Review Article

Out on Highway 61: Existentialism in America
t.h. adamowski

George Cotkin. *Existential America*
Johns Hopkins University Press 2003. 368. $63.50

Oh God said to Abraham, 'Kill me a son.'

Abe says, 'Man, you must be puttin' me on.'

God say, 'No.' Abe say, 'What?'

God say, 'You can do what you want Abe, but

The next time you see me comin' you better run.'

Well Abe says, 'Where do you want this killin' done?'

God says, 'Out on Highway 61.'

Bob Dylan

A common error of intellectual generations is to think the world new because they are new in the world. This is especially likely to occur when a period that had been marked by several decades of harmony across generations - 'Comrades, let us pursue our common research projects!' - comes to its inevitable and Oedipal end. This is the time when T.S. Eliot's priest, grown old and feeble in the Sacred Wood, must be killed by a young challenger in order that this more vigorous priest may celebrate the Mysteries for new generational cohorts. And yet, one day, he will also enter the autumn of his body, be slain, and, like his predecessors, be forgotten. New generations will thrive for a time under a new priest and again find a new world all before them. *Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper. Et in saecula saeculorum.*

In our day, for example, we have been living through a period of consensuality among generational cohorts in the humanities that began after old priests in different disciplines

received their quietus in the early 1970s. 'No foundations! No absolutes!' contemporary placards shout, celebrating our postmodern alertness to 'contingency' or the 'construction' of all manner of phenomena. However, our favourite concepts may not quite be *our* gifts to the world. Contingency, non-existent foundations, and universal 'constructibility' have, in fact, preceded us, and not so very long ago. Fortunately, though, true scholarship is rarely caught up in the generational dramas occurring in sacred woods; and it is the scholar's job, when things have settled down, to jog our memories, as does George Cotkin in his account of existentialism in America, and to remind us of forgotten priests and the ways in which their preferred concerns may inform our own.

Unsatisfied, someone of post-1970 vintage may concede 'contingency,' for example, but still ask about 'absent presences' (or the reverse), those now-you-see-it-now-you-don't phenomena of the deconstructive cohort: were *they* not 'our gift to the world'? Only if one's concern is with texts rather than with a conception of consciousness or selfhood - Sartre's, for example, or Heidegger's - that flourished in the middle decades of the last century. An 'identity politics' critic may ask about her favourite bogeyman, 'essentialism.' Not so new, essentialism: dispatched long ago by existentialism. But the *body*, a busy supervisor of PhD dissertations asks, when so many students are writing about 'embodiment,' surely we have a new research area. Try again, paying attention to existentialism's kinship with the phenomenology of the body. Not even, feminists wonder, the terrible and constitutive 'gaze of the Other'? Especially not that![(1)]

What *is* new in the current employment of these classic concerns of existentialism is their subordination to the preference of contemporary academic criticism for texts and 'discourses' over consciousness and selfhood. Perhaps there is also a postmodern cheerfulness attaching to the new lives of those old terms, for existentialism was tremendously gloomy: Abraham and Isaac, and all that. Knowing that Abraham's anguish was textual, semiotic technologists now wish primarily to see how its 'meaning' was 'produced.'

For existentialism, 'texts' mattered less than individual persons, and thus everything turned on freedom, choice (usually in situations of extremity), death, and, of course, dread, that shadow cast by freedom. God was of little (direct) help, even when still around, and for many of the people Cotkin discusses he wasn't around. Nor could one rely for assistance on hand-me-down codes, traditions, laws, or values. Indeed, the very rise to prominence of 'values' - you have yours, I have mine, they have theirs - was itself a sign of the diminishment of any shared notion of the Good. The classic (and usually male) 'existential hero' of that era forged his *own* codes, and it was a test of his personal integrity to abide by them in full knowledge of their ultimate … absurdity. For the most part, one relied on oneself and one's own sense of integrity (neither was enough for traditionalists of that era); and thus it is no accident that solitary selves - like the figures in the paintings of Edward Hopper (e.g., *Room in New York*) or in the photographs of Robert Frank (*Bar - Las Vegas, Nevada*) - became a pre-

eminent artistic, theological, or even political concern of mid-century American culture.[(2)]

But why America? What has America to do with existentialism? Was that not a phenomenon of *Europäische Hochkultur*, born in Danish gloom, nourished in Heideggerian mountain eyries, and made famous around the world thanks (naturally) to a Parisian intervention of the 1940s? Cotkin's intention is to make clear what America 'had to do' with this European creation, and one might almost say of his answer that America was where existentialism came into its own.

As Cotkin points out, the two most famous existentialist thinkers of the past century, Heidegger and Sartre, had little use for America. Heidegger saw it as the 'metaphysical' equivalent of the Bolshevik state to the east: 'Europe lies in the pincers between Russia and America, which are metaphysically the same, namely in regard to their world-character and their relation to the spirit' (*Introduction to Metaphysics*, 47-48). The more generous Sartre loved the jazz, cities, and novels of America but thought the country lacked any sense of evil, something Europeans were more likely to understand. Perhaps this was because European cities

lacked the ubiquitous urban grid plan of the United States, a layout that, as Sartre once noted, permitted one to pull up stakes and move easily on, leaving behind all that was disturbing in the old place. This was very unlike the experience of the European city: '[Our streets] are oblique and twisting, full of bends and secrets. The American street is a straight line that gives itself away immediately. It contains no mystery' (*Literary and Philosophical Essays*, 115). Ahh, but New York, now *there* is a city for existentialists: 'In the numerical anonymity of the streets and avenues, I am simply anybody, anywhere. No matter where I may be my position is marked out in longitude and latitude. But no valid reason justifies my presence in this place rather than in any other, since this one is so like another. You never lose your way, and you are always lost' (*Literary and Philosophical Essays*, 121). 'Abandoned,' as Heidegger might have put it, had he ever seen New York.

