Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling:*
A Metaphorical Reading

Jonathan A. Hayes

**Department of Religious Studies
McGill University, Montreal
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*A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate
Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of
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Send to: Mario Costoin
Graduate Secretary, Religious Studies
Birks Building, McGill University
3520 University Street
Montreal, P.Q.
H3A 2A7

ABSTRACT

Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: a Metaphorical Reading

This study proposes to investigate the central metaphors of journey and silence as they are found in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling. Relying primarily on Paul Ricoeur's corrective to the tradition of metaphor theory, The Rule of Metaphor, Kierkegaard's use of these metaphors will be analysed for the way in which the nature of faith is depicted in this difficult, highly lyrical text. Key features of this study include a consideration of the role of "possibility" and "indirect communication" in the language of faith and, by extension, metaphor. Ricoeur's theory helps to connect what he terms the "work" of the text with the "world" of the text.

Cette composition examine les metaphores de silence et voyage dans le Fear and Trembling a Soren Kierkegaard. Il se fiait sur la discussion de Paul Ricoeur, que l'on retrouve dans La Métaphor Vivre. La méthode de Kierkegaard est analysée pour la peinture de l'essence de la foi dans ce texte. Les charactéristiques fondamental de cette dissertation incluent une estime des rôles de "possibility" et "indirect communication" dans la parole de foi et, par agrandissement, métaphore. La théorie du Ricoeur établit des rapports avec, dans ses termes, le "travail" du texte et le "monde" du texte.

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Words lead to deeds... They prepare
the soul, make it ready, and move it
to tenderness (St. Teresa).[1]

[1] Quoted from Raymond Carver. "Meditation on a Line from Saint Teresa." No Heroics, Please:
Uncollected Writings. New York: Vintage, 1991. p. 223.

Chapter One: Kierkegaard

This study will deal with Søren Kierkegaard's <u>Fear and Trembling</u> in the light of Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor. My thesis is that an analysis of the central metaphors in <u>Fear and Trembling</u> provide the key to understanding this seemingly fragmented text.

With argument layered upon counter-argument, anecdote fed upon philosophic conjecture, hyperbole collapsed into understatement, understanding <u>Fear and Trembling</u> can be a daunting and frustrating task for the reader. In keeping with its variegated content, the book bears the subtitle "dialectical lyric," providing its readers with just the slightest of clues as to where to begin to unravel Kierkegaard's argument. The argument is indeed a dialectical one: the foibles of modern day Denmark are set against the moral grid of the Abraham saga in Genesis; Abraham's response counterposes other possible responses; Johannes *de Silentio*, the poet, is contrasted with Abraham; the knight of infinite resignation faces the knight of faith, the reader confronts the text. While the dialectic sketches for the reader what is being compared, the lyric colours the argument with detail. Therefore, it is equally important to examine the latter component of Kierkegaard's imaginative hybrid genre. <u>Fear and Trembling</u> is, without doubt, an inspired lyrical exegesis of Genesis 22: it indulges the poetic license of the author and sparks the imagination of the reader. The metaphor is central to the way in which Kierkegaard examines Abraham's crisis and, by extension, the way in which his theology is done.

The burden of the present study is to examine some of the preeminent metaphors found in <u>Fear and Trembling</u> and show how they provide a clear interpretive path in what is a densely wooded philosophic tract. I argue that these metaphors— journey and silence— are able to draw upon the larger themes and problems presented in Genesis 22 and, in

recognising them, elicit the reader's participation. A consideration of these aspects will form the core chapters of this study.

An ancillary concern of this project, running in tandem and undergirding the former, shall be to show how the metaphor might be said to refer beyond the text to the world. By focusing on the possible worlds given through metaphor in Fear and Trembling, we will consider how this world, refracted against our own, can enlighten our present perceptions, helping us to articulate our immediate condition.

In order to ground these claims I devote chapter two in its entirety to the metaphor theory of Paul Ricoeur. Here, I show how Ricoeur arrives at the philosophical stance he does and why his position is enlightening to our consideration here and to theological language in general.

The study will close in chapter five with a consideration of the appropriateness of metaphor to the language of faith. The placement of this problem at the study's end might seem odd; however, the connection between chapter two on Ricoeur and the core investigations of Kierkegaard's metaphors in chapters three and four is best measured in hindsight. Here, I argue that metaphor exists in the realm of the not-yet or possible; does the language of faith share this same cognitive space? Does the indirect manner of metaphor (saying something by what it is not) display something particularly enticing for theology? Is Kierkegaard a successful practitioner of the theological metaphor?

This introductory chapter will concern itself with background issues necessary to understand the argument which follows. There are, in fact, three categories in this study with which it is necessary to become familiar. The first of these is metaphor theory, dealt with in chapter two. The two remaining components are Kierkegaard's philosophical disposition and the insights gained and the problems raised by Genesis 22. In the case of the former, limited but necessary background material on Kierkekaard's philosophy shall

be provided. I will make every attempt to avoid introducing issues not crucial to the argument that follows.

In its ambiguity, Fear and Trembling confronts its reader with a choice: it invites the reader to act upon the text, to make sense of the textual world, confusing and grey. Fear and Trembling is a text that cannot be received passively: we respond to its inchoate structure, piecing it together, tracing argument and counter-argument dialectically: in turn, we stand in judgment of our own lives. Strains of this theme of choice-- either/or-- run throughout Kierkegaard's work. The centrality which Kierkegaard gives to choice as fundamental in the establishment of selfhood is essential for readers to recognise from the outset.

Choice appears in myriad forms, not the least of which is the manner in which a reader reads a book. This interface between reader and text is one issue of which Kierkegaard is highly aware. His epigraph from Stages on Life's Way, quoted from Lichtenberg, reads as follows: "such works are mirrors: when an ape peers in no apostle can look out." In this brief sketch of Kierkegaard I wish to present the central idea that Kierkekaard is successful as a philosopher/religious thinker due to reasons beyond his mental prowess: a shrewd dialectician, he engages the reader by frustrating the reader. In a gesture of true Kierkegaardian irony, his invitation to the reader to be involved in his work is one in which easy access to that work is flatly denied (Poole, 2). Indeed, lamenting the publishing of the third section in Stages on Life's Way, even the venerable Kierkegaard scholar Walter Lowrie confesses, "I will say for my own part that I heartily wish that S.K. had never written this Diary-- nor written the hundreds of pages on the same theme...I am tired of reading it all..."(Poole, 108). Beyond the subterfuge, fictitious findings by fictitious persons, dual time schemes, verbal trickery, and loquacity of the highest order is the author's tacit injunction: you must work in order to understand me! The innumerable

frustrations any reader of Kierkegaard experiences are fully intended.[1] Like Jacob who wrestles with the angel to learn his name, we fight with and against Kierkegaard's text in order to understand. As a reward, we see in it something of our own lives.

The argument which I wish to make here is that the texture or shape of _Fear and Trembling_ may be understood as an outgrowth of Kierkegaard's theory of the self. This theory of the self is applicable, though not constant, in each of the stages of existence, to be outlined presently. In turn, the book's form is closely tied to Kierkegaard's understanding of faith. The present reading of Kierkegaard's theory of the self will attempt to keep in mind its applicability to the text we are considering.

In his "Kierkegaard as a Theologian of Hope,"[2] Mark C. Taylor writes that, without misconstruing his intention, Kierkegaard's theory "can be reduced to three fundamental components: possibility, necessity and freedom" (Taylor, 1973: 225). If the reader imagines a triangle with these labels-- possibility, necessity and freedom-- placed at each of its points, and then matches future, past and present with each respectively, she will have a helpful model from which to work. "The task of selfhood," as Mark C. Taylor observes, "is to establish an equilibrium among the components of the self..." (Taylor, 1973: 227). In this model, the real self (one which has lived or has been actualised in the past) meets the ideal self (one that exists in future possibility) at the triangle's third point, the present. Taylor comments on the self's present condition: "freedom is the means by which the ideal and real selves are actively interrelated. Through one's freedom, but with

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[1] Walter Lowrie notes that, "[s]ubtle as the Diary and Epistle (parts of _Stages on Life's Way_) are in psychological detail, the good Frater is probably justified when in his Conclusion he expresses doubt as to whether he has any readers left" (quoted in Bretall, 173).

[2] Mark C. Taylor. "Kierkegaard as a Theologian of Hope," _Union Seminary Quarterly Review_. Vol. XXVIII No. 3 Spring, 1973, p. 225-233.

constant awareness of his actuality, one strives to realize those possibilities which have been imagined" (Taylor, 1973: 227).[3] To say that the self is free is to foreground the notion of individual choice. A self that chooses possibility is rooted in hope. Yet, the self does not act alone. As mentioned, the three components of selfhood are dialectically interrelated. As such, the self must recognise that its "sustenance by God is a necessary aspect of the self's being; it is the self's actuality" (Taylor, 1973:229). Refusing to acknowledge its actuality, the self cannot find equilibrium and looses its authenticity.

For a self to be unauthentic is tantamount to having a misrelationship with God. As Taylor notes, "the ability to sustain a balance among the components of the self is faith" (Taylor, 1973: 229) and thus "to be aware of the fact that one lives before God is to realize that one has the possibility of a faithful life through the maintenance of an equilibrium within the self" (Taylor, 1973: 230). This is not the complete picture of Kierkegaard's theory of the self. It is, however, enough for the reader to appreciate how the metaphors of journey and silence, discussed in chapters three and four respectively, draw upon Kierkegaard's theory of the self and probe the nature of faith.[4] Without elaborating this notion in full until chapters three and four, it may be useful for the reader to consider briefly the relationship between faith and possibility in Kierkegaard's theory of the self, and the manner in which Fear and Trembling must be acted upon by the reader.

A cognate of his theory of the self, Kierkegaard's stages, articulated in the sixth and last of his "aesthetic writings," are divided into three spheres, the last of which includes two sub-sections: the aesthetic, the ethical, religiousness 'a', and religiousness 'b.'

I will use gender-neutral language in this essay whenever possible. Remarks made by other authors in quotations will not, however, be altered for this purpose.

[4] Kierkegaard's The Sickness Unto Death and The Concept of Dread most directly deal with the his theory of the self.

Whereas Either/Or concludes with the ethical sphere. Stages on Life's Way deals

extensively with the two religious spheres. Each is cleverly represented by a paradigmatic

figure to whom the reader responds and in whom she recognises something of herself.

This recognition gives a compelling illustration of a reader's identity: we are. in most

cases. a composite of all four stages. This non-substantialist view of the self (wherein a

self is said to be a relation which relates itself to itself) offers a deep psychological insight.

What might at first appear to be contradictory elements in a personality are. in fact. the

essence of the person. The stages come to represent different possibilities for how to live a

life.

The aesthetic stage has been treated by scholars in two ways. each being in tension with

the other: immediacy and reflection.[5] The first reading is supported by the figure of the

Seducer[6] and by various characters at a banquet depicted in Stages on Life's Way. There.

one of the party goers. Victor Eremita. rises from the table. wine-filled goblet in hand. to

declare magniloquently that: "[t]o be good. a thing must be all at once. for 'at once' is the

most divine of all categories and deserves to be honoured...because it is the starting-point

of the divine in life. so that what does not occur at once is of the evil" (Kierkegaard. 1946:

177). Such fulsome bombast on the part of the well-groomed aesthete gives clear

indication as to how Kierkegaard employs the terms "aesthetic." In the context of this

"reading." when Kierkegaard uses the word "aesthetic." he does so in a manner

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[5] See Mark C. Taylor's criticism of past Kierkegaard scholarship
which focuses on one "reading" of the aesthetic stage at the expense
of the other. Taylor claims both approaches need to be held in
tandem. "Sounds of Silence," Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling:
Critical Appraisals, p. 167.

[6] In addition to his attendance at the party, the Seducer appears
in various guises in Kierkegaard's works: as the author of The
Seducer's Diary, the editor of Either/Or, and the author of
Repetition.

significantly different from its present putative connotation. The focus Kierkegaard

intends is not so much one of beauty but rather immediacy.[7] In the company of beautiful

people, engaged in laughter and frivolity, the Seducer's life seems anything but unhappy.

Yet, the world of the senses does not satisfy that for which a holistic life longs, the eternal.

As stated previously, the self is a composite of variegated qualities, a synthesis of body

and spirit, the temporal and eternal, necessity and freedom. Both sides run in confluence

through a person's life, yet the aesthete deigns only the first of each to be of importance.

Onanistic and self-absorbed, the aesthete runs from other people who might shock him out

of his one-sided indulgence: as a result, he is denied his own true self. In this respect we

may understand the aesthetic sphere as a "distance from reality."[8] This denial of reality

leads to a despair that cripples the individual. The aesthetic existential sphere has within it

that by which it is destroyed. Describing this phenomenon, Bradley R. Dewey remarks

that "[a]esthestic pleasure is inextricably mixed with pain, and aesthetic joy inevitably

leads to suffering" (Dewey, 27).

The unheeded yearning of the spirit— the second component of the personality in

Kierkegaard's anthropology— and the longing for a freedom unrequited, drives the

individual to despair. It is elsewhere referred to as dread or Angst.[9] Whether the

experience be described as epiphanic or an awakening of sorts, the individual eudaemonist

confronts the pain and ignomy of living a purely aesthetic life. A change is wrought by

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[7] "The aesthetical in Man is that whereby he is immediately what he is. He ignores the future and the decisions it demands. Instead, he is content with the present moment..." Frederick Sontag. A Kierkegaard Handbook. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979, p.18.

[8] Journals and Papers. I. 370.

[9] This subject is dealt with in Kierkegaard's The Concept of Dread.

choice: either remain in the aesthetic life or move towards the ethical sphere. This, then, is a first "reading" of aesthetics.

Without dismissing this first approach to aesthetics, we may call upon the second approach which champions an objective stance; its aim is "objective comprehension [rather] than moral action or religious devotion" (Taylor, 1981: 167). Essentially, this approach acknowledges reflection as a preparatory stage before ethics. For example: whereas the prurience and deceptiveness of the merman in Problem III of Fear and Trembling may be exposed in the first reading of Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage, it does not address what might be called his change of heart. Something occurs, making the merman realise the folly of his ways and the moral poverty of his actions. The reflective, detached stance— wherein truth is located externally— leads the merman to search for something greater than monomaniacal self-fulfillment.

Aesthetics, then, is not wholly bad. Removed from the actual world, the aesthetic embodies a sense of possibility.[10] The "young man" who appears as a dinner guest in Stages on Life's Way is also the protagonist of the book co-published with Fear and Trembling. In this book, Repetition, aesthetics engenders repeated, quotidian experience with a vitality and freshness with each renewal. It embraces possibility. The underlying assumption behind repetition is that truth is an experiential category; one can revisit circumstances and "reckon with those obscure forces which lie below the surface of consciousness" (Kierkegaard, 1946: 135). Biographically read, repetition refers to the

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[10] "The poetic presentation charms us; actuality makes us flee. For this reason "aesthetic" is also associated with "possibility," since it is opposed to actuality too." Sontag. A Kierkegaard Handbook, p. 15.

broken engagement between Kierkegaard and his fiancee, Regina Olsen.[11] The bleat of a guilty conscience is almost palpable; yet, there is more. It is my gambit that this so-called obscure force is, in fact, a sense of possibility, emanating from the religious sphere. This force acts upon the self, encouraging it to move beyond the limited offerings of the aesthetic sphere.

The ethical sphere, championed in Either/Or, seems very much a transitional category when Kierkegaard's works are viewed as a whole. Placing oneself under a moral code and consciously operating within that system is a noble pursuit. Yet, rather than addressing the second part of Kierkegaard's dualistic anthropology, the ethical sphere seems concerned with merely taming or harnessing the base desires extant in the aesthetic life. As much as ethics functions as a moral guide it also "eliminates disquieting uncertainty" (Dewey, 28) proffered by the religious sphere, the world of the spirit. This is a contentious matter that, in many respects, is the pivotal point on which Fear and Trembling turns.

Here and in Stages on Life's Way the need for a concrete religious orientation toward life becomes prevalent. Religiousness 'a' or what Kierkegaard also termed "cultural religion" is a privatised version of Christianity; one in which no overt manifestation of faith is required. Instead emphasis is given to the cultivating of interior religiosity. In its best sense, Socrates comes to stand for this type of religiosity. It avoids legalism and pious works intended to be righteous or win approval of the church.

The central problem with this brand of religiosity is that, in attempting to act as an emollient to the problems raised in the aesthetic and ethical realms, religiousness 'a' simply

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[11] Fear and Trembling is widely speculated to be, " on a more personal level,...a veiled correspondence letter to Regine...an attempt to convey to her his pent-up passion and the religious motivation behind his outrageous behaviour." Louis P. Pojman, The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984, p. 148.

numbs us to their reality. The engagement with the world is minimised to such a degree that a false sense of peace is proffered. The occlusive, almost monastic, sensibilities of religiousness 'a' that shut the world out are, in the end, found wanting.[12] As odd as it may appear-- coming from the pen of the bookish, hermetic Kierkegaard-- his challenge to his reader is to be involved in the struggles of the world. We must confront and be a part of the suffering world in order to participate in or experience its redemption.

In Religiousness 'b' or "New Testament Christianity" Kierkegaard's religious anthropology is most complex. We have already noted that the formation of the self is contingent upon choice. The heart of the matter is not what a self chooses but that the self does indeed choose. That is to say, the self is made concrete by the act of choosing and, paradoxically, the self must choose the most concrete reality: the spirit. The individual self becomes absolute by implying a further relation to the ultimate. Kierkegaard's understanding of the self is as a relationship that is authentically stabilised only when it yields to a power beyond the self. Theologically, to be human is to be in relation with God, for "the relationship with eternity constitutes the very essence of his spirit" (Dupré, 42). Yet, the self is never pure spirit: it is an amalgam of the temporal and the eternal.

The reasons why it is important to detail Kierkegaard's theory of stages are not limited to substantive matters such as recognising a particular stage and its implications as it appears in Fear and Trembling. Its importance extends to a general reading strategy that will help "unlock" Fear and Trembling. Kierkegaard's view of the self, as William Schweiker notes, is "not a simple given or a substance self-identical through time; it is a

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[12] While I do not have the space to explore this seeming contradiction in Kierkegaard's thought I do wish to note that this remark may seem odd given SK's association with his claim that, "truth is subjectivity" and his proclivity towards a cultivated, interior life.

task" (Schweiker, 1990: 140).

If life is truly inchoate, waiting to be made, faith will certainly constitute a (perhaps the most) significant part of this process. Again, the individual's choice becomes a self-defining act. Fear and Trembling attests to a life lived in faith, open to possibility and growth. Abraham marries Sarah: he becomes a husband. Abraham and Sarah wait patiently for God to give them a son: they become parents. God asks for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and Abraham demonstrates his unflinching willingness to accede to God's demands: he becomes the father of faith for the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The identity is constantly under reconstruction. It is as William Schweiker, following Mark Taylor, notes: "the principle of identity threatens to deny the qualitative difference between God and humanity" (Schweiker, 1990: 140). It is now a relational category whereby the "relationship is not that of knowledge, as philosophy (and many forms of religion) supposes; the relationship is faith" (Kierkegaard, 1946: 109).

"One day a man, Kierkegaard, was deeply dissatisfied with the ideas of Hegel"[13]

Throughout the above section the idea of choice as an identity-forming agent has been discussed. This section will show how this idea of choice is predicated upon Kierkegaard's contention that "truth is subjectivity," a polemical attack on the dominant Hegelian philosophy of his day.[14] An elucidation of his reaction will make clear how Kierkegaard— by insisting on radical choice as foundational to our lives— lays the

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[13] Jean Wahl, "Existentialism: a Preface," New Republic. 113: 142-144 (Oct. 1, 1945). Quoted by Walter Lowrie in Bretall's A Kierkegaard Anthology, 190.

[14] Louis Dupré, in 1963, writes that Kierkegaard's thought is, "in large measure to be understood as a Christian reaction against Hegel. Kierkegaard As Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence. New York: Shed and Ward, 1963, p. 39.

groundwork for what would come to be called Existentialism.

In the simplest of terms, the matter of contention between Hegel and Kierkegaard is over Hegel's system. Kierkegaard fundamentally objects to the idea of system, conjecturing that, "[s]ystem and finality correspond to one another" (Kierkegaard, 1946: 201).[15] He asserts that the system does not supply an intelligible last word as such, but rather a chimera of truth under the cloak of objectivity. He concedes that a logical system is possible, yet the systematiser, Hegel, seems unable to remain wholly in the realm of logic. Instead, Hegel introduces concepts such as "movement" into the formula.[16]

The almost gravitational attraction to movement and the things of existence (on the part of the system's advocates) is, for Kierkegaard, a tool of indictment against speculative Hegelian philosophy. Its magnetism demonstrates that a system so easily becomes a mockery of itself; aware of its deficiencies, it seeks to address this uncertainty and, in so doing, collapses of its own volition.

Simply put, Kierkegaard believes life to be a process lived amid uncertainty; that uncertainty is the earmark of our existence and the catalyst which propels each individual to seek the truth, to strive towards the infinite. Reminiscent of St. Augustine's famous restless heart that yearns for its creator, Kierkegaard's anthropology is one in which the essence of human creature is to be engaged in a search for the spiritual. This self-defining

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[15] This quote, extracted from Bretall's anthology of Kierkegaard's writing, is found in Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Elsewhere in Postscript Kierkegaard writes: [s]ystem and finality are pretty much one and the same, so much so that if the system is not finished, there is no system...a system which is not quite finished is an hypothesis; while on the other hand to speak of a half-finished system is nonsense (Bretall, 195-196).

