a risky and dangerous venture that can only succeed if the basic emotions are erotic excitement and trust rather than aggression and fear. If it fails, if aggression wins over the erotic, then either we destroy the beloved or are ourselves thereby destroyed. So sexual passion involves the courage to trust the self in a desired union with the ideal other in the face of unconscious but once-terrifying dangers. As Kernberg succinctly describes things:

> The beloved presents themselves as a body which can be penetrated
> and a consciousness which is impenetrable. [425]

To put this another way, the contradiction of love is that desire aspires to be fulfilled by the destruction of the desired object, and love discovers that this object is indestructible and cannot be substituted.

There are, I suggest, two obvious points. First, erotic passion with a preferred other is a great part of what makes us both human, and complete as a human. According to object relations theory, erotic desire is both generated by and is the resolution of issues (oedipal issues) that affect every person. To deny the erotic is thus to deny humanity. And secondly, many would argue that it is only through the validating process of erotic love with a preferential other that we have the internal strength, completeness and ability to love others. Without the sense of authentic self and independence that comes with oedipal resolution, we cannot properly take our place in the

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[425] Kernberg (1995) p44.

world, we cannot thereby love others for themselves, for their alterity. For without an oedipal resolution, we continue to love, in however slight a way, the oedipal object in everyone we meet, and in this sense, *Elskov* precedes *Kjerlighed.*

There is no easy reading of Kierkegaard's analysis of sexual preferential love. For one who complains about the lack of passion in general in life, Kierkegaard is remarkably demure about sexual passion. His views on the married state are perhaps best expressed in *Either/Or* part II, where the interminable words of the estimable Judge convey a tale of a marriage of some boredom, some complacency, and an apparent lack of any kind of desire. Kierkegaard's views on lust may perhaps best be summed up in the *Diary of a Seducer,* which has previously been discussed. Whatever the psychology of this seducer, his actual sexual passion would seem to be minimal. So we are left with Hall's question about fear of intimacy and George's observation about sour grapes. Object relations links the one to the other, suggesting that Kierkegaard's profound and narcissistic fear of failure in intimacy brought about his arrogant denial of the importance of the erotic in life.

8.4 NARCISSISTIC ABSTRACTION AS THE DENIAL OF ALTERITY

In *Works of Love*, Kiekegaard talks about many aspects of our relationships with the other, with 'you'. He writes of our duty to love the other, he considers the needs of the other, and talks especially of the importance of God in any kind of relationship. I propose to coalesce these into a consideration of the psychological role and status of the other, of 'you', in Kierkegaard's ethic.

It was suggested above that the narcissistic Kierkegaard had a very poor view of other selves, stemming from a parallel troubled view of his own self. What is evident is the narcissistic fury at other selves having significant others apart from him, indeed having significance that does not depend

upon him. The contradiction in his both supporting and denigrating love is, I suggest, a result of two opposing object relations processes. His discussion of erotic love is both an omnipotent and furious response to the existence of significant others that do not include himself, as well as an unconscious plea that he be loved even though he is not significant to others.

In this section I try to indicate how the angry and omnipotent half of narcissistic Kierkegaard needs to go further, to denigrate the very concept of the other. For as we have seen from a consideration of theory, if others can no longer serve the maintenance of the narcissistic self, what reason do they have to exist? In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard comes close to denying the value and virtue of existence of the real other, the real 'you'. Despite appearances to the contrary, the 'you' that is derived from Kierkegaard's ethic is a devalued 'you', and his motives for this devaluation are narcissistic. To achieve this, I want to consider in detail what is perhaps the most poignant of all the sections in *Works of Love*: Discourse IX '*The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead*'. This has been the subject of intense debate. [426] I have mentioned the Hong's contention that this section is prompted by a meditation on the death of his parents. What is odd is that Kierkegaard raises to such an extent the virtue of loving in this way. Certainly, object relations theory would have exceptional difficulties with most of his claims:

> Truly if you want to ascertain what love there is in you or in another person, then pay attention to how he relates himself to one who is dead.' (WL p 347)

> The work of love in recollecting one who is dead is a work of the **most unselfish** love. (WL p 349)

His logic revolves around the fact that those who are dead cannot change, therefore love of the dead is the most faithful and unchanging love; and that in loving those who are dead, one cannot expect any kind of repayment.

> You cannot say that the one who is dead has grown older, become colder, become more ugly or become involved with others. [427]

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[426] see Ferreira (1999); see also Keeley (1999).
[427] WL p 356-7.

> The work of love in recollecting one who is dead is a work of the most faithful love. [428]

And

> When one wants to be sure that love is unselfish, one can of course remove every possibility of repayment. But this is exactly what is removed in the relationship to one who is dead. If love still abides, then it is truly unselfish. [429]

This is a most naïve and psychologically simple account of our relationships with those who have recently died. For one proclaimed as a master psychologist, Kierkegaard's insights in this section would appear to be superficial. The process of living though the death of a loved one has been explored by many [430], and object relations theory has its own views. [431]

The section is both poignant and remarkable, however, for its insistence of the lack of the real other in relationships. Kierkegaard suggests: 'If one wishes to observe a person, it is very important for the sake of that observation that one, in seeing him in a relationship, look at him alone' (WL p 347). Clearly, object relations would claim the very opposite is true. It is only through relationships, both objective in the external world, and subjective in the internal world, that we exist as meaningful human beings, that we are defined, that we can comprehend and be comprehended. Kierkegaard does not accept the view that selves are defined though others, that the 'I' is ultimately bound up with the 'You'. Nowhere is his denial of relationships more clearly exemplified than in the paragraph where he speaks of two essentially interpersonal processes – boxing and dancing. He says:

> If you could manage to see someone shadow-boxing in dead earnest, or of you could prevail upon a dancer to dance solo the dance he customarily dances with another, you would be able to observe his motions best, better than if he were boxing with another actual person or if he were dancing with another actual person. [432]

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[428] KW WL p 355.
[429] WL p 349.
[430] *'A Grief Observed'* by C S Lewis remains a masterpiece of self-observation and analysis.
[431] See Kernberg (1985) Ch 7.
[432] WL p 347.

Here, Kierkegaard chooses two social activities linked to the two most fundamental drives – the first emphasising the aggression in all of us, and the second symbolising the erotic in all of us. Both aggression and eroticism are fundamentally directed towards an other, whether real or imaginary. Neither of them works without the other, except in pathological situations. To deny the other in these two most essential social activities is to court the surreal. The 'Work of Boxing' is about hurting, punishing, damaging, even murdering the other, just as Klein suggests. The 'Work of Dancing', in Western cultures at least, is about erotically touching the other, about forbidden feelings, sensual caresses, the breaking of taboos. [433]

Recollecting one who is dead is, above all, about loss, and I suspect the loss for Kierkegaard at this time in his life is truly terrible, and loss's pain immense and unremitting. He is now having to come to terms with all the losses of nearly forty years at much the same moment: the narcissistic injury from childhood; the loss, never mentioned, of Mother; the family members who died; the death of Father, so complex and never properly talked about; the loss of something that never was - marriage, the loss of his early brilliance at the hands of an unforgiving society; the loss of pride, dignity and his own sense of goodness at the hands of the intelligentsia; the loss of his so carefully nurtured omnipotent and grandiose self, a self that remained his sole comfort for much of his adult life – all these condense into this small section on Recollecting One Who is Dead. What has died is the original narcissistic Kierkegaard, 'the fork', that brilliant youth, that object of self-idolatry. His grief is very profound and very moving. His immensely real and deep pain is there in much of this text, but this section is a distillation of his sorrow.

In the first part of the text, Kierkegaard attacked and marginalized the 'I' in relationships, especially erotic relationships. He demanded that the erotic be subjugated to neighbour love, that there is no place for preferential love, that

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[433] I am aware that it was later in the 19th century that the more outrageous forms of bodily contact while dancing came into being in middle and upper class society. But that does not detract from the manifestly erotic process of dancing, even in a formal

the only love is spirit. Later he attacks the other half, the 'You' in the relationship. He systematically dismantles anything that can make the 'You' concrete. We are not to look at our neighbour; we are not to note differences; we are to love them regardless of what they are like. We are not to give them any cause to thank us for our love; indeed our love should be unnoticeable. We are not to concern ourselves with ameliorating their plight or misery or changing their station. And we must recognise that it is not them that we love, but God. It can be no surprise that critics have alighted upon these themes to question the very nature of Kierkegaard's view of the other. This does sound like, as Adorno puts it, a general principle of otherness, a universal human. This is a denial and a stripping out of all that makes the individual special. Ferriera has to admit that Kierkegaard is in danger of exchanging the blindness of self-love of the other for an equally unloving blindness to the other. But this is Kierkegaard at his most uncompromising, and most direct:

> The neighbour is the common watermark, you see it only by means of eternity's light when it shines through the dissimilarities. [434]

The key question in coming to terms with *Works of Love* is: what kind of ethic, or rather in what tradition of ethics does Kierkegaard write? Is this no more than a restatement of the Reformation ethic of self-sacrificial love, or has he added more? Is the text, as Ferriera asks, 'an example of an ethic that promotes neighbour love as unilateral, self-denying, impartial, and disinterested' ? [435] Her answer is ambivalent; but there is less ambivalence about Kiekegaard's psychological intention: much of the thrust of *Works of Love* is about demeaning the individual, out of revenge and out of rage, stemming from both his own failure to live up to exaggerated expectations primarily of his father, and his own demeaning at the hands of, principally, *The Corsair*.

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situation – the whole point about dancing with a partner was to observe the body of the other, with all the responses and fantasies that follow.
[434] WL p 89.
[435] Ferreira (2001) p 256.

8.5 CONCLUSION

So what does happen when we read *Works of Love*? This is much more complicated than reading *Fear and Trembling*. The earlier text calls out to the narcissist in all of us, the omnipotent, grandiose narcissist that Kohut tells us is a remnant of everyone's normal development. Kohut describes exactly the situation in which Søren Kierkegaard found himself in 1847 when writing *Works of Love*. Kohut speaks of the

> guiltless despair of those who in late middle age discover that the basic patterns of their self as laid down in their nuclear ambitions and ideals have not been realised.

And he speaks of a time

> of utter hopelessness, for some utter lethargy, of the depression without guilt and self-directed aggression, which overtake those who feel they have failed and cannot remedy the failure in the time and with the energies still at their disposal. The suicides of this period are not the expression of a punitive super-ego, but a remedial act – the wish to wipe out the unbearable sense of mortification and nameless shame imposed by the ultimate recognition of a failure of all encompassing magnitude. [436]

In Chapter Six I argued that Kierkegaard's willed and wanton involvement with *The Corsair* was, at one level, akin to an act of suicide. Though no one could accuse Kierkegaard of lethargy as far as his writing was concerned, I contend that *Works of Love* is a most personal statement about Kierkegaard's own sense of failure. We have come a long way from *Fear and Trembling*, with its implied carefree grandiosity. This was narcissistic Kierkegaard at his most optimistic. Quite where *Fear and Trembling* was to lead was uncertain, but we have in that text and about that time an enormous self-confidence, arrogance and sense of power. Along with King Lear, he might have said: '*I will do such things – What they are I know not – but they shall be the terror of the earth.*'

But after the Corsair we have shame, a recognition that despite all the words, all the efforts, there remains the narcissistic void in his life. *Works of Love* is therefore a taking stock, a coming to terms with this loss. It is a work

of grief, and full and irreducible dismissing of all that it is to be human. Both the 'I' and the 'You' are systematically destroyed. The only hope Kierkegaard has of any relationship is with God, and I have to suggest that for Søren Kierkegaard at this time, God is a true projected omnipotent other, Kohut's idealised imago, the one other that will truly mirror Kierkegaard's own greatness.

When we read *Works of Love* I suggest there are two responses, that actually reflect the responses discussed at the very start of this chapter. For some, whose abnormal narcissism is effectively neutralised, Kierkegaard's claims verge on the outrageous and bizarre. The man is talking nonsense. Logstrup's long Polemical Epilogue sums up the complaint:

> 'As far as Kierkegaard is concerned, he regards the attitudes comprised in a zest for life as incompatible with the relationship with God because they cannot at the same time capture the mind.' [437]

Those for whom narcissism has receded as a major driving force in life are free (although perhaps only freer) to engage with life, to enjoy life, to find fulfilment in life. This is not to deny God, but it is to live whatever ethic follows from faith, to live that ethic through life as it is encountered. Logstup's complaint is that Kierkegaard's ethic requires us to withdraw from life, or at least to lead life in what he sees as an unnatural way – 'loving everybody as if they were dead'. Kierkegaard's ethic demands a wholescale denial of much of what it is to be human. For those with healthy narcissism, reading *Works of Love* is in part reading the work of an arrogant and obnoxious writer: empathy or congruence with Kierkegaard's unreasonable demands is difficult to the point of being impossible. And pointless: why live life like this?

And this very writing still triggers resentment from the residual narcissist in even the most healthy. 'I have had to deal with my narcissism, why cannot he?' is a wholly unspoken, even wholly unformulated thought. But if the unconscious speaks to the unconscious, as Freud proposed, much of the vitriol to be found against this text may well stem from such a sense of

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[436] Kohut (1977) p 238-241.

grievance. Eventually, as every psychotherapist learns with every narcissist, there is a sense of wanting to give up and abandon this most difficult and persistent of conditions. One tries to make sense of what is said or read, but one cannot. Every counter is met by more excessive claims; every attempt at compromise is met with yet more unreasonable demands. McWilliams, speaking from the heart as a practicing psychotherapist, says of the process of treating narcissists:

> Treatment of narcissistic clients feel qualitatively different from what one is used to with most other kinds of people.... Therapists receive devaluing transferences as well as idealising ones. If it is any consolation for the misery one endures at being the object of subtle and relentless disparagement, being the recipient of idealising transference is not much better. Extreme drowsiness is perhaps the most unpleasant of the countertransference reactions to narcissistic patients. Above all, to treat narcissists, one needs infinite patience; it is a permanent temptation to give up on them. [438]

The critics of *Works of Love* have done just that.

But for the reader whose normal or abnormal narcissism has not been properly resolved, Kierkegaard speaks to us through the ether in a very different way. He awakens in all of us our narcissistic self-pity, our outrage at the failure of others to maintain our narcissistic supply. His writings in *Works of Love* make sense. We engage with him in his denials and his rewriting of human nature. The shame that Kierkegaards feels, and the contempt thus generated for humanity, become our shame and our contempt. Through projective identification, he displaces his own shame and humiliation, and we hear it and accept it. He projects, and, if the state of our narcissism is conducive, we identify. In this way, such narcissists can see the sense in what he writes. For them, his is a difficult ethic, it might be an impossible ethic, but that does not mean we should not attempt to live it. Kierkegaard's ethic does require humankind to be different, and the unresolved narcissist in all of us agrees that humankind should be different, loving me regardless, never loving others more, not taking account of my failures or errors. Kierkegaard is right - it is your duty to love me.

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[437] Logstrup (1997) p 240.
[438] McWilliams (1994) p 178-9.

9. NARCISSISTIC INFLUENCES IN *THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH*

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I want first to appraise the text itself, and briefly review some of the responses it has generated. I do this to gather evidence for my thesis that narcissistic texts bring about narcissistic responses. Second, I consider the text from an object relations point of view. Thus seen, it stands or falls on the idea of the self accounting for itself, relating to itself, and to the Other. Inherent in this is the assumption that the self is unitary, singular, at least known – available to itself, whether or not, as Kierkegaard demands, it relates to itself. I look at evidence that mitigates against such a simple reading of the concept of the self, considering the self from a post-Freudian point of view. It seems undeniable that the idea of the self has become a highly complex one in the century since Freud, and I examine what this term, this concept, has come to mean. I examine the pertinent comments from Donald Winnicott. The psychodynamic problems that are inherent in *The Sickness Unto Death* now come into relief, for if the self is a more complex and less certain a concept than Kierkegaard suggests, what are we to make of his text? Essentially, this text is Kierkegaard at his most revealing. With age, some of the intensity of narcissism is modified, and self-awareness becomes apparent. I discuss towards the end of the Chapter some of the insight that Kierkegaard may well have been experiencing at this time about his own psychology.

This is a text of late narcissism, when the initial fury at the failure of the narcissistic project has receded, when depression is taking hold, but when there remains the need to reassert narcissistic ideals. This is an instructive text, literally a text-book, telling us how we ought to behave, in the way the author knows to be right. Against apparently massive disconfirmation, Kierkegaard tells us that there are only two ways to live a life: in sin and despair, or with God. There is no middle road, no other option, no alternative. Against what would almost certainly be a rejection of such an unforgiving demand, Kierkegaard none the less writes his instruction

manual. This is by no means a pseudonymous text: this is an authoritarian 'how-to' compendium. I conclude that this is a narcissistic text, again, and that our response to it is both a response to what Kierkegaard has written as well as a reflection on where we have each arrived in terms of our personal narcissism.

The Sickness Unto Death is authored by one Anti-Climacus, [439] although there is broad agreement that this is not really a pseudonymous text, and many commentators dispense with the courtesy requested by Kierkegaard of assigning ideas to the pseudonymous authors, and not to him. [440]

SUD begins with what is probably the most famous of all Kierkegaard's dense passages – about the self relating itself to itself. Whether or not the opening section, or even the whole text, really was written to mock Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* or Martenen's contemporaneously published *Christian Dogmatics* as many suggest, [441] remains a matter for conjecture. Actually, the abstraction present in those opening ninety-seven words in the Hong translation is nothing more than extreme efficiency. Once the ideas are unpacked, the section remains a model of conciseness. There is simply no more precise way of saying what Kierkegaard wants to say. Somewhat like attempting to paraphrase Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, one realises there is really very little point.

It is the unpacking that is the problem, if only because the opening section of the text is stuffed with ideas, each of considerable weight and import. There are at least six, and it is worth spelling them out.

In the first two pages of SUD, we have a definition of the self. The primary attribute of the self is that it is a synthesis of bipolars: 'the finite and the infinite, temporal and eternal, freedom and necessity'.[442] Second we have the fact that the self is self-relating, that it is not just a mixture as it were of

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[439] see the Hong's Introduction to SUD for the relationship between Kierkegaard, Climicus and Anti-Climacus.
[440] For a detailed discussion of the exact status of Anti-Climacus, see Crites (1992).
[441] See for example Hannay (1987) and Kirmmse (1981).

chemical compounds, but can reflect upon itself, the 'relation that relates itself to itself'. And third, the self is dependent upon, and can only be itself, through a relationship with God: 'a derived established relation, a relation that ...in relating itself to itself relates to another'. The Sickness unto Death is another name for a lack of faith – Despair, in fact, which in Part Two is called Sin. So the remaining concepts in the first part of the text explore the degrees or presentations of despair. The fourth concept presented by Anti-Climacus is despair as a misrelation of the components of the self, with the bipolar elements being in incorrect balance (too much finitude or too little necessity, etc). Fifth, we have despair as self-awareness and defiance. Finally (a topic that takes up much of Part Two) we have the true understanding of despair as sin, a refusal of the relating self to relate itself to God. The opposite of sin is not virtue, but faith, and the self who attains faith comes to a state in which 'in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it'. [443]

Much of the text is a filling out of these condensed ideas. Indeed, on one reading, apart from the initial pages, this is another of Kierkegaard's long lists of human behaviours, with notes on the psychological process that underpin them. It is, as in *Fear and Trembling*, an incomplete glossary. Some of the bipolars, for example, he appears to like, and other to shun. So we have a great deal on finitude and infinitude, something on possibility and freedom, but precious little on the temporal and eternal. (Arguably *Either/Or* fulfilled that: the story of A in Part I of *E/O* paints a defining picture of someone who has failed, totally, to come to terms with any of the three bipolars.)