Cotkin has written a superb book on existentialism and America, but it is important not to give the impression that he merely wants to outline the influence *of* existentialism *on* America. For Cotkin the movement's appeal to the American imagination was not, finally, comparable to, say, the latest appeal of French cuisine or dress styles on an America perennially intimidated by European sophistication. Cotkin realizes that although a European pedigree never hurts when an idea is trying to get somewhere in the United States, existentialism was a natural fit in a country that gave us Jonathan Edwards, Anne Hutchinson, Emerson, Dickinson, Hawthorne, Melville, Stephen Crane, and the 'will to believe' of William James. Existentialism and the United States were made for each other, and when the European movement flowered, after the Second World War, American painters, novelists, scholars, literary critics, theologians, political thinkers, and 'activists' were quick to sign on.

Cotkin's roster of American existentialists is impressively long. In addition to those early American proto-existentialists I have just mentioned, they include Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Marc Rothko, Barnett Newman, Norman Mailer, Woody Allen, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Lippmann, many of the 'New York intellectuals' associated with *Partisan Review*, the New Left's Tom Hayden and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's Robert Moses (the Camusian influence), Betty Friedan (Simone de Beauvoir), scholars like Walter Lowrie and Walter Kaufmann. And those visual artists, Frank and Hopper.

But wait! There are yet more signs of American existentialism: Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, for example, or the blues, or Hollywood's *film noir* (e.g., *D.O.A.*, the ultimate 'boundary situation' film), and such 1960s and 1970s depictions of 'existential heroes' as *Cool Hand Luke* and *The Graduate*. Cotkin might have included *Hombre* or *Lonely Are the Brave*, or certain of those film stars and celebrities Mailer once associated with the existentialist self: 'Cagney, Bogart, Brando, Sinatra' (*The Presidential Papers*, 39). Indeed, so many American existentialists are brought forward by Cotkin that one sometimes wonders if any important intellectual figure, coast to coast, was *not* concerned with freedom, choice, dread, and death.

What was it in this European intellectual movement of the mid-century, now nearly forgotten (in the academy), that touched a nerve in the American imagination? An intellectual historian, Cotkin writes from outside that grim recognition ceremony that has restricted much of academic criticism to those trained to bow to each other (ceremoniously) across the baroque syntax, the unforgiving deployment of bristling concepts, and the allusions to Famous Names that have for decades served to identify professor-criticism. This is a way of saying that his book is readable. Nor are there many areas of twentieth-century American intellectual and artistic life into which it is unwilling to venture - which is to say that it is ambitious. Nevertheless, Cotkin does not try to account for what it may have been in American historical life that led to the nineteenth-century anticipations of existentialism or to the full-blown phenomenon of the middle decades of the last century.

He does, however, generously invite fellow scholars to continue the concern he has begun with this book, and a first effort might be to offer one or two speculations about what may have made the American experience

responsive to the legacy of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Beauvoir.

As an invented country, built on certain optimistic and Enlightened conceptions of 'natural' right coexisting with a legacy of sombre Calvinism (Milton as the major influence on American literature), one might suggest that Americans are likely to be particularly alert to such key existentialist notions as contingency and those 'boundary situations' (e.g. marked by death, conflict, chance, suffering, and guilt) that not only bear on a distant and unknowable (or just plain dead) God who leaves us to make our way in the world but that also account for so much of the existentialist concern with 'extreme states.' It is an American paradox that the country of 'inalienable,' natural, and *knowable*-by-reason rights is also dialectically hypersensitive to the fragility of those rights and their human - all *too* human - eighteenth-century sources.[(3)]

Such a dialectic is at work even today in that quest pursued by various unacknowledged heirs to existentialism to reveal how something we have always taken for granted, as virtually a natural 'fact' - femininity, motherhood, masculinity, the American West, Romanticism, or even existentialism - was, once upon a time, 'constructed.' Heirs to Enlightenment liberalism, Americans have no choice but to subject even their most precious secular-scriptural texts to challenge. 'Free speech' - does it really exist? The Constitution and Declaration - the inspired word of Enlightened reason or ideological cover-stories for a master-class comprising a Northeastern bourgeoisie and a Southern Planter aristocracy? A monstrous blood-letting would occur in the 1860s owing, in considerable part, to equivocations, ambiguities, and outright contradictions in the sacred texts of American life.

Every year, thousands of American schoolchildren travel to Washington to gaze solemnly, under the eyes of their teachers, at those old and 'inspired' documents in the National Archives, mute testimony to the 'essence' of the American national identity. Annually, thousands of immigrants undergo acts of 'incarnation,' passing from some other identity to that jealous American identity. Not for nothing do Americans heatedly debate 'multiculturalism,' fearful, as many of them are, that this latest -ism might suggest that the 'essential' American identity might be forced to coexist (just another historical construction) with some other identity: Asian, Mexican, European.

As if such cohabitation had not always been self-evident in any large American city. However, that is precisely the point of the American paradox, that 'absurdity' which demanded an act of faith ('Although I grew up speaking Italian/Polish/Vietnamese/Hungarian/Spanish, etc, yet I know I am *now* an "American"'). It is as if there were at the heart of the country a perpetual crisis of identity, entirely justifying a concern with 'un-American' Activities. Today I 'know' I am American, but tomorrow, who knows? I may slip.

Contingency, absurdity, one's feeling of being *de trop*: all are ways of calling attention to the drama of choices, unsupported by 'foundations.' Existentialism is as American as baseball, apple pie, and all those lawyers - noted by so many commentators on the American scene - whose job it is to keep at bay all the national contingencies.[(4)]

When, early in the twentieth century, word made its way across the ocean of the importance of Søren Kierkegaard, Walter Lowrie, an Episcopalian clergyman-scholar, took it upon himself to bring the Danish philosopher to the attention of the American nation.[(5)] It is one of the virtues of this book that Cotkin spends so much time on the scholarly apparatus - translations, editions, anthologies - by which existentialism's appeal was established. It is all very well to note the existentialist dimension of the work of Mailer, Bellow, Rothko, et al. However, unlike Lowrie (Cotkin has spent much time with his papers), very few of these artists were learning Danish in order to read him. They would rely on Lowrie's translations and editions and, later, on Hazel Barnes's translation of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1957), or the many anthologies that provided not only essential texts from twentieth-century European masters but also texts from the literary tradition (Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Goethe, et al), texts that suddenly looked different when read over the shoulders of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre. Shakespeare, our contemporary.