[16] Movement, claims Kierkegaard, is "subject to an existential dialectic" (Postscript, 196) and is "sheer confusion of logical science (Postscript, 196); therefore it is an inappropriate category to introduce into a logical system.

search is marked. paradoxically. by our condition: we cannot build adequate systems: moreover. any accurate system (one which successfully details the incomprehensibilities of a life). such as God's perhaps. we would never be able to understand.

Each of these objections is predicated upon the idea of possibility. A system leaves no room for possibility: it deals in conclusions. Life cannot be detailed in a grand system; rather, it should, as T.S. Eliot suggests, be "measured out...with coffee spoons."[17] In tiny instances, between epiphanies, each life must be lived and reflected upon subjectively. As each person will have a different life experience, the nuances of a person's life-- in frailties and hopes-- must be articulated and received in fragments, not grandiose systems. So, while a logical system may be possible, an existential system is impossible to formulate. The latter cannot be represented objectively, it must·be experienced subjectively. This claim informs a reading of Fear and Trembling in a fundamental manner.

Objectivity is, then, a force of mediation; it functions in a system whereby a thing, (thesis) is related to something quite its opposite (antithesis) in order to arrive at a common ground (synthesis). This pull between the objective and subjective is exemplified in the relationship between philosophy and Christian theology:

> philosophy teaches that the way is to become objective, while
> Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, i.e. to
> become a subject in truth. Lest this should seem a mere dispute
> about words, let me say that Christianity wishes to intensify passion
> to its highest pitch: but passion is subjectivity, and does not exist
> objectively (Kierkegaard, 1946:209).

What saves this passage from seeming misplaced is Kierkegaard's mention of passion. It is possible, perhaps likely, that Kierkegaard uses this word, laden in the jargon of

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[17] T.S. Eliot. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Selected Poems. London: Faber & Faber, 1963, p.13.

Christian theology with its dual meaning of desire/suffering, to give a rhetorical power to his claim. Kierkegaard layers meaning upon meaning: equating passion with subjectivity, subjectivity with truth, truth with faith.[18] Although such imbricated definitions may lead to some confusion, the coalescence of these ideas underscores a larger polemic at work in Kierkegaard's thought: that the purpose and workings of philosophy are markedly different from those of the Christian faith.[19] To distil Kierkegaard's argument: while the system encourages objective thinking as clear and rational, this impulse is a misguided one in the understanding of the Christian message. That is not to say that Christianity is irrational. However, the argument is that reason is subordinated by the importance given to faith and love in Christian doctrine and teachings.

Only in this context may we begin to understand Kierkegaard's claim that the truth is gained subjectively or "truth is subjectivity." Kierkegaard is not advocating a morose, introspective period of self-absorption. Taken out of its context, such a statement might appear this way. Its intention is quite the opposite.

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[18] Passion is a natural reaction to the realisation that the self consists of two parts: finite, infinite; bodily, spiritual. Kierkegaard, in Sickness unto Death, also terms this despair. An individual's passion occurs as suffering in his realisation of the brokenness or abrogation-- the "infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity" --of his relationship with God. The same passion occurs as desire to mend this brokenness through a leap of faith, an act of the will, a condition where the human may receive God's grace.

[19] Kierkegaard writes that, "[t]he idea of philosophy is mediation -- Christianity's is the paradox" (Kierkegaard,1946:14).

from "what" to "how" [20]

Kierkegaard, having argued against the system, proceeds to turn the question of "what" we know into a methodological one: "how" we know. His fervent answer— we know subjectively— is one that may mistakenly be understood as an endorsement of relativism. In the above section I have attempted to show how Kierkegaard's claim that we know subjectively, or the more strongly-worded "truth is subjectivity," may be contextualised by his protest against the system.

What does it mean to know subjectively? In answering this question we come full-circle, in a sense, by returning to the notion introduced at the very outset of this study: choice. The very notion of choice is built upon ambiguity, either/or. Things are not always clear, yet the individual must chose. This choice is most radically a task made inwardly by the individual. The self weighs and considers options; it wrestles with moral dilemmas.

To recapitulate, Kierkegaard champions the act of choosing itself. This is true to the extent that an individual engaged in a passionate and heart-felt commitment to that which may be misguided is, in Kierkegaard's view, far superior to a lackadaisical, disengaged commitment to what may be genuinely true. An act devoid of passionate intensity and inwardness is found wanting. The exaltation of the act and the actor gripped by his decision is reflected through and through in Kierkegaard's prose.

In the case of Abraham, choice can be the most life-changing and heroic of acts. Abraham exemplifies the most radical of choices. He leaves himself open to the possibility that, no matter the circumstance, his God will provide. Abraham has faith. This is no small endeavour: "truth is an equivalent expression for faith. Without risk

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[20] "The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said" (Postscript, 213).

there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty" (Kierkegaard, 1946: 215). In short, Kierkegaard takes Hegel and the objective system to task on its own grounds. His argument in Concluding Unscientific Postscript works dialectically with one important exception. Resisting the tyranny of wholes, Kierkegaard's dialectic never loses sight of the one who is engaged in the dialectic itself: "the knower is an existing individual, and the task of existing is his essential task" (Kierkegaard, 217).

To exist, then, means to occupy the space of both uncertainty and possibility. Moreover, to have faith in such a world means one must resist anything too certain. Can such a world, such a faith be articulated directly?

The Necessity of Indirection

Here, it is necessary to examine Kierkegaard's argument from a different vantage point. This inquiry will in turn lay the important groundwork for his indirect communication. To be explicit: the following section will begin to introduce Kierkegaard as a stylist whose technique is a direct outgrowth of his philosophical disposition. Moreover, I hope at this early stage to show that, given Kierkegaard's proclivity to express the incongruities of an individual's existence indirectly, a metaphorical reading of his psychological study of faith, Fear and Trembling, is uniquely appropriate to the task at hand.

The impulse behind indirect communication comes from what might be called the heresy of direct communication. As William Schweiker notes,

> "direct communication" would assert that existence could be reduced
> to conceptual terms and easily communicated to the reader: that
> being in love, for example, could be communicated by talking about
> one's being in love. The possibility of direct communication would
> signal the primacy of theoretical reflection over the practical task of

thought and life (Schweiker. 1990: 140).

Direct communication, then, is contrary to Kierkegaard's philosophy that life cannot be reduced to a system. By undertaking his indirect communication, Kierkegaard underscores that life is an existential task: it is to be lived. He accomplishes this task through various literary tools we shall presently discuss.

The view that Kierkegaard is a bold and innovative literary stylist is well established;[21] however, the inquiry into the extent of his technique is a field of study that is quite recent.[22] With regard to the subject of the present study we may ask the following two questions: what does Kierkegaard mean by "indirect communication;" what role does Kierkegaard's "indirect communication" play in Fear and Trembling?

What does he mean?

The question of what Kierkegaard means by a certain term is sure to bring a smile to anyone interested in Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms. The joke (at our expense) is that Kierkegaard *himself* does not *mean* or say anything in his "aesthetic" texts of the 1840's,

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[21] See Louis Mackey's seminal study Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet. Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

[22] "The history of reading Kierkegaard is unfortunately an almost uninterrupted series of attempts to look in the mirrors of the aesthetic texts and to find there Kierkegaard's view of X....But, after the events of the last decade, in which philosophy has been taking rueful account of the extent to which it is itself a rhetorical art of persuasion..., it could be that there will be some openness to reading Kierkegaard as a philosopher who uses all the major tools of deconstructive theory long before before they were given a location and a name by Derrida" (Poole, 7). In addition to the work of Stanley Cavell and Christopher Norris cited on page 7 of Poole's Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication, see also: Mark C. Taylor's Alterity. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; Louis Mackey's Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard in Kierkegaard and Postmodernism series. ed. Mark C. Taylor. Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1986.

let alone give a direct, single explanation of such an amorphous concept as the identity. Indeed, the motley cast of assorted characters who, in a sense, host these intellectual excursions, opine and lecture, grandstand and complain, all the while deflecting a reader's attempt to say Kierkegaard means this when he says that! Why does Kierkegaard do this?

Although a reader's experience of the indirect communication can indeed be maddening and potentially traumatic, the aims of the device are quite noble. At its most basic level the indirect communication has various functions: to defer meaning and elicit the reader's participation in the construction of a text's meaning; to diminish the role of the author and elevate the ideas presented; to issue a built-in corrective to the former contention, never sanctifying any idea or proposition, as it is the product of a human mind. This helps to explain the stream of characters who run throughout Kierkegaard's aesthetic writings— *Hilarious bookbinder*, Johannes *de Silentio*, *Victor Eremita*, etc: none supply final readings, they supplement and stand in for different opinions. The impulse behind this latter function is to underscore the fallibility of human reason.[23] A twentieth century correlative to Kierkegaard's notion may well be Paul Tillich's "Protestant Principle." Although Tillich does not cloak this idea in any literary manner, the impulse is similar. To paraphrase Tillich, no idea may be so assented to as to override that which is being thought about, namely God (Tillich, 96).

While a discussion of irony, supplement, and deferred meaning would each be appropriate to an investigation of Kierkegaard's indirect communication, I hope that the general outline and a brief nod to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship will be sufficient to develop a causal link between the indirect communication and his use of

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[23] The pseudonymous authorship of Kierkegaard is but one among many devices which contribute to the body of his indirect communication.

metaphor.

In Kierkegaard's scenario, we may read the indirect communication as a further polemic against Hegelian philosophy: no system may be erected so as to diminish the role of faith, or for that matter, God. It is now appropriate to take a closer look at this feature of Kierkegaard's thought.

The question of Kierkegaard's "indirect communication" has been given book-length treatment in Roger Poole's recent study of the same name. Poole argues that if we begin with the assumption that Kierkegaard, in full command of textual devices,[24] had prescience enough to be aware of the power of such literary tools, then the "aesthetic writings"-- those writings of the 1840's in which Kierkegaard used an easily-penetrable pseudonymous voice-- become less frustrating to read. An awareness of planned and deliberate obtuseness on the part of the author lets the reader know that the traditional elements commonly associated with instructive or exegetical texts, moral counsel and enlightenment, do not apply. The mould is cast yet is unfamiliar as "Kierkegaard progressively denies us any secure position from which we could make a judgment" (Poole, 8). In the adjustments we make to understand the text, a clear message is sent forth. Stylistic cul-de-sacs tell the reader that the author is unwilling to take a final position, to commit to an objective system.

Antagonised and dejected, the reader of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works is, happily, not without recourse. Kierkegaard provides. His provisions, rarefied and elliptical, can be a great deal more "existentially nourishing" (Vanhoozer, 59) than the sometimes meagre fare served readily to readers in more "approachable" books. That is to say, whereas many readers come to expect objective and certain answers readily attainable

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[24] devices such as "difference" and "supplement" associated today with Deconstructionist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida.

by following a book's linear narrative, readers of Kierkegaard are *challenged* into the answers at which they arrive. The answers— or at least the questions asked— are of a sort to which only a reader, "gathered in as a potential ally, seduced and intrigued by the typographical and rhetorical waylayings of the text, and then involved in a kind of detective work" (Poole, 9-10) could arrive.[25] So, Kierkegaard provides in a manner that lets the reader know what resources are available to that individual. There are no easy answers to important questions. This provides a window of entry into what Kierkegaard may have intended by the following: "[i]f the concept of existence is really to be stressed, this cannot be given direct expression" (Kierkegaard, 1946:205).

The reasons for this are myriad. First, the manner of expression must be appropriate to that which is expressed. Today, in a world that has long accepted the popular teachings of Marshall McLuhan, imbued with notions of reception theory, we are highly aware of the impact of the medium on the message: the packaging counts. In this light, we may understand Kierkegaard's argument that, "[a]n actual emphasis on existence must be expressed in an essential form: in view of the elusiveness of existence, such a form will have to be an indirect form, namely the absence of a system" (Kierkegaard, 1946: 205). This indirect manner of communication, portraying real life furled in ambiguity, resisting absolutes, is derived from a deeply ingrained philosophical stance of humility. This may seem an odd claim to make of a thinker so intellectually daring, so brash and brilliant as Kierkegaard. He was all these things and knew it! Yet, his humility is a position assumed in the face of that which cannot be directly expressed: God. Directness, while it certainly has many attributes, seems to place a certainty on things mutable or not wholly attainable.

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[25] In *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, Ronald Green employs this same metaphor of detective work to the task of reading *Fear and Trembling*.

That is not to suggest that God is changeable; rather, it is the manner in which we receive

this knowledge that changes. The point of his rhetorical technique, or perhaps the

assumption underlying the technique, is that directness does not necessarily yield clarity.

While the above example is applicable to the ambiguities of existence and a knowledge of

God, for the purpose of this study I shall focus on the matter of faith.

In Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Johannes Climacus announces the central tenet

of indirect communication:

> Inwardness cannot be directly communicated, for its direct expression
> is precisely externality, its direction being outward, not inward.
> The direct expression of inwardness is no proof of presence; the
> direct effusion of feeling does not prove its possession, but the tension
> of the contrasting form is the measure of the intensity of inwardness
> (Kierkegaard, 1992: 232).

The link made to inwardness by indirect communication may also be made by faith. Put

another way, as a quality of faith, inwardness must be communicated indirectly. Nancy J.

Crumbine explains that "[f]aith is a dimension of the relation between self and world that

cannot be comprehended in any linear account because it constitutes a contextual fullness

that underlies all possible linear directions."[26] Therefore, communicating inwardness is a

paradox which Kierkegaard recognises to be at the centre of the faith experience and the

task of theologians and biblical scholars alike. The problems raised by the Genesis 22

story exemplify this situation.

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[26] Nancy Jay Crumbine. "On Faith," Critical Perspectives: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling. ed. Robert L. Perkins. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981, p. 189.

Genesis 22: Past interpretations and Present investigations

The Genesis 22 story raises innumerable and complex theological questions. Gerhard Von Rad writes that, "one must from the first renounce any attempt to discover one basic idea as *the* meaning of the whole. There are many levels of meaning, and whoever thinks he has discovered virgin soil must discover at once that there are many more layers below that" (Von Rad, 243). Walter Brueggemann concurs, calling the tale "a story of anguished faith," which is, "notoriously difficult to interpret. Its difficulty begins in the aversion immediately felt for a God who will command the murder of a son"(Brueggemann, 185). The text explores the "contradiction between the *testing* of God and the *providing* of God..." (Brueggemann, 192). The story of epic emotions "is rightly admired as a masterpiece of economy, psychology, and artistic subtiety."[27]

I wish, in this brief section, to highlight some of these problems, showing how, in isolated but representative cases, they have been dealt with in the past and how they are treated by Kierkegaard in Fear and Trembling. Further still, we may note how Kierkegaard's interpretation of the story has been interpreted. So as not to lose our way or the reader's confidence in the unity of this proposal, I will remind the reader that the purpose of this section is to establish that-- through metaphor-- Kierkegaard addresses problems fundamental to the biblical text while concurrently providing his readers with a compelling interpretive path through his own text.

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[27] Jack Miles. God: A Biography. New York: Knopf, 1995, p.58. Miles, challenging conventional readings, makes an interesting observation that further attests to the dramatic ambiguity of the story: "we never learn whether he (Abraham) would actually go through with the sacrifice," and later, "Abraham goes as far as he possibly can without actually doing the deed, and God chooses to be satisfied with this much" (Miles, 59).

Ronald Green finds the "established view" (Green, 1988:123) or normative reading of

Fear and Trembling holds that Kierkegaard,

> was essentially espousing a suprarational, supramoral understanding
> of Christian ethics, a view that makes the revealed divine command,
> not conscience, the supreme guide for Christian life. If rational mor-
> ality brands Abraham a criminal and if Abraham really is the father
> of faith, then rational morality must be rejected or at least subordinated
> to the higher norm of revelation (Green, 1988:123).[28]

Whether or not this reading of Kierkegaard's interpretation is a correct one (Green, siding

with Louis Mackey,[29] believes it is misguided), it serves to underscore the centrality

Kierkegaard gives to the difficult question of ethics and religion. The question is

"difficult," because reason seems pitted against revelation, learned moral imperatives

against God's divine command; such was not always the case.

The splintering of ethics and religion would have been unthinkable to the Jewish

rabbinic tradition. As Green notes,

> Christian thinkers developed the idea of an ethic independent of
> of revelation known to human beings on the basis of reason alone:
> the ethic of natural law. Others opposed this emphasis on human
> autonomy in ethics and set forth seemingly uncompromising de-
> fenses of a divine command morality that would equate morality
> with whatever God willed. Nevertheless...the divine command
> was almost always interpreted to support the deepest requirements
> of human moral and religious reasoning (Green, 1988:103).

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[28] The brief historical sketch of the manner in which Genesis 22 has been interpreted by Christian thinkers is heavily indebted to Ronald Green's Chapter 5, "Revelation and Reason in Biblical Faith: Genesis 22 and Christianity," in Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. p. 103-129. This first-rate and accessible chapter provides a more detailed analysis of the interpretations which preceded Kierkegaard's reading of the Abraham saga.

[29] Green cites Mackey's reading of Abraham and Isaac as poetic "type,"--a character who stands for or represents some identifiable other-- in Mackey's Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet. See Green,1988: 123.

While Judaism does not entertain the notion of a separation of ethics and revelation, the separation is not as radical as one would suppose.[30] It is tenable that the divine command could be articulated through reason. It should be made clear that this type of thinking is not made to support the verity of either approach, but rather to suggest the feasibility of a mutual shared space between reason and revelation.

Isaac's wood and Christ's cross

The shock of the implications of Genesis 22 were absorbed by New Testament, early, mediaeval, and Reformation writers; each aligned the *Akehdah* (indicating child sacrifice, but more strictly referring to the "binding"of Isaac) as it is known in Jewish liturgy,[31] with Christ's passion on the cross. "*Akehdah* became the prototype of the Christ event" (Green, 1988:104). To read the Genesis 22 saga through this interpretive lens is forever to suggest a link with God's forgiveness and, tacitly, "the apparent suspension of justice this involves" (Green, 1988: 104).

It is evident from the minute New Testament gloss on the story of Abraham and Isaac[32] that Christian writers have paid little attention to the story's moral significance. Straw

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[30] The argument I am making here is not a methodological one, rather it has to do with the complimentary conclusions which are arrived at by natural theology and revelation.

[31] For an excellent consideration of the role of Akehdah in this context see Louis Jacobs's, "The problem of the Akehdah in Jewish Thought," in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals. ed. Robert Perkins. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981. p.1-9. In this article raises an enormous problem in Jewish thought: "[h]ow could God have ordered a man to murder his son? The problem is aggravated by the fact that in no less than sixteen other passages in the Bible...child sacrifice is condemned as an abomination before God" (Jacobs, 1).

[32] See James 2: 21-23; Hebrews 11: 17-19.

man or not, James expresses the significance of the passage in terms of "justification by works;" Hebrews upholds the story as exemplifying the doctrine of resurrection (Green, 1988: 105). Writers from Origen (Homilies on Genesis) to Augustine (City of God), to Luther (Lectures on Genesis) and Calvin (Commentaries on the Book of Genesis) have, to varying degrees, followed orthodox biblical teachings which, expurgating its unsavoury aspects, tend to view the story through New Testament eyes (Green, 106-118c). Reason -- subsumed under God's grace-- maintains the possibility of articulating and understanding God's revelation to humankind.

Kierkegaard's message would appear to be markedly different from the preceding interpretations. His aim is not to align reason and revelation, but rather to remind his readers of the nearly unfathomable difference between God's ways and our own normative moral standard. Gerhard Von Rad advocates a similar reading when he exhorts exegetes who seek properly to understand the story to "leave to the statement in v.l its entire weight...and that one does not try to resolve it by a psychologising explanation" (Von Rad, 238).[33] However, the purpose of this study is not to bolster this well-entrenched view of Kierkegaard's work; nor is the intention to offer a new interpretation of the work as Ronald Green has done.[34] Rather, I wish to show that the way in which Kierkegaard

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[33] Elsewhere Von Rad writes that, "Abraham had to cut himself off from his whole past in ch. 12.I f.; now he must give up his whole future" (Von Rad, 239). The story is highly dramatic and should not be rendered otherwise.

[34] Challenging the standard reading of the text, Green argues that Kierkegaard's "focus is on the very different 'transnormative' or 'transmoral' religious question of whether we can count on God's grace and forgivenes" to help us fulfil our moral destiny. " If I am right about this," Green supposes, "Fear and Trembling is not the idiosyncratic moral treatise it seems to be but, despite its misleading surface argument, a very traditional work of Pauline-Lutheran theology" (Green, 123). Green goes on to build a

communicates-- indirectly, through metaphor-- invites the reader to co-habit the textual world; to participate in the dilemmas which the Genesis 22 story raises, to feel the anxiety which bespeak the story.