True to form, Kierkegaard's language can be confusing, for example in sentences such as *'the self not willing to be itself'*. He seems to have several meanings in mind for the word 'self' – the actual self as is; the higher or potential self that could and should be; and a denied self. I shall consider

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[442] SUD pp 13-14.
[443] SUD p14.

this confusion below. But let me first consider the important first section of *The Sickness Unto Death.* [444]

The three levels of intensification of despair correspond to the three levels of increasing complexity within one's consciousness of the structure of the self. At the lowest level is spiritlessness, at the next level is weakness, and at the highest is defiance. Kierkegaard is keen to give real world examples of his taxonomy. So he speaks at some length of the bourgeois philistine as representing the spiritless form of despair. Interestingly he singles out the comfortable urban middle class, rather than the poor or the ordinary, as typical of this lack of spirit. The middle type of despair he summarises through the contemplative Christian, one who acts in every way, from an outside point of view, as a caring, thinking respectable Christian, but who has real doubts about the message of Christendom: 'He goes to church very rarely, because it seems to him that most of the priests don't know what they are talking about.' [445] For the highest level of despair, Kierkegaard gives us no social types or examples: this is a much more abstract concept.

It is, of course, considerably more complex than that, and many varieties of despair can be found in the long section between pages 42 and 74, and their phenomenology can be summarised by degree.

At the lowest level of despair, the person certainly does not feel despair, but lives a life of pure immediacy, with a lack of self-consciousness, and unaware of any need to reflect upon himself or his life. Kierkegaard would suggest that such a person is still in despair (although that must be a philosophical or logical use of the term rather than anything phenomenological). At the next level of despair, a life event can occur such that our seemingly oblivious person is required to reflect upon their life and themselves. Kierkegaard suggests there are two outcomes from such an event: to wish that the life event had never happened, or to wish that one was somebody else, someone less affected or troubled by the event. At the

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[444] pages 13 to 74 in the Hong translation.
[445] ibid p 175.

next level of despair, this single event can precipitate reflections about life in general, precipitate self-reflection as a way of being.

So these first three levels involve no more than reflection or its lack – there is no imperative for action, whether physical or psychical, no recognition of a need to change. But at the fourth level, our subject despairs over life in general, and insists that he can himself remedy the despair, that self-help is the road to salvation, that there is no need to invoke the eternal. Note that this is in no sense a defiance – the subject is essentially unaware that the eternal has a role to play in overcoming despair. At the fifth level of despair, by contrast, our subject may well understand that the road to salvation is through the eternal; but for whatever reason he cannot accept this truth, and despairs over his weakness and failure to live up to what he knows is the truth. Sixth, our same subject may despair at his own weakness and inability, and replace this with pride and self-reliance, such that he denies his weakness. Then finally we have Kierkegaard's demonical defiant despair, in which, in fury, the subject would rather be the imperfect creature he is than submit to the will of the eternal.

This is long and subtle list. But there is a troubling conclusion to all of this analysis. For Kierkegaard, there is only one real despair, and that can only be known by overcoming it. So the only people who really understand despair are those no longer in despair. This may turn out to be a surprisingly small number of souls.

Finally in this exposition, mention must be made of the difficult long footnote [446] in which Kierkegaard seems to view women as a different species in terms of having independent selves. As Stephen Crites puts it, it is as if a radio announcer *'had interposed a few strains of* Waltzing Matilda *over a recording of the Mozart* Requiem.' [447] Sylvia Walsh [448] presents an heroic defence of Kierkegaard's notorious footnote, although, as she concludes, several aspects of Kierkegaard's analysis remain unsatisfactory: it

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[446] ibid p 49-50.
[447] Crites (1992) p 144.
[448] Walsh (1987) p 134.

accentuates stereotyped views; it ignores external influences; it does not take adequate account of interpersonal relationships in the formation of the self, particularly for female development [449]; and Kierkegaard's notion of feminine devotedness involves a form of submissiveness which itself is the basis for male dominance.

This thesis is not in any way a feminist critique of *The Sickness Unto Death*, but it goes without saying that male narcissists typically have a no more honest view of women than they do of the human race in general. Their object relations turn real people into good and bad objects. It is tempting to conclude that Søren Kierkegaard is revealing something of what kind of objects women are for him.

9.2 RECEPTION

The text has had a mixed reception. In terms of contemporary scholarship, it is undoubtedly revered and respected. It has been called a work of *'vertiginous abstraction'*, [450] *'Kierkegaard's most perfect book'*, [451] *'The first text by a clinical psychologist'* [452]. I want to suggest that the book, far from being perfect, contains large elements of narcissism, pointing to the first steps on the path that will lead Kierkegaard metaphorically back to the monastery; and that while this may be a text on psychopathological taxonomy, it is an inhuman, asocial, somewhat punishing treatise on human redemption, and certainly the opposite of what clinical psychology might set out to achieve.

Nonetheless, it has acted as, and continues to be, inspiration for a very considerable number of essays, though it lacks popularity as the basis for book-length analyses. There is a rich and immensely varied set of interpretations of this 'psychological' text. (And if any evidence were needed

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[449] when considered from the point of view of neuropsychological, neurohormonal and neuroanatomical suggestions; see Schore (1990).
[450] Rudd (1993) p 21.
[451] Kirmmse (1981) p 167.

of the thesis that a text written by a narcissist touches the narcissism in the reader, the range of psychological speculation to be found in this set of essays surely makes the point. Kierkegaard's very economy in the text makes it a veritable Rorschach ink blot, with interpretations - as is always true with the Rorschach - ranging from the dubious to the fabulous.)

Vincent McCarthy's 1978 study [453] on Kierkegaard's four primary moods is both a careful explanation of the ideas surrounding Kierkegaard's use of the term despair, and a reminder of the difficulties of working with translations. 'Despair' is the Hong's translation of *Fortvivlelse*, a word with roots implying both doubt and a twinning or two-ness, a double-doubt, as it were. Simple doubt is a philosophical concept; despair is about existence. As McCarthy puts it: 'The sickness of despair is the state of being cut off from the future, from possibility. Without a future one is self-condemned to an ever repeating present.' [454]

Stephen Crites [455] also has problems with the translation, just five words in, questioning the Hong's use of the indefinite article in '*a human being is spirit*' as opposed to the narrower Danish meaning of '*the human being*' or just '*human being*'. [456] Crites is proposing that there is an essentially social reading of SUD, and that the self relating to itself can be an individual, but could also be 'a pair of lovers, or a family, or a sisterhood, or a string quartet, or a labour union.' [457] And 'strictly as defined, the self is intersubjective, social, and an individual human being can be a self relation only because he or she can also be related to others.' [458] I am not sure that any such interpretation is in the spirit of Anti-Climacus, or Kierkegaard for that matter. Further, not only is such a reading difficult to discern in the text, it is inventing a social aspect of SUD that I suspect Kierkegaard would have hated.

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[452] Westphal (1987).
[453] McCarthy (1978).
[454] ibid p 85-6.
[455] Crites (1992).
[456] ibid p 149.
[457] ibid p 150.

In order to make sense of the expository passage in Part C of SUD, Crites, who is sure that SUD can be read as a text on clinical psychology, introduces the two notions of the given self and the potentiated self: the former is historically who we are, the latter 'is the.....self that has faith in the divine horizon of possibility.' [459] And critically, 'for the potentiated self to materialise in faith, the given self must be acknowledged.' [460] This is all reminiscent of the early Freud, with its archaeological metaphors. There is a real but damaged (= repressed) self, and there is a potentiated (= healed through psychoanalysis) self; the trick is to get from the first to the second, when all will be well. This is but one example of attempts to meld recent psychology (or more usually psychoanalysis) with Kierkegaard's psychology, and I would suggest that often these attempts end up as exercises in psychodynamic confusion.

C Stephen Evans provides another such essay. His writing on Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious [461] is surely guilty of sloppy scholarship [462] if not confused thinking. [463] Evans' thesis is that there is a correspondence between contemporary psychoanalytic theory and despair as described in SUD. He likens the despair caused by an unwillingness to be oneself to the primary splitting process described by Melanie Klein. [464]

> 'Of course the psychoanalytic thinker sees the faulty relationships to
> be primarily with the care-giver, while, as we have seen, Kierkegaard

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[458] ibid p 150.
[459] ibid p 156.
[460] ibid p 156.
[461] Evans (1995) .
[462] for example *'Object Relations Theory is a form of psychoanalysis developed in England by W.D Fairbairn.'* (ibid p 80). Leaving aside the fact that Fairbairn was born, raised and worked (apart from a two year stint) his entire life in Edinburgh in Scotland, rarely visiting that other country, it is a travesty to claim that one person could be responsible for the British School of Object Relations theory.
[463] For example *'The unconscious is what I choose not to recognise or intentionally fail to perceive.'* (ibid p78). At best this is confused thinking. In Freud's topographical model, this is more or less what was meant by the pre-conscious (system pcs), but *not* the unconscious (system ucs). But the concept of repression caused Freud to redefine the unconscious, in order to answer the questions *'who is the 'I' that chooses to repress material?'* Freud expressly developed his structural model *exactly* to account for the problem that in some sense we must be aware (although equally we must be completely unaware) of what we repress.
[464] Although he mistakenly attributes the concept to Fairbairn, and to Harry Guntrip, no less (ibid p 95).

focuses attention on the relation to God. Once we recognise however, that different [developmental or physiological] ages are involved here, there is no real contradiction between the two views.' [465]

Evan's thesis would seem to ask as many questions as it answers. [466] I fear that such a line of thinking simply underlines the danger in ever trying to equate the process of psychotherapy with the process of finding salvation [467].

Westphal is another psychologist with a mission: *'Kierkegaard's psychology is a clinical psychology.'* [468] Westphal does actually consider in what modern sense Kierkegaard uses the term and concept 'psychology'. He concludes it might be nearer to phenomenology. But he still sees a therapeutic process here: *'Its starting point is sickness; its goal diagnosis and healing'*, [469] a point of view with which I disagree, and which I discuss further below. And Westphal interprets Kierkegaard's view of the self as essentially a task, a process, of becoming a self-conscious freedom that asserts God as its ground. Despair and faith are the terms used to describe failure and success at this task.

Roberts is a further psychological analyst, raising a topic he has discussed anon - the exact phenomenological status of despair. Is it an emotion? What is an emotion? Can it be enacted (as in: I will make myself angry) or is an emotion by definition only passive. [470] Kierkegaard has it that despair is always conscious, even if we are not particularly aware of it: 'The ever increasing intensity of despair depends upon the degree of consciousness or is proportionate to its increase' (SUD p 42). But if we do not feel in despair, can we be in despair?

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[465] ibid p 94.
[466] For example, Klein's point is that the splitting of the integral person (mother) is into good and bad objects. Does Evans believe that God is a similarly split object for each of us? Is object constancy therefore equal to the avoidance of sin?
[467] See Appendix II.
[468] Westphal (1987) p 40.
[469] ibid p 40.
[470] For a discussion of emotions as seen by Kierkegaard, see Roberts (1985), especially the section on *The Anxiety of Possibility*, p 135.

Others have written about both the sociological ideas within the text. Kirmmse (1981) links the publications and concepts of SUD with the revolutions across Europe in 1848. The work, as Kirmmse points out, was written during the first five months of 1848, and published a year later. He views it as a refutation of the rise and writing of H. L. Martensen, *'a brilliant and suave intellectual'* [471] who became the protégée of both Bishop Mynster and the playwright Johan Heiberg, pillars both of the Golden Age establishment, representing the Church and Culture respectively. (The vitriol that Kierkegaard displays in the text has been discussed in the previous biographical chapter. A psychodynamic reading of SUD reveals intense envy and fury about Martensen, along with his outrage that Copenhagen citizenry will not see the truth he proclaims.)

Alastair Hannay, sticking with the social aspects of SUD, suggests that the maieutic Kierkegaard is challenging his fellow citizens, who profess belief in Christendom, to reflect on what they are claiming. Just as *Fear and Trembling* challenges the local vicar and his sermon, *Sickness unto Death* demands that the good citizens of Copenhagen be shocked at the real demands of their faith. And, decontextualising this idea, we could equally employ Kierkegaard's analysis to challenge current complacent agnosticism. [472]

Edward Mooney gives a highly speculative account of SUD. His mode of explication is to use musical analogies and terminology. Thus he uses the idea of keys and tonal gravity (echoing Daniel Dennett's idea [473] of self as a narrative centre of gravity); the idea of ensemble playing grounded in the music to be performed; and the idea of ensemble members as representing relations relating to themselves. [474]

While almost without exception commentators find, as has been seen, enormous depth and complexity with SUD, there is dissent. Peter Mehl has

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[471] Kirmmse (1981) p 172.
[472] Hannay (1987) pp 36-37.
[473] Dennett (1988)
[474] Mooney (1996) Ch 8.

given us a major critique of *The Sickness unto Death* in his recent text, [475] although many of the ideas expressed can be found in at least two earlier papers. [476] Mehl's avowedly pluralistic criticism is that Kierkegaard in SUD is too restrictive in his cure for despair. There are other ways of living a life that may not involve such strong mediation through spirit, and the author describes an authentic way of life that need not involve such strong evaluative identity.

Haim Gordon has written against the simplicity of Kierkegaard's monism of despair, [477] and his criticism deserves consideration. He points out that there are three implicit assumptions in SUD: despair is a universal sickness; Christian faith is the only panacea for despair; and the only way to reach this true faith is through eradicating despair. Gordon suggests that this is an unreal view of both the human condition and its resolution.

Kierkegaard's point, that one may not know one is in despair, just as in his analogy only a physician knows whether you are really sick, is highly contentious. At the least, Kierkegaard is asserting that there are only two ontological states for humankind - in Christian faith or in despair. This is bordering the fanatical, negating so much of human existence. And as many have suggested, Kierkegaard's definition of self is the definition of a recluse: neither others nor society are important, let alone crucial. To be sure, Kierkegaard spends some time negatively explaining how different groups in Copenhagen and Danish society are in different kinds of despair. But for the self to be in despair (according to the definition in SUD - p 30, for example) involves only two entities: the self and God.

Gordon gives an alternative definition of despair:

> The consciousness of a person that he is in a situation in which he is unwilling or unable to live his freedom creatively in society and to act lovingly to other persons. [478]

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[475] Mehl (2005).
[476] see in particular Mehl (2003) and Mehl (1995).
[477] Gordon (1987).
[478] Gordon (1987) p 244.

So Gordon's definition broadens Kierkegaard's to include active love, creativity and joy. In that these are very human activities, any faith that ignores them can appear empty. Gordon further suggests that any faith that places such emphasis on sin can lead to a dehumanising spiral of despair. And this is the problem with SUD. Where are the positive examples? Where are the instances of active living, creativity or joy? As Walter Kaufman put it:

> Kierkegaard is often extremely perceptive when he deals with inauthenticity, but quite disappointing when he deals with authenticity. [479]

But, suggests Gordon, for much of human existence, the struggle of creativity, the intensity of loving and the sheer feeling of joy are themselves acts of faith through acts of spirit. The truth is that in becoming oneself, a person develops a relation to transcendence, to beauty, or to truth or to good, a relationship that may develop into a relationship to God. But there is not, in SUD, a single mention of a worldly endeavour that is itself worthy in itself.

> Worldly joy does not fit into Kierkegaard's ontology of human existence primarily because his is not an action-oriented philosophy....his writing is a result of contemplation and intense internal suffering, and not of active experience with other persons in the world. He brings us to the very brink of acting, he suggests in very broad terms what should be done, but he does not acknowledge the dialectics of growing through doing in the world, or the joy of interaction with this specific person, or with a portion of nature, or with works of the spirit. [480]

These critics make an important corrective, and point to a theme that runs through *Fear and Trembling* and *Works of Love* as well as this presently considered text. Abraham doesn't speak, interact with his wife or family; Kierkegaard demands that we love our neighbour abstractly; the only route to redemption is not through the world but through a personal relationship with God. So why does Kierkegaard shun the real world? The asocial charge, once again, seems justified. The charge of being acosmic is by no means inappropriate either; and the reason, as I have claimed before, is about narcissism. However, the key psychodynamic, the premise in SUD, the single assumed concept on which the text depends is that of the unitary self.

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[479] Kaufmann (1980) p 28.
[480] Gordon (1987) p 252.

Kierkegaard's corrective for despair is that the self comes to know itself, and in this knowing comes to know God. Is it that simple? Kierkegaard, in Part II of SUD, compares his analysis with that of the Greeks:

> The intellectuality of the Greeks was too happy, too naïve, too aesthetic, too ironic, too witty – too sinful – to grasp that anyone could knowingly not do the good, or knowingly, knowing what is right, do wrong. The Greek mind posits an intellectual imperative. [481]

But for Kierkegaard:

> This means that the Greek mind [says]: If a person does what is wrong, he has not understood what is right....Christianity begins in another way: man has to learn what is sin by a revelation from God; sin is not a matter of a person's not having understood what is right but of his being unwilling to understand it, of his not willing what is right. [482]

This is fierce stuff, harsh even. And it begs a fundamental question about the nature of understanding, especially about the self. Is it that easy? Is it just a matter of effort and discipline? Do we fool ourselves about ourselves because of nothing more than sloth? Is there any possibility that for some people, or for some of the time, we truly do not, and cannot through our own effort, know ourselves? Is there a possibility that for some proportion of human existence, the self really cannot relate itself to itself? To answer this we must turn to a further analysis of the concept of the self, and ask: can there be more than one self?

9.3 THE TRUE AND THE FALSE SELF

The distinction between the true and false self is generally ascribed to Donald Winnicott, although others, including Freud, had spoken of the much the same idea. Interest in such a distinction is by no means recent, and Baumeister [483] is one who has given an extended history. Thus, centuries before Freud, an interest in deception, pretence and mendacity was to be found in much of European literature and life; later, the Puritans,

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[481] SUD p 90.
[482] ibid p 95.
[483] See Baumeister (1987).

for example, were concerned that they may be deceiving themselves about the veracity of their own virtues of good Christian living; and the Victorians notoriously repressed so much in their society. Much of the thinking about the self was linked to the only partially formed idea of the unconscious, and Whyte [484] has provided an excellent history of this concept up until Freud's time. So in one sense, Freud's thinking was no more than a culmination and focusing of ideas that had been around for half a millennium.

Winnicott [485] points to Freud's distinction in his separation of id-based and ego-based processes. In principle, the primary and secondary processes could easily be thought of as the true and false selves respectively. Winnicott is also insistent that deeply regressed patients approach the same psychical situation as the neonate and its mother, and reveals that much of his theorising comes from his work with such patients as much as with babies.