Cotkin never forgets the religious sources of existentialism, and thus Lowrie exists in his book as more than translator and editor. He had grown weary of the vapid 'social gospel' of 1920s and 1930s America, with its assumption that one might be virtuous and close to God merely because one held progressive social views. What does God care whether one is a progressive? Kierkegaard's supreme indifference towards social

moralizing offered escape from the anodyne social gospel, and Lowrie took up his own scholarly place in a tradition that would come to include, in Europe, Karl Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans* (1968), as well as, in America, Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (1945) and *The Irony of American History* (1952).

Because of his alertness to the ambiguities of moral choice, the impossibility for finite creatures of knowing *for sure* that the policies they might adopt, or support, would be able to avoid evil, Niebuhr would become perhaps the most influential American social thinker of the late 1940s, at the dawn of the Cold War. For the Christian Niebuhr, foreign policy could not, of course, permit the end to justify the means. However, he was Kierkegaardian enough to know that action in the world entailed risk and moral uncertainty arising not so much from 'irrationality' as from conflicts among good reasons (we have been taught to call these 'aporias'). This was not so unlike the conflict Kierkegaard found in his meditation on Abraham's response to God's request that he sacrifice Isaac, and it entailed an appreciation of that 'irony of American history' whereby the self-styled 'exceptional' country found itself, nevertheless, staggering through the same old historical labyrinths, like so many nations before it.

Cotkin's concern with the social dimension of American existentialism continues well beyond the Cold War period in which Niebuhr flourished and into the New Left era, where figures like Sartre and Camus enter the American political debates of the 1960s, with their overriding concerns with race and the Viet Nam War. The principal political figure mentioned by Cotkin, in this connection, is Senator Robert Kennedy, whose own boundary situation, in November 1963, made possible his transition from McCarthyite thug to haunted quoter of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Camus. However, Kennedy's discovery of Camus has been amply noted over the years; and Cotkin's contribution is to recall the importance of Camus to both Tom Hayden (famous New Left 'activist' and author of 'The Port Huron Statement') and Robert Moses of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. It is impossible to overestimate the importance for either man of the cautions against violence for which Camus was famous. These, in turn, must recall also the Sartrean stress on counter-violence in resistance to French colonialist policy.

Eventually, that French dialectic would intrude into the American New Left itself, pitting factions against each other, with the Weathermen embarking on what might be called the Sartrean way.[(6)] For Hayden, though, the conflict was deeply internalized, and he was tempted by both responses, the non-violent and the violent, with, at first, the Camusian path the more appealing:

Hayden also accepted ... Camus's emphasis on rebellion, on the ethical demands upon the individual to act, on the momentous decision to 'choose justice in order to remain faithful to the world,' however absurd that world might appear. As his journey led him from involvement in the civil rights movement to actions with sds, voter registration drives in Mississippi, demonstrations at Columbia University, and confrontation in the streets of Chicago in 1968, Hayden gauged retrospectively the logic of his rebellion in the language and terms that Camus had bequeathed to him. Sometimes he lived up to Camus's strictures; other times he fell short. At all times he regarded Camus as a role model and a moral exemplar. Hayden appeared to be most Camusian when he was the rebel with a cause, tinged with a sense of doubt and tragedy. Doubt and a chastened sense of possibility are the bookends of Hayden's important career as an American radical. (Cotkin, 241)

By 1968, however, things had darkened, and some would accuse Hayden of indulging in a 'reckless existentialism,' by which they appear to mean a tendency to choose action for action's sake - almost as a sign that the self was thereby maintaining its integrity - even if this meant, in Hayden's words, that protestors of the Viet Nam War 'should come to Chicago prepared to shed their blood' (Cotkin, 247) as the Democratic party held its convention.

For this, too, was a legacy of European existentialism, as we can recall from the shout of Matthieu, in Sartre's *Iron in the Soul*, as he begins firing his rifle at the approaching Germans: 'He fired, and the tables of the Law crashed about him. ... He was firing on his fellow men, on Virtue, on the whole world. Liberty is terror. ... He fired. He was cleansed. He was all-powerful. He was free' (225). Or, he was - or, at least, he *felt* - 'authentic.' When it came to this cardinal existentialist virtue, capable of supporting any number of moral (and not so moral) positions, existentialism's affinities with native American liberalism often became problematical. One need go no further than Philip Roth's recent *American Pastoral* (1997) for an account of the 'problematics of authenticity,' of the self that seeks to establish its own integrity by engaging in acts of revolutionary terrorism, acts that 'cleanse' the soul of its bourgeois (and liberal) traces and permit it to coincide with itself in an illuminating moment of authenticity.[(7)]

If Niebuhr represents a kind of liberal American existentialist, and Hayden the existentialist as Radical, Cotkin is, nevertheless, aware of existentialism's claims to political 'diversity.' This must inevitably recall the name of Heidegger, whose place in existentialism has been a long-standing object of discussion.[(8)] His celebrated 'turn' in the 1930s, towards language, seems for some to have taken him beyond existentialism. It is impossible to take up this question here, and it will have to do to say that for me, at least, the Heidegger of *Being and Time* (1962) is very much an existentialist, and we know that shortly after the appearance of that great work Heidegger became a member of the Nazi party.

There is an old joke (sometimes attributed to Tom Wolfe) about fascism in America. A European intellectual intones darkly to an American that 'fascism is descending on America.' The American responds, 'Yes, it's always descending on America but always *landing* in Europe.' In America, existentialist *fascism* was less a danger than that 'reckless existentialism' of the authenticity-generating Deed. Cotkin is right, though, to extend his survey of the existentialist spirit in America to the political Right and to Whittaker Chambers in particular.