This method is one which is particularly well-suited for dealing with the ambiguities of the Genesis 22 text. Both Von Rad and Brueggemann agree that the Genesis 22 text is multi-layered and is thus, "presented to permit free play of interpretation. The intent is not clear. It requires some decisions by the interpreter" (Brueggemann, 185). Exegete and author agree: the reader must act upon the text, ordering and wrestling with the nuances of its meanings. The reconstructive act of metaphor-making broaches a possible world, stretched between the biblical world and our own. It is a world in which we view the movements of faith (Kierkegaard, 34); not going further (Kierkegaard, 5) than faith, but content to be sojourners on Abraham's "journey". It is also a world set apart from the chatter of secular spaces, full of "silence." These two extended metaphors allow the reader entry into Kierkegaard's often confusing, frequently disturbing textual world. We must work to understand this text

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> **Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**
> **For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to**
> **do his good pleasure (Phil.2:12-13).**

To return to Kierkegaard: the questions that need to be answered in the following section are: what is the role of indirect communication in **Fear and Trembling**, and how

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very strong case for this argument which I do not have space to elaborate upon in this essay. It is, however, well worth mentioning because any interpretation of Kierkegaard that settles too comfortably in the mind risks losing the point of Kierkegaard's thought. We are to look at the Genesis story anew, each time. We must be disturbed by its detail and the profundity of faith.

does indirect communication help Kierkegaard grapple with the difficult theological questions raised by the Genesis 22 narrative? Here, I hope to show that the indirect communication functions deliberately as a call to faith.

Ostensibly, Fear and Trembling is, as Edward F. Mooney notes (Mooney, 2), an exegesis of the Genesis 22 story of Abraham's response to God's command that he sacrifice his only son, Isaac. It is, in fact, a great deal more. The narrative, in itself, raises immensely difficult theological questions that lodge in our psyche and lay claim to a visceral response. We react in shock, recoiling at the notion that God would ask a parent to harm, let alone kill, a child. Kierkegaard, attuned to the sweeping drama of the story and its ability to hold the reader's imagination, pushes the account further: the story becomes a platform for an investigation of the nature of faith.

This psychological examination is made possible through Kierkegaard's indirect communication. How is the indirect communication helpful? Kierkegaard compels his reader into an active participation by denying the reader's expectations. Gone is the simple preface: there are four. The linear narrative is counterposed by a stream of consciousness-like prose. Pseudonyms replace reliable narrative guidance. Each device conspires to prod the reader into surviving by her own wits. The active role the reader must take in making sense of the narrative mirrors the act of faith a believer must make. The indirect communication affords the text and its subject matter an intimacy that reflects the faith journey itself. In a marked contrast to current deconstructive sensibilities and reading strategies, the act of reading Fear and Trembling is an act of construction as we, following Abraham, stand before a word.

Walter Brueggemann, in his study of the book of Genesis writes that, "the narrative (Genesis 22) locates Abraham before a word" (Brueggemann, 189). Notice the use of the word "locates." Brueggemann's spatial metaphor is an apt one: it underscores the

Judaeo-Christian tradition's spiritual investment in the Word. It is, therefore, appropriate that Abraham, the father of faith, should stand before a word.

> He is addressed. He answers immediately and faithfully. His
> response to Isaac in the second speech is the same as his response
> to God in the first and third speeches...He understands fully that he
> is a creature of the word (Brueggemann, 189).

Fear and Trembling propels the reader though numerable visitations with a host of characters occupying different stages or spheres of life. We encounter these individuals and in so doing question our own motivations for attempting to understand who they are. The paramount example of this in Fear and Trembling is, of course, Abraham.

Yet Abraham is never portrayed directly. His image is cast and recast through framed narrative; his image is conveyed by other characters' descriptions of Abraham. We peer into possible outcomes, possible choices Abraham may have made in the absence of faith. In this void and emptiness we come to realize the importance of a direct engagement with faith. Therefore, Abraham's story is not delivered to us in completion. We must work to understand the Genesis 22 account and in so doing come to realize attraction and repulsion; the beauty and the absurdity that is a life of faith.

Yet Kierkegaard does not totally abandon his readers: there are "clues" placed with exacting deliverance throughout the text. My contention in this study is that the central metaphors found in Fear and Trembling are these clues.

The Motive for Metaphor

By its very nature, the metaphor is a microcosm of the larger text: a problem to unfurl. Concrete and indisputable meaning is postponed through and in favour of a plethora of meanings. The reader must sort out which meanings are appropriate and pursue these imaginative avenues to their logical extent. The metaphor is highly effective in this text

because it functions in a manner that never pins down meaning. The possibility of seeing anew is ever present.

The strategy behind Fear and Trembling goes well beyond poetic device and skilful literary technique. The refusal to conform to systematics, to accept identity as a preconditioned, cohesive unit, to present faith as easily attainable undergirds Kierkegaard's authorship. Therefore, it is necessary here to provide something of a *caveat emptor*. The study of how Kierkegaard uses metaphor in Fear and Trembling is not primarily a literary study. Rather, the intention of this study is to show that the metaphor is a tool used to draw attention to his hypothesis that faith demands that one be involved in its attainment: there is no such thing as a passive investigation of the nature of faith.

Faith cannot be discussed in a passive manner because it is based on choice. Indeed, as Kierkegaard asserts in his journals, "faith, surely, implies an act of the will" (Kierkegaard, 1946: 2). Choice is an act of the present that anticipates the future: it contains an eschatological component. This component is important for our study because it underscores the appropriateness of metaphor to the language of faith. Just as faith deals in the language of possibility-- not actuality-- so, too, does metaphor. The relationship of metaphor to possibility, and by extension to faith, is a fundamental component of this study.

We have introduced several key aspects of Kierkegaard's philosophy which will permeate the remainder of this study. Chief among these are the idea of choice and the method of indirect communication, both of which inform our reading of Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor in the next chapter.

We have seen that choice is deeply embedded in Kierkegaard's theory of stages, is crucial to a life of faith, and is significant in textual reconstruction. Choice is indeed a key component of the metaphoric process. Open to new meanings, a reader will choose a

possible meaning to help make sense of a text.

In choosing to articulate that meaning, a reader may do so indirectly, though metaphor. It is equally important that the reader of the present study understand that Kierkegaard's project is steeped in indirect communication. This indirect communication is evidenced through his use of metaphor, which we will now turn to consider via the metaphor theory of Paul Ricoeur.

Chapter Two: Ricoeur and Metaphor Theory

Stephen Crites has written that "human beings have a form of consciousness capable of entertaining possibilities...they remember. they anticipate. they scheme. they fear. they fantasise: they ventilate their localised reality with myriad forms of possibility" (Crites, 1991: 185). A central claim that I make in this study is that Kierkegaard's language of faith embodies a sense of possibility. Put clearly, the language of faith *is* the language of possibility.[35] "The language of faith must speak of things beyond our actual situation, and therefore beyond the reach of literal or descriptive language" (Vanhoozer, 73). That being said, I wish to present Ricoeur's theory of metaphor as one which provides the philosophical grounding for this claim.

In what follows, I will present seminal arguments made by theorists of metaphor and the response to these arguments made by Ricoeur in his demanding tome The Rule of Metaphor. Yet, I am conscious that metaphor theory is an enormous field unto itself and, alone, merits an entire study. The danger is, then, that the complexity of the theory threatens to overwhelm that to which the theory is applied. In order to help prevent this occurrence, I will begin by situating Ricoeur's theory of metaphor in the context of the language of faith.

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[35] In Heb. 11:1 faith is said to be "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Although this definition does not encapsulate all the Bible has to say about faith, it does indicate the main thrust of faith to be that of a holding fast to possibility.

Ricoeur and the Language of Faith.

In order that it be determinable, thought needs to be grounded through signs.[36] Language is the primary example of such a sign. In this capacity, language has a mediatory function. Yet, the very thing which language hopes to attain— determinability (by a shared community) of thought— is, ironically, denied because of the inherently polysemic nature of the medium. A word may have multiple meanings. Instead of proffering stability, language postpones mediation. Language does indeed convey meaning, but this meaning is never complete: it is forever in a state of evolution. This being the case, language occupies a state of constant possibility. Through various avenues of explanation, this chapter will endeavour to show that this is the case.

If it is indeed so that language itself occupies the space of possibility, creative language —specifically metaphor— is chief in exhibiting this quality. By looking at one thing in terms of another, a metaphor changes the way we think about a thing and, by extension, the way in which we communicate about that thing. Faith, it would seem, is one such subject that would benefit from this interpretational approach. "Because of its capacity to express and create possibilities, metaphor is ideally suited to be the discourse of a theology that is oriented to eschatology" (Vanhoozer, 57). Both metaphor and faith deal with what is incomplete and strive for completeness, for meaning. The travails of Abraham— both in anticipation of Isaac's birth and the unflinching hope that God will, somehow, return Isaac to him— display this ordeal of faith. The story of Abraham, in Kierkegaard's telling of it, is a story of possibility. This possibility is rendered through the use of metaphor. Showing that this is so will be the burden of this study.

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[36] See Leonard Lawlor's _Imagination and Chance: The Difference between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida_. Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 1-6.

Past Theories of Metaphor

1. Substitutionary: In the beginning was the Word...

From the Greek *metapherein*, metaphor is understood as a process whereby meaning is "carried over" from the actual term to one possibly like it (Ricoeur, 17). Yet, to be sure, metaphor is conceived of solely in terms of a single word. Aristotle, the first to offer a theory of metaphor, uses the term in the above sense in his Poetics and Rhetoric, but rather than accentuating the aspects of movement, transfer, or process, he focuses on the word: he categorises metaphor as special *kind* of word. The emphasis classical rhetoric bestows upon taxonomy is reflected in Aristotle's definition of metaphor. In Poetics the metaphor is said to be "the application to a thing of a name that belongs to something else, the transference taking place from genus to species, species to genus, from species to species, or on grounds of analogy" (*Poetics* 1457 b 6-9; Ricoeur, 13). Why, we might ask, is it wrong to view metaphor as a special *kind* of noun, as a phenomenon of naming? Examining the presuppositions which lie behind this influential definition will help answer this question.

The first presupposition that Aristotle makes in his definition is that each word has a singular extant meaning accepted by a particular community and determined by common use. The second presupposition, following from the first, is that a metaphor challenges and *deviates* from this ordinary-- and therefore correct-- use. To employ a metaphor, then, shades closely to solecism and constitutes intentional *misspeak*. This act of deviation is predicated upon the substitution of a commonly accepted word for another word that appears foreign or seemingly wrong. This may be termed a deviation of *type*. In Aristotle's analysis, the metaphor is reduced to that of an ornament that exists solely for entertainment.

The association between ornamentation and metaphor persisted well into the nineteenth century. Ricoeur, in fact, argues that the residue of this distrust still lingers today. The word "distrust" helps to answer the question of why is it wrong that Aristotle accord such weight to taxonomy? The answer to this question is that, as a *type* of language, the metaphor is relegated to a secondary --

almost inconsequential-- position in language. Ricoeur charges the logical positivists (Locke)[17] with prolonging this distrust and misinformed understanding of metaphor. It is they who state that, "all language that is not *descriptive*, in the sense of giving information about *facts*, must be *emotional*." (Ricoeur, 227). From this, the logical positivists equate the emotions as "within the subject" and therefore, "not related in any way whatsoever to anything outside the subject" (Ricoeur, 227). Already one can detect the bias of such thinkers have in favouring the impulse toward the universal and external.[38] In the face of the distrust modern philosophy displays toward creative language, Ricoeur urges his reader to reconsider the role of creative language in the creation of meaning in language.[39] The argument, an import from philosophy, rather than literary study, is discussed in section three of this chapter. Ricoeur argues that the world existing outside a literary text-- what Ricoeur terms a text's *reference*-- is of equal if not greater importance to the working of a text, termed the *sense*. It is precisely philosophy's misguided focus on sense alone that has caused the disturbing tendency to view the metaphor solely as a piece of ornament, carrying no cognitive significance.

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[17] In his "Of the Abuse of Words" (On Human Understanding) Locke's view of metaphor epitomises the empiricists' distrust of creative language: "all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and therby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats...in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct wholly to be avoided." As quoted by J. Soskice. Metaphor and Religious Language. (Clarendon Press 1985) 13.

[38] Kierkegaard and Ricoeur are united in their challenge to this universalising tendency.

[39] For a defence of poetry's contribution the thought process see "Poetry and Possibility" in A Ricoeur Reader p. 448. Ricoeur is, of course, not alone in making association between the creation of meaning in language and creative language.. The Oxford English Dictionary takes great pains to illustrate the meaning of word and how that meaning has changed over time through citation of how that particular word is used in a specific literary text.

While the definition of metaphor given in the _Poetics_ is retained by Aristotle in _Rhetoric_, its function appears significantly different in the case of the latter.   On this account, Ricoeur cautions the reader to proceed carefully: not only does this theory of figures of speech come from a discipline no longer in existence, "but amputated as well" (Ricoeur, 9). That is to say, of the three parts which form the foundation of rhetoric-- argument, composition, and style-- it was peculiarly only "style" which remained under consideration. Once lively and vibrant, rhetoric "became an erratic and futile discipline" (Ricoeur, 10) devoid of philosophic sensibility and reduced to mere taxonomy. Alone, style implied several things-- the notion that what was being expressed hid, disguised, augmented and manipulated what was pure, unadorned, and normal. This emasculated rhetoric, condemned by Plato as an art of illusion and deception, was indeed dangerous and worthy of skepticism according to Ricoeur.

The response to the potential havoc which rhetoric could create was to "draw a line between use and abuse (of language), and to establish philosophical connections between the sphere of validity of rhetoric and that of philosophy" (Ricoeur, 11). Embellishment and indirection in language, therefore, were viewed as the enemy of clarity and precision; the metaphor-- as we have seen in Locke-- became the primary candidate for such condemnation. This, says Ricoeur, is how metaphor became so inextricably bound with the notion of ornamentation.

Although the function of metaphor differs significantly between _Poetics_ and _Rhetoric_-- the aim of the latter is persuasion, the aim of poetry is "to compose an essential representation of human action" (Ricoeur, 13)-- the two vastly different approaches are united in the emphasis which is placed upon the single unit, the noun.

The noun, made explicit by Aristotle, is accorded a pivotal function in the creation of metaphor whereby a single term is substituted for another on the basis of a perceived resemblance. While Ricoeur feels that it is misguided to analyse a metaphor solely as word, disregarding its context amid other words in a phrase or sentence, he applauds Aristotle for an incisive breakthrough: Aristotle

argues that resemblance is a key component of metaphor. Aristotle saw this ability to perceive likeness in things normally unrelated as a mark of genius. Yet, the notion of resemblance remains today "an idea fallen on hard times"; it is a basic feature that, caught in the turgid prose of contemporary metaphor theory, has lost its voice.

2. Interaction Theory

Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension... (Shelley).[40]

Interaction theorists of metaphor regard the demarcation between literal and figurative language made by classical rhetoric to be wholly misguided. Whereas Aristotle claimed the metaphoric process was one by which resemblances between things were recognised, interaction theorists contend that this skill is a fundamental component of *all* language. Could it be that language itself is, as Shelley contends, "vitally metaphorical" (Ricoeur, 80)?

The answer to this question is entirely dependent upon whether or not language is said to be a closed system whereby a word's meaning is as bedrock, firm and unchanging. The central dilemma with this position, prevalent in classical rhetoric, is that it accords the metaphor little more than an ornamental function. This is so because there is no cognitive weight given to its use; its ability to change the way one thinks is negligible.

However, if one takes the alternate view that language is ever changing and mutable, there is much to be considered here. By seeking to understand metaphor beyond its ornamental capacities, the tensive or interaction theory of metaphor issues a challenge to substitutionary theory on several fronts. This section will address four specific claims which interaction theorists make: 1) words do

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[40] Percy Bysshe Shelley. "A Defence of Poetry," The Norton Anthology of English Literature. vol.5/2. ed. M. H. Abrhams. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986, p. 780.

not have primary meanings; 2) the sentence, not the word, is the locus of meaning; 3) the tension brought about by metaphor is a matter not simply of two competing terms, but rather of two interpretations of the metaphoric statement; and 4) resemblance is insufficient in addressing the dynamic of metaphor.

The first of these claims is predicated upon the notion that it is utter nonsense to insist, as do substitutionary theorists, that words have correct or primary meanings. I.A. Richards is the first of the interaction theorists to attack "the cardinal distinction in classical rhetoric between proper meaning and figurative meaning" (Ricoeur, 77). "Words have no proper meaning, because no meaning can be said to 'belong' to them; and they do not possess any meaning in themselves, because it is discourse, taken as a whole, that carries the meaning, itself an undivided whole" (Ricoeur, 77). However, this is not to suggest that a word can meaning anything. The issue at hand here is where, might we say, is meaning in language created; what is its source? With this in mind we can concede that of course words 'stand for' something. What they stand for, however, is neither atomic ideas nor missing atomic things. Rather, words abbreviate parts of context" (Schaldenbrand, 67).

The word's relationship to the sentence is one of reciprocity: it derives its meaning from the larger context of the sentence yet it functions on behalf of that sentence. In this light we may understand the claim made by Richards that, "what a word means is the missing parts of the contexts from which it draws its delegated efficacy" (Ricoeur, 77). This give-and-take dynamic, perhaps dialectic, is for the interaction theorist central to a proper understanding of metaphor.

The third claim of interaction theorists is that to *read* a metaphor properly it is necessary to address the tension which exists between interpretations of words; *not* the words alone. Simply by using the term "interpretation" in the context of a word's meaning indicates just how far removed interaction theorists are from substitutionary theorists. Interpretation is an irrelevant term in the latter's case.

A good interpretation of metaphor, in this theory, must be sensitive to how a given word appears in a phrase or sentence. To give an example, when we say "God is good," our notions of what God might be and what we perceive goodness to be intersect with the metaphor constructed of a benevolent deity. "God," in this case, is contextualised by "good" and conversely "good" by our conception of "God."

The idea which the above illustration intends to explore is the notion that metaphor includes both a concrete image which it "presents" and an underlying meaning evoked by the presenting image. Moreover, the example leads into a discussion of what might be called the interaction theorists' disdain for the poverty of resemblance. I.A. Richards, Max Black, and Monroe Beardsley— cited by Ricoeur as proponents of the interactionist "school"— each find the idea that metaphor is a work of resemblance to be grossly vague; for this single descriptive ailment there are, not surprisingly, three different remedies.

Predicative Structures[41]

I.A. Richards describes the "tension" insufficiently articulated in substitutionary theory in terms of *tenor* and *vehicle*. The tenor is said to be the "underlying idea" of the metaphor statement while the vehicle is "the idea under whose sign the first idea is apprehended" (Ricoeur, 80).[42] Yet why, asks Ricoeur, is it necessary to employ such conspicuously rarefied terminology? Could not the same idea be conveyed by using easily understandable terms such as an "original idea" and "borrowed idea" or "the idea" and "its image"? (Ricoeur, 80-81). Ricoeur's response to the question

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[41] See The Rule of Metaphor, p. 99.

[42] As noted on page 336 of Ricoeur, Richards, in fact, borrows the term tenor from Berkeley who implores his readers not to "stick on this or that phrase, or manner of expression, but candidly collect my meaning form the whole sum and tenor of my discourse, and laying aside the words as much as possible, consider the base notions themselves."

is measured. The argument made in favour of Richards' terminology is that esoteric language is

imperative because it is wholly necessary to resist any suggestion that a word has a fixed or proper

meaning.

> Tenor and vehicle are neutral terms with regard to all these
> confusions. But above all, they prevent one from talking about
> tenor apart from the figure, and from treating the vehicle as
> an added ornament. The simultaneous presence of the tenor
> and the vehicle and their interaction engender the metaphor;
> consequently, the tenor does not remain unaltered, as if the vehicle
> we nothing but wrapping and decoration (Ricoeur, 81).

Perhaps Richards compensates too much for the inadequate formulations of Aristotle and, in

doing so, loses something quite central to the make-up of metaphor. Moreover, it can be argued that

the terms tenor and vehicle are too ambiguous and are destined to cause confusion rather than

clarity. In his now famous article "Metaphor," Max Black notes this pitfall and improves upon

Richards' terminology, introducing the idea of *focus* and *frame*. "The advantage of this

terminology," as Ricoeur rightly notes, "is that it directly expresses the phenomenon of focusing on

a word, yet without returning to the illusion that words have meanings in themselves" (Ricoeur, 85).

This corrective is highly important. Black employs his terms by advocating what he calls a "system

of associated commonplaces" (Ricoeur, 89) whereby meanings which are not based upon common

use are filtered out.

Recalling the binary methodologies of Richards and Black, Monroe Beardsley joins in offering

his theory of signification between the primary, what a sentence says, and the secondary, what is

suggested therein (Ricoeur, 90). The first is explicit, the latter implicit. This secondary meaning,

what is connoted, is contingent upon the context in which the word is found. The word will,

therefore, interact with other parts of the phrase to suggest new meanings. These tacit suggestions

are referred to by Beardsley as a "range of connotations" (Ricoeur, 91). Beardsley's theory, raised

by Ricoeur, is important to the present study because Beardsley is a theorist of literature primarily

and is sensitive to the fact that "literature precisely does confront us with discourse where several

things are meant at the same time. without the reader being required to choose between them" (Ricoeur. 91).