He gives us five grades of false self, from the most unhealthy to the most healthy (his terms). At worst, all one ever meets is the false self, it 'runs' the person, and the true self is completely hidden from the outside world. At a less extreme stage, the true self has a secret life, which is acknowledged, but the false self exists to defend this secret true self from any harm, aggression or annihilation. Here we have the possibility of psychological symptoms in the service of preservation of the true self. At another level, less damaged still, the false self exists to enable the true self to come into its own, to exist. So modes of existence are tried, until one is found that offers minimal threat to the true self. But, notes Winnicott, if such a safe way of being cannot be found, then *in extremis* the false self will do anything to preserve the true self. The logical limit is clinical suicide, where in order to protect the true self, the false self brings about the annihilation of the whole self. But in normal health, the false self is no more than that socialised side of our

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[484] Whyte (1960).
[485] *Ego distortions in terms of the true and false self* (Winnicott (1960))
There is clutch of papers than can be read alongside this one, giving supporting information and amplifying key points. Especially worth reading are: *Withdrawal and Regression* (1954); *Primary Maternal Preoccupation* (1956); and *Mind and Its Relation to the Psycho-soma* (1949). All can be found in Winnicott (1965), which contains a large number of his key papers. The other collection is *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-analysis* (Winnicott, 1992).

selves, it exists to help us *'avoid wearing our heart on our sleeve'*, so that society may function.

Midway through this paper, almost as an aside, are Winnicott's thoughts on the mind as the false self. Winnicott puts the case so well, so efficiently, and in just two hundred words, that there is no point in trying to paraphrase it.

> When a false self becomes organised in an individual who has a high intellectual potential, there is a very strong tendency for the mind to become the location of the false self, and in this case there develops a dissociation between intellectual activity and psychosomatic existence.
>
> Where there has taken place this double abnormality, (i) the false self to hide the true self, and (ii) an attempt on the part of the individual to solve the personal problem by the use of a fine intellect, a clinical picture results which is peculiar in that it very easily deceives.
>
> The world may observe academic success of a high degree, and may find it hard to believe in the very real distress of the individual concerned, who feels 'phoney' the more he or she is successful. [486]

I surely cannot be alone in finding resonance with Søren Kierkegaard in these words.

In terms of aetiology, Winnicott tells us that we are examining the stage of the first object relations. Again, he repeats, with emphasis:

> To get to a statement of the relevant development process, it is essential to take into account the mother's behaviour and attitude, because in this field, dependence is real, and near absolute. *It is not possible to state what takes place by reference to the child alone.* [487]

Winnicott introduces his idea of the 'good-enough mother', the mother who repeatedly sees in her baby the gesture coming from the true self, sees the omnipotence contained, and to some extent makes sense of it. So the child's ego is strengthened by the extent to which he is allowed to believe he has power in the world, and the extent to which his gestures, indications of the true self, are allowed existence and confirmation. The not good-enough mother, by contrast, cannot meet the child's gesture, but substitutes her own, which is given viability by the compliance of the child. Here, at these

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[486] ibid p 144.

most tender moments, we have the origins of the false self and thereby of narcissism. The compliance of the child, forced by the lack of empathy from the mother to the gestures of the true self, results in the false self complying with the primary care giver. It stems from *'the mother's inability to sense her infant's needs.'* [488]

So the true self only becomes real through the mother's success in identifying and holding the omnipotence hallucinations of the child. If all goes well, the child begins to feel it controls the world, including and excluding its own self. And in due course, as the differentiation between the two accelerates, the child can, as Winnicott says, abrogate omnipotence, safe in the knowledge that the true self has spontaneity, and can engage with the real world. So the same symbol begins as an omnipotent hallucination, but ends as a real object onto which the child can cathect.

But when the mother is not good enough, the child becomes *'seduced into compliance'.* The false self then builds a set of false relationships, although, depending on the severity, may still enjoy an apparently normal, though phenomenologically empty life. But the great purpose of the false self will have been achieved: it will be successful in hiding the true self. Winnicott concludes:

> Here is the origin of the true self, which cannot become a reality without the mother's specialised relationship, one which might be described by a common word: devotion. [489]

And, when discussing the degrees of the false self, Winnicott comments, interestingly from the point of view of this thesis, that

> sometimes this false self defence can form the basis for a kind of sublimation, as when a child grows up to be an actor. In regard to actors, there are those who can be themselves and who also can act, whereas there are others who can only act, and who are completely at a loss when not in a role, and when not being appreciated or applauded (acknowledged as existing). [490]

And, importantly, both clinically and conceptually:

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[487] ibid p 145.
[488] ibid p 145.
[489] ibid p 148.
[490] ibid p 150.

the analyst can only talk to the false self of the patients about the patient's true self. It is as if a nurse brings a child, and at first the nurse discusses the child's problem, and the child is not directly contacted. Analysis does not start until the nurse has left the child with the analyst, and the child has become able to remain alone with the analyst and has started to play. [491]

9.4 IS THE SELF DIVIDED?

So with these insights, can we speak of a unitary self, of the self really knowing the self? From a psychodynamic point of view, there would appear to be two distinct approaches to the concept of mind. The first is to view it as unitary, as continuous and as spatially layered. This view owes a great deal to Sigmund Freud. Both of his models (topographic and structural) were immediately viewed as Newtonian-type concepts. So the mind is a place where psychic events take place, and there are subdivisions of that place; it has a geography. Such a mental image obliges us then to consider whether the self has a core; it induces questions about the true and false parts of the self; it promotes the idea of uncovering or analysis in the archaeological sense. In many ways, as Ryle [492] pointed out very many years ago, Freud's adoption of the historically ancient idea of a spatial metaphor for the mind is highly regrettable. But it has entered our consciousness, and it is difficult to ignore.

However, this is not the only way of talking about the self. The other way of thinking about the mind is in terms of temporal metaphors, that are every bit as helpful and explanatory. Object Relations theory has at its heart the idea of a self formed through relationships, and these relationships evolve, change and develop. And each relationship can involve multiple selves – the self as child, as parent, as daughter or sister or mother. Stephen Mitchell summarises it:

> The object relations approach focuses on phenomenological units, the kind of person one experiences oneself as being when one does what one does with other people. These phenomenological units are

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[491] ibid p 151.
[492] Ryle (1949).

understood to derive either from how one felt with a significant other in a particular context, or from one's sense of how it felt to be that other in relation to oneself. [493]

But these senses of separate and continuous selves are somehow smoothed into at least the illusion of a unitary, stable self.

This personal sense of self is difficult to define; it is ineffable, and perhaps easier to sense than to describe. But this sense of self, the inner, most private self, is still defined through the other. Just as we can only see our physical self through a mirror reflection, so our true self comes into being only through relationships - pathological or healthy - with others. The idea of a real, true, inner, isolated self is, for Object Relations theory, an illusion. More and more the nervous system is viewed as being formed through social interaction rather than some physiological unfolding. [494] And as Mitchell puts it, self-definition necessarily implies the definition of others. By stating what I am, I am also stating what I am not, what separates me from others. 'I' dialectically implies 'you'.

In summary then, much of recent psychoanalytic thinking has favoured the idea of a multiple self, ever changing and ever responding, a relationship based self. Object Relations theory demands that we avoid a reductionist model of the true self, that sees this self as essentially present at or before birth, and which unfolds aided or thwarted by interactions in the real world, a true self that is somehow prior to relating existence, a bud that turns to blossom. Rather we should consider all experience to be authentic or inauthentic, true to myself or not, even if there are multiple selves operating in differing way at any given time. But authenticity or the lack of it does not refer to a resulting inner core or true self, frozen at some primitive age. Authenticity refers to congruence with the history of who I am, what I really feel and believe:

> I view the analytic process as one in which the analysand is created through an intersubjective process. ....Analysis is not simply a

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[493] Mitchell (1993) p 106-7.
[494] See, again, Schore (1994).

process of uncovering the hidden; it is more importantly a process of creating an analytic subject who had not previously existed. [495]

In object relations theory terms, a self that relates only to itself is barely a self. A self develops through relating to objects - internal and external - and anyone who avoids the input of the external, who avoids, that is, the world, can become only the most impoverished self. Such a self is defined very carefully by Laing, [496] in his analysis of the splitting that comes about when ontological security fails to materialise to an adequate degree. Such a self relates only to itself, and lives in a world of fantasy. But this true self cannot encounter reality - only the false self can do that. So consequently, the true must eventually whither and perish, for the self needs the other in the real world to attest and affirm its existence. Hence Laing's existential analysis of the true and false self, not in a spatial, geographical or archaeological sense, but in terms of authentic knowing of the self and the other. With or without insight, Kierkegaard has postulated a true self that has little or no dependence (as he describes it) on external reality, save for relating to Kierkegaard's other, which, we learn, is God.

9.5 RE-READING *THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH*

So what can we draw from this discussion of the true and false self? Was Kierkegaard aware of their phenomenology? How practical, how realistically helpful, is his prescription for overcoming despair? What does reading *The Sickness Unto Death* do to the reader?

Young Søren was well aware, and from an early age, of the need to find the true self. Certainly, the Gellelelje letters contain the realisation that a person must *'first learn to know himself before he can learn anything else.'* [497] This Delphic injunction, however, is easier said than done, and perhaps one major achievement of the twentieth century was to demonstrate just what is

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[495] Ogden (1992) p 619.
[496] Laing (1960).

involved in fulfilling such an apparently simple dictum. But knowing one's self is at the heart of this text. Kierkegaard opens Part C of SUD, perhaps the most instructive part of his most perfect book, with a discussion on the role of consciousness in despair. It seems they are intimately linked, for:

> consciousness - that is, self-consciousness - is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. [498]

So something about the true self, and implications of living as a false self, are clearly present in Kierkegaard and in *The Sickness Unto Death*. And there is considerable psychological insight into the phenomenology of despair throughout SUD. Each of his layers of despair is exemplified with phenomenological descriptions.

In his discussion early in the text of the first pair of bipolars, finitude and infinitude, there is to be found a good approximation of the ideas of the true and false self. When the emphasis is on the infinite, says Kierkegaard, the self lacks finitude, and he gives us examples of how this detracts from being a true self by indulging in the fantastic, in phantasy. Kierkegaard comments:

> The fantastic is generally that which leads a person out into the infinite in such a way that it only leads him away from himself and thereby prevents him coming back to himself. [499]

And:

> The self, then leads a fantasised existence in abstract infinitising or in abstract isolation, continually lacking its self, from which it only leads further and further away. [500]

And when speaking of the second bipolar, of too little necessity and too much possibility, Kierkegaard nicely predates Laing in his awareness of the attraction of fantasy over action: 'Thus possibility seems greater and greater to the self; more and more it becomes possible because nothing becomes actual.' [501]

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[497] JP 5100.
[498] ibid p 29.
[499] ibid p 31.
[500] ibid p 32.

In the final description of despair Kierkegaard is at his most profound, and I suggest, his most revealing. The relevant subsection is titled *In Despair to be Oneself: Defiance*. In this, we meet a comprehensive and startlingly modern understanding of defiant despair and its psychological constituents, (although there is not a word about a remedy – this is strict nosology. And regrettably from a modern point of view, Anti-Climacus begins by labelling the previous accepting kind of despair 'feminine', and this, new kind of despair 'masculine'. I make no comment.) Defiant despair is a third step:

> First comes despair over the earthly, or over something earthly, then despair over the eternal, over oneself. Then comes defiance, which is really despair through the aid of the eternal, the despairing misuse of the eternal within the self to will in despair to be oneself. [502]

Kierkegaard makes a distinction between an acting self and a self acted upon. And in this extended description, he conjures with concepts very close to those in Object Relations Theory.

> If the self in despair is an acting self, it constantly relates itself to itself only by way of imaginary constructions, no matter what it undertakes, however vast, however amazing, however perseveringly pursued. [503]

And:

> In so far as the self in its despairing striving to be itself works itself into the very opposite, it really becomes no self. [504]

This is close to Laing's description [505] of the false self, the self that creates fabulous invented states, all with the goal of protecting the true self. Anti-Climacus says of the self in defiant despair: 'The self is its own master…however, it is easy to see that this is a King without a Country, actually ruling over nothing', and we are surely close to Laing's analysis of the split from reality and the implications for the impoverished true self.

When talking about the other option, the self that is acted upon, Kierkegaard speaks immediately with his favourite metaphor for things dark and personal – the thorn in the flesh. For the self acted upon and in despair to

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[501] ibid p 36. Compare this with the previously mentioned quotation from Laing that 'action scleroses freedom' Laing (1960).
[502] KW SUD p 67.
[503] ibid p 68.
[504] ibid p 69.
[505] see Laing (1960).

will to be oneself, the self becomes convinced that a particular affliction or suffering cannot be healed, ameliorated or overcome by any force – it is a condition, a curse that must be endured:

> He has convinced himself that this thorn in the flesh gnaws so deeply that he cannot abstract himself from it, (whether this is actually the case or his passion makes it so for him) and therefore he might as well accept it forever, so to speak. [506]

And 'he wills to be himself with it, takes it along, almost flouting his agony.' [507]. In a particularly insightful section, Kierkegaard then analyses the psychological dependency of being helped, the humiliation of being obliged to accept any kind of help unconditionally:

> A self that in despair wills to be itself is pained in some distress or other that does not allow itself to be taken away from or separated from his concrete self... so now he makes precisely this torment the object of all his passion, and finally it becomes demonic rage. [508]

Kierkegaard is here foreshadowing a very Fairbairnian analysis of the role of the anti-libidinal ego. This agency in Fairbairn's endopsychic structures has the power to denigrate and deny any sense of good and worth that might come about through the libidinal ego. Even without Fairbairn's sense of structure, or his portrayal of the process, Kierkegaard very accurately describes the resultant behaviour:

> it is of particular significance to him to make sure that he has his torment on hand, and that no one takes it away from him - for then he would not be able to demonstrate and prove to himself that he is right. [509]

And, crucially:

> This eventually becomes such a fixation that for an extremely strange reason, he is afraid of eternity, afraid that it will separate him from his demonically understood infinite superiority over other men, his justification, demonically understood, for being what he is. [510]

This surely is autobiographical. The emotions Kierkegaard describes are surely those he himself felt? The phrase 'his demonically understood infinite

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[506] KW SUD p 70.
[507] ibid p 71.
[508] ibid p 72.
[509] ibid p 72.
[510] ibid p 72.

superiority over other men' is surely something bubbling into Kierkegaard's consciousness from his repressed narcissism.

SUD was written in a remarkably short space of time – probably between March and May of 1848. Kierkegaard never explained exactly what this 'extremely strange reason' was: it would be a century before we had any kind of answer. Anti-Climacus concludes with a disturbing analogy, worthy of Laing or Winnicott. Speaking of defiant despair, he says:

> Figuratively speaking, it is as if an error slipped into an author's writing and become conscious of itself as an error – perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production – and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred for him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second rate author. [511]

Whether one speaks of the Kleinian phases, Fairbairnian structures, Laingian ontological insecurity or Winnicottian true and false selves, this long sentence that closes Part One of *The Sickness Unto Death* holds remarkable parallels to each.

But there is a problem for the reader of Kierkegaard who lives after Freud's century. Kierkegaard gives an often exceptional analysis of the feelings of being in despair. He also prescribes the way we have of responding to a life even. But: in his psychology, there would seem to be only one response for every life stimulus. For Kierkegaard, the responses invariably involve one or more of his levels of despair. For most of us this is not common experience. Different people do respond in different ways, and not all of the responses, even with the most generous interpretation, can be called despair. Or to put it another way, Kierkegaard is guilty of a logical sleight of hand. He defines despair in such a way that by his definition it is a place we all inhabit. But its very universality makes discussion about the amelioration of despair almost pointless, certainly meaningless. Kierkegaard's answer is another universal process – simply to acknowledge oneself before God. But he gives

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[511] ibid p 74.

us precious little help in how to go about doing this, and issues of impediments to knowing the self are ignored or dismissed.

Kierkegaard gives an example to make his point about the universal nature of despair. He tells of an ambitious man whose slogan is '*either Caesar or nothing'*. If this man fails to become Caesar, he is in despair. But, maintains Kierkegaard, he despairs, in a deeper sense, over the self that has failed to become Caesar. He wishes to be rid of this self that has failed. [512]

It seems to me that there is at least room for debate here. Traditional psychology would have it that there are two types of personality in such a situation - intrapunitives and extrapunitives. The intropunitive would indeed blame themselves, and see their shortcomings: 'it's all my fault' they might say. The extrapunitive would blame everybody else: 'it's not *my* fault' runs their mantra. So Kierkegaard's unequivocal answer may be incomplete. Some people may wish to be rid of themselves for their failure, others may see nothing wrong with themselves but blame the world. Psychodynamics has taken such a facile analysis very much further, into providing models of *why* people respond in different ways. But the idea that there is only one response is surely difficult for us to accept in this, our time. Immediately, object relations theory questions the very idea that we all respond in the same way to a life event. A life event is decomposed, according to theory, into good and bad objects, and we respond to these objects according to our individual psychic development. Knowing thyself is, on this reading, about appreciating the pervasiveness of this splitting process, being aware of it, and, so to speak, putting the various objects in their proper place. But there is no objectivity here – there is no single correct way of responding to a life event. We are who we are, and our responses are part of who we are. We have moved beyond the Freudian archaeological metaphor, and we know there is no single piece of antiquity of the self waiting under layers of sand. There is no single correct analysis to replace an incorrect one, and there is no need to assume a response involves despair.

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[512] ibid p 19.

Is Kierkegaard aware of this? In Part B, Kierkegaard discusses the universality of despair, and here we see the narcissistic nature of Kierkegaard's analysis, and the essentially unhelpful and indeed arrogant nature of his remedy. Kierkegaard favours a comparison between physical illness and despair. Each needs a physician. The role of the physician is 'not only to prescribe remedies, but also, first and foremost, to identify the sickness..... Such is also the relation of the physician of the soul to despair.' [513] And: 'Therefore, the common view that despair is a rarity is entirely wrong; on the contrary, it is universal.' [514]

I suggest that this is about the depth of Kierkegaard's understanding of the phenomenology of despair, compared with his inability to comprehend how despair is overcome in the world. It is about his asocial and acosmic view of the universe, which in turn is the product of his narcissistic self. Perhaps the difference between Kierkegaard's analysis - and hence prescription - about despair, and that of Laing, is the sense of resolute control. The self in Kierkegaard's analysis *chooses* to be in despair rather than in any sense being driven to it through lack of ontological security. There is a certainty in Kierkegaard's description of despair that is wholly missing from the Laingian analysis. For Kierkegaard, one is in despair for reasons of personal failure - failures of perception, of effort, of openness and responsiveness, of insight, of honesty, of humility of will. We are all in despair, we are each to blame, and there is no health in us.

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[513] ibid p 23.
[514] ibid p 26.

10 READING KIERKEGAARD'S TEXTS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a development of some eight ideas, each of which I have tried to substantiate in the preceding pages.