After a 1930s career as a spy for Soviet Military Intelligence, Chambers came to prominence in the 1940s as the accuser of Alger Hiss, darling of American progressives and a member of Chambers's 1930s ring. Chambers would turn from Stalinism later in that decade, breaking with the Party in a melodramatic fashion memorably represented by Lionel Trilling in *The Middle of the Journey* (1947). Following the conviction of Hiss for perjury, Chambers published *Witness* (1952), one of the most striking autobiographies in American history, where he recounted his turn to and then away from Communism and towards reintegration with Christianity. However, as Cotkin notes, *Witness* is throughout marked by Kierkegaardian inflections, suggestive of the ambiguities, mixed motives, conflicting reasons, and tortured leaps of faith that marked the lives of many intellectuals during the Cold War period:

Here the either/or choice between faith in communism versus faith in God is explicit, as is the necessity to choose to act rather than to choose to be passive. Chambers used Kierkegaard to frame his own theological stance. On one level, *Witness* recounts Chambers's life in the Communist Party and his decision to leave the party and work as an informer against party members. ... On another level, *Witness* is a religious parable, with Chambers presenting himself as a despised Knight of Faith, sustained only by his anxious faith. He becomes 'an involuntary witness to God's grace and to the fortifying power of faith.' (75)

Chambers would know on his pulses much of the Kierkegaardian dialectic of choice, paradox, resignation, faith, and the 'sickness unto death' that is despair; for it was his destiny to wrestle with the demands posed by the twentieth century's major alternatives for a man who needed an absolute in his life: Christianity or Communism. His 'existential' burden would be *not* to know, definitively, short of making a choice, taking an action, in which direction finally to leap. Should he refuse to betray his former comrades, or align

himself with the most urgent political demand of the time, resistance to Soviet totalitarianism? When set against the turmoil of his life during the 1930s and 1940s, it matters scarcely at all that National Security Agency decryptions of Soviet cables and evidence from archives of the former Soviet Union would vindicate him, posthumously, by bearing out his accusations against Hiss:[9]

In many ways Chambers deeply identified himself with Kierkegaard's presentation of Abraham, the Knight of Faith, in *Fear and Trembling*. After all, Abraham too makes the ultimate sacrifice in the name of absolute values. The typical tragic hero, according to Kierkegaard, acts in accord with universal values. Even in failure, that individual is understood and respected because he or she has acted with high idealism. But the Knight of Faith answers to a higher authority, to a voice that beckons him or her to act without any comprehension from others. (Cotkin, 77)

Insofar as he placed himself in the position of the loner, 'against his former comrades' in the Party, Chambers cast himself as the Knight of Faith. That Congressman Nixon may have been an ally is neither here nor there, except to those who are unaware how powerfully arrayed against Chambers were the forces of advanced consciousness of the time. What Kierkegaard provided Chambers was a kind of 'role model' against which to measure himself and to assist him as he made his way against everyone who 'mattered' - famous columnists (e.g., Lippmann), the *New York Times*, the elite universities, and Chambers's colleagues at *Time*. Nixon was just a shrewd *kid* who rode to prominence on Chambers's tattered coattails.

However, in those years, the warm reception of Kierkegaard was not universally applauded; Cotkin observes (56-58) the resistance of many on the Left to what they took to be the quietistic implications of Kierkegaardian thought. Better to speak of the philosopher's indifference, indeed, his hostility, towards the programmatic materialism of the Left - its new and secular 'social gospel' - rather than towards politics itself. What Kierkegaard offered Chambers was a 'political' example rich with consequence, but its scorn for the 'metaphysics' of progressivist thought went to the root.

The 'politics of existentialism' is an endlessly fascinating theme of Cotkin's narrative. There was, for example, at least one group of leftists in America for whom Alger Hiss probably *was* guilty, those 'New York intellectuals' associated with *Partisan Review*, including Lionel and Diana Trilling, Harold Rosenberg, Irving Howe, Philip Rahv, Mary McCarthy, Leslie Fiedler, Hannah Arendt, and others. Like Chambers, many had themselves encountered the 'absolute' value of Communism and its offer of alignment of the self with History (a progressivist prophylactic against dread). Of course, this merely replayed a commitment to 'system,' something against which Kierkegaard had railed at a time when 'system' represented not Marxism but Hegelianism. However, by the end of the 1930s, most New York intellectuals had, like Chambers, broken with Communism. By 1945, they had begun, also like Chambers, to sense the importance of existentialism. But it would not be Kierkegaard's Christian existentialism that attracted them, or even the Heideggerian kind (despite the presence among them of Arendt, Heidegger's former student and lover), but, rather, the atheistic French variety associated with Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus, each of whom had impeccably leftist political credentials.

It was virtually impossible *not* to sense the significance of existentialism in the postwar years, and Cotkin recalls the extraordinary publicity that attended its formal introduction into America. There had never been anything quite like it, intellectually. Articles on Sartre and Beauvoir appeared in the major publications of the time, with the latter identified in the *New Yorker* as 'the prettiest Existentialist you ever saw.' Even fashion magazines like *Vogue* celebrated existentialism, disseminating what would become the movement's photographic archetypes: Sartre with pipe and glasses, Camus in trench coat, photos of Paris cafés, etc.

Asked by someone what would replace 'surrealism' as the next sensation, the editor of the avant-garde *View* magazine replied (in full-throated American), 'Existentialism, Honey. Existentialism.'

However, *Partisan Review*'s celebration took a higher road, with selections from Sartre's *Nausea* and *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and translations of works by Beauvoir and Genet. Cotkin cites the remark of Mary McCarthy that between 1946 and 1948 the New Yorkers were 'all taken, more or less, with the existentialists' (105). Their preference in literature for Dostoevsky and Kafka made it easy for them to believe that the outlook that gave us *Nausea* and *The Stranger* would be congenial to their own attempt to fuse leftism (purged of Stalinism) and literary modernism. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Dostoevsky and Kafka as the mediating influences that permitted the New Yorkers to take French existentialism with the seriousness they did. The spectre of nihilism, the possibility of absolute freedom, and the implications of the death of God in Dostoevsky or, in Kafka, the nightmarish anticipations of a totalitarian world in which the individual had to act without knowing the consequences of his actions - these, far more than the New Critical textual operations then in vogue in academic criticism, are what mattered to *Partisan Review* intellectuals.

What they didn't take into account was postwar politics.