A work's implicit meaning is. then. central to a literary composition (Beardsley 126: Ricoeur. 91). The problem remains in articulating or explicating how this work comes to "mean" these secondary or implicit meanings. According to Ricoeur. there are two senses to meaning. The first, deals with "the world of the work" and asks about "the projection of a possible and inhabitable world" (Ricoeur. 92). Yet, from a literary approach. meaning has a great deal more do with "verbal design" and other technical matters. Ricoeur argues that these two extant views of meaning need to be held in tandem and not divided. as is often the case with literary criticism (Ricoeur. 92-3).

What Beardsley brings to the discussion of metaphor and what Ricoeur champions is the notion that metaphor has within it the ability to "project and reveal a world" (Ricoeur. 93) Beardsley brings into conflict two "modes of understanding" (Ricoeur. 93) between the projections made by the work and the work itself as an arrangement of words.

Yet, with regard to the creative work, the question remains: "[h]ow do we know which potential meanings should be attributed...and which should be disclaimed?" (Ricoeur, 94). Monroe Beardsley attempts to answer the above question. approaching it in quite a different way than does Black. Beardsley concentrates on the role of "logical absurdity." (Ricoeur, 94) conjecturing that absurdity has an emancipatory function in "liberating the secondary meaning" (Ricoeur, 94) of a phrase. Free to decide on a plethora of meanings, logical and illogical, the reader oversees what Beardsley terms a "spread of connotations" (Ricoeur,98). For an absurdity to perform, it needs something to react against; the absurd will always be in the face of something. Thus, Beardsley's absurdity is akin to both Richard's tenor/vehicle and Black's focus/frame in that "metaphor is a kind of attribution, requiring a subject and a modifier" (Ricoeur, 95).

The central problem of all three accents to this one school of thought is that by castigating and excoriating the role of resemblance from their approach, the imagistic nature of metaphor has been

side-stepped. Why is it important to remark upon the image? The image is wholly bound up with the metaphorical process for it is the foundation of metaphoric invention.

Aristotle suggests that the use of metaphor evinces genius in the ability to see likeness in things unrelated: simply, resemblance *precedes* metaphor. In contrast, the interaction theorists claim that resemblance is, in fact, the result of metaphor, not the motivation behind it.. While the interaction theorists provide Ricoeur with a linguistic framework from which to work, he parts with them over the devalued status given to resemblance.

3. Ricoeur

Thus far, we have covered key components of metaphor theory as espoused by proponents of the substitutionary and interactionary schools. In this section I will present Ricoeur as a corrective, nuanced voice to these theories, demonstrating why his approach is helpful in providing a way in which to read Kierkegaard's metaphors in Fear and Trembling.

Polysemy

A recurring motif in The Rule of Metaphor is a challenge to the notion-- discussed in section one of this chapter-- that there is a univocal, correct, normative, and immutable meaning to all words. Ricoeur, building upon the findings of the interaction theory of metaphor, posits that polysemy is a fundamental feature of language.[43] We cannot deny the plurivocity of language. That is to say, an

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[43] "That polysemy is not a pathological phenomenon but a healthy feature of our language is shown by the opposite hypothesis. A language without polysemy would violate the principle of economy, for it would extend its vocabulary infinitely...We need a lexical system that is economical, flexible, and sensitive to context, in order to express the spectrum of human experience" (Ricoeur, 115). I believe this quote not only encapsulates the foundation of Ricoeur's philosophy of language; it will be instructive when we consider the metaphors of journey and silence as articulations of the human experience of faith.

attempt to harness meaning through singular denotations is an affront to the self-renewing capacity

of language. Paul Ricoeur expounds upon this view:

> one basic feature of the language is this polysemy, the fact that for
> one word there is more than one meaning. So there is not a one-
> to-one relationship between word and meaning. And so it's a source
> of misunderstanding, but it's also the source of all richness in lang-
> uage, because you may play with this range of meanings which
> accompany one word (Ricoeur, 1969: 449).

It is telling that Ricoeur remarks upon the both potential for misunderstanding and the richness of

expression which are products of the polysemy of language. It would seem that the two are

intimately related. The richness of language is utterly dependent on the fact that meaning is not

pinned down. Terms shade into one another; meanings change. We are able to "play" with a

plethora of meanings, none of which may be called actual; some, however, are possible. Vanhoozer

explains this dynamic, suggesting that, "by making words and sentences mean all they can mean,

Ricoeur hopes to bring back to language its capacity for meaningfulness. Though scientific

language is clear and precise, it is not existentially nourishing" (Vanhoozer, 59).

If, as Ricoeur claims, words share the capacity to have multiple meanings, then Aristotle's

taxonomy (in which the metaphor is classified as a deviant *type* of language) ceases to be of

relevance. Instead of a classification of words based on binary opposition (proper/deviant;

primary/secondary), Ricoeur exhorts his reader to consider the metaphoric impulse germane to all

language. He writes that the "idea of an initial metaphorical impulse destroys these oppositions

between proper and figurative, ordinary and strange, order and transgression" (Ricoeur, 23). Why is

it of benefit that these categories be destroyed?

If the metaphor is a mere after-thought to *proper* words, a substitution of the intriguing or novel

for ordinary, then the metaphor cannot be accorded any importance other than that of ornamentation.

Wrest from being merely an ornament to append to "normal" words, a deviant trope of sorts, the

metaphor can finally be appreciated for its innovative capacity.

Metaphor as a Work of Discourse

The plurivocity of language is an idea which Ricoeur borrows from interaction theorist of

metaphor. However, the foundation behind this claim, as S.H. Clark notes, sets Ricoeur apart from

these theorists. In her study of Paul Ricoeur, S.H. Clark plies beneath the dense arguments of The

Rule of Metaphor and finds that,

> something in language allows, perhaps compels, the disclosure of
> new meaning. This underlying dynamism conforms to the structure
> of Ricoeur's other underpinnings of faith...the renewal of a promise
> of future abundance here becomes a kind of forward-directed confidence
> in the human capacity for creativity" (Clark, 121).

What Clark is tapping into here is the connection Ricoeur makes between language and those who

use language. This relationship, then, provides the context in which a metaphor is created. Its

context is not limited to the single word; nor is it accurate to suggest that context is limited to the

sentence. Instead, Ricoeur posits that the metaphor is a work of discourse, alive and referring to a

world beyond the text.

The metaphor, viewed as a work of discourse, becomes a potent force in the creation of meaning

and understanding. Whereas the contexts for metaphor proposed in sections one and two limit the

metaphor's reach, discourse seems to advocate an open system. Ricoeur's aphoristic claim that "the

dictionary contains no metaphors; they exist only in discourse" (Ricoeur, 97) leads him to the

following assertion. Metaphors are not only innovative (in their semantic impertinence), but also

refer to a world. It may be help to understand this claim as a response to the lexically closed system

of Structuralist linguistics.

Hermeneutics: Finding Meaning Beyond the Text

Structuralists view language as a closed system of signs arranged as both an atemporal (*langue*)

and a temporal message (*parole*). Structuralism focuses on the deciphering of these atemporal codes

in order to arrive at what a particular text means. In dealing with the internal dynamics of a text—

the placement of phrases, words, their cognitive and linguistic relationship to each other--

Strucuturalism is concerned with the sense of a text. In modern literary criticism, S/Z, Roland

Barthes's painstaking (for reader and writer) dissection of Balzac's novella, Sarrasine, surely stands

as the pinnacle example of such Structuralism. While Ricoeur admires the view that a text is a work

of language, his interest extends beyond the *sense* of a text to its *reference*. When one refers to a

text's reference it implies that there is a world beyond the text to which it refers. Therefore, unlike

Structuralism, there is a belief that a text's meaning is nourished by the extra-linguistic features of

that text.

It is here that Ricoeur introduces the idea of hermeneutics. He writes: "[h]ermeneutics then is

simply the theory that regulates the transition from structure of the work to world of the work"

(Ricoeur, 220). While it is true that hermeneutics has in the past attempted to accommodate a

reading of a text with authorial intent.[44] Ricoeur views hermeneutics as a necessary bridge which

aids in the transition that Structuralists were unable to make. Language is not the closed system

which Structuralist thinkers believe it to be. Because this is so, Ricoeur postulates that reference is

applicable to literary works; there is a quality in the sense (think of the tools used to make literature

come alive: metaphor, simile, hyperbole etc.) of a literary work which "calls for reference or

denotation" (Ricoeur, 221). Moreover, "the literary work through the structure proper to it displays

a world only under the condition that the reference of descriptive discourse is suspended" (Ricoeur,

221).

In its concerns for the reference of a work, hermeneutics attempts to account for the diverse ways

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[44] "in another publication, I contrast this postulate with the
romantic and psychologising conception of hermeneutics originating
with Schleiermacher and Dilthey, form whom the supreme law of
interpretation is the search for a harmony between the spirit of the
author and that of the reader. To this always difficult and on
impossible quest for an intention hidden behind the work, I oppose a
quest that is displayed before the work" (Ricoeur, 220).

in which being is expressed. Such interpretation must recognise similarity, novelty and the points

of connection between the sense and reference of a text; between the work and world of a text.

A central feature which distinguishes Ricoeur from the preceding interpreters of metaphor is the

place in which he locates the act of interpretation. Whereas the interaction theorists hold that

metaphors and texts are extant and are in need of interpretation, Ricoeur conjectures that

interpretation itself stands in front of and before the text. That is to say, before we encounter the text

we approach it as an interpreter: we act upon the text. The idea is central to hermeneutics: all

thought is interpretation.[45]

A consideration of hermeneutics gains a sharper edge if we recall the section entitled,

"The Necessity of Indirection" in chapter one of this study. Indirection for Kierkegaard

was a stance of humility taken in order both to comprehend and to communicate concepts

beyond the reaches of a direct approach. The focus becomes the manner in which this

information is filtered. Kierkegaard's concern with indirect communication finds a modern

day echo in Ricoeur's hermeneutics. In his engaging essay "The Creativity of Language,"

Ricoeur argues that, "[c]onceptualisation cannot reach meaning directly or create meaning

out of itself ex nihilo; it cannot dispense with the detour of mediation through figurative

structures. This detour is intrinsic to the very working of concepts" (Ricoeur, 1974: 469).

The above contention helps clarify Ricoeur's position with regard to his claim that

metaphor "redescribes" reality. Janet Martin Soskice is deeply critical of this kind of talk,

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[45] This should not be confused with what Ricoeur sees as the task
of hermeneutics. He writes that, "the task of hermeneutics, as I have
said, is a double one: the reconstruction of the inner dynamic of
texts and the restoration of the ability of the text itself to point
from itself to the idea of a world in which I can dwell" (William
Schweiker, 90) "Erzahlung, Metapher, und Interpretationstheorie,"
Zeitschrift fur Theologie und Kirche. 84 (1987),248. See the
following footnote for a contrast between how Ricoeur views previous
notions of hermeneutics and his own.

finding it evasive. "Ricoeur's language of redescription," Soskice writes, "inevitably suggests ontological tension, it implies that there is some definite, preexisting thing...that the metaphor is *about* and simply redescribes" (Soskice, 89). She goes on to write that

> redescription, however radical, is always *redescription*. The
> interesting thing about metaphor, or at least about some metaphors,
> is that they are used not to redescribe but disclose for the first time.
> The metaphor has to be used because something new is being
> talked about. This is Aristotle's "naming which has not name"
> and unless we see it, we shall never get away from a comparison
> theory of metaphor (Soskice, 89).

Soskice's complaint is perceptive and helpful in that it raises important questions which pertain to metaphor's genuine innovativeness. Yet, the term "redescribe" seems fitting in light of Ricoeur's belief that a metaphor refers to a world and that metaphor has its grounding in that world. The language of redescription is, therefore, in accordance with metaphor's referential function. Moreover, the appropriateness of Ricoeur's language of redescription is exemplified in our study of Kierkegaard's metaphors. Certainly, the metaphors "journey" and "silence" used in describing the ambiguities of faith will not strike the reader as particularly new. Rather, it is the way in which Kierkegaard employs them to redescribe faith that is of significance. These metaphors are used because phenomena such as faith cannot be described directly: a detour through metaphor is needed.

A consideration of this intellectual "detour-- its problems and its insights-- is taken up in earnest in Ricoeur's essay, "Metaphor and the Main Problems of Hermeneutics." There, Ricoeur's aim is to note the connection between the problems raised in hermeneutics and those raised by metaphor. Put in the form of a question: "to what extent may the hermeneutical problem of text-interpretation be considered as a large-scale expansion of the problems condensed in the explication of a local metaphor in a given text?" (Ricoeur, 1991: 305). From the vantage point of our study, both find common ground in

Kierkegaard's advocacy of an indirect communication.

Rescuing Resemblance

Ricoeur's theory of metaphor rescues the much-maligned attribute of resemblance in the task of metaphor making. Noting resemblance between things which normally bear no relation to each other is, surely, one of the primary characteristics of metaphor. Yet, as was shown in section two, somehow resemblance came to be perceived as outmoded and primitive. In The Rule of Metaphor, Ricoeur champions metaphor as a work of resemblance, coopting Aristotle's insight and extending its implication. The significance of resemblance ceases to be an identification between two terms-- a phenomenon of naming-- and becomes in Ricoeur's work "a tension between identity and difference in the predicative operation set in motion by semantic innovation" (Ricoeur, 6). Ricoeur's gambit is that resemblance be understood in terms of the imagination, projecting the possible via language. To "image," to "see-as," is to project onto an object an analogue of that object.

Readers of the Bible will be familiar with such a device. In the task of articulating the relationship between the divine and earthly realms, we tell stories, listen to parables; we work by analogy, through symbol, via metaphor. We communicate distance and proximity through the tools of resemblance. Although the distance is never bridged between God and the human being, "the symbol gives rise to thought" (The Symbolism of Evil).[46]

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[46]   Throughout the New Testament parables are told and metaphors used, describing God and the spiritual world; each implicitly point the way without ever aspiring to define --and thus limit-- its object. In each of the parables, the unknown is described in terms of a known quantity; we stretch mentally to imagine the texture of what is described. Giving the believer a sense of the numinous, the parables

Ricoeur attributes the decline of resemblance in Anglo-American philosophy to a disregard for image in general.[47] Schaldenbrand concurs; she observes that, in their disregard for image and its role in the metaphoric process, interaction theorists not only lose the key to metaphoric invention; they abandon metaphoric logic" (Schaldenbrand, 68). We "see" things not apparent but inherent and relate these properties to objects with an accepted association with otherwise unfamiliar attributes.

A key ingredient in perceiving such similarity involves the act of transposition. We are familiar with this idea having discussed the Greek roots of the word metaphor. Ricoeur considers the role of transposition in light of his contention that metaphors involve semantic innovation. He writes that

> metaphor destroys an order only to invent a new one; and that
> the category mistake is nothing but the complement of a logic of
> discovery...[M]etaphor bears information because it 'redescribes'
> reality. Thus the category mistake is the de-constructive inter-
> mediary phase between description and redescription (Ricoeur, 22).

This concept, metaphoric logic, is an elusive one and requires consideration. Recognition of relationship between two normally unrelated things has within it an aspect of image association. In his chapter, "Metaphor as a Knowledge Process" in A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, Earl R. MacCormac writes:

> Images offer an alternate method of relating the features of the re-
> ferents of metaphors to that of propositions. Sometimes the compre-
> hension of a metaphor depends on a visual image rather than on a
> linguistic understanding of the referents (MacCormac 140-141).[48]

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of Jesus attest to the kingdom of God being like a mustard seed or like yeast mixed with flour.

[47] See his section "Icon and Image" in The Rule of Metaphor p.207-215.

[48] MacCormac's chapter goes on to deal with some competing views of the nature of image and its relation to memory and the capacity for thinking through metaphors. However, this citation provides enough of

MacCormac provides us with a reasoned, academic response to the place of image in the metaphoric process. However, the relationship may be expressed in a much more forthright manner. The familiar claim that a good metaphor will help one to "see things differently" or "see things in a new light" bears out this claim. Of course, "seeing" itself--when used in this fashion-- becomes a metaphor for understanding. Yet, there is a sense that the understanding is marked by a freshness and vitality that the metaphors of "sight" or "vision" express so acutely.

It is interesting to note that the correlation between the visual and the cognitive process is carried on by metaphor's common appellation as a figure of speech. There is a physicalness about this phrase that makes sense to us: it seems to give us something to hold on to. In a small way, this helps illustrate how thinking is dependent upon external references. It grounds what is being thought. Is not all metaphor expressing the unknown in terms of the known, the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar? When Ricoeur argues that metaphor carries a genuine cognitive component he is touching on precisely this point: we use images, born of new semantic combinations, to express what cannot be expressed directly or in a normal fashion.

It is precisely at this point that the image becomes significant to the metaphoric process. That Ricoeur champions the role of resemblance and image marks a significant break with his interaction theorist predecessors. However, Ricoeur is not alone in the importance he accords to the image. Novelist Salman Rushdie contends that image association is endemic in all thinking in general: "our response to the world is essentially imaginative: that is, picture-making. We live in our pictures, our ideas. I mean this

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an argument to show that image is a component of metaphoric logic and perhaps thinking in general. Its relationship to resemblance is the primary concern here.

literally. We first construct pictures of the world and then we step inside the frames. We come to equate the picture with the world..."(Rushdie, 377-78).

We sift through mental images in order to find resemblances. A reader's perception of similarity in difference is basic to the metaphorical process. In The Necessary Angel, Wallace Stevens concurs, writing that "[r]esemblance in metaphor is an activity of the imagination; and in metaphor the imagination is life" (Stevens, 73a). In this imaginative landscape we recognise something of ourselves.

Several facets of Ricoeur's theory of metaphor have been highlighted. The polysemy of language, the role of resemblance, and the constructing of a metaphor's meaning in context lead Ricoeur to foreground the act of interpretation. Ricoeur recognises the metaphor's ability to allow the speaker to articulate what is beyond his or her immediate circumstances. Metaphors allow one to project the possible. Like Kierkegaard, whose fragmented narrative structure invites the reader to reconstruct the text, Ricoeur's theory champions a reader's involvement in the shaping of a metaphor's meaning. Both Ricoeur and Kierkegaard display a confidence in the human capacity for discerning meaning, for interpreting. In this fashion, the depiction of the world of faith is made possible through the work of metaphor.

Chapter Three: Journey

Tomas did not realize at the time that metaphors are dangerous.
Metaphors are not to be trifled with. A single metaphor can give
birth to love.[49]

This chapter will investigate the root metaphor of "journey" as it is used by Kierkegaard in

depicting a life of faith in Fear and Trembling. The central question which this chapter poses is this:

how does the metaphor of journey bring the reader closer to understanding the nature of faith? To

answer this question we must first consider how its past use in texts which pre-date Fear and

Trembling affects how this metaphor performs in the text presently under consideration. What

should the reader be aware of in fashioning metaphor to text?

In the previous chapter, we have looked at how good metaphors can jar readers out of

complacency by making them realize new relationships between things, new possibilities. It is often

the case that this new way of looking at a thing becomes so compelling that the metaphor undergoes

something of a change in status, becoming a model or an interpretive guide.[50] The reason why

Ricoeur's analysis is so persuasive is that he addresses himself to a fundamental question: if surprise,

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[49] Milan Kundera. The Unbearable Lightness of Being. New York: Harper & Row, 1984, p.11.

[50] On the place of models in theological language, Sallie McFague writes: "[t]o envision theology as metaphorical means, at the outset, to refuse to the attempt to denude religious language of its concrete, poetic, imagistic...terminology. It is to accept as one of theology's primary tasks remythogozing for our time: identifying and elucidating primary metaphors and models from contemporary experience which will express Christian faith for our day in powerful, illuminating ways." Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, p. 32. Although I do not use the term "remythologize" in this study, by engaging his contemporaries through the metaphors in Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard was certainly preforming an act of "remythologizing" in his day. This will be demonstrated in this chapter by discussing the way he treats the metaphor of journey.

freshness, vitality and other such attributes are what make metaphor such a compelling and useful device in articulating a concept, how may a metaphor sustain itself when raised to the level of model?[51] Ricoeur's argument is that there is a self-renewing capacity in metaphor derived from its ability to refer to a world beyond the text, a world ever-changing, prepared to receive in a new way and thus sustain the metaphor's ability to captivate the imagination (Ricoeur, 92). In turn, we employ root metaphors in shaping the way we think about certain things. It is as H. Richard Niebuhr, in The Responsible Self, contends: "[w]e are more image-making and image-using creatures than we usually think ourselves to be..." (Niebuhr, 151).

Journey: A Well-Trodden Path

It is my contention that the metaphor of "journey" is given a fresh treatment in Fear and Trembling and shapes the way in which we think about the nature of faith. For Christian theology and similar literature, the use of the "journey" metaphor to describe the dynamics of faith is now entirely familiar, if not hackneyed. Indeed, in the New Testament Jesus speaks of himself as the Way to God and says that the believer must follow him in leading a faithful life (John 14: 6). St. Augustine confessed, "[o]ur hearts, O Lord, are restless till they find their rest in thee," (Augustine, 21) thus beginning his fourth century journey from the city of man to the city of God. In 1386 Geoffrey Chaucer recounts with delightful irreverence, a

> pilgrimage/ To Canterbury with ful devout corage./ At night was come into that hosterlrye/ Wel nine and twenty in a compaignye/ Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle/ In felaweshipe, and pilgrmes were they alle"
> (Chaucer, 95).