First, there is the contest between emotion and cognition [515]. Cognition, reason, has traditionally been the province of philosophy; emotion, up until recently, was best considered through the language and constructs of psychodynamics, although the neurosciences have been making very considerable inroads into basic models of emotion over the last thirty years. I will make no attempt to define reason; and emotion remains a difficult concept, as many have pointed out. [516] But the basic hypothesis is that emotion interferes with cognition; that there is effectively no cognition without emotion. This may be disputed by, for example, the Logical Positivist, who would claim we could arrive at pure reason. But after Wittgenstein perhaps we are more concerned with usage and less with meaning, and emotion can thus easily be seen to play a part in how we use words and how we reason. At the extreme, there is pure emotion, pure rage or hatred, such that we are, even if only momentarily, incapable of reasoning at all. This happens because the emotional centres of the brain flood the neocortex with neurochemicals, inhibiting rational thought. [517] Some, usually much more modest version of this process, is happening to us for much of our lives. But before the neurosciences, Freud nevertheless understood the interdependence of thought and emotion: 'where there was Id there shall be Ego' is a mantra that runs through his entire work.

Second, there is a particular process of emotion affecting reason, and this is called narcissism. This is in fact no more than a label for a set of underlying

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[515] There is clearly a subtext here, that of neuroscience. I take a materialist position, and agree with the distinction that neuroscience makes between cognitive reason and emotion. For a discussion of this dichotomy, see Pankseep (1998) Ch 16.
[516] See, for example, the entry in the *Oxford Companion to the Mind.* (Gregory (1984)).
[517] See Bear et al (2001) Ch 15.

primary defences that the neonatal self invokes in the face of, as it sees it, annihilation. Once invoked these defences are very difficult to remove in later life. The analogy is with the physical survival of the baby. If any infant is effectively starved during the early months of life, there will be damage to, among other things, the liver, eye and brain, and no amount of, for example, vitamin A in later life will make up for the structural damage to the retina caused by the starvation. This seems to be reasonably uncontentious. [518] A similar situation applies to early psychical damage, usually in the form of poor care from the primary care giver. Narcissism begins as a universal condition, but 'good-enough' mothering, or caring from the primary carer, mitigates against the permanence of the syndrome for the majority of people. Vestiges remain for us all; for some, there is not 'good-enough mothering', and the need for omnipotence is not resolved but repressed, only to appear throughout the life of the narcissist. At the extreme, this blights the person's life - every moment, interaction or sensory input is processed through their narcissism, leading at the very least to a very inefficient way of living and often a very unhappy one, for the narcissist certainly, and for those around them.

Third, when any of us reads any text, we are involved in a particular psychodynamic process called projection. This is a psychodynamic construct, with no neurological basis, but a construct that makes sense for us in our time. Any author must put some part of their personal experience into their text. Even in the most abstract texts, what they put in, what they project, is about *their* organisation of their material, its presentation. In less abstract texts, it is often about their personal history, their own narrative. Allegedly neutral figures or situations become imbued with that narrative. This is the writer's projection. Readers, too, have their projection. When we read that text, we project our own narrative onto the text; it may or may not coincide with the narrative of the author; but if we judge the text to be good or insightful or praiseworthy, it is because the projections of the author enable in some sense our own coherent projections. But there is no great

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[518] See Chusid (1970) Ch 4.

element of control – we are free, generally speaking, to make our own projections.

Fourth, what I have called narcissistic texts add another layer onto this process, one called projective identification. For the narcissistic author does care very much about what his reader projects. Indeed, on one reading, that is the reason the author writes the text. The author wishes - needs - to project into the reader emotions that are difficult or incapable of being contained within the psyche of that author. The text is written so that we receive, accept, and identify with what is being projected, so that our own projections are thus secondary. The primary purpose of the narcissistic text is to control the responses of the reader, even to control the reader.

Fifth, what is projected by narcissists is based around the two poles of narcissism – omnipotence, a making up for the lost and unresolved omnipotence of infancy; and shame (which may show itself as rage), the shame of having failed to live up to the (wholly impossible) expectations of narcissistic youth.

Sixth, when readers read narcissistic texts, there is a spectrum of responses. For the essentially resolved narcissist, the emotion generated by the narcissistic projection is essentially ignored, or noted only in passing, and the cognitive component of the texts can be inspected without much emotional intervention or overlay. For the particularly unresolved narcissist, the emotion can be the primary response to the text; the projections of the authors are identified with by the reader, and then reprocessed to reflect their own narcissistic situation. Clearly, there is no such thing as a totally unresolved narcissist, nor a totally resolved one either, since we are all born of very human parents, with their own baggage from their own childhood, and this to a lesser or greater extent they inflict upon us as children. We all sit on the continuum, and depending upon which 'self' is in play in any given situation, we move our location, and hence our responses, along that continuum.

Seventh, Søren Kierkegaard was nearer the unresolved end of this continuum, and he wrote essentially narcissistic texts. He wrote, especially and in some sense uniquely, about matters close to the heart of any narcissist: relating to God, the idea of the self, truth. This thesis contends that any unresolved narcissist reading these texts must recognise, even if unconsciously, the narcissistic elements in these ideas, and respond to them.

Eighth, it is important that we do not continue the tradition of medicalising Søren Kierkegaard. This would give us his readers the power to diminish the importance and effect of what he says. We should be open to receive all of his messages, cognitive and emotional, for they speak to us equally importantly in their own way. And we should be open to reflecting on quite how these responses affect us.

So this thesis is asking no more than that, when we all read Kierkegaard, regardless of where we are on the narcissistic continuum, we reflect even if only momentarily on our emotional response to these eminently cognitive texts. I am hence presenting what might for some be a new Kierkegaard, a new life; but I am *not* presenting a new version of his 'true life': that 'true life', if it has any meaning at all, is beyond our ken, for reasons explained in Chapter Two. And this is done, not to blacken the radiant and drag the sublime into the dust, but to give another understanding of a self, and a self that seems to have a particular effect on us his reader. And I am not suggesting that Kierkegaard's narcissism was the only influence in his life, but it would seem to me to be an important aspect of how he lived his life. Reflecting on his life and his ideas, with narcissism in mind, can help an understanding. It presents us with a new Kierkegaard, a new life, a way of peering into how he was motivated. And we may take from it whatever we wish.

But this thesis is about more than an inspection of a life and output. It is also about how we respond to that paring of life and work, and what our response to it tells us about ourselves. I want by way of summary to reflect from a psychodynamic point of view on some of the great themes in

Kierkegaard's work, and what happens to us when we read Kierkegaard writing on these topics. I am more concerned to ask questions than give answers, since our answers are so intimately bound up with how we conceive of ourselves. To offer generalisations is surely to risk allocating people to medical categories, to return to 'truths for all', something this thesis has tried very hard not to do. I am asking the reader, then, to ponder upon their own response to Kierkegaard's ideas and presentation: how does the analysis presented here make the reader feel? What does is it say about their own understanding of narcissism? Regardless of the intellectual stimulus that Kierkegaard's ideas provide, what emotion does he generate within the reader? Let me begin with a challenge to the received view of Kierkegaard.

10.2 GRUNBERGER'S CHALLENGE

> The time will come when not only my writings but my whole life, the intriguing secret of the whole machinery, will be studied and studied.[519]

Consider this description of the psychodynamic processes typically used by charlatans:

> Enigma per se is a sadistic genre, for posing a riddle is always laying an anal trap. [520] One confronts the other with a problem or obstacle, while enjoying absolute mastery oneself. One sees the other become entangled, and their grief is all the greater as the wager becomes linked to a loss…. Obscurity is in itself an anal trap, one "hoodwinks" one's victims or "keeps him in the dark." [521]

The entire quotation is lengthy but highly pertinent:

> For one thing, the obscurity of the oracle's language permits all sorts of interpretations in terms of the narcissism of the person inquiring, even if he must pay with fear and trembling, which at a deeper level,

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[519] JP 6078.

[520] Grunberger is a French classically trained psychoanalyst who writes in the language and style of high psychoanalysis. The anal stage is one of Freud's three stages of personality development – being sequentially in the middle of the oral, anal and genital stages. The anal stage is associated essentially with control, a generalisation of the toilet training process. An anal trap is thus, in straightforward terms, a trap set up in order to control.

[521] Grunberger (1979) p 299-300.

moreover, are really linked to pleasure. (The technique of doling out obscurities is familiar to those who abuse the public's credulity, and an unbroken line leads from sorcerers and seers to astrologers, diviners, conjurors, and fortune-tellers.) Fortune-tellers both conceal and promise, lead on and then put off until tomorrow, which assures them a faithful and permanent clientele. They are constantly making out drafts against the future, a system that allows them to remain in the abstract, the vague and the hazy, in allusions, paradoxical statements, and slogans, in order always to leave a window open into a future where everything will be possible....

Contact with the astrologer or fortune-teller immediately plunges the subject into the primary process [522] where reason and logic lose their power. A few seductive gestures suffice, but also merely ambiguity or obscurity (the language itself must be marked by the ineffable). With regression thus established, one is carried away in rapture, and the doors open onto a narcissistic universe of infinite possibilities – one need only believe. But, if the diviner installs the subject in that universe, at the same time he deprives him of the necessary means to get out of it. [523]

Many Kierkegaardian scholars may well be surprised at linking this eminent thinker and writer with sorcerers and fortune-tellers. For some, such a comparison is incomprehensible, insulting even, showing a lack of depth of understanding of a complex writer by whoever posits such a linkage. For them, Kierkegaard is the very opposite of a charlatan, in that he demands the most intense intellectual rigour and courage from his readers. But Grunberger is not in the world of philosophy, theology or of *belle-lettres*. He is contemplating what is in many ways a simpler, certainly much more primitive world, that of how we respond, how we feel. The more we learn of neurophysiology, the more we have to confront the evidence that rational brain processes appear to be affected by emotional brain processes. There is a spectrum, from extreme emotion overpowering reason, to clinical reasoning barely aware of what emotion might be. The point is not the degree of involvement of the one with the other: the point is the principle; and that principle, since Freud, has been established. We are not just rational engines, under our own control, but complex engines, not always able to

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[522] Another key Freudian term. It refers to essentially unconscious thinking, use of condensation and displacement, and occurs early in life, though obviously remains to some extent. It can best be understood by contrast with the secondary process, which is conscious, of the real world, able to accommodate reality, and involves logic and language. Quintessentially the primary process is about dreaming; the secondary about reasoning.

[523] ibid p 300.

reason with the clarity our observing ego might wish. From the viewpoint of evidential psychology, our minds are a product of our evolution - what else could they be - and our evolution includes emotion: any hermeneutic that pretends otherwise is missing a significant part of what it is to be human.

The received view of Kierkegaard is that, despite what might be called his excessively emotional over-reaction to a moderately unfortunate life, he is a cerebral man, a thinker and writer, who must be approached, and *can only be* understood cerebrally. Whatever he says about the subjective nature of truth, and those Assistant Professors (to be discussed below), Kierkegaard's ideas, as he presents them, require all our cognitive power to be understood, if indeed we can understand him at all. Whatever he says about his or our age lacking passion, the passion he speaks of is about involvement in ideas, about the relentless, logical pursuit of where an argument may take us. His thoughts are sometimes akin to those described by his fellow Dane [524] as *Gedankenexperiment*, thought experiments that take place in the mind, because the testing of the ideas in reality may appear impossible.

But the engendered desire to concentrate on and understand what his elliptical writings are saying and what they mean is not the only effect Kierkegaard has on us, as by now should be clear. We respond not only cerebrally, but also emotionally. And Grunberger paints perhaps an extreme picture of what happens to us emotionally when we meet such ideas and writings. I am not wishing to reduce Kierkegaard to a fairground astrologer, but I do want to acknowledge Grunberger's insight about playing the game set by the conundrum master. For example, *Fear and Trembling* both conceals and promises; it clearly has a faithful and growing clientele; it deals, demonstrably, in allusions, paradoxical statements and slogans. *Fear and Trembling* suggests, demands even, that traditional reason and logic lose their powers; and from Freud onwards, all agree that the primary process inevitably follows such a loss. The language of de Silento is nothing if not ineffable; and anyone who has wrestled with what happened to Abraham on Mount Moriah will have experienced the irresistible and persuasive invitation

from Søren Kierkegaard as he beckons us to join him in regression, to approach his universe of infinite possibilities. The intellectual content of *Fear and Trembling* may make the above précis seem ludicrously superficial. But in psychical terms, it is perhaps less ludicrous. Kierkegaard seduces us into a trap that denies the value of the secondary process, and leaves us there.

It takes a singular effort to escape from this seduction. Kierkegaard, the narcissist, induces narcissistic responses in us. This is projective identification through the ether – the words of the long since dead author obliging us to own a set of feelings, emotions and motives that are not really ours but his. Narcissistically, Søren Kierkegaard resolved a particular crisis in his narcissistic life by invoking a narcissistic explanation. There were far simpler, far more down to earth explanations he could have used, that the world would have accepted. But any of those would have removed his façade of grandiosity. So as we read his fantastic explanation, it touches and awakens the narcissist in us. And for some, this reawakening is persuasive. It may not be in quite the way he would have wished, but from the point of view of this thesis, here is why, as Søren Kierkegaard famously predicted, *Fear and Trembling* alone is sufficient to guarantee his reputation across the centuries.

The essential point is that Kierkegaard demands that we do all of this in isolation. Cerebral, Kierkegaard was; social, he wasn't, not, at least, at the level of relating. And it is when we withdraw from external reality, when reality testing is banned by the very nature of what is being discussed, that Grunberger's strictures come into being. This intellectual isolation is the hallmark of Kierkegaard's demand on us: the use of silence, abjuring the other, thinking through paradox, eschewing teachers, denying reason. The problem is that Kierkegaard inflicts this upon us, while, it would seem, withholding any solution that he himself has discovered. His own words:

> My life, my work as an author, will be explained *höchstens* as a special kind of genius, by no means as serious and by no means as

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[524] Kierkegaard's contemporary, Hans Christian Orsted is credited with the first use of the term.

consistent as the lives of various others. I am the only one who can explain this. …. alas, and I am silent. It is as though someone had a great treasure and hid it so securely that he threw the key away. What troubles me most is whether or not I have the right to do this, whether in relation to God this silence is permissible, whether it is permissible to let a productivity which is so infinitely indebted to him for its ingenuity remain an enigma and for many somewhat odd. [525]

Here is the essential psychodynamic conundrum about Kierkegaard. Did he do this for our own good, that we might to the best of our ability seek after truth as he understood it and in the only way he believed would be effective; or was this all a game, a huge game, played with the intention of self aggrandisement to repay earlier narcissistic injury? This need not be presented as our own either/or. While taking nothing away from the intellectual products of Kierkegaard's mind, just as we must pause when we read him to consider what intellectual points he makes, we should pause and consider what these texts are doing to us, as whole, relating people. So how do we respond to this conundrum master? Do we applaud? Do we despair? When we wrestle with the impenetrability of Kierkegaard, indeed the vertiginous abstraction, do we ponder what projective identifications we are permitting? Setting enigmas was Kierkegaard's way of retaining mastery of his universe. Our emotional response to Kierkegaard's traps must surely say something about our view of our universe, and our place in it.

10.3 RELATING, THE OTHER AND SILENCE

As early as just eight days after birth, it would seem that the neonate has some kind of mental representation based on what is happening to them in the world. Sander [526] showed that if a mother put a pair of ski goggles on her face while breast-feeding, the baby was very disturbed and feeding was disrupted.

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[525] JP 6345.
[526] Sander (1985) .

In current psychodynamic theory, thought is not synonymous with verbal language and symbols. Psychodynamics now seriously entertains the idea that many important levels of psychodynamic meaning are held and enacted through non-verbalised processes. The previous belief was that meaning can only be generated through symbolisation, and that an infant incapable of reflecting on its actions cannot act meaningfully. [527] But much recent developmental psychology and neuropsychology has radically doubted this. Hobson [528] has very capably summarised this work, and his summary is that observation or videotaping of mother-neonate interactions bring broad agreement that the mother's actions mean something to the baby, and that the baby's responses reflect meaning generated within them. A primary, unworded apprehension of relationships is foundational to our meaning systems and to our subjectivity.

This topic, the development of the self through the other, is fundamental to this thesis. It has been well known throughout human history (at least to primary carers, usually mothers) that mother and baby mirror each other during intimate play sessions: the expression on the mother's face and on the baby's when playing wordless 'goo-goo' games match to a remarkable extent. When, in a somewhat cruel experiment, an unknown caregiver was required not to mirror the baby but remain expressionless for just two minutes, the baby remembered that face and actively avoided it for a period of up to twelve months. [529] Why should this be? The argument is that we come to know the world not through solipsistic exploration, but through the other, the caregiver. The external world is not an independently existing given that is there to be discovered: we create this external world through others, through teachers. And this wish and need stay with us. The neurobiological work on eye contact [530] confirms this view: shared consciousness in infancy is now a cornerstone of developmental theory. [531]

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[527] The idea that there can be no thought without language has a certain hold in philosophy, but less so in post-Freudian psychodynamics. For a detailed discussion and an attempted rapprochement, see Cavell (1993).

[528] Hobson (2002).

[529] Haley and Stansbury (2003).

[530] For a summary of this vast area, see Farroni et al (2003). See also Fonagay et al (2003).

[531] see, just as an example Trevarthen (1993).

This and other research suggests that human external reality is inherently shared. It is constructed out of shared feelings, shared intentions and shared plans. This is an essentially relational process, and one that continues through adult life. The objective world always retains its historical connection with the earlier sense of shared interpersonal reality. [532] Infants for whom there is not a mirroring and engaging caregiver develop somewhat disorganised forms of attachment, and under stress will look within themselves rather than risking a shared experience involving the external world. So frightening parenting, helpless feelings on the part of the infant, mismatches between parental and infant emotions, false and inappropriate mirroring, all lead to a loss of the shared external, and a consequent searching for meaning only from within.

On this reading, then, turning inward is not just asocial: it would seem to approach being ahuman. We can learn little about the world around us without joining the mind, the subjectivity, of the person teaching us. All of this links to narcissism and to Søren Kierkegaard. The narcissist has failed in infancy to trust the objective world and resorts instead to a certainty that he can control - a certainty within. Probing of other minds in real dialogue is to be feared, and hence real self-knowledge, which comes only through exposure to the other, also retreats. The playful exploration of thoughts with an other becomes impossible, because we cannot anticipate what the result might be. With early learning processes that engender risk, narcissists evolve strategies that turn inward. The narcissist thus learns less about how outside minds work. [533] Eventually, there is no real external reality - the process fails, and the narcissist then looks to project stimuli into others in order to experience vicariously what they feel. It is not that the external does not exist, but that their own sense of self is so fragile they dare not experience the external as real.

Kierkegaard wrestles perpetually with the difficulty of putting into any words anything about his Wholly Other God despite its complexities, and perhaps ironically all of his two million words are an attempt to explain the problem

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[532] For a foundational discussion, see Gergely and Csibra (2005).
[533] For a general discussion, see Fonagay et al (2007).

of silence. Beyond the literal and superficial, there is another point about silence: in highlighting the difficulty of talking about God, Kierkegaard offers a legitimisation of silence in our relationships. The former is a philosophical point; the latter very much one about psychodynamics.