I have noted the movement's capacity to satisfy thinkers of profoundly different political orientation: Heidegger on the fascist Right, Sartre leaning increasingly towards the Marxist Left, Niebuhr the liberal, Hayden the radical, Chambers the Conservative, and the New Yorkers with their mixed heritage of Marxism and liberalism. This political capaciousness is worth a moment's pause because it is so different from the contemporary academic world, even where that world has borrowed significantly from its existentialist predecessors. It would entail, for example, quite a search to find at any self-respecting academic conference postcolonial or cultural studies theorists of, say, a Burkean outlook. Find a proponent of one of the reigning academic orientations and there should be no great problem in predicting his or her views on virtually any major political issue of our time.

The New Yorkers played host to both Sartre and Beauvoir at various times during the years just after the Second World War, and it wasn't long before each group had had enough of the other. By reference to Sartrean existentialism, the New Yorkers appeared mere liberals, no matter that they may have viewed themselves as anti-Stalinist leftists. Whether it were a matter of literary taste or postwar international policies, the two groups had little in common once one bracketed out the influence on them of Dostoevsky and Kafka (and perhaps Faulkner and Joyce).

For Sartre those years were marked by his attempt to find a 'third way' between Soviet Communism and American capitalism. For the New Yorkers, reeling from the Moscow Trials of the 1930s and the Hitler-Stalin Pact[10] and taking pride in the role America played in defeating Nazism, this Sartrean *projet* smacked a bit too much of what, in the 1970s, would be called attempts to establish the 'moral equivalence' of the usa and the ussr. Indeed, one might well see in the bitter quarrels that marked the encounter of Sartre and Beauvoir with the New Yorkers an anticipation of those that pitted liberal against liberal thirty years later and led to the rise of American neoconservatism.

For example, political correctness, *bête noire* of neoconservatism, made an early 'cameo appearance' in the disputes between the two groups over what should comprise a mid-century American canon. For Sartre, it included not only the *de rigeur* Faulkner, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, but the much more problematical (for the New Yorkers) Erskine Caldwell, John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, and James M. Cain. Simone de Beauvoir would recall the horror some of these names aroused in one of the intellectuals she met in New York, for whom even Dos Passos and Hemingway, not to mention Caldwell, Steinbeck, and Cain, were 'all journalists, just realists. And to translate ... Cain, [Horace] MacCoy [*sic*] and Dashiell Hammett must mean that we [French] took Americans for barbarians' (Cotkin, 120).

It would not be long before a reaction set in among the New York intellectuals against Sartre and Beauvoir. Soon their novels and treatises would be criticized and their politics identified (not without some accuracy)

with the Stalinism that the New Yorkers had made their principal target for over a decade. Dwight Macdonald would remain intellectually close to Camus - always New York's favourite, because moderate, existentialist - and Arendt would write learned expositions of Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre. However, the political distance between the two camps increased throughout the Cold War, becoming virtually impassable by 1961, when Lionel Abel reviewed Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* under the title 'Metaphysical Stalinism' (1961).

For most of the New Yorkers, then, existentialism remained a certain temperamental 'tendency' arising from their disillusionment with the political absolutes on which they had been reared and from their devotion to Dostoevsky and Kafka. In only two authors associated with the group would it ever harden into part of their outlook on life.

For one of these authors, Saul Bellow - and no matter how deeply it may have informed such early novels as *Dangling Man* (1944) and *The Victim* (1947) - existentialism would be an outlook *resisted*. By the time of *Herzog* (1964), Bellow would be engaged in a major self-contestation with his own existentialist leanings. Although Cotkin spends little time on Bellow's existentialism, it remains an important part of his work, even when the novelist seems bent on disowning it. Those internal challenges, especially in *Herzog*, recall no existentialist so much as Kierkegaard, for not only is Bellow calling into question the sheer extent of existentialist influence among American intellectuals but he is, thereby, heeding one of Kierkegaard's most urgent warnings:

There is a view of life which conceives that where the crowd is, there also is the truth, and that in truth itself there is need of having the crowd on its side. There is another view of life which conceives that wherever there is a crowd there is untruth so that … even if every individual, each for himself in private, were to be in possession of the truth, yet in case they were all to get together in a crowd … untruth would at once be in evidence. For a crowd is the untruth. (92)

By 1964, existentialism was as much part of the American intellectual 'crowd' as any movement could be, thus permitting *Herzog*'s memorable objection to 'waste land' mentalities, death-centred psychotherapies (read: 'Heidegger'), and packaged forms of 'dread' and 'despair.' And yet Herzog is himself the existentialist as *comic* hero. Steeped in dread, Herzog sees his entire life become one of those extreme situations in which one's possibilities for action - or inaction - open before one.

More importantly, perhaps, *Herzog*, like such later novels as *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) and *The Dean's December* (1982), calls attention to Bellow's growing concern with nihilism, always on the existentialist horizon. One suspects that Bellow is probably well acquainted with Heidegger's own meditation on nihilism, in his great study of Nietzsche (*Nietzsche*, volume 4: *Nihilism*). Perhaps the shrewdest of all American novelists concerned with existentialism, Bellow is determined to throw readers off the scent of his existentialist commitments, not least by the critique of Heidegger that occurs throughout *Herzog*. Bellow's continuing concern with the nihilistic impulse of the West, not to mention his creation of characters like Herzog and Arthur Sammler (a reader of Kierkegaard), makes it difficult to imagine him lying outside any circle that might be drawn around American existentialism.

It is as if Cotkin has somehow 'missed' the special place Bellow has in the story he is telling.[(11)] It is not clear why this should be the case, since he is certainly aware of an existentialist current in Bellow's work. The oversight may arise from the relatively minor place that Heidegger has in Cotkin's inquiry, making him less attentive, perhaps, to Bellow's concern with nihilism.

Existentialism has not only been identified *as* a kind of nihilism but also as a diagnosis *of* and a response *to* nihilism, an attempt to offer its own ethic of authenticity and personal integrity against the prospect of a West in which all the old 'values' had lost their currency. Sartre, driven all his life by the quest for

authenticity (I have noted one of its dangers in his work), may stand as an example of the 'response,' Heidegger of the 'diagnosis.' For *Herzog*, the tocsin of oncoming nihilism is heard in late modernity's celebration of 'transcendence downward,' with degradation, despair, and calamity now celebrated *against* old and outmoded ideals.[(12)] In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, it is New York City itself that represents our entry into Nietzschean 'incomplete nihilism,' with various forms of late-1960s 'life styles' representing forms of a new 'authenticity' that would offer, in crime and in liberated sex, instances of a new set of 'values' by which to live. One may say of Bellow that he is more inclined towards a Heideggerian *critique* of the modern than a Sartrean concern with authenticity.