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[51] Ricoeur writes of the "baffling fecundity of dead metaphor" (Ricoeur, 292); "dead" because its use is no longer regarded as uncommon. Ricoeur argues that "[t]o revive dead metaphor is in no way to unmask concepts...above all because the full genesis of the concept does not inhere in the process by which metaphor is lexicalized" (Ricoeur, 292).

We can see, then, that "journey" is a well-trodden metaphor. Perhaps the most popular allegory of journey as description for a life of faith-- from sin to salvation-- is Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1675). The protagonist, named Christian so as to not leave any doubt about the tale's symbolic meaning, wades through the mire of the River of Death, past byways, and arrives at the Celestial City. The editors in The Norton Anthology of English Literature (vol.1/5ed.) remark that:

> [s]uch objects have the immediacy of daily experience, a quality that
> recalls the equally homely parables of Jesus, but Bunyan's allegorising
> of these details charges them with spiritual significance. Moreover, this
> is a tale of adventure (Norton, 1857-58).

Bunyan's is an interesting tale from which to begin to think about the place of "journey" in Kierkegaard's text: not so much for its similarity, but for its difference.

These two claims-- that the "journey" metaphor resonates with our common experience and that the tale has a sense of adventure about it-- made by the Norton editors would seem to be a point of comparison with Kierkegaard. The editors' claim that "journey" resonates with a reader's ordinary life experience is a valid one; its validity is due to allegory's ability to elicit comparison with the everyday and the ordinary. However, Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling is something of an anti-allegory[52]: his aim is not to provide a comfortable distance from which to view a life of faith, rather his aim is to advocate uncomfortable involvement. It is a desperate exhortation to the reader to realize-- almost to feel-- the pain which accompanies a life of faith.

Kierkegaard reinvents the metaphor of journey to address this very problem. He does so in two ways which will constitute the structure of this chapter and the next chapter dealing with the metaphor of silence. The metaphors of journey and silence will be analysed at a micro and a macro

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[52] This claim is made in contrast to the thesis of Naomi Lebowitz's Kierkegaard: A Life of Allegory. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985. While I am in agreement with Lebowitz in that, "the purpose of Kierkegaard's literature is to stimulate the reader to make his own movements of faith" (xii), I part with her interpretation of the structure of this method.

level. The first analysis will investigate the textual examples of the specific metaphor as they are found in Fear and Trembling. The second method will consider these metaphors as extra-textual models which serve to shape and guide a reading of this text.

Textual Concerns: "...the shudder of the idea"(Kierkegaard, 9).

A proper interpretation of Fear and Trembling must never lose sight of why Kierkegaard wrote this text. To what was Kierkegaard reacting? It is a good question to ask because it helps the reader understand that by using metaphor, Kierkegaard gives response in both the form and content of his book. This claim will be borne out in the following section which, for the sake of clarity, will proceed logically through a consideration of the three following questions: What was Kierkegaard's complaint; what or whom did he blame for this problem; what solution does he give?

The Complaint: "Something's rotten in the state of Denmark" (Hamlet, I.IV.90).

Kierkegaard's complaint is this: faith has been made too easy. That is to say, faith has been stripped of its profundity-- an individual person can enter into a relationship with God-- and is attained like goods bought and sold amid the Danish market-place (Kierkegaard, 5). When faith is had at such a low cost, without work or care, it is not faith at all. In the language of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (The Cost of Discipleship), Kierkegaard is fighting on behalf of *costly* faith. A keen measure of faith's decline in nineteenth century Denmark is the value accorded to Abraham's trial of faith. More precisely, there is no sense of trial, of vexation, or anxiety in the manner in which the story is conveyed in the sanctuaries and seminaries of Copenhagen. Because Abraham's life is depicted with no particular struggle, the reader of the story attaches no meaning or life-changing significance to faith. Faith is a nice thing; so is a sweater on a cold day.

For Kierkegaard, the graphic details of Abraham's story cannot be swept aside; they stand inconveniently between the text and reader, between thought and understanding. The story is a

complicated one because we are forced to deal with these unsavoury details. By underscoring their

importance does Kierkegaard tacitly condone religious lunacy, killing for one's God?

Kierkegaard, writing in the 1840's, was as aware as today's reader of the disturbing implications

attached to this issue.

> Is it possible to speak unreservedly about Abraham without running
> the risk that some individual will become unbalanced and do the
> same thing? If I dare not, I will say nothing about Abraham, and the
> last thing I will do is to scale him down in such a way that he thereby
> becomes a snare for the weak (Kierkegaard, 31).

The reader will no doubt find Kierkegaard's retort brash and difficult to accept.[53] We

would argue today that this advice sets a "dangerous precedent" and is simply too great a risk. Yet,

at this very juncture we enter the door Kierkegaard has opened for us. He might respond by saying:

"quite correct, reader; faith involves risk." Through empathy with Abraham's situation we enter into

his dilemma: we are engaged by faith.

It is in this involvement, this stripping away of hesitancy and embracing what a life of faith

implies, that Kierkegaard finds the key to understanding the text. The reader *must be involved* with

the text. Kierkegaard's plan to involve the reader is two-fold. "In an age when everyone was trying

to make things easy, Johannes de *Silentio*...sees his task as making things more difficult. Faith is

achieved only when the individual has passed through an anterior 'stage of infinite resignation'

(Thompson, 127).[54]

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[53] Bradley Dewey writes that, "to affirm that it could happen again (even to oneself!) is to live forever on the brink of the Abrahamic possibility that something like divine telos...might be imposed on you" (Dewey, 41). This possibility, claims Kierkegaard, must be nurtured in each individual believer.

[54] The notion that work is rewarded in "the world of the spirit is found in the section entitled "preliminary expectoration." SK writes, "Here, it holds true that only the one who works gets bread, that only the one who was in anxiety finds rest, that only the one who descends into the lower world rescues the beloved, that only the one who draws the knife gets Isaac" (Kierkegaard, 27).

Kierkegaard's complaint, then, is that faith is a task requiring work and humility.

Fear and Trembling has its Biblical source in Phillippians 2:12, wherein Paul implores: "my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The passage is significant as it instructs its reader in both what to do and how to do it. What are we to do? We *work* out (our) own salvation. The passage strongly suggests that salvation cannot be attained passively, but requires assiduous effort and struggle. This exhortation is followed by a recommendation to work with fear and trembling. Commentators of The New Bible Dictionary (1962 ed.) suggest that the primary value of the Philippians letter is that it will "remain as a tribute to the apostle's attitude to his sufferings. By the grace of God he is able to rejoice under the most trying circumstances of his captivity and impending fate" (Douglas, 988). Therefore, the ideas of work, fear and trembling have a firm Biblical association with building relationship with God: it is realised in work, characterised in fear and trembling. Kierkegaard commented on this relationship in his private journals.

> Fear and trembling (see Philippians 2:12) is not the primus motor
> in the Christian life, for it is love; but it is what the oscillating balance
> wheel is to the clock—it is the oscillating balance wheel of the Christian
> life (JP III 2383, Feb. 16, 1839; Hong, 239).

Fear has a number of connotations in the Bible.[55] With his interpolation of "Mysterium Tremendum," Rudolf Otto comes closest, I believe, to the sense in which Kierkegaard employed the term. In The Idea of the Holy, Otto writes that, "it may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and

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[55]   "The most common of these...are Heb. yir'a, "reverence"; Heb. pahad, "dread," "fear;" Gk. phobos, "fear," "terror." Theologically, four main categories can conveniently be suggested": Holy fear, slavish fear, fear of humans, fear as the object of fear. see The New Bible Dictionary, p. 419-420.

above all creatures"(Otto, 13).

For Otto, this fear is received by the believer as something of blessing. The experience of fear is that of apprehension of God's presence. It is a feeling engendered by a God who—in spite of the "infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity"— draws near to his creatures. Fear and trembling is an experience of love and an expression of reverence. Otto's suggestion of "mysterium tremendum" is in keeping with Johannes de *Silentio's* claim that understanding "the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life" is no small matter (Kierkegaard, 33).[56] I raise this point here for it is my contention that fear and trembling provide the metaphor of journey, which we will soon explore, with its dominant characteristic.

The Blame:

Abraham's story cannot be understood when sanitised of aspects which may shock the reader's sensibilities. Fear and Trembling is, most directly, Kierkegaard's reaction to the myopic interpretations which the Genesis 22 text received at the hands of his contemporaries: clergy, eager not to disturb or upset their flock. A revisionist enterprise, an etiolation of sorts, extracting the aspects of the Abraham story which might offend or disturb, courts a distortion of the story's message. The unsavoury details are not peripheral to the saga; they are as integral to the story as they are difficult for the reader to encounter and imbibe. Kierkegaard registers this point early in the text. When the man of "exordium" (Kierkegaard, 9), reflecting upon the story of Abraham told to him as a child, awakens to the story's message, he does so not by dwelling in "the beautiful tapestry of the

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[56] Johannes claims later that ,"I cannot think myself into Abraham; when I reach that eminence, I sink down, for what is offered me is a paradox" (Kierkegaard, 33). Abraham occupies a religious sphere, an intimacy with God beyond his comprehension.

imagination." To understand the story is to feel its sting. In turn, the man's epiphany is received through "the shudder of the idea" (Kierkegaard, 9): God demands a child sacrifice; religion supersedes ethics; Abraham, the paragon of faith, displays unfailing willingness to ascent to God's command, to murder. Such aspects are certainly horrific.[57] Entertaining the thought of a helpless, blameless child being hurt burrows deeply in the psyche of every parent and any person.

This shudder intensifies as the reader witnesses the collision between Christian teachings of love for another human and the equally important teaching of faith in God. Can antinomy be avoided? Such irreconcilable facts demand that Abraham's story be conveyed, and perhaps understood, with fear and trembling. For Kierkegaard, grappling with the Genesis 22 narrative

> is a matter of whether or not we are willing to work and be burd-
> ened. But we are unwilling to work, and yet we want to understand
> the story. We glorify Abraham, but how? We recite the whole story
> in clichés...What is omitted from (the way in which we recount)
> Abraham's story is the anxiety" (Kierkegaard, 28).

To read Fear and Trembling is to understand that Kierkegaard believes the Genesis 22 account takes its reader into the very core of the nature of faith. Fear and Trembling was written immediately after and published concurrently with his book Repetition. Both books are imbued with the trials of a life of faith. In Repetition, Kierkegaard honours the figure of Job. In a stirring tribute, Kierkegaard writes:

> In the whole Old Testament there is no other figure one approaches
> with so much human confidence and boldness and trust as Job, simply
> because *he is so human in every way,* he resides in a *confinium*
> touching on poetry. Nowhere in the world has the passion of anguish

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[57] Sadly, such incidents occur with a frequency that threatens to numb us to the repugnancy of such actions. Perhaps most recently is the double murder/suicide case of Manon Maher and her two children. Susan Semenak. "Model mother kills 2 kids and herself," Montreal Gazette. January 25, 1996, p. 1.

found such expression (Kierkegaard, 204; *first set of italics mine*).

There are two decisive points which need to be underscored. The first is that Job is praised equally for his faith as he is for his frailty. Job is deeply human: he feels pain and communicates this pain so clearly it breaks the heart.[58] Indeed his boldness lies in the conviction that he must, above all else, be honest to his God.

Abraham is distinguished—in fact, markedly different—from Job in that he "initiates a new religious experience, faith."(Eliade, 109-10). Whereas Job's sufferings are intelligible and stirring to the human mind, Abraham's situation is utterly different, his story almost unintelligible.[59] Could he really have sacrificed Isaac, his only son? We are told so. In the pause that accompanies this profoundly disturbing situation there can only be shock. It is precisely this shock that Kierkegaard finds missing in contemporary considerations of this deepest of narrative insights into the nature of faith.

The Solution: Metaphor

Thus far, we have discussed the problem and its source. Kierkegaard's keenest tool in response to the spiritual malaise which he encounters is the metaphor. After considering briefly three ways in which the metaphor is an appropriate tool of redress, the discussion will turn to consider the way in which Kierkegaard uses the specific metaphor of journey.

If faith has been insouciantly cast about as something easily accessible, Kierkegaard's

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[58] Job's sincerity of expression was felt by others. In 1902, in Paris, living in penury, German lyric poet Rainer Maria Rilke is known to have read the 30th chapter of Job before going to sleep each night, saying it clearly "expressed his own state." *Letters to a Young Poet*. trans. M.D. Herter Norton. London: W.W. Norton Co., 1934, p. 92.

[59] For this reason, Abraham remains silent. Silence plays an enormous role in Kierkegaard's exegesis and will be analysed as a key metaphor in the following chapter.

response is to present a life of faith in as obstructive and occlusive a manner as possible.
His prose. at times uncompromisingly turgid. stands as a challenge to the perfunctory way
in which he heard faith described.   Indeed. Kierkegaard's reputation as a consciously
difficult thinker precedes him: reading Kierkegaard is a perilous (yet rewarding) journey
itself: following his argument can be difficult. Edward F. Mooney notes that. regardless of
Fear and Trembling's "underlying unity of theme. Johannes's work darts from image to
claim, from question to paradox, from lyric to parable to argument" (Mooney, 19).
Explaining the method behind the madness. Mooney offers the following as a reason for the
book's structure: "too quick or abstract a reconstruction will leave a false sense of order,
system or finality" (Mooney, 19). Mooney's admonition to scholars is a good one and
appropriate in a reading of Kierkegaard. The subject matter is utterly profound, conveyed
in utter bleakness; direct or immediate comprehension of its meaning is too great a task for
the reader. It cannot be systematised. We understand in fragments; life appears to us
unmitigated. Like the roving eye that passes from interiority to exteriority throughout the
streets and minds of Dublin and its people in Joyce's Ulysses, Kierkegaard's text is offered
in fragments which testify to a whole. The stance is one of deep humility and reverence for
a life of faith.

The text's fragmentation elicits the response of a reader; we search for a way to piece
together the text in an alternative manner. The metaphor helps us make sense of the text.
With the metaphor of journey, Kierkegaard has an extremely difficult task ahead of himself.
If the guiding motivation behind the text is to stir the pallid denizens of the Copenhagen
marketplace from their spiritual slumbers, surely the metaphor of journey is too common to
accomplish such a feat. Perhaps not.

Kierkegaard faced a dilemma with which writers of each age must grapple: how to
convey ideas which transcend temporal concerns and fashion them in a language suitable to

their time. What does a writer do when once-powerful symbols lose their impact? Twentieth century poets have addressed themselves to precisely this imbroglio. T.S. Eliot proffered the notion of an objective correlative, which champions "precise and definite poetic images evoking particular emotions, rather than the effusion of vague yearnings" (Baldick, 154): vague, because of lost contemporary relevance. In his later poetry, W.B. Yeats imbued an Irish tower with symbolic meaning, later offering an elaborate system of signs and symbols in his difficult and ambitious, A Vision. Wallace Stevens considers this problem most directly in a poem that captures the task Kierkegaard faced in conveying Abraham's story, with its myriad anxieties and struggles, to his contemporaries. In "Of Modern Poetry" (The Palm At The End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play), Stevens writes:

> The poem of the mind in the act of finding
> What will suffice. It has not always had
> To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
> Was in the script.
>   Then the theatre was changed
> To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
>
> It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
> It has to face the men of the time and to meet
> The women of the time. It has to think about war
> And it has to find what will suffice. It has
> To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage...

Surely Kierkegaard, living between the Romantic and modern world-views, must have felt that "the theatre had changed." If he were to speak to the hearts and minds of the people, to testify to verities of a life of faith, he had to engage his audience in a fresh and compelling manner. The following metaphorical consideration of journey will address this question, while coterminously bearing in mind the issues raised in the two preceding chapters.

A Danish Sojourn

In chapter one, the switch was made from examining what Kierkegaard says to the manner in which he communicates. Hoping the reader will not grow tired of this method, I wish to employ it again in this section. The anterior argument of the present chapter has focussed on the "what" in the above equation. That is to say, we have looked at Kierkegaard's passionate attitude towards a life of faith-- with its "dialectical struggles...and its gigantic passion" (Kierkegaard, 32)-- and his admonition that intellectual distance will not suffice in underst···ing faith. Faith demands participation.

This section will focus on "how" Kierkegaard's exhortation is realised in his study of faith, Fear and Trembling. I contend that Kierkegaard, through indirect communication, skilfully reinvents the time-honoured metaphor of journey to describe a person's faith. The following paragraphs examine the context in which this "reinvention" takes places. The discussion then moves to understand the "reinvention" through Paul Ricoeur's contention that metaphors refer to a world beyond the text.

The Context for Reinventing

In chapter one of this study, Kierkegaard's theory of stages was discussed. The central contention behind this theory is that the self is never fully developed, but always in the process of becoming: it is constantly choosing. In his book Sources of the Self, Charles Taylor contends that, "in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good, which means some sense of qualitative discrimination, of the incomparably higher" (Taylor, 47). Kierkegaard's stages stand as a process by which one orients oneself to a good beyond the measure of human capacity, namely God. The self is transfigured by choice: "all finite things get their value and significance from this choice" (Taylor, 450).

With the above contention fresh in the reader's mind, I wish to make the following two

claims, which will be discussed in the remainder of the chapter. First, I assert that this method of identity formation in the world, expressed--or better, revealed-- through metaphor in <u>Fear and Trembling</u>, bears a deep connection with what Kierkegaard terms the "movements of faith." To be clear, what I am proposing here is to interpret the development of the self, articulated through Kierkegaard's stages, in narrow and strict manner, so that-- in the context of <u>Fear and Trembling</u>-- self-development and the fostering of one's faith are interchangeable ideas. Both are rooted in choice.

This proposal is limited to an interpretation of <u>Fear and Trembling</u>. It is not my intention that the above formula applies to Kierkegaard's other writings or other general theories of the self. Edward F. Mooney terms <u>Fear and Trembling</u> a "Socratic call to selfhood" (Mooney, x) in that it marks the journey of a faithful life, of an "individual with depth and integrity, tempered by suffering...undergirded by a saving relationship to an absolute good" (Mooney, ix). Reading the text in this manner will, then, draw attention to the role of metaphor in Kierkegaard's theology.

The second contention is that the journey metaphor, as used by Kierkegaard, uniquely expresses the axioms or impulses behind these two concepts and is therefore worthy of our consideration. The metaphor of journey-- Mark C. Taylor has called it the journey to selfhood (see bibliography)-- gains new potency when considered in light of Kierkegaard's theory of the stages.

The Method for Reinventing

Paul Ricoeur's claim that metaphors gain their meaning beyond textual interplay and, in fact, refer to a world beyond the text helps reinvigorate the metaphor of journey. The structure of Kierkegaard's text is that of a circular journey: the structure of the book mirrors its content. However, Kierkegaard's dialectical application is so successful because he does

as Wallace Stevens counsels ("it has to be living"). His eye is trained on how to relate the power of the Abraham story to modern-day people. Through the use of the metaphor "journey" Kierkegaard succeeds in his task.

Therefore, I wish to propose the following method by which to analyse how the journey metaphor works and is worked upon in Fear and Trembling. With a nod to Kierkegaard's theory of stages let us state that the journey of faith is indeed a journey to selfhood. Second, let us realize the significance of indirect communication in the use of metaphor: it demands participation of the reader, it is a call to faith. The journey may be discussed in three ways via Abraham, Johannes, and the reader. The focus on three journeys is predicated upon the notion that it requires multiple metaphors, viewed from multiple vantage points, held in tandem to begin to depict the movements of faith. In an analysis ot the multi-layered world that is presented in Fear and Trembling, we will begin with Abraham's journey.

So Abraham...went to the place in the distance that God had shown him (Gen.22:3).

The following words appear at the end of Problem I, in Fear and Trembling.

> When a person walks what is in one sense the hard road of the tragic
> hero, there are many who can give him advice, but he who walks
> the narrow road of faith has no one to advise him—no one under-
> stands him. Faith is a marvel, and yet no human being is excluded
> from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is
> a passion (Kierkegaard, 67).

Incantations to the resilience of Abraham's faith appear as hypnotic throughout the text. The refrain, "but (sometimes "yet") Abraham had faith" (Kierkegaard, 20-21) comes like a swift answer to other possible avenues Abraham might have explored. The above quote gives evidence of the difficulties associated with journey. There is no confidant with whom he can share his burden; no viaticum which may ease his sufferings. Yet Abraham, we are

told, suffers gladly: he has faith.

What is particularly compelling about the above passage is the contrast set up between individual and collective experience. Perhaps "contrast" is not the right word here; there is, however, an attractive aspect to the idea that all persons may take a journey, but expressing the essence of one's own journey is futile. That is to say, the metaphor of journey embodies qualities associated with the self's journey of faith. In the Christian tradition, all persons are called to faith, but ultimately, the choice (as discussed in chapter one) is the individual's alone. The individual is alone with her faith. Abraham, the hero of faith, is the singularly perfect example of this journey which, alas, cannot be articulated by the poet Johannes. It may only be witnessed.

A second aspect of Abraham's journey is that of leaving behind the known, the familiar and ordinary and entering into the unknown. Kierkegaard describes this component in the following passage.

> By faith Abraham emigrated from the land of his fathers and
> became an alien in the promised land. He left one thing behind,
> took one thing along: he left behind his worldly understanding,
> and he took took along his faith. Otherwise he certainly would
> not have emigrated but surely would have considered it unreas-
> onable. By faith he was an alien in the promised land...
> (Kierkegaard, 17).