References to silence are to be found throughout the canon. They are telling, and the deep attraction of silence for Kierkegaard is very apparent. In *Two Ages* he speaks of the need for silence:

> Only the person who can remain essentially silent can speak essentially, can act essentially. [534]

And from his Journals,

> Authentic intensive actions spring from an individual and from silence. [535]

> Silence is necessary for my life, and precisely through silence it gains its power. Even if I wanted to speak, I would have to keep silence about that which is most important to me and most deeply determines my life. [536]

But it is in *Fear and Trembling* that Kierkegaard surely comes very close to denying language and defining silence as the true path to an encounter with God. The point about *Fear and Trembling* is that it tells the story of Abraham as a narrative, rather than as an analytic essay. We cannot get to Abraham as a person, to his theology, indeed his logic, through rational analysis: we can only approach him through living his story. Abraham's silence follows from the impossibility of logical, worded analysis. To murder a son is unethical: there is no other logical basis for commentary. From a religious point of view there is another commentary, but it is one which is unworded, one that necessarily demands silence as a constitutive part of itself. So the story of the Aqedah is told repeatedly in the text, over and over again, with different nuances and subtleties each time. The intention is that we will approach Abraham through this indirection, in our own way and for ourselves.

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[534] *Two Ages*, KW XIV p 97.
[535] JP 3986.

I commented in the chapter on *Fear and Trembling* about how, in our time, Abraham's silence would be countenanced less. I want to continue this idea by returning to the germane theories of Donald Winnicott, especially that of the intermediate space. When we read *Fear and Trembling*, when we ponder on Kierkegaard's cry for silence in our lives, we enter our own intermediate space, and play with the story of Abraham. And as was pointed out, this space remains private, unworded, unwordable, and necessarily secret. It is the place where we can ask questions about God, as Abraham does. We can sit between the polarised extremes of a god that we invent, and a god that is eternal. Both realism and anti-realism can co-exist in our intermediate space. [537] And we live in this space with the paradox, both gods coexisting, the one found and the other invented. But in this place, what we never do is ask the question: which is the true God?

Nicolas Lash perhaps best sums up the conundrum in his 1966 text. He says:

> Where our knowledge of God is concerned, are we constructors, explorers or pupils? Thus, do we invent our gods and project them beyond ourselves; do we search the world to find signs of the god; or do we listen, perhaps in silence, and wait for our god to appear? [538]

Perhaps we are now condemned to be all three of his categories. We construct, but often in the sense of taking a formal statement of religion and faith and making it our own. We explore, perennially hoping to find a newer or better means of conceptualising and speaking of God. And we remain as pupils, listing, learning, often in silence as befits pupils, sometimes praying. But we can hold all of these positions with some equanimity. And Winnicott's theorising is helpful in understanding why. What Winnicott exposes very carefully is the indeterminate, the unreal nature of the intermediate object:

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[536] *Letters and Documents*, KW XXV 187.

[537] The realist/antirealist debate asks: is a god really out there or just in our minds? For the realist, religious language, or god-talk, refers to an objective other; we do not project or create that other out of human needs or values. For the anti-realist, we can never know whether there is any objective referent; rather the language is a means of expressing a way of life and a set of values. See Shakespeare (2001) Ch 3.

[538] Lash (1996) p 77.

> ..the essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and phenomena (according to my presentation of the subject) is *the paradox and the acceptance of the paradox*: the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object....In the rules of the game we all know...., we will never challenge the baby to elicit an answer to the question: did you create it or did you find it. [539]

So hence the collusion, the permission given to the infant to relate to something that is neither pure subject nor pure object, neither me, nor the other. This seems to me to be very close to Buber's notion of the 'Between':

> On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective on the narrow ridge where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of between.[540]

Hence also the question of what is 'really' there is not entertained - that is the whole point. The intermediate space is not an area of pure reason, nor of pure emotion. It is a safe place, but one nonetheless fragile. For the illusion must be maintained. In real life, the physical embodiment of intermediate objects, teddy bears, often become notoriously smelly and dirty. This is for the simple reason that to put teddy through a wash cycle would utterly destroy the colluded illusion: Teddy would have to come out of the intermediate and become immersed, literally, in a very objective world indeed. Necessarily he would lose his magic: he would become just another object to be washed.

So here is the problem with God talk, that Kierkegaard has very well identified. Our language about God is poor in the extreme, and Kierkegaard repeatedly tries to put us in a position where we both recognise this and seek out our own solution to it. By the very use of the word God, it is as though we are forced, in Winnicott's phrase, *'to elicit an answer to the question: did you create that or did you find it?'* The word God is required to take on a referential load it cannot bear.

The point about the intermediate space, then, is that even though it remains, and remains a place to which we return, it is nevertheless an unreal place; it is not a place where we can live our lives. We live in fact in

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[539] Winnicott (1971) p 119.
[540] Buber (1949) p 55.

something usually called the real world, a place of subject and object, and I and It, sometimes I and Thou. We cannot remain in our intermediate space - reality calls us. But above all, so object relations theory would have it, relating calls us. Relations, relationships are the stuff of living, and we cannot escape these encounters if we are to call ourselves human. This very point is the narcissistic attraction of Kierkegaard. He is pointing up the immense difficulties that come when something unworded becomes worded, and he is appealing to the attraction of an unwordable place. And I fear he actually wishes us to remain there, in what is demonstrably an asocial and acosmic place. This perhaps is what Kierkegaard himself tried to do, and *Fear and Trembling, Works of Love* and *The Sickness Unto Death* in different ways stand as statements to that.

This is the appeal of Kierkegaard in our time. Language about the reality of God simply fails us. We understand language about God only by living that language. In the intermediate space, a state of unworded unknowing, silence would seem to be a quite appropriate response. But silence only makes sense by reference to word. This is a familiar theme throughout philosophy and indeed depth psychology. When I use a word to express something immediate, something from my unconscious or immediate consciousness, I transcend whatever it is I am trying to refer to, because words mean other things. Words can refer to universals, and not just the ideas or concepts to which I am attending. There are echoes of this certainly in Lacan's analysis of how we use language, not to mention Wittgenstein's. Hence the attraction of silence. Silence makes explicit language's inability to make reality present to us. The use of words is treacherous; allowing words destroys the illusion: it invokes Winnicott's forbidden question 'did you create it or was it there?'

But we cannot live like this if we are to take our place in the world. As was discussed in the consideration of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard seems to be suggesting that in some situations, all language is effectively null and void, that wording is impossible. He does not, its seems to me, pause to consider the human implications of such a position, that it can lead to illusion and delusion, to silent collusion in matters; in classical terminology, it risks a return to the primary process, in short, to Grunberger's challenge.

10.4 APPROACHING KIERKEGAARD'S TEXTS

Does Kierkegaard deliberately make himself difficult to understand? The pseudonym Climacus says so. It is his task to 'create difficulties everywhere' [541] and 'it is thus left to the reader to put two and two together…but nothing is done to minister to a reader's indolence'. [542]

Kierkegaard specifically says [543], perhaps narcissistically, that he has discovered regions which do not exist for others as such, but he has, in his own words, thrown away the key to this treasure. The use of pseudonyms necessarily prohibits immediate and sequential understanding of this thought. He says, again perhaps narcissistically, that 'the time will come when not only my writings but also my whole life, the intriguing secret of the whole machinery, will be studied and studied'. [544] And he actually spoke of giving his output 'the appearance of chance and caprice' [545] just in order to make things difficult for the reader. He required intense effort and a desire to penetrate his thinking through his writing to discover the ingenuity of his work, but 'The task must be made difficult', for 'only the difficult inspires the noble hearted'. [546]

What of the use of pseudonymity? This was not by any means unique to Kierkegaard at that time. [547] We have Kierkegaard's quite clear instruction that he is not to be regarded as the author of anything written in a pseudonymous author's name:

> I am impersonally or personally in the third person as a *souffleur* [prompter] who has poetically produced the *authors*, whose *prefaces* in turn are their productions, as their *names* are also. Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader. [548]

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[541] *Postscript*, KW XII p 166.
[542] ibid pp 264-5.
[543] already quoted, JP 6345.
[544] JP 6078.
[545] JP 5891.
[546] JP 656.
[547] See MacIntyre (1984) pp39-43.

But this doesn't quite make sense. There seem to be two separate styles of interpretation here. The first is Kierkegaard's proffered explanation, and there is evidence of how he went to great pains, especially early in the polyonymous authorship, to conceal his authorship, by for example concealing his handwriting through the use of amanuenses, and how, more bizarrely, he lounged around the Theatre every evening to give the impression of being a socialiser, before rushing home to work on *Either/Or* into the small hours. On the other hand we have a very plausible interpretation from Mackay:

> When Kierkegaard signed his books with impossible names .....no one in the gossipy little world of Danish letters had any doubts about their origin. Nor did he mean they should; his purpose was not mystification but distance. By refusing to answer for his writings he detached them from his personality so as to let their form protect the freedom that was their theme. [549]

So was Kierkegaard really trying to deceive the Copenhagen public, as he played a game with them, or was this a genuine literary device, part of his declared meiotic method, his means of engendering inward reflection on subjective truth? Was it another enigma, another anal trap, that he enjoyed enormously, or was this a pure hearted continuation of a solemn and pious process? I suggest it was some of each. Without reducing the process that Kierkegaard evolved for the communication of his vision of man's relations with God, let us also perhaps consider what else is going on for us when we read these texts. We now know, demonstrably, that all the words written by the pseudonymous authors were put on paper by the hand of Søren Kierkegaard. So what else is this single author doing to us when we wrestle with the conflicting commentaries from Climacus and Anti-Climacus on the same topic? Was there an easier way of doing this that would engender better understanding? Was there, actually, any virtue in the sometimes opaque and contradictory statements Kierkegaard has these authors make? There may be for a very few, but I cannot see how there might be for the common man. The daunting complexity of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings calls for an extraordinary effort and intellect to work with his challenging ideas. His alleged intended target, the single individual, may

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[548] *Postscript,* pp 625.

turn out to be a very small, but very special subset of the population. This is just what any narcissist would wish. When we read Kierkegaard, do we aspire to be part of that very few? Does this author set up a club with criteria of membership so high that most of us can only hope to be at the perimeter? Does he draw us in even though we are unsure of what he is actually saying, or even more unsure that his insights apply to us? What is the nature of our attraction to Kierkegaard? Is it purely intellectual?

In a final revelation (and this can be seen as narcissism of the highest order if one wishes), Kierkegaard wrote in his *Point of View* that there was indeed a cohesion to all of his output, that everything he did was planned, that he had at the very beginning of his writing an inclusive understanding of the path that writing would take. This might be true, that he did indeed in his early twenties have his entire plan of writing already worked out; it might, instead, be a delusion, genuinely felt by Kierkegaard, and as is so often the case by those reflecting near the end of their life, a story told to bring narrative cohesion to what were at the time a series of unrelated events in a life; or it might have narcissistic undertones, be another claim to his greatness, another instance of his seeing clearly what lesser mortals dimly stumble towards. In any case, what does this do to us his reader? Do we accept this Kierkegaard, ennoble him to an omnipotent status, acknowledge his superiority and share in his remarkable achievement through classical Freudian identification? Do we feel humbled, reduced and incompetent by the gap between his intellect and our own? Do we feel resentment, which on reflection is rage and hatred, at his mastery that causes our sullen response? How, in other words, does our own narcissism conjoin with his?

Apart from Kierkegaard believing that difficulty is good for the soul, and the no doubt profound belief that one can only approach truth through the inward engagement with that truth, why else would he write in this way? What underpinned his whole literary life? The answer, of course, is that this is exactly what narcissists do. In *Either/Or,* Kierkegaard described precisely his own situation, exactly what he was feeling. This is the curse of the

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[549] Mackay (1971) p 247.

narcissist. Much of life has no meaning at all, is empty, lacks any fulfilment; and Kierkegaard's entire strategy then is a search for meaningfulness through his reader, since for him, a narcissist, there is none. The permanent sense of loss he describes in *Either/Or* Part I was to a large extent what he felt; and the partial solution offered in Part II was his fantasy of what marriage, actually of what relating, might be like. But these were written vicariously: Kierkegaard imagined what each of his characters might be feeling because he himself felt so very little. Some readers might wonder if Kierkegaard revelled in the effect all this would have on his them; imagining their bafflement, frustration and anger, while delighting that he was both the cause of these intense feelings in his imaginary audience, while he, Kierkegaard, held and withheld the key to the solution. At the same time, other readers might consider that this is whole point of the existential approach, that no solutions are or should be offered, that Kierkegaard is wholly neutral in this process, and there are no emotions to be attributed to him. These very differences in response are at the heart of this thesis, and cannot, I am claiming, be discussed in terms of pure reason.

10.5 WITHHOLDING AND THE ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

No doubt, intellectually, Kierkegaard's withholding follows primarily from his avowed methodology, his pedagogic practice:

> When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focussed on the relationship, however, but on the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of his relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true. [550]

This, described as *'possibly the most debated and controversial passage penned by Kierkegaard'*, [551] sums up the problem of Kierkegaard and his

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[550] *Postscript*, p 178.
[551] Jacoby (2002) p 27.

enigmatic nature, his propensity for anal traps. This paragraph has indeed been the subject of intense scrutiny and debate by that most lowly of planetary species, the assistant professor. [552] Kierkegaard declares a vituperous disdain for these 'infamous rascals' [553]:

> Whenever someone existentially advances the cause one inch further – then a whole generation of assistant professors and lecturers appear who transpose this advance into a doctrine - that is, the cause moves backwards. [554]

> For the professor is even longer than the tapeworm which a woman was delivered of recently (200 feet according to her husband...) a professor is even longer than that – and if a man has this tapeworm "the professor" in him, no human being can deliver him of it. [555]

The issue, surely, is Kierkegaard's complete ambivalence: he decries his fate, that his work will end up as the subject of scrutiny by these academics, while at the same time writes in a way that demands the highest logical and intellectual rigour and effort for its understanding, such that assistant professors may actually be the only species capable of comprehending: a double bind if you will. Consider the above quoted paragraph. It has remained a particularly difficult, but pivotal, expression of something very close to the epicentre of Kierkegaard's thought. We have seen a good handful of serious attempts to make sense of it. Apart from the explanation from Jacoby, we have alternate views from George Lindbeck [556], Stephen Emmanuel [557], Timothy Houston Polk [558], and Louis Polman [559]

The point I wish to make is not philosophical but psychodynamic. The above listed members of the academy, almost certainly *full* professors (although they doubtless do not thereby escape Kierkegaard's strictures) all find this a perplexing and indeterminate paragraph. What hope has a casual reader of making sense of this dense script? In our time, do we not look to learned

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[552] Kierkegaard makes over seventy references Assistant Professors or Professors, always derogatory.
[553] JP 6872.
[554] JP 3574.
[555] JP 6817.
[556] Lindbeck (1984).
[557] Emmanuel (1996).
[558] Polk (1997).
[559] Polman (1984).

professors to help us understand things that are not immediately apparent? The professors, it would seem, are damned if they do and damned if they don't. There is no end to Kierkegaard's contempt, referring to them as 'cannibals' even 'castrates' [560], and liking their output to 'filth and vermin'. [561] He speaks of them as 'drivelling'. [562] While the underlying sentiment from Kierkegaard - the need to live rather than inspect - chimes with us, his chosen style of presenting this essential point makes the involvement of the professors unavoidable. Kierkegaard, on this reading, knew exactly what he was doing, and set up the double bind himself: more enigmatic mastery for Kierkegaard, more grief for the assistant professors as their wager is linked to a loss.

The issue is that the professors are bad objects for Søren Kierkegaard. His unusually blunt writing about them, continuous from the earliest to the latest of his Journals entries, tells us something about how he viewed that profession. Resentment towards them is everywhere. [563] He compares himself bitterly to them and their clique and their standards:

> I should have lived in professorial seclusion in cliques; then I would have had a great reputation and also would have had the security of belonging to the great aggregate of public officials who stick together according to the laws that when one suffers, all suffer. Instead I have lived as a single individual in whose fate not a single one participates. [564]

In fact, I suspect the majority of Kierkegaard's readers have a personal relationship with the role of assistant professor: a few have been promoted from it, a good many remain as such, and an even larger number perhaps wish they were one. So when we all, as assistant professors, whether ex, extant or merely *manqué*, read these strictures, what do we *feel*? We feel, I suggest, Kierkegaard's repressed rage and hatred. He at once wrote for, but despised, his readers. He wrote for the assistant professors, and then derided them for their attempts to make sense of his opaque prose. But of course he wrote narcissistically: because his intellect was his unique,

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[560] JP 3316.
[561] JP 1452.
[562] JP 1940.
[563] see more or less any of the Hong Cumulative Index of entries.
[564] JP 6585.

aggrandising property, the one lifelong thing that fed his narcissism; above all this was to be protected:

> If an assistant professor could steal my ideas from me, he would be a tremendous hit. [565]

Had he made his ideas simple to understand, had he written without enigma, his narcissistic supply would have dried up. His words says it all:

> What troubles me most is whether or not I have the right to do this, whether in relations to God this silence is permissible, whether it is permissible to let a productivity which is so infinitely indebted to him for its ingenuity remain an enigma and for many somewhat odd. [566]

Kierkegaard's god alone was allowed to know the greatness of Kierkegaard's genius, and Kierkegaard never wavered from his trust in this god. On an object relations reading, Kierkegaard's god remained his source of narcissistic supply as all the rest failed him. We, the assistant professors, the readers of his texts, were both good and bad objects. We were good objects when we sat, breathless in amazement at the incredible complexity of his literary production. We were bad objects when, as assistant professors are prone, we claimed to understand, or worse, to minimise, what he had written. In claiming to understand we take away his remaining earthly fountain of wished-for glory. With the demise of the impenetrability of what he wrote would go the final hope of narcissistic grandeur.

But we all have our very own Assistant Professors. We all have those whom we fear just as Kierkegaard feared his. These are the people who would strip us of that which makes us special: deny us, reduce us - choose your metaphor - castrate us. We may not call them Assistant Professors, and they may not loom in our lives as this species did for Kierkegaard. But consider our own response to reading about his. What does his unconscious say to ours? What projective identification do we admit? Do we do no more than puzzle over Kierkegaard's vindictiveness towards these ordinary people? Do we identify with his heroic struggle against a mean spirited and oppressive system that demands the compliance he adamantly and piously refuses? Are we strengthened, though his example, in our own struggles against those

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[565] JP 4977.

who would oppress and demean us? How much of this is our own narcissistic response? To what extent are we narcissistically living out our demands for omnipotence and special regard through reading Kierkegaard?