In any case, Bellow's existentialist concerns suggest a far richer and more lasting engagement with the European phenomenon than any of the cocktail party quarrels over mere politics that marked the meetings of New York intellectuals and French existentialists during the late 1940s.

That other New York novelist who never abandoned existentialism is the infamous Norman Mailer, to whom Cotkin devotes a thoughtful chapter. Where Bellow hides his tracks, Mailer sings a Whitmanesque song of his existentialist self, and for him the quest for an authenticity has always been paramount, no matter what risks of embarrassment and catastrophe he may run, in life or in art. One of his many third-person guises (the Beast, the Novelist, the Prince of Bourbon) in *The Armies of the Night* (1968) is 'The Existentialist.' He calls a collection of his essays *Existential Errands* (1972). In *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967), his two Texas teenagers, accompanying corporate executives on a bear hunt in Alaska's Brooks Range, constantly feel the hot breath of 'Herr Dread.' In his classification of the 'Hip and the Square,' Sartre figures as square. Heidegger's name is, amusingly, among the hipsters (*Advertisements for Myself*, 424).

It is not clear that Mailer read very much of Heidegger, but he had probably read enough to detect the religiose quality of his work, something he would, of course, have detected immediately in Kierkegaard. This is important because Mailer is perhaps the most intensely religious writer of his time in America, and, arguably, since D.H. Lawrence. However, as Cotkin points out, Mailer's God must be *embattled*, in dubious conflict with the Devil, and depending for his strength in that battle on our success in our own conflicts with evil. Those conflicts occur in 'existential' situations, and for Mailer we are in such situations whenever the stakes are high and we do know not what the outcome of our struggle will be: an escalating quarrel with one's wife, a police interrogation, a political demonstration, a homosexual encounter, a covert cia operation in Cuba, an encounter with a grizzly in Alaska, etc.

For Mailer there is no greater existential diminishment than to back away from such situations, fail to act, and settle for some sort of placidity supported by the social structures, received opinions,[(13)] and technological apparatus of modernity. Every failure to act means that one has failed to *grow*, and has, thereby, paid more just in order to remain the same. Somehow - and one must add, 'Who knows how?' - these failures affect the great cosmic adversaries, God and the Devil, fortifying the latter and making possible the extension of his domain on earth. A God who can't lose is of no interest to Norman Mailer.

As a literary critic, Cotkin is at his best in his reading of Mailer's *The Deer Park* (1955) and *An American Dream* (1965). He is wonderfully alert, in the former (the park of Louis xiv as well as the park mentioned in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*), to Mailer's minor, but pivotal, character Marion Faye, tempted by both good and evil:

Faye wants to transform himself into a saint of sin. He believes that 'the world is bullshit. That's why people want a dull life.' ... Rigorously honest about himself and his ability to overcome any obstacle, he announces that there is no pleasure greater than a 'conquered repugnance.' ... Armed with these insights, Faye constantly seeks to test himself, to experience life at the edge, to place his needs above those of others, to live a Kierkegaardian life of passion, and to refuse polite conformity. He is, to a degree, a modernized hip version of Kierkegaard's aesthetic personality on the road to becoming a Knight of Faith. (Cotkin, 200)[(14)]

A bit much, we might think, for a Palm Springs pimp, but, then, this is often Cotkin's point about 'existential America': that the reader must not permit himself to be led around, as by a ring in his nose, by the sacred aura attaching to the classic texts of European existentialism, in this case, those of St Søren. It all recalls Kenneth Burke's old 'scene/act ratio': new location (America), new actions, new idiom. Abraham and Isaac load the pickup truck and head out on Highway 61.

Cotkin also differs from much of the writing we associate with contemporary literary criticism in being willing to engage in judgments of literary merit. He is, for example, dutifully - but not 'politically' - correct in his objections to Mailer's infamous essay 'The White Negro,' which comes close to being an exhortation to violence, in the great post-1952 Sartrean tradition of marxified existentialism. At the same, he is indifferent to the received opinion on *An American Dream*, from the 1960s complaints that Mailer's protagonist, Stephen Rojack, was not punished (arrest, imprisonment) for murdering his wife to the no less pious objections of later decades about 'machismo.' He reads the book as the novel it is, with its emphasis on Rojack's willingness to run any risk - even the murder of his wife, Deborah - in order to rise above the clotted mass of mid-century dreariness that has settled around him.

Cotkin takes up so many issues in his survey of existential America that it is impossible to do justice to them all. Given his primary points of European reference - Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir - it is difficult to complain about what he has chosen to include in his study. He moves with exceptional dexterity, for example, from a consideration of the blues generally (with their sources in the kind of racial boundary situation that made Mailer himself sensitive to jazz as an existential form of music) to the importance the form had for Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Nor does he fail to notice Sartre's own pivotal employment of a blues song, 'Some of these Days,' in *Nausea* (1938). Indeed, the place of the blues in Ellison (and Richard Wright) is one of the most compelling insights Cotkin offers about the depth of the existentialist 'penetration' of American culture.

Recall, though, that debate the New York intellectuals had with Sartre about the American canon, for it signals one place that Cotkin falls short in his survey. After 1945, there are so many novelists who have been touched by existentialist thought - Robert Stone, for example or Paul Auster - that one can scarcely complain too much about Cotkin's occasional omissions. The book would begin to get seriously out of hand. However, it is in the run-up *to* 1945 - that is, in the consideration of literary work in the earlier decades of the past century - that it is sometimes puzzling, for it fails to do two things that seem important to its narrative.

First, it fails to cash the cheque, so to speak, of his early remarks on the anticipations in nineteenth-century American culture of existentialism. They more or less disappear into limbo. Second, it always threatens to make the sudden burst of postwar existentialist writing into precisely the sort of French craze his remarks on the nineteenth century seem intended to deny.