Leaving behind the known for the unknown is, as Kierkegaard writes, to leave open the "wounds of possibility."[60] To journey, then, involves a sense of risk. We ask ourselves, full of doubt, whether this choice or that one is correct. Journey is such an apt metaphor in the representation of faith as it involves all this: choice, risk, doubt, indecision. Indeed, the self "lives in never-ending tension between the uncertainty of his

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[60] Although I do not know the source of this quote, George Steiner attributes it to Kierkegaard on page 173 of his Real Presences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

own situation and the awareness of the certainty of God's demands and his own action. You cannot reach an immediate certainty about whether you have faith, for faith is a dialectical suspension which constantly involves fear and trembling" (Sontag, 32). With the figure of Abraham, the reader is given a model of how a faithful life is lived. The journey is undertaken without hesitation because Abraham is secure in the belief that, above all else, God will provide.

Therefore, the journey metaphor, as it is applied to Abraham, acts as a model of faith. Kierkegaard's, or more accurately Johannes's, depiction of Abraham as the father of faith may be seen as a rhetorical technique. That is to say, Abraham's life is expressed, but it is never explained in full. This technique is an ironic one because a considerable portion of the book articulates Abraham's significance above the din of Johannes's protestations that Abraham cannot be understood. Abraham's life and journey is depicted in fragments that we the reader must string together.

This point cannot be over-stressed. Abraham is, without doubt, a model of faith. Yet, this model is viewed with the humility of a poet, not the strength of a hero of faith. That faith is mediated through language means that its essence comes to us only in part. We must reconstruct the rest. This reconstruction is, however, not abnormal: nor is it without merit.

But Abraham is not illusion, he did not sleep his way to fame,
he does not owe it to a whim of fate (Kierkegaard, 31).

As a successful journey is contingent upon choosing wisely the right path to follow, we the reader must construct and choose when presented with a metaphor. As Abraham before God's word, we the reader stand before the author's word. Our imaginations encounter the possibility of faith as cast in the drama of the Genesis 22 narrative. We see the saddled

donkey, the gleaming knife, the terror in Isaac's eyes. The route Abraham chooses to

ascend Mt. Moriah is not our own. We must choose our own path and, in so doing, head

Kierkegaard's plea: faith is subjective.[61] With metaphor, we are called to summon possible

alternatives to its meaning, measuring its context. We must say with Ricoeur that,

> [m]etaphor is living not only to the extent that it vivifies a constituted
> language. Metaphor is living by virtue of the fact that it introduces the
> spark of imagination into a 'thinking more' at the conceptual level.
> This struggle to 'think more,' guided by the 'vivifying principle' is the
> 'soul' of interpretation (Ricoeur. 303).

How, then, does Fear and Trembling solicit and implore its readers to "think more?" Thus

far we have stated that the paradigmatic figure of Abraham functions as a model to inspire

the reader, to trigger the imagination as to what a faithful life might be. Moreover, we have

noted the inherent fragmentation of the text. Further still, we have discussed the inherent

"functional" quality of metaphor which bids the reader to participate in the construction of

its meaning. However, Fear and Trembling compels its reader to "think more" through the

figure of Johannes *de Silentio* and the journey which he undergoes.

Johannes and theology's changed face.

In the schemata of Kierkegaard's stages Johannes might fall in the interstice between the

aesthetic and the ethical. He is a poet, yet recognises the inadequacy of immediacy. He

writes:

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[61] "It is clear that in [Kierkegaard's] writing the language of
Christian theology is turned into the service of drawing the reader
into the intensification process itself, for the sake of the spiritual
truth inherit in it for the reader." See James E. Loder & W. Jim
Neidhard. "The Journey of Intensification" in The Knight's Move: The
Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science. Colorado
Springs: Helmer & Howard, 1992, p. 275-276.

> Recent philosophy has allowed itself simply to substitute the im-
> mediate for "faith." If that is done, then it is ridiculous to deny that
> there has always been faith. This puts faith in the rather common-
> place company of feelings, moods, idiosyncrasies, *vapeurs* [vagaries],
> etc. (Kierkegaard, 69).

That Johannes occupies this space between aesthetics and ethics is of tremendous

significance. The journey by which Johannes documents Abraham's trial of faith allows for

a reader to receive Abraham's journey. That Abraham's story is rendered in fragments stirs

the reader to undertake her own journey. It is through the eyes of Johannes that the journey

of Abraham is told. In this sense, Johannes is responsible for the structure of the narrative,

for plot, for setting the book's interpretive tone. A walk through this text will show that this

journey mirrors the journey of faith. Johannes' role, as a bridge between Abraham and the

reader, may be discussed via narrative.

Paul Ricoeur has written that, "[i]n the end, I do not know what man is. My confession

to myself is that man is instituted by the word, that is, by a language which is less spoken

by man than spoken to man...Is not The Good News the instigation of the possibility of

man by a creative word?" (Ricoeur, 1973:237-238). Our response to the biblical word is

foundational in the development of faith. When we interpret we are, in a small sense,

telling a story. Johannes is keenly aware of the power of narrative in Fear and Trembling.

In his essay "The Narrative Function," Ricoeur has written that,

> [t]o follow a story, then, is to understand the successive actions,
> thoughts, and feelings as having a particular directedness. By this
> I mean that we are pulled forward by the development and respond
> to this thrust with expectations concerning the outcome and the
> ending of the whole process (Ricoeur, 1978: 182).

When Ricoeur speaks of the particular directedness of a story he is most simply speaking

about the plot of a story. Responding to Ricoeur's project in an essay entitled

"Hermeneutics, Ethics, and the Theology of Culture," William Schweiker remarks that,

"[t]he making of a plot is, then, a synthetic act of the productive imagination in the face of

the diversity of lived time. It is creative of meaning by displaying a possible world in which a reader can dwell. Reading is also a synthetic act that relates a narrative and its world to actual life" (Schweiker, 1993: 304). Because story-making and story-interpreting are in essence acts of synthesis, Johannes knows that a story, like the metaphor, must be acted upon by the reader outside the text in order to be complete or at the very least make sense. The possible outcomes in possible worlds Schweiker speaks of are readily apparent in Fear and Trembling.

Although space does not permit an in-depth discussion of this heightened awareness of possible outcomes, we may note an example of this early in the text. After a rather jarring preface, Johannes guides the reader into a section called "exordium" in the Hong edition of the text and elsewhere referred to as "attunement." The latter, as Edward. F. Mooney notes, is suggestive of the tuning of an instrument and is in fact closer to the Danish *stemning* (Mooney, 25-26). The idea of tuning is highly appropriate at this early stage in the text. The four sketches of the journey to Mt. Moriah, as told by a man recalling the stories told to him as a boy "highlights, by what it omits, an essential feature of the faithful version of the story" (Mooney, 14). Therefore, these brief sketches are incomplete and need of adjustment: they need tuning. "Each is slightly off key" (Mooney, 25).

Perhaps Kierkegaard's most famous quote is that, "life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backwards." We may read the preface (exordium) in light of this quote. There is a bid for recollection. Although these stories, indeed these memories, are flawed, there is, nonetheless, something deeply compelling about each of the sketches. Of the child's recollection, Louis Mackey suggests that,

> [T]he increase in years brings about a dissociation of sensibilities.
> Maturity separates the passion and the reflection that are
> united in the pious immediacy of the child, and the man
> finds the greater his enthusiasm, the less his understanding

(Mackey, 41).

In "View from Pisgah: A Reading of Fear and Trembling," Louis Mackey speculates that

the young man of the prelude is, in fact, Johannes *de Silentio*. If Mackey is correct in his

view, Johannes would bear a strong association with the notion of possible outcomes which

a reader must act upon.

either/OR

We have said that Johannes is something of a bridge between Abraham and the reader.

Yet, in many ways, Johannes functions as a foil to Abraham. This is not to suggest a simple

good/bad dichotomy by which to understand the text; the world depicted in Fear and

Trembling is certainly a grey one filled with characters of composite natures. Yet, if we can

suggest, figuratively, that Abraham provides a sense of distance in the text -- a sense that

faith is such a demanding struggle that it is as distant to our eyes as was Mt. Moriah to

Abraham's at the inception of his journey-- then Johannes lends an air of attainability or

proximity to the journey of faith. Johannes, ironic poet, is, at base, deeply human.

In a sense Johannes guides us through the story, with its highly unusual terrain: unusual

because it appears devoid of characteristics the reader comes to expect on a narrative

journey. In its innumerable allusions, its metaphors of commerce injected into theology and

its perplexing structure, there is an uncanny sense of playfulness about the book. In

modern literature an author such as Italo Calvino knew the fun and profit of this type of

play. Displaying an unsettling awareness of reader (and the reader's journey!), Calvino

writes in the first chapter of If On A Winter's Night A Traveller:

> Are you disappointed? Let's see. Perhaps at first you feel a bit lost,
> as when a person appears who, from the name, you identified with
> a certain face, and you try and make the features you are seeing tally
> with those you had in mind, and it won't work. But then you go on

> and realize that the book is readable nevertheless, independently of
> what you expected of the author, it's the book in itself that arouses
> your curiosity; in fact, on sober reflection, you prefer it this way,
> confronting something and not quite knowing yet what it is.
> (Calvino, 9).

The presumptions made of an author, as Calvino notes, could well be made in a similar regard to those presumptions a student of theology brings to a theological or exegetical work. Because the reader of Fear and Trembling is so intimately engaged with the task of making sense out of the book, the reader comes to confront prior assumptions made about this well-known tale of sacrifice and faith. Johannes, the poet, has led us on such a journey.

The Reader: an invitation to journey.

From preface to epilogue, the structure of Fear and Trembling is that of a journey which begins and ends at home. Writing much as Schleiermacher did to the "cultured despisers" of religion, Kierkegaard directs his writing to the areligious denizens of Copenhagen's financial district. Rather cryptically it would seem, Kierkegaard's supposed lyrical exegesis begins not with any Miltonic summons of a heavenly muse, but with the following declaration:

> Not only in the business world but also in the world of ideas, our
> age stages...a real sale. Everything can be had at such a bargain price
> that it becomes a question whether there is finally anyone who will
> make a bid (Kierkegaard, 5).

Likewise, the epilogue recalls that

> [o]nce when the price of spices in Holland fell, the merchants had a
> few cargoes sunk in the sea in order to jack up the price. This was
> excusable, perhaps even necessary, deception (Kierkegaard, 121).

The opening image of a clearance sale and the closing one of spice dumping are odd ones to begin and end a theological work. What could these things-- business, sales, bargains and bids or spices sunk into the sea-- possibly have to do with Abraham's journey of faith? The

purpose behind this opening passage is to appeal to the people of Copenhagen with words and ideas which are familiar and easily grasped. Kierkegaard transposes these notions of staging a sale and dumping of spices into. as he says. "the world of ideas." Have we not. Kierkegaard barbs. done the same with the world of the spirit?

Edward Mooney comments that. "in effect his dialectical and imaginative skills have been employed to realise the price of faith...to make it less a cheap commodity available to all" (Mooney, 20). As one reads through the preface it becomes clear that it is a thinly-veiled attack on the Hegelian system which, in Kierkegaard's opinion, devalues the role of faith.

> Even if someone were able to transpose the whole content of faith
> into conceptual form, it does not follow that he has comprehended
> faith, comprehended how he entered into it or how it entered into
> him (Kierkegaard, 7).

The double use of "enter" in the above passage gives clear indication that Kierkegaard wishes for his reader to leave the crude world of the market place behind momentarily and step inside, enter into, the world of biblical narrative. He wishes the reader to consider Abraham's journey of faith first-hand. For this to be so, the reader herself must go on something of a journey; she will be guided by one who claims that he is "by no means a philosopher" (Kierkegaard, 7) but merely another traveller.

"In our age," Kierkegaard writes, "everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further" (Kierkegaard, 7). This metaphor of "goes/going further" appears throughout the text. He argues that faith itself is a journey and one need not go beyond it. In the epilogue Kierkegaard provides a direct caveat to this claim. It speaks deeply and profoundly to a dangerous attitude that moderns may hold in light of their predecessors. It is an attitude which, in the name of progress, skips over faith as something arcane; an anachronism best resigned to the past. We are beyond it; it embarrasses our modern sensibilities.

Condemning this attitude, Kierkegaard closes the journey with the following:

> the highest passion in a person is faith, and here no generation begins
> at any other point than where the previous one did. Each generation
> begins all over again; the next generation advances no further than the
> previous one, that is, if that one was faithful to the task and did not leave
> it high and dry (Kierkegaard, 121-22).

It would be wrong to glean from Kierkegaard's message that we are not better off from

having received the wisdom of prior generations. However, in matters of faith,

Kierkegaard's message is quite clear: faith has a strong experiential component to it. We

the reader are called to it.

Conclusion:

This chapter has limned the metaphor of journey, giving examples from the text itself

and extrapolations from the text which signal a way in which to interpret Kierkegaard's

work. Whereas Abraham's journey occurs at the level of text, the reader's journey

functions at an extra-textual level. Each vantage point is rooted primarily in the idea that

the individual's faith development is beautifully and imaginatively rendered as that of a

metaphorical journey in **Fear and Trembling**.

Chapter Four: Silence

We will now turn to look at the metaphor of silence. As with the previous metaphor of journey, this metaphor is significant for the way it is used explicitly in the text and-- at a broader level-- the manner in which it functions implicitly as a root metaphor, guiding a reading of this text. In the first part we will reconstruct Kierkegaard's argument, showing that, in Fear and Trembling, the meaning of silence is mutable: its meaning is derived from its context. Only through an investigation of the different meanings of silence will its relationship to faith be fully appreciated. The second section will examine how silence informs our reading strategy for Fear and Trembling. In this section, the reader will recognise the familiar switch from investigating what Kierkegaard says to the manner in which it is said.

Part One: Textual Examples of Silence

Silence pervades this book. It is a metaphor with which to reckon. Mark C. Taylor helps us to understand the extent to which Fear and Trembling is steeped in silence, drawing to our attention the irony of our pursuit.

> A book by Johannes de Silentio, about a person named Abraham
> who cannot speak, devoted to an exploration of the significance of
> silence. There would not seem to be much to say. Indeed to try
> to say anything would seem to land one in self-contradiction. But
> perhaps that's the point, or one of the points (Taylor, 1981: 165).

Silence is, then, more than deserving of attention. Yet, for a time this subject did not receive the attention it merits.[62] This is much less the case today thanks, in part, to the Kierkegaard and

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[62] Robert L. Perkins and Mark C. Taylor find that this aspect of Kierkegaard studies has "comparatively" been ignored. See Robert Perkins's "Abraham's Silence Aesthetically Considered" Kierkegaard On Art and Communication. ed. George Pattison. Great Britain: St. Martin's Press, 1992. p. 88-99. See also Mark C. Taylor's essay-- pre-dating Perkins's by a decade--"Sounds of Silence," Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals. ed. Robert L. Perkins. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1981. p.165-188. While the

<u>Postmodernism</u> series edited by Mark C. Taylor, and authors such as Pat Bigelow and Peter

Fenves.[63] To my mind it is helpful to begin an analysis of this metaphor by drawing upon four

specific instances in which the reader of <u>Fear and Trembling</u> encounters silence: the epigraph; the

multiple anecdotes of Problem III; Abraham; and the figure of Johannes de Silentio . It is my hope

that, as we move through these textual examples, the reader will become aware that silence does not

mean the same thing in each place (the differences are, in fact, crucial to Kierkegaard's

representation of faith) and, further, that the text has been "moving consistently towards silence."[64]

The exploration of these four areas of the text will constitute the burden of section one of this

chapter.

1. The Epigraph

"What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but

the messenger did not." These cryptic words are the first the reader of <u>Fear and Trembling</u> will

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qualifier "comparatively" rings true, the claims seems less accurate
at present. Perhaps this is due to Kierkegaard's "indirect
communication" receiving broader attention by Postmodern thinkers and
others such as Roger Poole (see bibliography).

[63] Both Bigelow and Fenves offer sharp, insightful philosophical
considerations of silence as a tool of communication in the context of
Kierkegaard's "aesthetic" works. See bibliography for individual
citations.

[64] Taylor, 165. These two arguments are made and carried out in
an excellent fashion by Mark C. Taylor in "Sounds of Silence" (see
bibliography). While I do not adhere as rigorously as does Taylor to
reading silence through the lens of Kierkegaard's stages, my reading
of this metaphor is, nonetheless, extremely indebted to Taylor's
article.

encounter. Borrowed from Johan Georg Hamman,[65] the epigraph appears to be rather odd: "is not Fear and Trembling a study of Abraham's faith?" the uninitiated reader might query. The question would certainly be appropriate. More important, however, it marks the first instance wherein a reader's expectation is challenged. Confused, the reader may attempt to dissect or decode this cryptic verse. Even without the knowledge of the source of the quotation, the reader will be struck by the phrase "by means of the poppies." It adumbrates what lies ahead. The phrase suggests a veiled, stealth-like manner of communication and thus sets the interpretive mood of Kierkegaard's text. The peculiar garden constitutional becomes a conduit of information.

In his excellent study, "Chatter:" Language and History in Kierkegaard, Peter Fenves issues the following claim: "[c]ommunication cannot *not* take place...Even noncommunication-- whether as silence, muteness, or total passivity-- is a negative mode of communication, which, however, remains a matter of communication" (Fenves, 145). If Fenves is correct in his assertion regarding the inevitability of communication, we may build on his argument to suggest that even elliptical communication which takes place in less than an ordinary manner (such as speech, writing) signals

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[65] See note on epigraph on page 339 of Hong/Hong edition of Fear and Trembling. The editors speculate that it is highly likely that Kierkegaard, an avid reader of Lessing, drew on Lessing's allegorical reading of Hamman's letter to Johannes Gotthelf Linder, March 29, 1763. With the editors, Ronald Green speculates that the epigraph is directed to a "secret reader," probably his erstwhile fiancee, Regine Olsen; possibly his deceased father. The epigraph, "alludes to an event in the life of the Roman general, Tarquinius Superbus. The general's son had seized control of a city and sent a messenger to his more experienced father to learn how he might best secure his tenuous hold on power. suspecting the messenger might be a spy, the father said nothing, but took him for a walk in the garden.. As they strolled, Superbus periodically removed his sword from its scabbard and cut off the tops of the highest poppies. When later told of this strange behaviour by the uncomprehending messenger, the son understood that he was to execute the city's indigenous leadership." Ronald M. Green. Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 124. For an expanded consideration of this issue see Green's essay, "Deciphering Fear and Trembling's Secret Message," Religious Studies 22 (1987), p.95.

or draws attention to itself. In the example drawn from Hamman, the security of a recently-conquered state demands that the type of communication *be appropriate to its content*. This tacit connection Kierkegaard makes between a subject and the manner in which this subject is conveyed has its first instance here. If the reader reflects on what might simply be termed the "appropriateness" of communication, she will note this to be a clue that will serve her well in interpreting Kierkegaard's language of faith. Kierkegaard's epigraph, then, is a striking example of silence.

2. Anecdotes of Silence

Far from having abandoned the metaphor of silence, Kierkegaard brings this metaphor to its highest pitch in Problem III when he poses the troubling exegetical question, "[w]as it ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Elizer, and from Isaac?" (Kierkegaard, 82). Roughly a third of the entire text is devoted to answering this question, which alone bespeaks the importance Kierkegaard accords to silence. Yet, as Mark C. Taylor notes, "[t]oo often this section...is read either as a repetition of points stated more precisely in Problems I and II, or as musings on Kierkegaard's personal experience that stray from the primary concerns of the work" (Taylor, 1981: 165). The notion that Kierkegaard "strays" from the question he puts forth is worth commenting upon.

There are, perhaps, two reasons for the above misconception. First, Kierkegaard chooses to embroider the question of Abraham's silence with the language of hidden and revealed. Stylistically, this may open Kierkegaard, rather unfairly, to the charge of discursiveness. He begins his consideration of the problem by stating that the individual occupies a hidden state and that "his ethical task is to work himself out of his hiddenness and to become disclosed in the universal" (Kierkegaard, 83). Finding that the best means to test this hypothesis is "dialectically to pursue hiddenness," (Kierkegaard, 85) he sets

forth multiple anecdotes extracted from myth and literature. The multiple scenarios put

forth by Johannes, which explore the merits and validity of silence, function as

counter-weights to Abraham's ordeal. From Agamemnon to Faust, the examples given in

the twenty pages which follow may appear to be straying further from the task of

answering the question originally posed. Is this simply a case of equivocation? The

reader who has followed the argument, yet continues to be suspicious finds direct

explanation at the end of this trail of anecdotes as to the method behind the madness.

> For I have not forgotten, and the reader will please remember,
> that I got involved in the previous discussion to make that subject
> an obstacle, not as if Abraham could thereby become more salient,
> for, as I said before, I cannot understand Abraham --I can only
> admire him. It was also pointed out that none of the stages described
> contain an analogy to Abraham; they were explained, while being
> demonstrated each within its own sphere... (Kierkegaard 112: *italics mine*).

