UNBINDING TRADITIONS:

RHETORIC, HERMENEUTICS AND THE *AKEDAH*

A Thesis

by

JOSHUA THOMAS BUTCHER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2006

Major Subject: Communication

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ABSTRACT

Unbinding Traditions: Rhetoric,

Hermeneutics and the *Akedah*. (December 2006)

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This thesis explores and explicates the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics in two separate contexts: Jewish and Christian hermeneutic traditions, and secular philosophical hermeneutics. The impetus for this division is an analysis of Kierkegaard's work, *Fear and Trembling*, which contains interpretations of the story of Genesis 22, the binding of Isaac; this event is referred to in the Jewish tradition as the *Akedah*. Kierkegaard's own position as a Christian, philosopher and poet situate him on the dividing line between Christian and Jewish hermeneutics, as well as secular philosophical hermeneutic positions. To show these connections, the thesis undertakes two necessary literature reviews: a review of the current theoretical positions on the status of meaning, interpretation, and how rhetoric and hermeneutics intersect; and a review of the history of interpretations of the *Akedah* in Christian and Jewish traditions. Out of the first review come three separate and general categories of secular hermeneutics: intentionalist, phenomenological, and deconstructive. Within each of these positions is a different understanding and application of rhetoric. Similarly, the second review reveals differences between Jewish and Christian hermeneutics which contain separate understandings and applications of rhetoric. Kierkegaard's own interpretation is situated within these contexts. Finally, modern Jewish responses to

Kierkegaard are examined to further explicate the differences between Jewish and Christian hermeneutics as well as the separate philosophical positions. This is done through an analysis of Levinas' and Derrida's separate critiques and appropriations of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the *Akedah* in *Fear and Trembling*. The conclusion drawn from these reviews and analyses is that intentionalist hermeneutics has the most comprehensive understanding and application of classical rhetoric, which in turn makes intentionalist hermeneutics the most capable of preserving the possibility of rhetorical agency.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What does one understand when one reads? How is it that an author imbues his writing with meaning? How is it that a reader draws meaning out of a text? These questions and others like them are most often posed under the topic of hermeneutics, a category of study with a long and complicated history of inception, reception, and change. Hermeneutics as a modern discipline is concerned with theories of interpretation, but this has not always been the case. For rhetoricians, the interest in hermeneutics has only resurfaced recently and in dispersed ways, including the increasingly popular Rhetoric of Science movement.[1] But in this interest there is a great deal of ambiguity in what exactly hermeneutics is, what its relationship to rhetoric is, and how that relationship works not only theoretically, but in the practices of interpretation and exposition. The ambiguity is in part due to the fact that the history of hermeneutics is cross-disciplinary and diachronic—ranging from legal cases in ancient Greece to religious exegesis of sacred texts, to the very interpretation of culture. Each field of interest holds differing presuppositions about the nature and purpose of rhetoric, including complex internal debates concerning such definitions and purposes. The predominant focus of this paper will be upon hermeneutics, to the neglect of focusing on the history and theories of rhetoric (which has an even more complicated history). Rhetoric, throughout the following pages, will be limited to the traditional five canons with a specific focus on invention. The reader will also notice that poetics is used often

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This thesis follows the style of *Philosophy and Rhetoric*.

in this paper and frequently in conjunction with rhetoric. The relationship between these two terms is, perhaps, even more inextricable than that of rhetoric and hermeneutics, but there will be an attempt to delineate how each of these terms are defined, at least within this paper and the scope of its interest.

In light of the structure and content of the chapters, it is necessary to provide an all too brief historical snapshot of hermeneutics. Chapter II will deal with the scholarly discussion on hermeneutics, rhetoric, and validity in interpretation, but in the interest of space and specificity of focus, a more lengthy discussion of the history of hermeneutics must be omitted. It is hoped that the brief introduction offered here provides some background context for the reader who may be tempted to view (because of the scope of chapter II) hermeneutics from only a modern point of view. Following the brief history a brief summary of the chapters and methodological considerations will be discussed.

We begin our brief historical discussion of hermeneutics with a well recorded skeptic, Socrates (by way of Plato). In the *Ion*, Ion is a rhapsode who recites Homeric epics with prowess. Socrates, in his usual fashion, questions Ion about his knowledge of the subject of which Homer speaks, and about what particular knowledge a rhapsode possesses. For Plato's Socrates, the conclusion is that knowledge is not what is possessed at all, but that the rhapsode is, supra-rationally, divinely possessed:

> You see it's not because you're a master of knowledge about Homer that you can say what you say, but because of a divine gift, because you are possessed….Then that is how we think of you, Ion, the lovelier way: it's as someone divine, and not as a master of a profession, that you are a singer of Homer's praises. (*Ion*, 1997, 943, 949)

While Socrates is seeking out certain knowledge of the actual topics of which Homer speaks—a particularly different inquiry from that of the rhapsode—he brings to light the notion that the rhapsode, as an interpreter, mimics the art of the poet, and not through certain knowledge, but by inspiration. An important idea in understanding the skeptic's perspective on the written word is in contrast to the spoken word, especially the written word's necessary link to its author:

> When it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support. (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 1997, 552)

The silencing of the author resulting from the use of the written word becomes problematic in later hermeneutics, but the search for authority in the written words focuses on the original author throughout the classical period. Hermeneutics in Plato's written works interrogates the metaphysical implications of the Homeric traditions against the knowledge of Homer and the interpreter who would mimic.[2] It is not until the advancement of law in Roman society that hermeneutics becomes more concrete and increasingly textual.