It comes back to projective identification, that ubiquitous process. This is for some:

> a general theory of human functioning. It is about the relations between people, between groups; of the relationships between internal objects; of the relationships in the symbolic world between thoughts, ideas, theories experiences etc. [567]

Projective identification is the most ubiquitous construct for explaining how we control an object, acquire its attributes, evacuate a bad quality, protect a good quality, and above all, avoid separation. Indeed it is the sovereign defence against separation. [568] Projective identification is the process basis, on this view, of all relationships, but also is the mechanism for some of the most alarming instances of psychological dysfunction as well as our worst inhumanities to each other. It is the basis of all human interaction. [569] We attempt to solve our internal unresolved inconsistencies by splitting off unwanted bits and projecting them wherever - onto blacks, Jews, women, across the Atlantic, to the Middle East - while saying the problem is not in me but in them. That is what projective identification attempts to achieve, and we all do it, all the time. So there is no easy line, as I discuss in Appendix III, between the normal and the abnormal in matters psychological, nor is there any line between normal and virulent or malignant projective identification. But the results are disastrous:

> In malignant projective systems the self is impoverished, realty testing fails, the other is not recognised for what he is but rather as the container of disowned aspects of the self, to be hated, feared, idealised etc, and relations are unreal and narcissistically intense up to the point of insanity. [570]

The phrase, originally written about intense anti-Semitic gangs, is not far from the picture I have been painting of Søren Kierkegaard. And I do this not

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[566] JP 6345.

[567] Segal (1973) p 191.

[568] Grinberg (1990) p 64.

[569] Torras de Bea (1989) p 266.

[570] Main (1989) p 105.

to liken him to any anti-Semite, but to show the ubiquity of projective identification as a process governing human thought. And I further want to say that when joining any group or club or party or institution or society, the price of admission is to enter into the splitting and projective identifications of that group. This is most obviously true in violent gangs, who *must* have an external other onto which to express all their hatred, and into which to place all their fears. The existence of the external is essential to the existence of the gang - the one defines the other. The same is true, though much hidden, in academic or professional circles. [571] The mechanisms are the same though: taking on the group values as a given, and adapting thereafter one's own primitive anxieties to that group's particular version of splitting, projection, stereotyping and scapegoating. This is not without cost: it leads to a significant impoverishment in the ability to think and feel with moderation and to deal with anxiety and reality:

> And there is the other side of the matter. When positive aspects of the self are forcefully projected, similar degrees of de-personalisation occur, with feelings of personal worthlessness and with dependent worship of the other's contrasting strengths, powers, uncanny sensitivity, marvellous gifts, thoughts, knowledge, undying goodness etc. This is the world of the devotee, cults and hero-promotion.' [572]

The convention has it that we approach Søren Kierkegaard intellectually, that he poses riddles, that his techniques of exegesis engender difficulty. And the outward response to this makes the case. Kierkegaardian scholarship, it could easily be argued, is predominantly managed by a relatively small group - a society - of Western, mainly English speaking, mainly male academics. Almost all references to Kierkegaardian texts refer to the same set of translations (from the Hongs), and the review process of this scholarship would appear to involve the same small group of scholars. Entry into this club demands a ferociously high level of rational scholarship, and increasingly, given what has gone before, a perpetually new view on what Kierkegaard said or meant. Post-modernism in particular has given a whole new life to this academic invention, such that any of Kierkegaard's more elliptical statements is now capable of almost endless interpretation.

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[571] The classic description of virulent projective identification in the UK Health sector is from Lyth (1959). See also Main (1989) and Bion (1961).
[572] Main (1989)p 106.

What, in preceding Chapters, the analysis of three of Kierkegaard's texts shows is the varying degree of ease and difficulty with which the members of Kierkegaard's club, Søren's gang, can assimilate their leader's splitting and his projective identification. *Fear and Trembling* is easy. We can all perform the splitting Kierkegaard performs, all see ourselves in sole communion with our god, alone on some metaphorical hillside with that which is all-powerful and all-loving. But *Works of Love* poses problems, since it ignores that one area that, in our time, can even be the basis of gangs and societies - sexuality. This remains a difficult text for the club members to assimilate. And in *The Sickness Unto Death,* we can see how the group members make attempts to translate an unacceptable process of splitting into something more benign. Above I précis seven attempts from members to make the unpalatable palatable, seven attempts, from McCarthy, Crites, Evans, Westphal, Roberts, Hannay and Mooney, to show that if a group can modify unacceptable splittings in its leader to something more benign, then the group can remain intact.

All of this is a long way away from Kierkegaard's common man. The common man has no hope of joining this club, and little chance of understanding the scholarship about Kierkegaard currently being produced. Is this what Kierkegaard would have wanted? More to the point, is this what we want? What is our motive for studying Kierkegaard? Can we each say that it is entirely rational, that the ideas of the man challenge our intellect *alone* in a way that other authors do not? Is there, as well, or even instead, some emotional attraction to the man and his ideas that remains essentially unacknowledged?

In 1663 in Rome, Galileo Galilei was tried by the Church for blasphemy, for claiming that the earth was not the centre of the universe. The Bishops and Archbishops present refused to look through Galileo's lenses at the moon and the stars, for fear that what they might see might question their reason. When we read Kierkegaard, we respond with reason, but also with emotion, and I am asking in this thesis that we be prepared to look through the lens

of our emotion to understand better our reasoned response to this most cerebral writer, philosopher and theologian.

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APPENDIX I: A CLINICAL VIGNETTE

What follows is an extract from a full case study to be found in a standard teaching text that accompanies DSM-IV [573].

> (Nick is a 25 year-old African American man, presenting for depression)
>
> Nick is tall, bearded, muscular and handsome. He is meticulously dressed in a white suit and has a rose in his lapel...
>
> When asked why he has come for an evaluation, he replies laughingly that he has done it to appease his family doctor "who seemed worried about" him. He has also read a book on psychotherapy and hopes that "maybe there is someone very special who can understand me. I'd make the most incredible patient."...
>
> Nick pulls out of his attaché case a series of newspaper clippings, his resume, photographs of himself, including some with famous people, and a photostatted dollar bill with his face replacing George Washington's. Using these as cues he begins to tell his story...
>
> (Speaking of a relationship with a famous actor): When the actor came to town, Nick rented a limousine and showed up at the gala "as a joke" as though he were the star himself. The actor's agent expressed annoyance at what he had done, causing Nick to fly into a rage. When Nick cooled down, he realised that he was "wasting my time promoting others, and that it was time to start promoting myself". "Someday", he said, pointing to the picture of the actor, "he will want to be president of my fan club"...
>
> Nick (an actor) has had little previous acting experience of a professional nature but he is sure success "is only a matter of time". He pulls out some promotional material he has written for his actors and says "I should write letters to God – He'd love them!"
>
> When the psychiatrist is surprised that some materials are signed by a different name than the one Nick has given the receptionist, Nick pulls out a legal document explaining the name change. He has dropped his family name and taken as his new second name his own middle name.
>
> Recently he has dated and adored a man with the same first name as his own; but as he became disenchanted, he realised that the man was ugly and was an embarrassment because he dressed so poor. He has no relationships with other homosexual men now, describing

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[573] There is a small industry surrounding DSM. Examples of supplementary pedagogic texts would include Spitzer (2002) and LaBruzza (1994).

them as "only interested in sex". He considers heterosexual men "mindless and without aesthetic taste". The only people who have understood him are older men who have suffered as much as he has. "One day, the mindless happy people who have ignored me will be lining up to see my movies"....

Nick described a tortured childhood, being picked on by his peers for looking odd, until he began body-building....

At the end of the interview, Nick is referred to an experienced clinician associated with clinic, who charges a minimal fee ($10) which Nick can afford. However, Nick requests a referral to someone who would offer him free treatment, seeing no reason for paying anyone, as the therapist "would be getting as much out of it" as he would. [574]

It is easy to find, in this not atypical case, all of the elements of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Nick's grandiosity is overwhelming, his sense of being special overwhelming. He needs constant attention, and is rapidly dismissive of those no longer able to sustain his narcissistic supply. From this follows a likely lack of empathy for the feelings of others. So we can readily tick off all of the DSM-IV traits: he has a grandiose sense of self-importance; is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, etc; believes that he is special and unique and can only be understood by other special people; requires excessive admiration; has a sense of unreasonable entitlement; is interpersonally exploitative; lacks empathy; is often envious of others, and believes that others are envious of him.

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[574] Spitzer (2002) p 84.

APPENDIX II: GOD AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

II.1 INTRODUCTION

One other topic that might well be considered when exploring the life and works of Søren Kierkegaard is the perception of God in psychoanalytic thinking, and thereby the relationship between a very twentieth century way of thinking about subjectivity and a somewhat older approach. We can look at the relationship between God and psychoanalysis for one obvious reason. Freud had it that religion is a neurosis. If this be true, then Kierkegaard, among many others, was theorising pointlessly: his words are just the ranting of a neurotic. And while philosophically interesting, and of doubtless literary merit, Kierkegaard's ideas along with all other discourse about religion should, on Freud's view, be bracketed awaiting a cure for the religious neurosis. Apart from that, using Kierkegaard as an examplar becomes pointless if Freud is right. If Kierkegaard is the purveyor of nothing more than neurosis, then our response itself may be little more than neurotic.

My view is that Freud was, at the very least, superficial in his assessment and diagnosis, and in the first section of this appendix I follow through the inverse of Freud's proposition, by considering that psychoanalysis is no more than a revision of religious belief. More to the point, I look closely at Winnicott's idea of the intermediate space, and suggest that here we have a set of concepts and terminology, a private language if you will, that permits a more reasonable and consonant explanation of the primacy of religious belief and experience. I do not believe that Kierkegaard's ruminations need be bracketed at all; rather, Kierkegaard addresses us in this very intermediate space, this third term between the subjective and the objective, this place to which we return, an altogether sacred space.

II.2 THE FREUDIAN VIEW

The question that has to be answered in any discussion of psychoanalysis and religion is: which is the narrative and which the meta-narrative? Freud himself had it, in writing *Totem and Taboo,* [575] that Judeo-Christian beliefs stem from a tribal murder of the father by his sons, followed by his reification out of their guilt, with the Oedipal situation arising directly from this brutal act. The key argument in Freud's text is worth quoting:

> One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United they had the courage to do, and succeeded in doing, what would have been impossible for them individually. Cannibal savages as they were it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers; and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things – of social organisation, of moral restriction, and of religion. [576]

Freud thus was positing a psychoanalytic meta-narrative, and hence that all religions descend from this primal act [577]; Judeo-Christian beliefs were an instance of such a subordinate narrative. There has since come about a very large secondary literature on this Freudian view of the origins and nature of religious belief [578] (though since it is not germane to my argument I will not pursue it here). Of late, however, Freud's foundational text and the supporting ideas have been severely criticised. [579] Nonetheless, the idea

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[575] Freud, SE XIII.

[576] ibid pp141-142.

[577] he did elaborate on this model somewhat in *The Future of an Illusion.* Freud, SE XXI.

[578] For example Erich Fromm offered a particularly insightful but faithful recasting of Freud's key ideas in *The Dogma of Christ* (Fromm (1963)). Most of the earlier psychoanalytic theorists also had their own version of the Freudian model.

[579] Freud's original explanation is, for many, akin to one of Rudyard Kipling's 'Just So' stories, fantastic tales about how the elephant got his trunk, the giraffe his neck. *Totem and Taboo* is, in not dissimilar language, about how humankind got religion. For a general introduction to the problems of the strict Freudian view, see Kung (1979). For a real riposte, turning the tables on Freud, see William Meissner's *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (Meissner (1984). To be more specific, note that even in Ricoeur's sympathetic reading, he concludes that 'Totem and Taboo is

remained important for Freud, for example in his continuing development of the concept of the superego, and it remains a crucial part of strict Freudian theory. But it does now seem a trifle slight a basis for all that is encompassed by the idea of religion. On this reading, Kierkegaard can be dismissed as trite and flawed, as just another author writing up his neurosis for the world to inspect.

Much more insight can be gained, I suggest, by reversing the situation and entertaining the view that psychoanalysis is the narrative to religion's meta-narrative. A summary of that view and its implications can show Kierkegaard to be the opposite of trite; rather he can be seen as a writer very much in tune with key post-Freudian concepts. First, let me show the derivation of first Freudian and then post-Freudian psychoanalysis from the story that is Christianity.

The essential biblical narrative is easy to summarise, although doubtless there are many such summaries. Here is one: God creates the heaven and earth; this creation culminates in humankind in the form of Adam and Eve; Adam and Eve live in paradise; they fall from God's grace; they are cast out of into a world of sin and evil and suffering; Christ's birth is a sign that God has promised redemption; redemption has not occurred, yet [580].

Following Abrams [581], and without entering the labyrinthine complexity of biblical narrative, I would make three points that relate the biblical story to psychoanalysis. First, the Bible story is linear: it tells of events occurring in a single temporal span, with, as it were, a beginning, a middle and an end. Second it is what might be called prospectivist: there was bliss in the past, the present is a fallen time, the future is filled with hope; and it is obviously an eschatological story, looking towards the last things, the vision of the end

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simply a huge vicious circle in which an analyst's fantasy responds to the analysand's' (Ricoeur (1970) p 208).

[580] I do not want to enter into the profundities of this narrative, only to make a point about the ease with which psychoanalytic metaphors can be seen as derivative of more biblical metaphors.

[581] This is taken from Abrams *Natural Supernaturalism,* pp 35 – 65, his sections on *The Design of Biblical History, Christian History and Psychobiography,* and *Alternative Ways to the Millennium* (Abrams (1973)).

of history. Third, it is about suffering and evil. The story describes the problem of evil, but also offers a solution in the form of God's redemption through Christ.

Freudian psychoanalysis is surprisingly similar in outline. It posits a linear path through life, with the neurotic self capable of being cured through analysis. We leave the initial state of postuterine bliss to become, courtesy of the oedipal crises, imperfect. We then live our lives having fallen from psychical innocence. But analysis will reverse the course of any such neurosis, and hold out the possibility of living the perfect and happy life. However, analysis is not a perfect science, and the proffered cure, or redemption, may or may not materialise.

So the origins of psychoanalysis on this view could be Christian. There has been a secular reinterpretation [582] of the original religious story about how the soul has fallen away from God and how we might reunite with him; the original biblical story has been transformed into a wholly secular story about the self – its origins, development and vicissitudes. According to this view it was the Romantic era, in response to the broken promises of the Enlightenment, which translated some key Christian themes into non-theological issues [583]. Essentially, the soul was reworked as the self, and God quietly receded. As Abrams summarises it:

> Romantic writers revived these ancient matters with a difference: they undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being. [584]

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[582] for a general discussion see Kirschner Ch 1 (1996).

[583] again, this is a very large area. I have drawn on Abrams (1973). But this is not my central thesis there. I am arguing only for the relativism of things, the reversibility of narrative and meta-narrative. The details of how the relativism might have come about, though fascinating, will not detain me.

[584] Abrams op cit p 66.

II.3 THE PROTESTANT INFLUENCE

This late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century move has been greatly added to by the arrival of Object Relations Theory and Self Psychology in psychoanalysis over the last fifty or so years. The particular issue that has occupied Anglo-American psychoanalytic practitioners since Freud is that of the self and its formation through relationships. And this has focused on personal life and events prior to Freud's important Oedipal phase. A case can, and indeed has been made [585], that British School object relations theory (and its US counterparts) is a psychoanalysis extolling essentially Protestant and Presbyterian Christian values. Much Anglo-Saxon post-Freudian psychoanalysis is about self-reliance, self-direction, and verbal expression. It is about self-reliance in the sense of knowing the self, the true self, having self-awareness. It is about self-direction in the sense of using this inner certainty to attain independence. It is about being skilled in verbally expressing what one wants, feels and fears.

Self-reliance, I suggest, is a Calvinist influence, for it was Calvin who, building on others, particularly emphasised the attainment of salvation through one's own effort. [586] This devolving of salvation, in whatever sense of that term, to the self, is both a mark of Protestantism, and a mark of Anglo-Saxon post-Freudian psychoanalysis. Independence of spirit, the soul and salvation have migrated from faith to psychoanalysis.

Self-direction on the other hand is about knowing what is in one's heart, and then living one's life according to those truths. Know Thyself [587], but more importantly, live accordingly. Implicit is that one must live according to one's own desires, not those of anybody else. It is again about true and false selves, about knowing what a truth for oneself might be, and not yielding to following a life path that is directed from anywhere else. But this idea of a true self might in turn be seen as a derivation of the concept of inner light, whereby the human sprit may be illuminated by a spark, a lighting from

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[585] see Kirschner (1996) Ch 2 for a discussion.
[586] Perry (1944) pp 93-94.
[587] inscribed on the temple at Delphi.

God, such that one may thereby apprehend what is right, in which way lies salvation [588]. So on this view, the concept of inner light has also become completely secularised. [589] Finding and knowing oneself through introspection and self-awareness, and then living a life by those precepts, is an endemic and dominant world-view in certainly in the US and increasingly the United Kingdom cultures.

(But, demonstrably, this is not a universal set of cultural values. Nor is it even a universal set of values that can be embraced by all varieties of psychoanalysis. It is distinctly Anglo-Saxon, Protestant and recent. It is true for Freudian theory and its developments in the US and the UK, along with some other northern European countries. It is how we do psychoanalysis here, but this is not true for other parts of Europe, or say South America, where a there is much less emphasis on the self. Psychoanalysis in Mediterranean countries, for example, has embraced these concepts to a much smaller extent. In Paris, Lacan retains a considerable influence, and he finds the concept of the self to be one to be done away with, or at least 'dissolved'. [590] Winnicott's distinction between the true and false selves is viewed with some disdain by probably a majority of French psychoanalysts. Latino nations, European and otherwise, still emphasise the role and importance of family and tradition, and one's place, role and independence in the world much more circumscribed by this view.)

Nonetheless, I suggest it is not difficult to make the link between Protestantism and the Freudian world-view. Protestantism, it has been summarised, emphasises religious individuality, as well as the priesthood for all believers, emphasising the individual's personal relationship with God (with respect for individual conscience, thus emphasising the individual's own right to his own spiritual practice), along with responsibility for his own

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[588] The term was much used by Quakers, deriving from "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." See Moore (2000) for a discussion.

[589] see Paul Tillich (1968) 'The rationalists were all philosophers of the inner light.... Rationalism was born out of mysticism in both Greek and modern culture. ...This happened in many places...The one term which grasps their unity is the term 'inner light' pp 317-318.

[590] See Olinor (1988) p 12.

spiritual condition. [591] This version of Protestantism particularly emerged in England and Germany during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and has been successfully exported particularly to the United States. It was perhaps a similar non-conformist mentality and desire to challenge orthodoxy that generated the post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories I am discussing. Interestingly, Fairbairn was raised and stayed with the Scottish Presbyterian Church, while Winnicott was raised as a Methodist. Harry Guntrip, the third member of the core of the British School of Object Relations, was himself raised as a dissenting Congregationalist. [592]

I comment on this simply to make the point that viewing psychoanalysis as any kind of meta-narrative is difficult to support. It is easy to show a cultural influence for the particular brand of psychoanalysis that is now prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon world. Hence, I remain very suspicious that object relations theory, the status of the primary defence mechanisms and the other unconscious processes that I refer to in this thesis, are in any sense objective and ultimate. Rather, they are of our time, and useful and convenient constructs, but I do not seek in this thesis to reify them. So the theories I here espouse, and the implications they carry for our views of what it is to be human, I believe to be culturally constituted, value-laden and involve issues relating to power and status. In particular, the concept of the psychoanalytic development of the self is quite culturally embedded and socially meshed; it is a product of this time and place. I especially reject the psychodynamic tenet, implied in the opening quotation of this chapter, that God and the soul are merely symbolic, whereas the self and the object are essential, ontological and permanent. We have no certain means of knowing which is which. The key I think is in a phrase from David Walsh:

> A historical picture that emerges is not of a world increasingly separating itself from God, but of a world progressively absorbing the divine substances into itself. [593]

On this view, then, issues about the ultimate meaning of life have come to reside in us, in relationships, and in ordinary life. We can talk, as never

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[591] Lukes (1973) p 94.
[592] See Sutherland (1989) and Phillips (1988).
[593] Walsh (1983) p 9.

before, about what happens for people when they wrestle with the most existentially important issues for them. There are of course limits to any language, and still whereof we cannot speak clearly we really ought to remain silent, for in any given context silence has its own meaning. But we have, through psychoanalysis, another set of mechanisms and above all another language for thinking about how we connect and reconnect with what is most profound within our selves.