He is, for example, fully aware of Sartre's admiration for Faulkner and Hemingway, and yet neither novelist, each with his own 'existentialist' dimension, is a significant presence in the book. This suggests that for him American cultural history immediately prior to the existentialist mania of the late 1940s needed the executive agency of Europe to come into its existentialist own and that it was a period for which no significant literary ground had been laid in the years prior to the Second World War. There is another way of looking at this, however, hinted at as early as Frederic Henry's refusal, in *A Farewell to Arms*, of all those idealisms of language, politics, and nationhood that stood between him and the 'separate peace' he finally chose to make.

I am suggesting that it may be better to think of existentialism not merely by reference to its admittedly canonical (and continental) texts, 'from Kierkegaard to Sartre' (as anthologists used to say). Better, perhaps, to think of it as a certain *mood* current in the twentieth century generally, one that nineteenth-century

novelists and thinkers (Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard as well as those American writers Cotkin mentions) may have anticipated and that received *philosophical* articulation in the work of certain continental *maîtres* (Heidegger, Sartre, et al), but a mood that arose independently in the United States (and also in England).[15]

If this view be correct, then it seems appropriate to identify a powerful existentialist current at work as early as the 1920s and 1930s in the fiction of both Hemingway and Faulkner. If anthologists, like Walter Kaufmann, enjoyed titles like *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, there is no reason why anthologies could not include, for example, Hemingway's 'Big Two-Hearted River,' with its astonishing anticipation of personal code-making. Neither *The Stranger* nor *Nausea* is more at home in the world of existentialist boundary situations - death, anxiety, collapsed social codes and re-established *personal* codes - than Hemingway's great story. Nor could such an anthology be complete without 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,' as strikingly existentialist in its mood as Sartre's 'The Wall.'

As for Faulkner, it is no accident that Sartre responded early to the great novels appearing in the 1930s. Not only do they offer us classic incarnations of the 'existential hero,' Joe Christmas, for example, in *Light in August*, but they open out onto areas that only scholars of existentialism are likely to notice. There are no European 'existential heroes' more 'correct' than Christmas. Everything is there in *Light in August*, including Christmas's choice to 'be' a 'Negro,' for example - many years in advance of Sartre's account of 'Saint Genet's' 'choice' to become a thief. In *Go Down, Moses*, the evocation of the great woods as an *imaginary* place is as rich and evocative as the many accounts of imaginary objects in Sartre's study of the imagination (1940).

Finally, there is that de-emphasis of Heidegger. Earlier I mentioned the ways in which our contemporary critical language sometimes echoes the language of existentialism, and it is here, precisely, that a concern with Heidegger might have permitted Cotkin to do more in showing us what existentialism's contemporary place is, for the traces of Heidegger's influence are everywhere in poststructuralism.

That 'contemporary place' of existentialism is too often associated with Woody Allen routines about anxiety, being, and nothingness (cohabiting

with Allen's dated allusions to psychoanalysis). Where existentialism lives on, however, is in its absent-present place in academic American criticism. All the old concerns have been metamorphosed by the intervention of Derrida, Lacan, and others (all deeply influenced by Heidegger) into a conceptual apparatus intended to evoke not the anxieties of the self faced by death, despair, torture, etc, but the anxieties of the *professor* faced by the free movement of signification across textuality (for *this* melodrama we need a new Woody Allen). Not Bogie as Sam Spade, not James Dean, not Mailer's Rojack, Hemingway's Nick Adams, or Faulkner's Joe Christmas but, rather, the Lonely Interpreter, faced with a bewildering dissemination of anxiety-provoking and often contradictory meanings. As early as Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence,' with its suggestion of choices and literary 'situations,' there was this relocation of existentialism from the 'in the world' status that defined Heidegger and Sartre to 'in the study.'

This is not to suggest that existentialism is necessarily diminished by this relocation, despite the comic possibilities offered by the Interpreter-as-Hero. After all, such prospects opened forty years ago, with Professor Moses E. Herzog. The concern with language was inevitable given the turn of Heidegger himself towards language in the 1930s. Indeed, even many of the old 'ontological' concerns of existentialism, including its far-reaching critique of foundationalism and essences, have been given a new lease of life in the academy. We may sometimes lament this academic routinization of existentialism - one damned cultural 'construction' after another - but anyone who recalls the place of the existential hero in academic criticism of the 1950s and 1960s will realize that routinization is not merely a contemporary problem.

Of that routinization one might say, 'We are all existentialists now.' Take the professors out of their studies and away from their professional concerns and probe them, over a few drinks, for their views on life generally (while keeping them away from their favourite political distractions), and it is likely that one will

hear the old language of existentialism return. More cheerful now, perhaps, because, after all, we are further away than our parents and grandparents from the obituary notices for the various gods (the real one as well as his political surrogates). Cotkin spends some time recalling Joseph Wood Krutch's *The Modern Temper* (1929) and linking it to the developing existentialist mood of the 1920s and 1930s. To sustain Krutch's dark mood for three generations would have been impossible. One accommodates oneself to virtually everything, lost gods, lost absolutes, and lost foundations. In such a post-existentialist world, nothing better than to retool the old language (far too melodramatic now) and turn it to professional advantage. As for dread, this we can leave to the novelists, who will show it *in action*, in our lives.