Eden (1997) shows that hermeneutics during the Roman period was primarily concerned with interpreting legal cases, including laws, wills, and contracts (7). Eden notes that the early practitioners Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian maintain a distinction between the author's intention and inherent ambiguity in the meaning of words. Particularly interesting is Eden's discussion of Aristotle's notion of equity:

> The advocate presented in court with a law prejudicial to his case is advised to argue against strict construction in favor of equity, for equity upholds not only the defendant's intention (*prohairesis*) over his action (*praxis*) but also the legislator's intention (*dianoia*) over his words (*logos*) (1.13.17). (1997, 11)

Cicero aligns himself with Aristotle's notion of aligning equity with intentionality, while still maintaining recognition of the limitations of writing (mirroring Plato's discussion in the *Phaedrus*) (Eden, 15). Hermeneutics in the classical Greek through Roman periods maintains theoretical continuity as Eden notes: "Like the equitable judgment, then, the broadly contextualized interpretation reads the part within the whole and the word (or deed) in light of the intention of the *scriptor* (or *actor*) (19). Moreover, in grammatical interpretation, the ancients relied on historical context and textual context as tools for achieving this kind of equity (Eden, 21). It is important to note that neither rhetoric nor hermeneutics were limited to the legal or judicial realm. The deliberative and epideictic modes of rhetoric discussed by Aristotle (and later revised by Cicero) are not devoid of interpretive method, or indeed of attention to textual materials.

Following the classical period, when the Christianity of the Roman Catholic Church ruled the West, hermeneutics was primarily concerned with interpretations of the Bible. It was in Christianity where hermeneutics was fully formed and practiced as a discipline unto itself. That is to say, "hermeneutics" was a practiced by Christian exegetes who had a defined methodology. While involved in a context of primarily religious aims, hermeneutics during this period was still concerned with the intention of the author as the object of validity in interpretation, even when interpretation deviated from the author's intention. Witness Augustine's remarks in the *Confessions* (1991):

> In Bible study all of us are trying to find and grasp the meaning of the author we are reading, and when we believe him to be revealing truth, we do not dare to think he said anything which we either know or think to be incorrect. As long as each interpreter is endeavoring to find in the holy scriptures the meaning of the author who wrote it, what evil is it if an exegesis he gives is one shown to be true by you, light of all sincere souls, even if the author whom he is reading did not have that idea and, though he had grasped a truth, had not discerned that seen by the interpreter. (259-60)

Augustine, despite his comfort with multiple interpretations, never rejects the necessity of authorial intention as the primary concern of hermeneutics:

> [...] I see that two areas of disagreement can arise, when something is recorded by truthful reporters using signs. The first concerns the truth of the matter in question. The second concerns the intention of the writer. (Confessions 263)

The first concern reflects Socrates' position as recorded in the *Ion* and both reflect the classical understandings of legal hermeneutics. Augustine's recognition that there is no way to discern the full intention of the author maintains the author's meaning to be what should be sought as part of true interpretation: "Together with them I would approach the words of your book to seek in them your will through the intention of your servant, by whose pen you imparted them to us" (*Confessions*, 263). Even in his belief that God was ultimately behind the meaning of Scripture, Augustine maintained that meaning came through the author's intentional effort to convey something to someone. Eden notes particularly well Augustinian hermeneutics:

> Augustine, then, outspokenly advocates a hermeneutics in which the meaning of the whole simultaneously depends on and informs the meaning of the parts....this circularity looks not only back to the rhetorical arguments and counterarguments for *scriptum* versus *voluntas* but ahead to the circle of understanding at the center of modern hermeneutics. Indeed, a hermeneutics of charity defines a disposition toward the text rather than any doctrine, in that the discovery of *caritas* within the text not only finds support elsewhere—indeed, everywhere else—in the text but also qualifies the *voluntas* of the reader by **qualifying his or her way of**

reading as equitable or, in Augustine's terms, spiritual in that it searches out the *voluntas* of the writer. (58, emboldening mine)[3]

Medieval hermeneutics, of which Augustine is representative, maintains the standard of fidelity to the author's intention as the prime object for validity in interpretation. The four types of hermeneutics of the Medieval period: literal, allegory, moral, and anagogical, have their roots in antiquity.[4]