Kierkegaard's direct admonition underscores a point made earlier in this chapter: the

metaphor of silence is used in varying capacities: silence means different things at

different stages. Here, we might recall Kierkegaard's reluctance to commit to a single

definition of a term. As George L Stengren posits,

> Kierkegaard does not give us a single unequivocal definition of
> faith that we might conveniently memorise or enshrine in a
> catechism. Rather, he suggests a number of viewpoints which,
> when taken together, give us a richer view than any one
> "objective" definition.[66]

Silence is not accorded a static meaning in Kierkegaard's text. The purposes of silence in

each of the anecdotes provided, whether it be Faust, Agnes, or Agamemnon, are similar to

those of metaphor. By is I mean to suggest that there is a comparative basis in which the

reader may gain proximity to the situation. When Agamemnon deals with the travails of

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[66] George L Stengren. "Faith," *Kierkegaardiana* 12, 1982, p. 86.

silence we are offered a key-hole look into the world of Abraham's suffering. Yet Kierkegaard is not one to give his reader false certainty. While his anecdotes do invite a basis of comparison between the knight of resignation (the hero of ethics) and Abraham (the knight of faith), Kierkegaard ultimately champions their differences. That is to say, Agamemnon, as the tragic hero, experiences silence in a profoundly different way than does Abraham. Agamemnon's sufferings as leader and father respectively can be weighed and measured according to ethical standards. Abraham's case is wholly confusing to ethical judgments. We may, in this light, understand Kierkegaard's claim that "nothing of what has been said here explains Abraham" (Kierkegaard, 98). Each anecdote preceding the discussion of Abraham, in a sense, illumines Abraham's very particular situation by showing what it is not. The method, then, will be in a vein similar to that of negative theology.[67]

Silence and the Ethical Sphere

Without ignoring the role of silence in the aesthetic sphere, I wish to focus the discussion directly on the role of silence in the ethical sphere. I do so because Fear and Trembling is so much a testimony to the clash between a moral code as developed by ethics and a religious code which supersedes that ethical standard. While this clash is perhaps best known in Kierkegaard's infamous question, "[i]s there a teleological suspension of the ethical?" (Kierkegaard, 54), it is aptly demonstrated by the way ethical silence is treated via the anecdotes of Problem III.

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[67] David Law interprets Kierkegaard in this manner in Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Essentially, ethics accords silence a negative value. David J. Wren articulates the

concern in a logical, matter-of-fact way. He writes:

> [o]ne of the characteristics that we demand of those who claim to
> be ethical is that their actions be done for good reasons rather than
> haphazardly or as a matter of personal whim. If someone borrows
> our car and returns it damaged, explaining its somewhat modified
> shape by that he had a sudden urge to argue with a tree, we would
> be entitled to consider his reasons suspect and his action irrespons-
> ible...On the other hand, if we are told that the car was damaged
> because running it into a tree was the only alternative to killing a
> pedestrian, we would have to acknowledge that the action was
> justified (Wren, 152).

Reasons help us to understand actions. Wren's example highlights the importance we place

on disclosure and accountability. That these two concepts are joined together is instructive

for our present study. In our communities, we occupy something like a moral space in

which the verity of our actions is judged and judged externally; we submit to a jury of our

peers. For this reason, Agamemnon—the king who, like Abraham, must sacrifice his child

for a higher good—presents his dilemma openly to his people. The people of the city may

empathise with his plight and deem his situation tragic. Moreover, Agamemnon must

apprise his daughter, Iphigenia, of the tragic situation. In this light we read that "ethics

demands disclosure. The tragic hero demonstrates his ethical courage in that he himself, not

prey to any esthetic illusion, announces Iphigenia' fate to her. If he does that, then the tragic

hero is ethics' beloved son in whom it is well pleased" (Kierkegaard, 87).

Since disclosure appears to be the opposite of silence, it would be helpful to note the

philosophical underpinnings of this compulsion to disclose. To answer this question we

may look to both Hegel and Kant. Mark C. Taylor finds in Kant's categorical imperative a

touchstone with the ethical approach to silence. For Kant, "the morality of a proposed action

is determined by its ability to be universalised, i.e. applied under any circumstance" (Taylor,

179c). To extrapolate from Taylor's reading of Kant, for a thing to be universalised, it must

be accessible and available for all persons: then, it may be called moral or ethical. Language

and our ability to communicate is one such thing. In fact, it is a defining characteristic of

who we are and claim to be. In all the case examples presented in Fear and Trembling it is

only Abraham who, it is said, cannot speak. What is the significance?

Johannes voices a Hegelian argument that language and thought share an intimately

connected space (Mooney, 115; Taylor, 1981: 170). In "Sounds of Silence," Taylor argues

that "thought and language are two sides of the same coin-- thought internalised language,

and language externalised thought" (Taylor, 170). The impact of this connection between

thought and language informs our reading of ethical silence.

> Persons share common cognitive and linguistic structures. The
> consequence of this position is that the attempt to bring rational
> order to disordered sense experience actually is an effort to express
> experience in universal terms which are, in principle, comprehend-
> sible to all rational beings. Another way of making this point is
> to say that the development of cognitive and linguistic facility
> establishes the possibility of communicating with other persons
> (Taylor, 1981: 171).

Speech, then, exemplifies the impulse toward the universal. It honours a system which is

shared and understood by all persons. To choose not to speak is tantamount to a refusal to

participate in this system.

Through Abraham's silence the limits of ethical disclosure are revealed. Edward F.

Mooney's critique is excellent here. Mooney contends that Abraham's silence is a calculated

affront to assimilationist ideals; ideals in whose name a moral community "removes the

barriers that separate individual souls" (Mooney, 114) and engenders "civic responsibility

and familiar intimacy, of a common life lived openly in the embrace of the universal"

(Mooney, 115). As with Taylor, Mooney finds the proclivity towards the universal to have

its roots in Hegel. Yet, the matter is not so much a philological one. Mooney cites the

Hegelian notion of a shared destiny "involving reciprocity and commitment to common

goods" (Mooney. 115) as the underpinnings of an ethics of disclosure. Responsibility,
ethical standards, a shared destiny: what could be wrong with such things?

The correct answer to this question would be to concede that of course these things are
good. They do not, however, help us to understand Abraham's actions. Ethical silence is
represented, in varying degrees, by Agamemnon. Faust, Agnes and the merman, and the
young lovers. What unites each case is the single fact that the ordeal may be judged
ethically and understood by a community which shares this ethical system. In each case the
individuals concerned can and do speak. With Abraham the matter is entirely different.

Silence and the Religious Sphere

This brief section is intended to be an introduction to a consideration of silence as it
functions in Abraham's world, the religious sphere. Its intention is to establish that _Fear and_
Trembling has, in fact, been working gradually towards the joining of the religious sphere
and the metaphor of silence. So, while the problem of religious silence is most directly
considered in Problem III of _Fear and Trembling_, this issue is hinted at earlier in the text.
We have already noted the epigraph wherein a message which is communicated in silence is
intended for a circumscribed audience, and therefore not understood by the messenger. The
idea that silence as communication may indicate a place of privilege or intimacy between
sender and receiver of the message is suggested. In perhaps the most stark and surreal image
in the whole of the text.[68] Kierkegaard builds on this sense of intimacy as characteristic of
religious silence by detailing the weaning of the child. Offered on four occasions, this
image acts as something of a refrain in the section entitled "exordium." It is surreal because
its appearance-- offset as a pseudo moral of the story-- is unannounced and quite out of the

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[68] In the first of the four sketches the mother is said to
"blacken" her breast.

ordinary; there is nothing which overtly prepares the reader for this image.

A striking image, the weaning of a child— an act of intimacy and silence— is a peculiar one appended to each of the sketches in "exordium." As Edward F. Mooney correctly notes of this refrain, "[e]xplicit allusion to mother and child is strangely absent in the remainder of Fear and Trembling. But here Johannes takes the archetype of maternal nurturance to be fundamental to faith" (Mooney, 30). This image, the feeding and weaning of a child, illumines a profound and nurturing manner of communication which provides a gripping analogue to a life of faith lived in relation to God. Suitably ironic, the weaning depicts so acutely the hope and vexation of Abraham, patriarch of faith (Mooney, 30).[69] It is important to note that the mother too "is not without sorrow, because she and the child are more and more to be separated. So they grieve together" (Kierkegaard, 13). This mutual grieving underscores the bond which exists between mother and child, Abraham and Isaac, Abraham and God, and God and the believer.

3. Abraham

Scholars such as Nancy J. Crumbine have deftly noted the appropriateness of the

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[69] Mooney speculates on possible interpretations of who the child is: "If the child weaned is Isaac, then the issue is how to make Isaac free...Alternatively, the child in the morals of these tales might be Abraham. In this case the test becomes his capacity to be weaned from a potentially harmful misrelationship with God, a relationship that would keep him unfree..." (p. 30-31). While Mooney's suggestion are certainly feasible, I would suggest that --in keeping with the interpretative concerns of this essay-- that the child to be weaned is the reader. My suggestion is predicated first upon the placement of this moral-widget at the text's beginning; second, the fact that this image (and) the further "blackening" of the breast in IV, is not sustained throughout. These "clues" would suggest the maturation of the reader as independent interpreter, as engaged as the passionate subject involved in the struggle of faith as independent. A Freudian analysis would suggest that this pivotal moment of weaning --a moment of terror for the child-- is also a moment of self-realisation. I exist independently, no matter how intimate the bond, from the "other."

metaphor of silence to the Genesis 22 narrative. Crumbine writes that,

> Kierkegaard's sensitivity to silence and its interconnectedness to
> faith is revealed in the very choice of the story of Abraham to convey
> his most serious concern. For the story is based entirely on background
> and divine mystery, on the darkness and contradiction of experience
> unrenderable in language. Abraham, the context of the story itself,
> and the story's presentation are all hidden and forever unknowable
> (Crumbine, 149).[70]

Crumbine suggests a number of facets of the Genesis 22 narrative— mystery, contradiction,

and hiddenness— which are foregrounded by Kierkegaard through the metaphor of silence.

Resisting resolution helps the reader to understand the trajectory of Kierkegaard's argument.

This might accurately be considered an anti-Hegelian stance: "Abraham cannot be mediated;

in other words, he cannot speak" (Kierkegaard, 60). Abraham is silent. Moreover, this

metaphor is wedded particularly well to the previous metaphor of journey, as the final part

of Abraham and Isaac's walk to Mt. Moriah is "traversed in silence" (Von Rad, 241). Von

Rad comments that, in Genesis 22, the effect of this silence is that "the tempo of the

narrative slows down noticeably...letting the reader sense something of the agonies of this

pathway" (Von Rad, 240). The metaphor of silence is, then, textually-based in this

particular biblical passage.

Changing the vantage point slightly: in secular literature, the merits of silence have been

extolled in the past with great conviction. We may remember, for example, Henry David

Thoreau's deliberate venture into the woods and the book, Walden, or Life in the Woods,

that was testimony to this event. Therein, Thoreau penned that "communication must be

more than loud talk or frequent chatter; it must be based on an inner communication in

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[70] Quoting Erich Auerbach, Walter Brueggemann suggests that
Genesis 22 is "fraught with background" and is therefore its "intent
is not clear. It requires some decisions by the interpreter."
Brueggemann, 185.

silence."[71] The phrase "inner communication" echoes our previous discussion of the

subjectivity of truth in chapter one. Further, we can begin to think about "inner

communication" as an embodiment of the metaphor of silence and the nature of faith. The

following analysis of Abraham's faith will be, in part, an articulation of what "inner

communication" might mean.

"No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?"[72]

To attempt to understand Abraham's situation is to know that his is an entirely different

one from that of the aesthetic hero. This is the case because aesthetics allows for silence if,

by remaining silent, a life may be saved (Kierkegaard, 112). Yet, Abraham is silent for

reasons that transcend the sparing of Isaac's life.

> Abraham remains silent -- but he cannot speak. Therein lies
> the distress and anxiety. Even though I go on talking night
> and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself under-
> stood when I speak, then I am not speaking. This is the case
> with Abraham. He can say everything.... [but] if he cannot
> [communicate the essence of his struggle]...then he is not
> speaking (Kierkegaard, 113).

In this passage it is made clear that silence is tantamount to not communicating. This claim

would, however, stand in contradiction to Peter Fenves' hypothesis that there is no such

thing as noncommunication (Fenves, 145). In the pause that accompanies a consideration of

these antithetical claims we must be reminded of who speaks for Abraham here: Johannes *de*

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[71] Henry David Thoreau's <u>Walden</u> is quoted from Nancy J. Crumbine's "On Silence," <u>Humanitas</u> 11, 1975, p. 154.

[72] Kierkegaard, 14. In a footnote on this passage, a cross reference from Kierkegaard's journals is supplied. Kierkegaard writes that, "[t]he one who is able to understand him is already great." The phrasing would appear to suggest that those who do not participate in a life of faith can neither be great, nor understand Abraham.

Silentio. As a poet, Johannes stands outside the religious sphere. He simply cannot understand the nature of Abraham's situation and therefore mistakenly conflates the inability to speak with Abraham's silence (Kierkegaard, 115). While it is true to say that Abraham is operating at a level of faith that a non-believer would not understand, it is incorrect to infer an absence of communication. Yet, just pages later Johannes seems to be closer to the mark: "[f]irst and foremost, he does not say anything, and in that form he says what he has to say" (Kierkegaard, 118) and later, "he does not say anything, for he is speaking in a strange tongue" (Kierkegaard, 119). Finally, Johannes concedes that "I do not have the courage to speak in this way, no more than I have the courage to act as Abraham did" (Kierkegaard, 120). Perhaps Johannes' equivocation mirrors the sense of incomprehensibility we feel in the face of this mystery, Abraham's profound capacity for faith.

Indeed, silence bears witness to Abraham's tremendous capacity for faith. Kierkegaard wishes for his reader to recognise this fact. He writes that Abraham, "suffers all the agony of the tragic hero, he shatters his joy in the world, he renounces everything, and perhaps at the same time he barricades himself from the sublime joy that was so precious to him..." (Kierkegaard, 60). In times of personal despair and anguish, one desperately wants to confide in another person feelings of fear, anxiety, and pain. That Abraham does not break his silence demonstrates, hope against hope, his confidence that the God who has asked that he sacrifice his only son is the same God that will provide. In Abraham's silence, we recognise that faith is so far removed from the pat and trite way in which it is depicted by Kierkegaard's contemporaries in the preface to Fear and Trembling. Conversely, faith requires the willingness to sacrifice absolutely everything. This is the message of Fear and Trembling, so acutely conveyed in the metaphor of silence.

Yet another matter to consider is the long-held relationship between silence and the numinous. The still, small voice of God depicted in 1 *Kings* 19: 11-12, a time of prayer, the

enormity of a great cathedral: all these things have strong mental connections with silence. Indeed, silence has a central place in the mystical tradition. St. John of the Cross writes, "[t]here is no way to catch in words the sublime things of God which happen in these souls. The appropriate language for the person receiving these favours is that he understand them, experience them within himself, enjoy them, and be silent."[73] Put another way: "[i]f someone who has experienced union with God becomes entangled in language, attempting to describe his experience, he runs the danger of being turned aside from his true purpose, knowing and loving God."[74] In both cases, the focus of attention is not on communicating the experience of God, but God alone. The desire to explain the ways of God - to use language--, it seems, can have a diminishing effect. Instead of seeking to "justify the ways of God to men," as did Milton,[75] Kierkegaard champions the virtues of silence in God, Abraham, and the narrative of the story.[76]

The above may seem an odd, almost deflated, position to take in a paper which supposedly champions the ability of metaphor to depict the nature of faith. By according silence such a pivotal place with Abraham are we suggesting that there is no room for speech or language? To the contrary, speech prepares a unique place for silence. Pat Bigelow comments that, "silence needs to be sealed by speech, otherwise it is as if nothing is

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[73] St. John of the Cross, "The Living Flame of Love," The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979, p. 602.

[74] Jill Leblanc. "The Act of Silence." Philosophy Today. Vol. 39:3, 1995, p. 328.

[75] John Milton. "Paradise Lost," Complete Poems and Major Prose. New York: MacMillan, 1957, p. 212.

[76] The second section of this chapter will comment upon the role silence at broader level in the way the reader reads Fear and Trembling.

vouchsafed in the act of silence...Words spoken in the affirmation of the act of silence do not repeal or revoke the silence; rather, they preserve it" (Bigelow, 105-106). In this context, we can begin to understand the role of the voluble, deeply human figure of Johannes *de Silentio*.

4. Johannes *de Silentio*

Consider the name, Johannes *de Silentio*. The latter part of the name might indicate a mental condition, a physical place, or unresolved ambiguity. The connecting "de" seems to lend to the name something of an aristocratic cache, suggesting something possibility regal.[77] However one interprets the name, Johannes betrays his description through the verbosity of Fear and Trembling. There is little that is silent about this figure, our narrator. Fenves writes that Johannes may "descend from a region entitled Silentio, but as the text itself bears witness, he has abandoned his homeland and ventured into a foreign region of discourse, into the domain of writing to be more exact" (Fenves, 165).

Johannes, then, is a stranger in the land in which he inhabits; he is on uncertain ground. This issue has been considered to some degree in chapter three. Like Abraham who found himself four days travel from his home, Johannes occupies a space which is quite foreign to him. Fenves remarks upon the unity between Johannes and "this lonely man who climbs Mount Moriah" (Kierkegaard, 61). He writes: "[t]he movement from homeland to alien domain is moreover the very topic of the text...undertaken as an ordeal whose specific terms of comprehension are utterly inaccessible to Johannes himself: these terms belong to silence, his estranged provenance" (Fenves, 165).

Ironically, it is the silence of Johannes which sounds at a higher pitch than all his poetic

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[77] This "aristocratic" reading of Johannes is given by Louis Mackey in "View from Pisgah: A Reading of Fear and Trembling," Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard. Florida: United Presses of Florida, 1986, p. 41.

musings. That is to say, his silence communicates to the reader the incommunicability of Abraham and of a life of faith. Johannes is a figure who views the spectacle which takes place atop Mt. Moriah from a distance, bleary-eyed. Although details are given in vivid images, these do not abate the central thrust of the axiom that faith demands that one be intimately involved in the ordeals of faith. As is stated and restated throughout Kierkegaard's text: the paradox of faith cannot be mediated. Here, we come to understand Johannes as the mediator *par excellence*. He provides detail and example, interpretation and insight. Yet, because faith cannot be mediated, Johannes fails to convey the nature of faith. Armed with a particular blend of Socratic irony (knowing that you know nothing), Johannes points the way to faith-- what it involves-- yet does not claim to have faith. The following passage helps clarify his position:

> Having spoken thus, having stirred the listeners to an awareness
> of the dialectical struggles of faith and its gigantic passion, then I
> would not become guilty of an error on the part of the listeners, so
> they would think, "He has faith to such a degree that all we have
> to do is hang onto his coat-tails." I would add, "By no means do I
> have faith. By nature I am a shrewd fellow, and shrewd people al-
> ways have great difficulty in making the movement of faith..."
> (Kierkegaard, 32).

Johannes' confession as to his lack of faith and profession of the necessity and verity of faith point the way for the reader to be involved, apart from mediation, with the text: to ask themselves, "who is Abraham?" Johannes's silence is a stance of pathos in the face of that which cannot be understood. Thus we can understand Kierkegaard's bold assurance that, "[o]nce I am dead, *Fear and Trembling* alone will be enough to immortalise my name. It will be read and translated into foreign languages. People will shudder at the terrible pathos which the book contains" (Journals).[78]

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[78] Cited by Edward F. Mooney on the cover page to his Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling.

Part Two: The Role of Silence in Reading the Text

Having discussed the role of silence as it appears in the actual context of Kierkegaard's argument, it is now possible to consider how this metaphor truly engages the reader, guiding a reading of Fear and Trembling. In chapter two, which served to introduce metaphor theory, I suggested that metaphor has within it the capacity to see things anew, to express ideas in innovative ways, and, in short, to entertain new possibility. This theme of possibility has undergirded the discussion of faith[79] in our consideration of the metaphor of journey. Possibility also plays a significant part in the metaphor of silence.

As the reader will remember, the role of possibility figures prominently in Ricoeur's work. In his study Biblical Narrative in Paul Ricoeur, Vanhoozer affirms the link made by Ricoeur that connects the language of faith to possibility, asserting that "[b]ereft of this access to the possible, humanity loses passion and must resign itself either to the actual or to the necessary, to *what is* or *what must* be --not to *what might be* "(Vanhoozer, 61). Nancy J. Crumbine finds evidence of this sense of possibility in the way in which the Genesis 22 narrative is rendered by Kierkegaard. She writes:

> silence of the divine, of Abraham, and of the narration function
> together to portray the relation of the human and the divine as one
> of infinite possibility. But silence also suggests multi-level signif-
> icance and richness which provides an actualised background of
> meaningfulness to this infinite possibility. This background is most
> clearly understood in the fact that it invites the reader to recollect
> and foresee, to attempt to relate its mystery to something one knows
> and understands...[allowing them] to stand forth in their relation to
> the individual and thus provide a continuity not only of events but
> of meaning (Crumbine, 152).

Both Vanhoozer and Crumbine accord possibility an important place in a life of faith.

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[79] While Kierkegaard describes faith in many ways he does insist in his journals that "faith is essentially this...to hold fast to possibility." Journals and Papers 11, 1126; as quoted in George L. Stengren's "Faith," Kierkegaardiana 12, 1982, p. 87.