II.4 THE INTERMEDIATE SPACE

There is a variation on the basic triple-phased psychoanalytic model, outlined above, of an initial bliss, a falling from grace through the legacy of Oedipus, and then a promise of redemption through psychoanalysis. This variation retains the idea of a dialectic, of an endless tension and desire to return to a state of fulfilment, while acknowledging that some kind of rupture has occurred and occurred irrevocably. Such a view perhaps originated in the Romantic period. Again, I do not wish to pursue the minutiae of this view, other than to make the case for the arbitrariness of metaphors in psychoanalysis, while showing that psychoanalysis in fact, rather than dismissing Christian religion, has provided another language and another set of concepts for talking about it.

The Romantic era, though heirs to the Enlightenment, found dissatisfaction in its rationalist view. [594] The great Romantic writers countered the Enlightenment dogma with a need to return to an inner spirituality. [595] The civilised human had become estranged from his natural instinctive self, and nature itself. This is not to suggest there should be an unmediated return to that self of instincts; rather that there is an unavoidable dialectic between the undoubted benefits of rationalism, and the necessity of more primitive and emotional ways of being. The division between the rational self and the natural world, while in some sense lamentable, is also unavoidable. So there

[594] Abrams (1973) provides the basic story.

is a need to undergo the suffering that division, alienation and conflict bring about, so that man may come to know his own identity and hence his relation with the rest of the universe.

It is easy to see how his more refined view has been taken up by the post-Freudians. They would deny the simplicity of Freud's monolithic model, and see the concept of cure as superficial at best. We remain in a persistent dilemma between wishing to return to some neonatal bliss of fusion, and the drive that leads to inevitable separation that is our destiny. No one has explored this tension so well as Donald Winnicott; he coined the terms, as well as effectively inventing the concepts, of the intermediate space and the intermediate object. He, perhaps more than any other, realised the dialectic nature of personal development, which mirrors the biblical story of a falling away from God followed by a desire for reuniting. In Winnicott's language, this is to do with returning whence we came to a blissful and primitive state, where we were united and not yet separated from the source of life and love. To lead a fulfilling life means that we necessarily, from time to time, return to this place.

Winnicott's insight was that, notwithstanding half a millennium of dualism, there is a third term between the 'I', the self, and the 'you', the object. This he called the intermediate space, and it is populated by intermediate objects:

> The third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.

> This area of playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world... In his play area the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality....In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling. [596]

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[595] See Abrams (1973) Chs 6 - 8.
[596] Winnicott (1971) p 2.

For every person born into this life, Winnicott suggests, the initial move is from omnipotent merger with object (all the world is me) to disillusionment and realisation of separate selfhood and limits of what the self can achieve. It begins for Winnicott as the basic linkage: 'there is no such thing as a baby', he famously said. It is the mother, through what Winnicott called maternal immersion, who mirrors the infant to a sufficient degree to enable the baby to believe that they control the world about them: what they want, through the good offices of the good-enough mother, they get. They want the breast, they cry and usually it appears. This enables the infant to develop a sense of a true self. By her attunement to the baby, the mother ensures the baby can enjoy states of omnipotent fantasy.

In play, the child invests external things with internal meanings, and does so in a psychological space resonating with the earliest experiences of intimacy. The baby was able to begin to comprehend the idea of the external, the 'not-me', only because mother, the good-enough mother, gave sufficient early intimate mirroring and support for this initial omnipotent state to be transgressed. This very experience of play resonates with the very earliest memories: 'the playground is a potential space between the mother and the baby '. [597] It is a state about which we never lose our attachment or longing.

But even with a good-enough mother, failure inevitably happens, as the mother looses her absolute preoccupation with baby. 'The mother's eventual task is gradually to disillusion the infant.' [598] As long as this happens at the right time, the true self is assured. If this happens too early, there is no chance for the true self to emerge and consolidate, and all the child ever knows is a false self, responding only to the needs of others. But if all goes well, this inner core, the true self remains. It is for Winnicott a very private self, uncommunicative, isolationist:

> 'Although healthy persons communicate and enjoy communicating, the other fact is equally true, that each individual is an isolate,

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[597] ibid p 47.
[598] *Primitive Emotional Development* in Collected Papers p 145-146 (Winnicott (1992)).

permanently non-communicating, permanently unknown, in fact unfound.' [599]

There is thus a part of the self that does not communicate, that does not want to be met, to be found, and indeed must be left in that state.

So this is the key process: the attribution to internal objects of external reality, and the assimilation of external objects into an internal world. This playground may begin as a theatre of teddy bears and similar friends, but becomes, in due course, the arena for art, for religion, for creativity, for invention. While the intermediate space remains and develops in the healthy child, the first intermediate objects do not. In an oft-quoted passage, Winnicott says of teddy bear:

> Its fate is to be gradually allowed to be decathected, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean that in health, the transitional object does not "go inside" nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between "inner psychic reality" and "the external world as perceived by two persons in common", that is to say over the whole cultural field. [600]

Even though particular transitional objects recede, the driver for them remains forever. There is a constant dialectic between the wholly controllable world of "me", of subject, and the essentially uncontrollable world on "it", of object. We engage with the latter at the expense of the comfort of the former, and we return to our intermediate space, therefore, as a more comfortable place, a place of retreat, a personal and individual space, but above all a space of experience. This is where we make sense of experience in the external world by relating it to our personal and more primitive template.

What it clear, I suggest, when reading Klein, Fairbairn, and Winnicott in particular, is the non-linearity of their concept of personal growth. Fairbairn speaks of the goal of healthy psychical development as being the move from

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[599] *Communicating and Not Communicating leading to a Study of Certain Opposites.* In Maturational Processes p 187 (Winnicott (1965)).
[600] Winnicott (1971) p 12.

dependency to independence, but he shows clearly that this is a goal, rather than something actually achievable. Winnicott is, I feel, considerably more subtle, in his use of the concept of intermediate space. What these three writers in particular are talking about is the dialectic of growth. There is a continuing and permanent tension between letting go, growth, and social development on one hand, and returning, regression and personal isolation on the other. It is as if there is a permanent underside to development, that we sense the positive, enjoy the trajectory, have pride in our achievements, but are less self aware about the need and pressure to return to our safe place, to regress.

> The task of reality acceptance is never completed. No human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience... This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is "lost" in play. [601]

Hence there is a real difference between the essentially Protestant secularised version of the biblical narrative (the idea that self-awareness and self-reliance are now the road to redemption) and Winnicott's view of personal growth. Though desirable goals, self-awareness and reliance cannot be achieved as a single and simple trajectory, he would suggest. There is a continuing dialectic between the benign regression he refers to above, and the very grown up process of re-connecting at a higher level, once independence is achieved.

The self that can be alone in the presence of another, particular another with whom it has intimate relations, can reconnect without becoming overwhelmed by its own responsiveness to the other's qualities or needs. The self that can use objects in this way has attained a capacity to relate to another, not as a pathological false self, but by being able to reconnect to it at a higher and more individuated way. But most importantly, all of this permits the benign regressions to the intermediate state, the intermediate place, a place that engenders creativity, culture, and religion, where the real dialectics, between separateness and togetherness, illusion and reality and boundlessness and limitation can co-exist. For the pathological individual,

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[601] Winnicott (1971) p 13.

this threatens sanity; for the normal person, this is a hugely enriching process.

So there is a place for each of us between the desire for primary fusion and the demands and calls of the real world. In this place we engage in dialectical processes; we admit the external, and accept but modify, assimilate but accommodate, according to our primary need for fusion. And simultaneously we release our most fundamental wishes into the space, and test these against the demands of the real world, again, maintaining yet adapting what is most precious to us. This is truly a sacred place. For the few, it is the locus of inspiration and creativity that results in the novel, the sonata, or the architectural construction. For many, this is where we touch that most vital to our existence; here we meet the idea of the Holy; here, the Ground of our Being. For Kierkegaard, here was the gestation for *Fear and Trembling*, *Works of Love,* and *The Sickness Unto Death*.

Thus I maintain that Freud was being at best superficial in his dismissal of all religion as mere human neurosis. Winnicott's post-Freudian view gives a psychoanalytic basis for finding a truth about human religion, and shows its importance to us all. One could summarise Kierkegaard by saying that, when pushed to its limits, human life encounters God, for Spirit is the means, the basis, of the self's relation to itself. For psychoanalysis to denigrate this insight to a neurosis is for me unacceptable. In returning to our intermediate space, we make contact with that which has been most vital in our lives. And we return to this place oft and with good reason; for it remains a touchstone of the experience of being human. We assert ourselves through relationships with the other in the external world; but we define ourselves by relating our self to our self in this most numinous internal place.

APPENDIX III

THE TROUBLING MATTER OF MENTAL ILLNESS

III.1 INTRODUCTION

This appendix outlines my own views on the concept of psychopathology, the concept and its language. As the reader will have noted, I have struggled with the language of psychopathology, and explicating the theory of narcissism has involved very difficult and sometimes convoluted re-presentations of the ideas of the masters of this field. I would rather view narcissism not as pathological, but as a way of being in the world. But at the margin, narcissism brings about behaviours that I will call unwanted, for the narcissist and those around him. I have to reconcile what seems like a fact with what I propose is a value: narcissism in our time brings sufferers to seek professional help to make their suffering go away; and those around narcissists agree that there is a deep unhappiness associated with this syndrome. This suffering and unhappiness, for those affected, does not feel like an intellectual option – the suffering is very real, and seems objective, not open to fine philosophical discussion. So in what sense we can speak of psychopathology?

I want to look at recent innovations in psychodynamic psychotherapy that emphasise the atrophy of the concept of cure, and the quite dramatic change in the relationship between the analyst and analysand. From this, I draw the conclusion that the term psychopathology is very much a convenient concept when producing theory. Any theory in the psychological sciences is about explaining differences in response in some sense. Any theory about mental behaviour will set up what will be called a normal process, and compare it with something different, and this different process is often called pathological. This value-laden term I suspect is used for historical reasons, and in reality is intellectually lazy: pathology has become another term for difference. But before that, I want to consider the cultural change that has been taking place in how we think of mental illness, particularly in the last

thirty years, driven in part by pure philosophy and the rise of relativism, and in part by the neurosciences, that has questioned to a great extent the division between normal and abnormal in anything to do with the brain. First, then, let me recklessly sprint through thirty years of theory in psychiatry to show the demolition of many of the foundations of mental illness.

But prior to that I have to confess that I cannot sit with the most extreme schools of anti-psychiatry on this matter. Laing's revision of Kraepelin's observations on an insane patient being interrogated at a public lecture [602] doubtless has face validity; when it first appeared it was extremely appealing. The problem is that we are dealing, in extremis, with people who have lost the distinction between the self and the other, between the 'I' and the 'It'. They are living in a world where there is no distinction, no boundary between where they end and where the objective world begins. All the world is controlled by them and they are in turn controlled by the world. In severe psychotic states this is a truly, truly terrifying state in which to be. They are trying to bear unbearable states of mind. The vast majority of us have simply no idea of the terror involved. [603] It might theoretically be possible to contain,

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[602] Laing (1960), pp29-30.

[603] A personal footnote: I met mental illness - madness - at the age of 19, when I worked for three months in a state mental asylum in Lancashire. As part of my undergraduate degree, we were encouraged to spend time working in some aspect of the psychological disciplines. Hence I became a nursing assistant in a four thousand-bed asylum, a dumping ground, truth be told, for the schizophrenics of north Manchester. I lived in the Victorian nurses' home; I was the only guest, since the remainder of the nursing staff lived locally and went home after work. The rooms, completely neglected since the second-world war, made my previous boarding school environment seem quite opulent. I was assigned to a ward of seventy-eight men, all deemed schizophrenic and all institutionalised. My primary task was to attend to their morning *toilette*. And so, just one year out of privileged education, I was obliged to wet-shave the faces these seventy-eight men, itself an indecent intimacy, and then wipe the arses of the same seventy-eight, mainly doubly-incontinent schizophrenics, all before breakfast. It was a unique experience. But among the ward members was a single teenager, a very disturbed and quite dangerous psychotic young man. The neuroleptics of the day, mainly Haloperidol and Chlorpromazine, had no effect on him, and he was regularly assigned to the padded cell, still in use even though tranquillisers made such a place unnecessary for most patients. There he would remain for days at a time, shouting the single sentence: 'I'm not fucking mental. I'm not fucking mental.' As it happened, the air vent for this cell exited just below the window of my room in the nursing quarters. So, when not on the ward, I could lie awake, alone in that creaking building, listening to the terrible anguish of this young, mad, man. He once continued

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to understand this world, and so help the patient make sense of it. But the gap between the perceived reality of the patient and perceived reality of the helper can sometime be so great that any *approachement* is impossible. These people we call mad, not for political, social, moral or control reasons, but because there is no possibility, as we see it, either of their entering our world, or our entering theirs.

III.2 DECONSTRUCTING PSYCHIATRY

I want to suggest most psychiatric disease entities, especially as defined through DSM-IV, are actually value-laden entities. This is true of narcissism: DSM-IV describes a state but considers no underlying process; it is an entity generated through a perhaps flawed democratic process in the medicalised professions; it is one imbued with values about disease, discomfort and disability. As an entity or concept it no doubt serves many purposes – economic, political, social, intellectual - but helps little in the understanding of what makes anyone live the life they live, or write the texts they write.

The only real issue is the distinction between psychiatric facts and psychiatric values. All other issues are footnotes to this debate. However, in this post-modern age, there remains a substantial body of medical professionals who would view many if not most psychiatric diagnoses as based on empirical and objective fact. So within psychiatry we have two groups, each claiming philosophical lineage, and each, it would seem, implacably opposed to the other. [604] Most recently in psychiatry, Agich [605] and Fulford [606] might be singled out as major champions of the pro-value team; while Kendell [607], Wakefield [608] and Boorse [609] can be mentioned as proponents of the pro-fact group.

shouting for thirty-six hours without any break, thus giving me much time to reflect on what being fucking mental might actually entail.
[604] For a general discussion on this point, and as a guide to the myriad of references on this topic, see Fulford et al (2003).
[605] Agich (1994).
[606] Fulford (2002) in Sadler (2002).
[607] Kendell (1986).
[608] Wakefield (1994).

But there are attempts at integration. Fulford in particular has suggested that while values are everywhere in medicine, they are most obvious in psychiatry. He suggests that where values are uniform, they tend to be shared and hence implicit and become reduced to facts. Where they are not shared, where different values can operate in a given context, then they become apparent. [610] But admitting that values, implicit or explicit, are everywhere has implications - the very concept of disease is itself presumably a value concept. It is possible, though perhaps unlikely, that there have been or will be cultures where any kind of disability is not thought of as in any way disabling. [611]

This primary opposition can be developed into several issues. A mental disorder has been defined as an 'involuntary organismic impairment in psychological functioning'. [612] So here is a clear implication of a value judgement about necessary, adequate or optimal psychological functioning: the diagnosis of mental ill health thus calls for a value judgement about poor or inadequate psychological functioning. (The same reasoning is of course applicable to physical illness – there is a value judgement about optimal physical functioning, equally value laden, though since it is a culture wide assumption, it is never mentioned, except for headline cases, for example about withdrawal of life support systems).

At some stage one must ask the age-old question: is physical medicine actually different from psychiatry? There has been great discussion from both philosophers and anti-psychiatrists. Briefly, if the mind is an abstract entity, how can it have physical attributes? If the medical model says that a physical illness is caused ultimately by the improper functioning of a physical organ, does this mean that all mental illness is caused by an improper functioning of the brain? This is the stance of neurology, and the situation is valid for some psychiatric conditions, reflected in DSM-IV, that

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[609] Boorse (175).
[610] Fulford (2000).
[611] Widiger (2002).
[612] Widiger and Trull (1991) p 112.

are based on a malfunction of a part of the brain, just as is the case for physical illness. For much of psychiatry, such situations are a rarity. Common sense tells us that many mental conditions – simple neuroses, many personality disorders - would seem to fall outside this frame. A way of being can be called abnormal in one culture, even in one family, but not in another. Some argue that true physical diseases have a straightforward aetiology and are treated essentially in the same way in every society. Mental illness, by contrast, is a whole person acting in a social role. Mental illness refers to the identity or being of the person, rather than something apart. Neurology can have little to say about this.

But this still begs the greater question about what counts as a disease. Just because I have the symptoms of some disease, am I necessarily ill? That decision also surely is cultural, psychological, personal. This decision to permit or encourage the label 'ill' about one's self, the process by which an individual allows themselves to be labelled as ill, with all the personal and social implications that contains, has been discussed at length. [613]. I suggest that even in the case of a complete aetiologically-based syndrome, the presence of a disease is not the same as being ill. The former may be reasonably objective; the latter is usually cultural and personal.

And of course the roles of culture and history are evident at every point throughout the history of psychiatry. This is true to a lesser extent in physical illness (though consider the debates during the last century about the advisability of otherwise of tonsillectomy or circumcision). But in mental ill-health there is much greater opportunity for cultural bias. So here, reflect on the diagnosis of draepetomania [614] in the nineteenth century, or the diagnosis of homosexuality as a psychiatric disease for much of the twentieth.

Further, there is an undoubted 'pseudoscience' about the way psychiatric disease is currently diagnosed. Let me give the DSM-IV approach to diagnosing schizophrenia as an example. For a diagnosis, there must be

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[613] Scheff (1999).

found any two symptoms out of a list of six, for a period of one month, along with continuous existence of the psychotic symptoms for six months; there must not be incidence of mood disorder or schizoaffective disorders. This is very exact; this kind of diagnostic process is surely very much along the lines of *teche* or the nomothetic: it is about ticking boxes rather than understanding a person. The psychiatric patient is objectivised into a series of discrete, atomic facts, and a diagnosis made on that basis.

So what does hold psychiatric classification together? What psychiatric diagnoses have in common, I suggest, is an intersubjective judgement and agreement between professionals both about what is right and wrong, and how to put it right. And this is exactly the complaint of the anti-psychiatrists of the 1960s. Intersubjective agreement between psychiatrists increases their power and control, and therapies of the day may be nothing more than coercions into more appropriate behaviours.[615] Psychiatry is unique in medicine in that it can oblige citizens to incarceration, and perform processes upon them without their consent.