WORKS CITED

Abel, Lionel. 'Metaphysical Stalinism: A Study of Sartre's "Critique of Dialectical Reason."' *Dissent* 8 (Spring 1961): 137-52

Barth, Karl. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Trans Edwyn C. Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press 1968

Beauvoir, Simone de. *America Day by Day*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1999

Bellow, Saul. *Dangling Man*. 1944. New York: Vintage 1984

- -*The Dean's December*. New York: Harper 1982
- -*Herzog*. New York: Viking 1964
- -*Mr. Sammler's Planet*. New York: Viking 1970
- -*The Victim*. 1947. New York: Penguin 1988

Chambers, Whittaker. *Witness*. Washington, dc: Regnery 1952

Cotkin, George. *Existential America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2003

Faulkner, William. *Go Down, Moses*. New York: Vintage 1991

- -*Light in August*. New York: Random House 2002

Hayden, Tom. *The Port Huron Statement: The Founding Manifesto of Students for a Democratic Society*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr 1990

Haynes, John Earl, and Harvey Klehr. *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1999

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper 1962

- -*Introduction to Metaphysics.* Trans Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven: Yale University Press 2000
- -*Nietzsche.* Vol 4: *Nihilism*. Ed David Farrell Krell. Trans Frank A. Capuzzi. San Francisco: Harper and Row 1982

Hemingway, Ernest. Big Two-Hearted River: Parts i-ii.' *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Scribner's 1966, 219-66

- -'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.' *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, 379-83
- -*A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Scribner's 1997

Howells, Christina. 'Conclusion: Sartre and the Deconstruction of the Subject.' *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*. Ed Christina Howells. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, 318-52

Kierkegaard, Søren. 'On Himself.' *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Ed Walter Kaufmann. Cleveland: Meridian 1956, 83-99

Krutch, Joseph Wood. *The Modern Temper: A Study and a Confession*. New York: Harcourt, Brace 1929

Mailer, Norman. *Advertisements for Myself*. New York: Putnam's 1959

- -*An American Dream*. New York: Dial 1965
- -*The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History*. New York: New American Library 1968
- -*The Deer Park*. New York: Putnam's 1955
- -*Existential Errands*. Boston: Little, Brown 1972
- -*The Presidential Papers*. New York: Putnam's 1962
- -*Why Are We in Vietnam?* New York: Putnam's 1967

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*. London: Nisbet 1945

- -*The Irony of American History*. New York: Scribner's 1952

Rajan, Tilottama. 'The Double Detour: Sartre, Heidegger, and the Genealogy of Deconstruction.' *After Poststructuralism: Writing the Intellectual History of Theory*. Ed Tilottama Rajan and Michael J. O'Driscoll. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2002, 43-87

Roth, Philip. *American Pastoral*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1997

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans Hazel E. Barnes. London: Methuen 1957

- -'*The Devil and the Good Lord' and Two Other Plays*. Trans Kitty Black. New York: Vintage 1960
- -*Iron in the Soul*. Trans Gerard Hopkins. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1963

- -*Literary and Philosophical Essays*. Trans Annette Michelson. London: Hutchinson 1968
- -*Nausea*. 1938. Trans Bernard Frechtman. New York: New Directions 1964
- -*The Psychology of Imagination*. 1940. New York: Citadel 1965
- -'Réponse à Albert Camus.' *Situations, IV*, 90-125. Paris: Gallimard 1964

Trilling, Lionel. *The Middle of the Journey*. 1947. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1981

- -*Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1972

1. See Rajan and Howells for accounts of existentialism's kinship with recent thinking.

2. But not 'philosophical.' The 'main line' of American philosophy remained resolutely analytical, permitting existentialism only at its margins. Cotkin's remarks on the career of Hazel E. Barnes, translator of Sartre, are useful in this regard (151-58).

3. The often-remarked religiosity of Americans should not lead us to overlook the tensions arising from its coincidence with American hyper-modernity.

4. Or, as a friend suggests to me: 'An existentialist - one who notices at around the age of eight that most of what people think is preposterous, the social arrangement, preposterous, indeed, nearly anything you would care to name, preeeeeposterous. He is not thrown by this. He merely chooses to live Quixotically, knowing that he would be much better off materially if he were to join a law firm or the Mafia. Who better than an American is equipped to arrive at this conclusion?' (M. Holdreith, Seattle, private communication).

5. Eventually, even Franklin Delano Roosevelt would drop Kierkegaard's name in an Oval Office conversation. 'You ought to read him,' FDR told his secretary of labor: 'Kierkegaard gives you an understanding of what it is in man that makes it possible for these Germans to be so evil' (Cotkin, 35).

6. The Weathermen might themselves have identified theirs as a Marcusean way, but Marcuse's concern with violence was never more than academic, whereas Sartre's seemed almost visceral. Beyond that, Marcuse was, finally, a limited thinker, entirely lacking the scope and incendiary international appeal of the Sartre of those years. It is worth recalling, though, that Marcuse had his own existentialist pedigree, as a former student of Heidegger.

7. See also Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*.

8. Some would also say this of Camus, although I think they take too seriously his occasional remarks that he was not an existentialist. It is an odd to thing to 'be' an existentialist.

9. The burden of evidence now suggests that Chambers's charges were accurate and that Hiss lied in denying his association with the Party (Haynes and Klehr).

10. Of a meeting with Dwight Macdonald and other (unidentified) New York intellectuals, Simone de Beauvoir writes, 'They hate Stalinism with a passion that makes me realize they are old Stalinists' (Beauvoir, 41).

11. Another such odd omission is Walker Percy, deeply committed to existentialism, and a finer novelist than Richard Wright, who receives far more attention in this book than Bellow. Cotkin may be led to the attention of Wright by the relevance to his work of the blues, important to Cotkin's view of American existentialism, and by the friendship Wright developed in Paris with Sartre and Beauvoir. There is also, of course, the important issue of race, the kind of 'situation' that, in America, calls existential issues into high relief.

12. The place of the violent low-life character is important here. Literature and drama have always reserved a place for low-lifes (Dickens, for example), but they become overwhelmingly present by the end of the twentieth century: *Pulp Fiction*, *The Godfather*, 'The Sopranos,' Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. Readers can add to the list.

13. Cotkin reminds us of the Sartrean term for such a preference: *l'esprit de sérieux*, the person who is *serious*, the term Sartre used to insult Camus ('Mon Dieu! Camus, que vous êtes sérieux...') in his letter criticizing his former friend (*Nausea*, 100). The 'serious' person is dread-free and *therefore* doomed to the necessities of his situation, his profession, his national identity: a bourgeois, a Canadian, an American, an engineer, a mother, etc. Serious people live in perpetual 'bad faith,' doing what they *must* do.

14. The relevant European text here is Sartre's *The Devil and the Good Lord* (1951), where the protagonist, Goetz, seeks, by an attempt at a complete transformation of his character, to be ... good.

15. D.H. Lawrence would be an English instance.