Holding Crumbine's claim that Kierkegaard's use of silence generates possibility against

Vanhoozer's assertion that the perception of possibility is a necessary foundation for passion,

we arrive at the following question: how does Kierkegaard's silence elicit the reader's

participation and, ultimately, challenge her to a life of faith? The answer to this question is

found in an examination of silence at the level of narration.

We have discussed the variegated forms of silence that appear in the text. Of the three

areas of silence which Crumbine mentions-- the divine, Abraham, and narration-- it is the

last to which we will turn our attention. The narrative structure and narrative voice of Fear

and Trembling prepare a type of silence. This silence, in turn, directly affects the way in

which the text is read. In his introduction to Pat Bigelow's Kierkegaard and the Problem of

Writing, Mark C. Taylor, waxing particularly Derridian, articulates the logic behind

Kierkegaard's narrative.

> The strange shapes of Kierkegaard's texts are, in effect, various
> folds of discourse written to solicit an Other that can never be
> represented. The pseudonymous authors of the works Kierkegaard
> eventually attempts to claim or reclaim are obsessed with the
> impossible. Repeatedly returning to the impossible task of concept-
> ualizing that which resists conception...Long before the current
> preoccupation with écriture, Kierkegaard insisted that the impos-
> sibility of philosophy can only be exposed in and through certain
> styles and strategies of writing.[80]

Kierkegaard announces the irony of his task-- depicting a life of faith through language-- by

employing the voice of Johannes *de Silentio*. If we pay attention to the book's narrative

structure, the movement from language to silence, we can see that Kierkegaard was keenly

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[80] Kierkegaard and the Problem of Writing, viii. Roger Poole,
Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication, agrees: "[v]ery little
attention has been paid to Kierkegaard's writing...The aesthetic
devices have been largely brushed aside as mere irritants as if,
without those, Kierkegaard's meaning would be easily recuperable"
(p.1-2). "Kierkegaard, writing a century before Derrida, worked out
for himself a rhetoric...which he could oppose the Danish Hegelians"
(p.5-6).

aware as to the irony of using language to discredit language itself.

Structurally, Fear and Trembling opens amid the chatter of the Danish market place. As Edward F. Mooney notes, "[t]his is the world we are assumed to inhabit...and are invited, or perhaps *provoked*, to vacate for the duration of our reading" (Mooney, 20). We are then led through a series of false beginnings (there are, *de facto*, four prefaces) by the ultimately unreliable narrative voice of Johannes *de Silentio*. With his words and misrepresentations Johannes gives empirical evidence of the problem of language. This problem, as Pat Bigelow observes, shares affinities with the task of theology.

> The problem of language has some connection with the problem of the numinous. The connection is further strengthened when the poet is addressed as the spokesman for the numinous...the poet seeks the divine, a sensitivity to the divine and a sacred participation in its mysteries. And the poet does so by seeking to invest language with an element of the divine" (Bigelow, 98).

As Bigelow is well aware, Johannes is unsuccessful in his attempt to understand Abraham. His words accentuate the difference between the human and divine spheres. "Language," as Bigelow later comments, "draws out and reinforces this distinction" (Bigelow, 99). The philosophical underpinnings of this distinction have been addressed previously in our consideration of disclosure— the use of language— and its relationship to assimilationist (Mooney, 114) ethics.[81] As the reader peers more deeply into the text, a dichotomy— between ethics and language on the one hand, and religion and silence on the other— begins to take shape. By denying the reader of Fear and Trembling a linear narrative structure, Kierkegaard exposes the limits of language. He underscores the folly of over-wrought confidence in the system of language through the paradoxical figure of a poet who bears the name "silence." We move no closer to understanding what faith is by accepting Johannes

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[81] The discussion is found in the section entitled, "Silence and the Ethical Sphere."

uncritically. It is only when the reader pays attention to the faults of Johannes that she is able to understand what a life of faith might entail. Amid the uncertainty, the narrative inches its way along to arrive at a testimony to Abraham's silence.

It is my contention, then, that the text has two coterminous trajectories. The first trajectory begins with the chatter of the Danish market place and a concern for language; it then recedes into a still, gaping awe at Abraham's silence, which is a depiction of his faith. Although Johannes insists that Abraham attains his faith "by virtue of the absurd," (Kierkegaard, 119) Abraham's faith is not, in fact, absurd. Rather, it appears absurd to the unprosyletised Johannes who shrinks from the paradox of faith, without comprehension. The second line of development, running in tandem with the first, is a move from the everyday world of skepticism,[82] contemporary mores, and the championing of philosophy to a world of faith. It is a trajectory from unbelief to belief; one which moves past dread and entertains *possibility*. It is perhaps not too great a claim to make that Abraham is the example example *par excellence* of one who holds fast to the possible. He always believes that he will get back Isaac. He is the father of faith. The crux of my argument, then, has been this: to follow Kierkegaard's use of silence— perhaps to succumb to it— is to be witness to the nature of faith. Kierkegaard represents faith through the metaphor of silence both textually and extra-textually. In the first, we sense the pain and commitment that is involved in a life of faith through Abraham's silence. Ethics may not be able to defend Abraham's choice; Kierkegaard exposes the limits of the ethical at the textual level through the figure

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[82] This is evidenced by Kierkegaard's vitriolic attack on the Danish Hegelianism of his day. He excoriates the "world of ideas" which, like the world of business, "stages a real sale" (Kierkegaard, 6). It is an age of skepticism in which faith is a primitive notion; "it can probably be taken for granted that they have doubted everything, since otherwise it certainly would be odd to speak of their having gone further" (Kierkegaard, 6).

of Abraham.

> Using the Abraham and Isaac tale as a scalpel, Kierkegaard deftly
> separates the conditional laws of society from the unconditional
> autonomy of God. If God is God, then he can (purport to) set aside
> (even his own) laws. If God is God, then he can break into human
> time and space in unexpected and incomprehensible ways which
> command that we radically alter our normal ways of doing things.
> If God cannot so act, then he is no longer God, and culture has usurped
> the sovereign's throne (Dewey, 40).

God's ways, however unpalatable, cannot be circumscribed to the laws of ethics: silence

affirms this. Further still, the metaphor of silence functions as an invitation, nay

exhortation, to the reader to participate, to be involved in a life of faith. One cannot

understand faith without this involvement.

In discussing the epigraph to Fear and Trembling near the beginning of this chapter, we

noted that it is important that a type of communication be appropriate to its content. We

have come full circle. The language of silence, to be sure, is the language of faith. Set apart

from speech, it is marked as something special. In Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling silent

places become holy places.

Chapter Five: Drawing Conclusions

We began this study with the simple proposal to analyse Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling by way of Ricoeur's theory of metaphor. The impetus behind this reading strategy was that the argument made in Kierkegaard's text is not a linear one and is difficult to decipher; by paying attention to the metaphors within the text, and those that function to to guide a reading of it, we could negotiate our way through Kierkegaard's argument.

In aid of this interpretative approach, chapter one dealt with background information necessary to understand Kierkegaard's examination of the nature of faith. Specifically, we inquired into the role of choice in his theory of the self and stages of existence. Moreover, we discussed Kierkegaard's indirect communication, primarily to underscore his intellectual disposition, but also to set the stage for a consideration of the role of metaphor in Fear and Trembling. Chapter two examined metaphor theory, demonstrating that Ricoeur's particular corrective to the tradition of metaphor theory is well suited for the present reading of Fear and Trembling. Dealing primarily with The Rule of Metaphor, I presented Ricoeur in reaction to his predecessors in metaphor theory. Most important, we began to think about the shared space metaphor and faith occupy: they exist in a sphere of "possibility."

Now that we have had some time to digest Ricoeur's theory and see how it applies to Kierkegaard's text, we can reconsider what has been accomplished.[83] Believing subjective idealism to be impossible, Ricoeur champions the externalising of thought through signs, language being the primary example. In order that thought be determinable, objective or universal, thought must mediate itself through

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[83] See Leonard Lawlor Imagination and Chance: The Difference Between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida, p.1-5.

language. The irony behind this mediation was fully explored in our discussion of silence in chapter four. That is to say, although this mediation is crucial to the thought process, the polysemic nature of language itself, "postpones the end of complete mediation" (Lawlor, 2). Linguistic mediation is necessary but not sufficient; while it provides continuity it occludes completion. We are left in a state of constant possibility.

It is my hope that this sense of possibility was conveyed in the present study of Kierkegaard, first, in the discussion of Kierkegaard's theories of the self and of the stages of existence. The reason why these two interrelated theories were considered was to show that possibility is not simply rosy, unthinking optimism in spite of dire circumstance. Possibility is actualised through a dialectic between past/present/future (in his theory of the self) and aesthetics/ethics/the religious (in his stages or spheres of existence). Both theories espouse the sense that life is not handed to us in completion: we think and choose. In thinking new thoughts we entertain new possibilities; yet some things-- God-- are beyond the cognitive capacity of human beings. In choosing to orient one's self to the good we embrace the possible. In these instances, Kierkegaard advocates stepping, or more accurately leaping, beyond understanding into faith: understanding does not aid Johannes when thinking through Abraham's life; he is in need of faith. A life of faith is an experience of communication with the divine. Kierkegaard's metaphor of silence draws upon this very idea.

It is in the realm of possibility that the metaphor— an act of discourse— gains relevance. Ricoeur writes that "we are in quest of a language which would be appropriate to the kind of imagination which expresses [the] most characteristic existential possibilities...it is this opening of human possibility, this attempt of my projects by which I advance toward my being" (Ricoeur, 1973: 219). In projecting beyond the immediate, the metaphor functions as a bridge between our localised reality and that to which we are oriented. Ricoeur's jargon might, at times, seem unnecessarily rarefied, yet possibility in metaphor is not the abstract concept we might think it to be:

[B]ecause discourse originates in the world, all expressions are

> about or refer back to the world. They return to our belonging-to-
> the-world, to thought, to spirit, to being. Even novel constructions
> such as symbols and metaphors refer [back to our own being in the
> world] because they are expressions of new experiences of the world.
> ...Reflection and self-understanding can be maintained as a task
> (Lawlor, 3).

Indeed, Kierkegaard's metaphors of journey and silence are reconstructions or, in Ricoeur's term,

redescriptions of the biblical world of Abraham. In turn, they reflect something of our own experience.

I have tried to show that Ricoeur's theory of metaphor is compellingly demonstrated in the narrative

structure of Fear and Trembling. Kierkegaard firmly believes life is presented to us as a task. What,

then, is the nature of this task?

The nature of the task is for the individual to become a self-interpreter. As life and experience come

before us unmitigated, it is up to us to make sense of them by constructing a narrative.[84] In Fear and

Trembling Kierkegaard notably stresses the subjectivity of faith as a life-altering, life-affirming

decision, in reaction to the cerebral intellectualism that characterised the social milieu of which he so

painfully found himself a part. His task, then, was to make sense of the gripping drama of faith as

presented in the Genesis 22 narrative. Kierkegaard knew the autobiographical nature of sense-making.

In this light, we can understand Kierkegaard's passionate confession that

> ... [w]hat I really lack is to be clear in my mind what I am to do, not
> what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must
> precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what
> God really wishes me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true
> for me, to find *the idea for which I can live and die* (Kierkegaard, 1946: 4-5).

Note the delineation Kierkegaard makes in this passage between "what I am to do" and "what I am to

know." Kierkegaard does not long for answers, which he knows are unattainable, so much as for a

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[84] "...to construct a coherent narrative out of the scattered events of one's life, is to interpret those events as part of a significant plot with an overall meaning." T.R. Wright. "Religious Autobiography: Writing God and The Self," in Theology and Literature. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988, p. 92. See also Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of the American Academy of Religion. Vol. xxxix 3, September 1971, p. 291-311.

framework or a way in which he may ask these questions. Like the old man in the final chapters of

Elie Wiesel's The Town Beyond the Wall, Kierkegaard knows that "[t]he essence of man is to be a

question, and the essence of the question is to be without answer...The depth, the meaning, the very salt

of man is his constant desire to ask the question ever deeper within himself, to feel ever more

intimately the existence of an unknowable answer.[85] "

    Fear and Trembling, with its complex structure, is a work that demands interpretation. In reading it,

we not only become interpreters of text, but --because of Kierkegaard's literary strategy--

self-interpreters, as well. Indeed, because the text functions as an attestation to the verities of a life of

faith, Fear and Trembling is about interpreting that life, becoming a self, working out one's salvation

with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13). It is of paramount importance for the reader to

understand why Ricoeur's hermeneutical project is so aptly suited for dealing with this text.

> Hermeneutics then is...the theory that regulates the transition
> from structure of the work to world of the work. To interpret
> a work is to display the world to which it refers by virtue of its
> 'arrangement,' its 'genre' and its 'style.'....the issue in the present
> discussion is...the right to pass from the structure to the world of
> the work... (Ricoeur, 220).

Lawlor puts the matter in a sightly different way.

> Hermeneutics, for Ricoeur, attempts to construct a system out
> of the diverse ways being is said. This would not be a closed sys-
> tem which would reduce the multiple meanings of being down
> to strict univocity, but an open system that places diversity, novelty
> and surplus within an analogical unity. It would be a 'regulated
> polysemy of being' (Lawlor, 3).

With its multi-pronged applicability to Abraham, to Johannes, and most importantly to the reader, Fear

and Trembling is in need of an interpretational approach that not only guides the reader through the

logic of its argument, but also offers a way to pass from the structure of the work to the world of the

work. This is accomplished, in part, by insisting that meaning be an open-ended pursuit. By thinking

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[85] Elie Wiesel. the Town Beyond the Wall. New York: Schocken
Books, 1964, p.176.

through metaphor we invest notions with new meaning. Ricoeur's theory of metaphor illumines the task set forth by Kierkegaard.

Moreover, because of its dialectical argument, _Fear and Trembling_ is highly responsive to a metaphoric reading. The movements in the text between yes and no, affirmation and denial, possibility and corrective are each gestures which would indicate a receptivity to a metaphorical approach. Nicholas Lash notes that,

> [i]f it is true that one of the most important features of any metaphor is that we must deny its literal truth if we are to understand its meta-phorical significance....then it is perhaps not fanciful to suggest that the dialectic of affirmation and denial, which is so striking a feature of the history of Christian spirituality, amounts to a practical recog-nition of the metaphorical status of those narrative forms which I have described as paradigmatic for Christian religious discourse.[46]

By interpreting Kierkegaard's structure through metaphors which both give the book its interpretive _texture_ and resonate with a reader's experience, Ricoeur's hermeneutics helps clarify what Ricoeur terms the "world" of the work. There is a connection made between the reader and the text. The reader's act of appropriation is "less the projection of one's own prejudices into the text that the 'fusion of horizons' --to speak like Hans-Georg Gadamer-- which occurs when the world of the reader and the world of the text merge into one another" (Ricoeur, 319). In reading _Fear and Trembling_, this shared "world" is a world of faith. We might now turn to consider the metaphor's appropriateness to theology and religious language in general.

Metaphor and Theology: general appraisal

In "The Language of Faith," Paul Ricoeur comments upon the intellectual concerns which he shares with Kierkegaard. Ricoeur writes that, "the hermeneutical task is always to overcome a cultural

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[46] Nicholas Lash. "Ideology, Metaphor, and Analogy," _Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology_. ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, p.123.

distance. It is this problem which Kierkegaard posed when he asked. 'How does one become contemporaneous with Christ?" (Ricoeur. 1973: 213). Overcoming cultural distance--between the world of the Danish marketplace and the biblical world--is. we should add. a dominant concern in Fear and Trembling. Ricoeur takes Kierkegaard's question. posed at the level of what Ricoeur terms "individual affirmation." (Ricoeur. 1973: 213) and investigates it from "the centre of understanding. of language. of the articulation of Christian discourse" (Ricoeur. 1973: 213). What then. we should ask. should be the form of Christian discourse? Or. to recall again Wallace Steven's "what will suffice?" ("Of Modern Poetry").

Part dialectic. part lyric. Fear and Trembling has the quality germane to all good literature. To read Fear and Trembling is to have the sense that you have gone some place other than that from which you began (remember the book's structure of marketplace/biblical world/marketplace).[87] Indeed. the self-conscious "once upon a time" refrain in the books' opening pages beckons the reader through narrative technique. It is a compelling device used in considering the nature of a life lived in faith; "once upon a time" asks us to consider the possible. In this light we can understand Ricoeur. discussing biblical hermeneutics. when he writes that "another way of making us contemporaneous with the text of another time is opened to us; it consists of transferring ourselves into another universe of meaning and thereby putting ourselves at a kind of distance with regard to our actual discourse" (Ricoeur. 1973: 213).

It has been the contention of this study that the metaphors of journey and silence have done this very thing. Through Kierkegaard's metaphors we are transported into another cognitive space, one appropriate in which to consider the nature of faith.

A theologian is a bit like Johannes in Fear and Trembling, the poet who cannot capture in full that which he seeks to describe: one who bears the name silence but cannot resist speech. While theology

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[87] This move might be said to parallel the move from philosophy to faith; the secular to the sacred.

asserts that God cannot be adequately described or summed up in language (for to do so would be to reduce God), theology cannot seem to help from declaring what God is or what God is like. In doing theology, we relish the paradox of practice. Perhaps this is not such a bad thing.

The metaphors in Fear and Trembling are used in much the same fashion. While they are able to articulate Abraham's struggle to some degree, they are in no way an appropriate substitute for a life of faith. In using metaphor we are reminded that theology is done amid an extremely important tension. When describing God or a life of faith we do so by way of Ricoeur's split-reference, the "is/is not" component of metaphor. Metaphor, it seems, is particularly valuable in the service of describing that which cannot be adequately described. By asserting what God is in consciously non-literal language, we are reminded of the limited nature of our tools.

Although the metaphor is a tool of limited means, I have tried to show that the metaphor has the ability dramatically to shape the way in which we think about a certain thing. Sallie McFague has reminded her audience— not all of them receptive[88]— of the closely held relationship between theology and metaphor. Janet Martin Soskice, in Metaphor and Religious Language, explores the relationship in a different, perhaps more nuanced, fashion. These scholars and many more preceding and following

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[88] Janet Martin Soskice, Colin Gunton and Donald Wiebe, among others, contend that McFague's project is fraught with contradiction. See Soskice (in bibliography) p. 105. Gunton writes that, "Soskice has alluded to the fact that may theologians working in this area [metaphor] present a confused picture. Drawing on recent philosophy, they begin by advocating a realist use of metaphor and other symbols --in science, for example-- but end in subjectivism when they come to theology (Gunton, 41). In the related footnote, Gunton cites McFague "collapse into idealism" as an example of Soskice's complaint. Donald Weibe characterises McFague' s Speaking in Parables: A study of Metaphor and Theology as a work which "seems to be a complete rejection of academic theology," later calling the findings of her general project in metaphorical theology "bewildering in the ambiguity created by its repeated affirmations and rejections, submissions to and transcending of both metaphorical and conceptual thought." See Donald Wiebe's study The Irony of Theology and the Nature of Religious Thought. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1991, p. 22-25.

them have grappled with this long-held relationship: the intended application to "God-talk" is never too far in the distance.

This project is of a slightly different nature than McFague's or Soskice's; yet it does have points of similarity with these projects worth noting. McFague's task "necessarily involve[s] significant departures from past metaphors and concepts."[89] The reason for this is that past metaphors bear the marks of an age which did not have the same sensibilities or concerns as the one in which we live. While the debate is well outside the scope of this project, we can stand with McFague, Ruether[90] and others concerned with the issue in making that simple affirmation that the language we use in depicting God reflects our understanding of God. We stand on similar ground here. However it be expressed, the way in which we describe the nature of faith, the models from which we work, the lens through which we look— each gives credence to the notion that our understanding of faith is deeply influenced by the way we think through and express this understanding. Kierkegaard and Ricoeur have proved stalwart allies in this regard.

By its very nature faith dwells beyond what is immediate and readily attainable. This idea was articulated through the metaphors of journey and silence. To have faith is to hold fast toward the future, to believe, like Abraham, that God will provide. This future orientation is present also in the metaphor. We redirect known quantities into a space that is new and yet unthought. We might assert, then, that to "metaphorize" (Ricoeur) and to have faith are analogous acts of bridge building— however inadequate— between one's localised situation and beyond, between identity and difference.

The metaphors of journey and silence, limned respectively in chapters three and four of this study, are metaphors steeped in possibility. They allow to think about faith in light of the possible. Mark C.

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[89] Sallie McFague Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987, p.29.

[90] Perhaps Ruether's most recent contribution to the debate is, "The Image of God's Goodness" in Sojourners vol.25, no.1, Jan./Feb.1996 p. 30-31.

Taylor contends that "Kierkegaard consistently held that hope is a necessary condition of authentic selfhood" (Taylor, 226). In undertaking his journey, Abraham the paragon of faith never gives up the possibility that God will provide; he does not despair but has hope. In this sense, Abraham teaches us how to be human.

In this study of Kierkegaard's <u>Fear and Trembling</u>, we have explored the potential of metaphor to examine the nature of faith. Metaphor engages the reader's participation to make the movement of faith. As the language of faith recedes from public discourse, and as the Genesis 22 narrative increasingly upsets modern sensibilities, Kierkegaard's question-- "I wonder if anyone in my generation is able to make the movements of faith?" (Kierkegaard, 34)-- is surely relevant.

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