The logical extension of this view is that psychiatric classification is about classifying social norms rather than disease, and that it remains a means of imposing social control. The archdeacon of such views is Michael Foucault:

> ..a society expresses itself positively in the mental illnesses manifested by its members; and this is so whatever status it gives to these morbid forms: whether it places them at the centre of religious life, as if often the case among primitive peoples; or whether it seeks to expatriate them by placing them outside social life, as does our own culture. [616]

Foucault's point is that social practices, institutions and knowledge serve to construct the social phenomenon of madness. This is not to say that madness does not exist, but rather that there is a host of social determinants:

> at any given instance, the structure proper to individual experience finds a certain number of possible choices (and of excluded

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[614] An unreasonable desire for slaves to escape slavery.
[615] For a concise summary of this view, see Peter Sedgewick's essay in Boyers et al (1972).
[616] Foucault (1987) p 63.

possibilities) in the systems of society; inversely at each of their points of choice the social structures encounter a certain number of possible individuals.' [617]

To put this another way, social factors actually construct individuals, and what it is to be a person is determined by the potential categories that may be used to describe that person. Unlike the classification of things, classification of people makes a difference to how we view ourselves, our sense of self worth and even our sense of personal history. For Foucault, it is all about power, not just power imposed from the top by a monolithic hegemony that enjoys that power, but through a matrix of power: *'Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are matrices of transformations'* [618] that determine who we are not only through being subject to power from others but through creating power over others. So power is a constitutive of madness. On this view, mental illness is not a myth, and psychiatry is not just an exercise in social control. But such a view would assert the irreducible role of the social in madness. And hence there is no psychiatric disorder independent of a cultural and historical setting. Further, empirical science cannot in itself bring about any ultimate amelioration in psychiatric illness. Beyond empirical science is the need for the historical culture of the time and place to understand its own needs and actions.

Against what seems to me to be an unanswerable case for relativism, it would appear that the DSM-IV classification increasingly acts as a monolithic and unimpeachable source of matters to do with psychiatry. It is used as the authority in matters legal, [619] in psychiatric research, in more fundamental research even at the genetic level [620]; in applications for funding for research, in supporting funding for hospitals and clinics, in reimbursing psychologists and psychiatrists through health insurance schemes, in advancing careers of those in the psychiatric guild.[621] Clinically it is effectively the only source for problem identification, case formulation,

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[617] Foucault (1980) p 380.
[618] Foucault (1990) p 99.
[619] see for example Schuman (1994).
[620] for a summary see Gottesman (2002)).
[621] There is much written on these points. As just one sample, see Radden (1994).

and everyday clinical language. [622] It is owned and published by a profit making organisation and publishing house [623], and it was drafted through the efforts of a large number of sub-groups and committees, selectively drawn from the great and the good of the same psychiatric guild [624]. On this basis, I cannot see how it can be viewed as other than a hegemony. I suggest that Longrino's criteria of science as a social activity are most pertinent here [625], and that despite appearances to the contrary, disparate and contradictory views about the philosophy that underpins DSM-IV have little chance of making themselves heard: there is little advocacy for dissent. [626] This is not to say that there is no dissent; there has been an enormous softening in the lay approach to mental illness, in part as the chemistry of moods has become understood, and in part as the great asylums of the western world have closed. Caring for those called mentally ill is now much more a community process, and attitudes have changed accordingly. But if these changes have yet to be reflected in much of orthodox psychiatry, what about the other arm of the understanding of the psychical – psychodynamics?

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[622] see Schwartz and Wiggins (2002).

[623] see Sabshin (1993) for a commentary.

[624] for a discussion see Kirk and Kutchins (1992).

[625] Longino (1990).

[626] The individuals involved in the compilation of DSM were organised into 13 Work Groups, each with a responsibility or a part of the final manual. Participants were informed they were included as scholars independent of any theoretical standpoint or bias. A Methods Conference, attended by all, prescribed the methods to be followed in 'finding, extracting, aggregating and interpreting data in a comprehensive and objective fashion'. (APA (1994) p xviii). Each Work Group then performed literature reviews to identify the most pertinent issues. The APA believed without doubt that it was involved in a purely objective process, and that it is based on extensive, empirical and objective information. (APA (1994) Introduction). It might be pointed out that the membership of the Task Force and Work Groups was made up almost entirely of professionals with an MD qualification from the USA: their representation never fell below 55% on any group, was often 100%, and averaged over 80% (ibid).

More revealing is the story ((Ritchie (1989), p 698)) about the category of Masochistic Personality Disorder, with symptoms of remaining in an exploitative relationship, sacrificing one's own interests for others etc. A ginger group pointed out that for historical, cultural and sometimes religious reasons, a large proportion of the world's women behave in this way. Discussions led to a series of revisions of the concept, ending with a question from the group to the Working Party about: 'whether jogging, playing football, or wearing high heels and girdles constituted masochism'. The answer they received was that 'sports activities were not masochistic, nor was wearing high heels. But wearing a girdle is, unless the woman is over 70'.

III.3 THE END OF THE CONCEPT OF CURE

Freud's 19th century background is very important in any discussion of the history of psychoanalysis. He took reality for granted. The existence of an objective reality, a reality that could be empirically verified, was simply not in doubt for Freud or many of his contemporaries. We can debate the exact meaning of positivism, but for Freud it involved a belief in an external world existing independently of human perception, and one which might eventually be completely understood by objective observers using the scientific methods of the day. [627]

So Freud's theories began with the seed of their own destruction. The memory of the patient was the receptacle within which all psychoanalytic work began and ended, but even during his lifetime he began to doubt the absolute verisimilitude of some of his patients. He devised increasingly complex theories and theoretical structures to enable access to the very deepest memories. One key question remained: What is the reality from which a memory is based? How veridical can this be? Slowly Freud accepted that memory can be modified, and serially modified. His term *Nachträglichkeit* was invoked to refer to the re-transcription that can occur to memories. Clearly they were not as absolute as was initially thought.

There has been endless discussion about the importance of Freud's penchant for collecting antique statues, and his whole fascination with the process of archaeology, which mercifully will not need to be rehearsed here. [628] But archaeology was a powerful model for Freud. As he says in his discussion of *The Wolf Man*:

> the psychoanalyst, like the archaeologist in his excavations, must uncover layer after layer of the patient's psyche before coming to the deepest, most valuable treasures. [629]

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[627] See Wolman (1984) for a comprehensive discussion of Freud's views on positivism.
[628] see, just for starters, Gay (1988), Spitz (1989), Bergmann (1989), Gamwell (1989) for discussions on Freud's own character and the influences on his life and work.
[630] Gardiner (1971) p 139.

And speaking then of the curative process of psychoanalysis, Freud was in no doubt:

> The ideal termination of analysis has been reached when the analyst has had such a far-reaching influence on the patient that no further change could be expected to take place in him if his analysis were continued. It is as though it were possible by means of analysis to attain a level of absolute psychical normality - a level, moreover, which we could feel confident would be able to remain stable, as though, perhaps, we had succeeded in resolving every one of the patient's repressions and filling in all the gaps in his memory. [630]

The clear assumption is that the analyst knows best, that the analyst's understanding is the complete antidote to the chaotic, infantile, primary process that the patient brings to the analysis. The analyst alone has contact with objectivity and reality. The analyst can see through the patient, layer by layer, to the truth.

Compare this with a typically modern view:

> I view the analytic process as one in which the analysand is created through an intersubjective process. ….Analysis is not simply a process of uncovering the hidden; it is more importantly process of creating an analytic subject who had not previously existed. [631]

The fundamental shift that these two views represent is away from seeing, as Freud did, humanity as a drive-regulated organism, to a view of humanity as about generating meaning.

A number of writers have been involved in this rewriting the psychology of psychoanalysis by reconsidering, sometimes quite fundamentally, the idea of objective psychic reality and the extent to which it is recoverable at all. Four names are usually associated with this process: Donald Spence [632], Roy Schafer [633], Robert Stolorow [634] and Irwin Hoffman [635].

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[630] Freud SE XXI pp 216-253.
[631] Ogden (1992) p 619.
[632] The ground-breaking text from Spence was *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth.* Spence (1982). Also of interest in *The Freudian Metaphor* (Spence (1987)).
[633] Schafer's ideas are somewhat more distributed. See *The Analytic Attitude* (Schafer (1983)) and *Retelling a Life* (Schafer (1992)).
[634] Robert Stolorow , to be fair, is usually the lead author in a series of important papers and texts. The key work is *Psychoanalytic Treatment: An Intersubjective Approach.* (Stolorow et al (1987)). Similarly important is Stolorow and Atwood (1992).

These writers are heirs to the twentieth century intellectual climate just as much as Freud was to the nineteenth. Oft quoted as one of the bases for this change in emphasis is Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. [636] The reading of this esoteric principle, that the act of observing changes what is observed, can be seen to have acted as a powerful stimulus towards relativism in all its forms. That principle, together with the equally oft quoted ideas of Kuhn, propelled a genuine shift in thinking about the nature of the psychology of psychoanalysis, as summarised in the simple question: *'what does the patient need?'* [637] Mitchell's implication in the question is to doubt the linear archaeological processes beloved by Freud. Freud believed that the patient's need was about uncovering truth, about replacing the primary process with the secondary process – that was why they came to see him.

Donald Spence's contribution to the debate can be summarised in his concern with language. If psychoanalysis concerns itself with that which is capable of being said, then echoing Lacan, Spence postulates that actual experience can be lost when represented in speech. Language, he says, 'is too rich and too poor to represent experience'. [638] and 'to put a picture into words is to risk never seeing it again'. [639] and most troubling: 'the patient must continually translate from the private language of experience into the common language of speech'. [640] So for Spence, communication in psychoanalysis equals the destruction and remodelling of exactly the historical truth that psychoanalysis claims to seek. This is a potentially catastrophic conclusion for the entire process of psychoanalysis. From this standpoint, objective reality seems forever gone; alone, this insight requites psychoanalysis to drop any claim to scientific pretence.

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[635] Hoffman has conveniently reprinted most of his important papers, essentially unchanged, in a recent text *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process: A Dialetical-Constructivist View* (Hoffman (1998)).
[636] for a discussion see Weinberg (1994).
[637] posed most eloquently by Mitchell (1993) Ch 1.
[638] Spence (1982) p 49.
[639] ibid p 62.
[640] ibid p 82.

Roy Schaffer embraced the hermeneutic mode, and spoke extensively of narrative in psychoanalysis. One quotation will summarise his point of view:

> We have only versions of the true and the real. Narratively unmediated, definitive access to truth and reality cannot be demonstrated. In this respect, therefore, there can be no absolute foundation on which any observer or thinker stands; each must choose his or her narrative or version.[641]

So no information acquired within a given meaning system in which it is valid can be moved or transferred to a situation outside that system. Any such movement will result in a loss of validity. These, clearly, are demanding statements for the practice of psychoanalysis.

There is no doubt that Hoffman has tried hardest to liberate psychoanalysis from any pretence of scientific mantle. Like the others, Hoffman emphasises the implications of abandoning the tenet that psychoanalytic meaning has a verifiable empirical basis. His own constructivist model owes much to the insights of the Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. As Wachtel puts it in his Piagetian reworking of psychoanalytic procesess:

> Neither as children or as adults do we respond directly to stimuli *per se.* We are always constructing reality every bit as much as we are perceiving it. [642]

This Hoffman takes very seriously, writing that communication is a subset of participation, that 'Not only is the patient's life story a matter of historical reconstruction, it is also a new piece of new history being made or constructed right now it the immediate interaction.' [643] So all experience is constructed as meaning, and as communication; knowledge is replaced effectively by impressions, and these are to be understood as constructions.

So how can I summarise the story so far? These writers, (and there are many others that have added similar cries of dissent [644]) have fathered the growing recognition that the problem of *not knowing* is at the core of modern psychoanalytic theory. They have all emphasised not knowing on the part of

[641] Schaffer (1992) p xv.
[642] Wachtel (1980) p 62.
[643] Hoffman, ibid p 137.
[644] for a brief summary, see the last three chapters in Mitchell and Black (1995).

the client, the patient, the analysand. Desperate questions arise: if there is no objective reality on which to ground the psychoanalytic process, what, then, is it grounded in? How do we distinguish between the reality-based wishes of the Ego with the phantasy based needs of the Id? Actually, on what possible basis do we discriminate between normal psychological functioning and psychopathology? Only one kind of psychoanalytic knowledge still remains for these writers: the knowledge of a particular person at a particular time in interaction with another person.

This shift, away from the view that the analyst knows the truth about the patient to a view that the analyst may know one or more of but many truths about the patient, has given rise to a considerable crisis of confidence in the profession and the discipline. Mitchell lists three responses that the community has adopted: a retreat to empiricism, an embracing of phenomenology, and a dialogue with hermeneutics. [645]

The problem with the first solution, appealing to empiricism, is twofold. First, psychoanalysis, despite Freud's pleas and wishes, has never been considered an empirical science in the way that he wished. But worse, empirical science itself has also suffered the inflow of relativism, and the certainty that science once provided has been eroded by the writings of, for example, Khun.

And the embracing of phenomenology by the likes of Schwaber [646] is underpinned by assumptions that many will find difficult. It assumes there is a unity of mind and experience that the patients can access. It assumes that accessing this unified experience is easy and straightforward. But crucially, it assumes that the analyst can also know what this direct truth is, without contamination. Few would nowadays agree with this condition. [647]

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[645] for a discussion see Mitchell (1993) Ch 2.
[646] Schwaber (1990).
[647] For an additional discussion, see Dennett (1991), especially Ch 4.

In contrast to this classical view with its idea of a stream of veridical memories, to which either the analyst has access (the traditional view) or the patient certainly has access (the phenomenological view), is the hermeneutic view, which would deny both of these, suggesting that at best the patient can generate a construction of what might have happened, with the analyst confined to creating a construction of a construction.

There remains for some, however, a remnant from classical theory, the implicit assumption that the neonate at least has a true and pure core, one that is affected and distorted by early life. This pure core is arguably what Freud had in mind when he spoke of the Id [648]. It should be recalled that equally influential upon Freud as the siren call of science were the lasting effects of nineteenth century romanticism, with its call for a return to nature. Freud himself thought of the Id as the wellspring of all that is naturally human; it was the Id that represented 'the true purpose of the organisms' life. …the satisfaction of innate needs.' It was with this kind of reasoning that psychoanalysis became to be called a depth psychology, one that sought to discover and unearth these deepest, most central and most primitive of aspects of each human being. There has always been a feeling that if only we can return to these deep primitive modes of being, we will return to the true, core self. This remains a compelling driver for many seeking psychoanalysis. But post-modern psychoanalytic theory cannot support such a view. The idea that there are more or less authentic views of the self, more or less authentic actions, these imply a yardstick, an objective measure against which we contrast our actions. Alas, it seems difficult to know what this yardstick might be.

In summary, I want to suggest that most of the changes in the century since *The Interpretation of Dreams* reflect changes in the intellectual and social milieu. The change has been away from drives to relationships, from Id to Ego, from solitary analysis with the neutral other to a highly interactive process with two participants as equals; from matters oedipal to matters pre-oedipal, critically from the idea of historical absolutism to constructed

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[648] Freud SE XXIII 139-207.

relativism; and from a positivist view of psychoanalysis as finding causes to a hermeneutic view about meaning. In Stephen Mitchell's succinct phrase:

> The state of psychoanalytic knowledge is not anchored in enduring truths or proof, but rather in its use value in making sense of a life, deepening relationships with others, and expanding and enriching the texture of experience. [649]

III.4 DISCUSSION

So, what then is psychopathology, and what is narcissism, and how should we categorise Søren Kierkegaard?

Psychopathology I suggest is essentially about psychological and psychical difference, about thinking or feeling, behaving or acting in a way that is not usual in a place and at a time. It is often about behaving in a way that is not wanted, either. [650] When the way a life is being lived is not wanted, we speak in ordinary language of suffering that life. And suffering is what is felt both by the subject and those around him. What recent psychiatry and psychotherapy are attempting to do is relax the limits of the normal, of entry into the psychopathological, while respecting the subjective feeling of suffering and trying to do something about it. In extremis, the most confused or violent psychotic episode remains baffling, and apart from depressing whatever part of the brain might be involved in the syndrome, much of psychiatry sits quite motionless in response. The psychiatric nosology outlined in DSM-IV is simply a product of our time; the primary defence mechanisms also discussed above I suggest should be thought of as pathologically neutral, neither endorsing nor denying psychopathology.

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[649] Mitchell (1993) p 65.

[650] The terminology of Theodore Sarbin I think is particularly apposite. [650] He has traced one particular aspect of the medicalisation of mental abnormality. Teresa of Avila (1515-81), in order to save her nuns from the Inquisition, suggested that their hallucinations were actually *como enfermas – as if* they were symptoms of illness rather than resulting from commerce with the devil. This metaphor 'as if' gradually turned to myth and became accepted. But there was one proviso. The diagnosis of physical illness depended upon observable symptoms and complaints by the patient, two conjunctive criteria. In order to add mental illness, the criteria had to become disjunctive: either complaints by the patient, or complaints by others, of unwanted

Defence mechanisms are metaphors, simply a language, a means of talking about how people live their lives, and make sense of their lives in this world.

Narcissism on this basis is a way of being that seemingly produces more unhappiness for those around the narcissist than for the narcissist themselves. Living with the arrogant, boastful, bombastic results of early psychological damage can be exceptionally difficult. Most narcissists only seek professional help when their internal emptiness overwhelms them. It is a particularly difficult syndrome to comprehend and sympathise with exactly because others are used quite ruthlessly in the service of the self. Freud's original observation remains the most telling: narcissists do not invest themselves - cathect - into others, and this lack of the ability to relate makes for a particularly unhappy view of the world. It remains convenient to use the concept of narcissism because the supporting theory, the metaphors we use, permit the beginning of an understanding for the narcissist about where his way of being has come from and how it has evolved. Narcissism is, as we order things in the world, a useful syndrome, a convenient shorthand, just a construct. Traditional psychiatry may view it as an end point, psychotherapy as a starting point. But the ideas that underpin the concept have value if only in helping make sense of some of the unhappiness of the life thus lived.

As for Kierkegaard, my view is that, sometimes for himself, and sometimes for those around him, he exhibited unwanted conduct. The teasing of fellows at school, the treatment of Regine, his attitude over *The Corsair,* leaving aside the difficult discussion about his later life and writings, all these are instances of conduct that resulted in some kind of suffering at least for Kierkegaard himself. His diaries are full of his misery, and he uses exactly the language of misery to describe it. I cannot go along with any of the diagnoses about bipolar disorder, or simple depression, or any form of epilepsy. I suspect that discussion about matters sexual, while perhaps entertaining, will lead us not very far. Rather, this is how Kierkegaard lived his life. This is how he made sense of his life. So I am not willing to bracket

conduct. For a summary see Sarbin (1990). For a narrower focused view, see his

Kierkegaard's writing as the work of a damaged and unhealthy individual. This is not to deny motivation or the intrigue of discussing texts with reference to some historical origin and difference: it is still valid to ask why Kierkegaard wrote the way he did. But it is not valid to deny either the authenticity or the relevance to our time of what he said because he can be given a psychopathological label.

Schizophrenia: Medical diagnosis or moral verdict? (Sarbin (1980)).