Handelman attributes the allegorical sense back to Philo (a 1st century Hellenistic Jew), who came into Christian literature through Origen (96). It was Origen who divided meaning into literal, moral, and spiritual aspects (108). Augustine and Jerome expanded into its familiar fourfold formula, and it was Augustine's theory of signs that came to be a dominant influence in Christian hermeneutics (113-120). According to Handelman, Jewish Midrash shared this understanding of multiple meanings in Scripture, but whereas Christian hermeneutics prioritized meaning according to the four types of interpretation, Rabbinic meanings were more often coequal. Significantly, one of the major points of Handelman's book is that the separate presuppositions of the nature of words is the distinguishing difference between Rabbinic and Christian hermeneutics. Finally, where hermeneutics had been a subset of rhetoric in the legal cases during the Roman period, Augustine's turn toward the Biblical text took hermeneutics to the edges of rhetorical invention—away from productive enterprises and toward explicative enterprises. Rhetorical invention in legal cases had relied upon the commonplaces of what was spoken and to whom and in what context, and hermeneutics within these considerations was tied to historical and concrete content. Applied to written texts, and more importantly, to Sacred written texts, whose meaning was

presupposed as timeless and potentially transcendent, rhetorical invention focused upon the symbolic and conceivable more often than the literal and actual. Beyond the judicial realm, invention was productive in the sense of drawing upon principles of discourse and rudimentary human psychology, but in Augustine's focus on Scripture intertextuality and transcendent spirituality overshadowed the Aristotelian formulations of invention. Further divergences were to occur in the period following Medieval hermeneutics.

Jasper (2004) judges the hermeneutics of Martin Luther and John Calvin as paving the way for a more anthropocentric and subjective slant to interpreting texts (specifically, Biblical) because in their break from the Catholic Church they encouraged people to read the Bible on their own (62-67). Luther disavowed the fourfold meaning in favor of the literal and other Reformers who were less strident still limited Scriptural meaning to the literal and moral senses. Their notions were no doubt aided and affected by the use of printing press technology and the later proliferation of vernacular texts. The Enlightenment brought with it a new skepticism for looking at Biblical texts and a rigorous scientific approach for both sacred and secular interpretation. It was Schleiermacher who advanced the linguistic and syntactical elements of interpretation during the 19th century (2004, 83-86). Finally, it was in the modern era where hermeneutics became closely aligned with philosophy and specifically interpretation within the interplay of epistemology and ontology.

The subject-object distinctions of the Cartesian system combined with the locus of reality in the inductive logic of Kantian epistemology led hermeneutics into its scientific period, where complex theories of meaning and intention were offered and

debated and the "hermeneutics of faith" in Scriptural interpretation was implicated in a dialectic with a "hermeneutics of suspicion," according to Jasper (81-83). It was Schleiermacher who began the exodus out of scientific hermeneutics when he posited that the reader should seek to understand the text even better than the author who wrote it did (83-86). Dilthey expanded Schleiermacher's concern for the text's original moment into a universal concern for human thought generally, and Bultmann and Heidegger turned hermeneutics toward the existential and ontological focuses of present day hermeneutics, respectively. The modern climate of hermeneutics is characterized by a dialectic between those who align more closely with Gadamer (and subsequently Paul Ricoeur) and those who follow closer to Derrida. Gadamer's hermeneutics is developed out of the phenomenological and ontological tradition of Heidegger (through Husserl) whereas Derrida's hermeneutics, as Handelman claims, is a reinvention of radical forms of Rabbinic hermeneutics.[5]

The snapshot offered above is too brief and a bit crude, but it will hopefully provide the reader with a working understanding of the progression of hermeneutics before diving into chapter II (which is heavily entrenched in this history). It remains now to briefly outline the content of the following chapters and the methodology they employ. Chapter II is concerned with investigating the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics and how validity in interpretation has been discussed by rhetorical scholars. The chapter proceeds through a review of the pertinent literature from rhetorical scholars in the disciplines of Communication, English, and Philosophy. In the overall structure of the thesis, chapter I provides the theoretical context for the analyses

and the central questions of inquiry: What is the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics and how does rhetoric function in formulating hermeneutic theory and practice in each system or version of hermeneutics examined? Chapter III is a review of the literature on the various interpretations of the *Akedah* (Genesis 22) across the contexts of history and tradition (specifically Christian, Jewish, and secular). The term *Akedah* is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for "binding." *Akedah* has been the traditional Jewish label for the story of Genesis 22, the story of God, Abraham, and Isaac where God commands Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.[6] The literature includes general commentaries, specific articles, and entire books devoted to the interpretation of the biblical story. Chapter III serves the thesis as a whole by providing a rich background of interpretation for the analyses of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and the modern Jewish responses to Kierkegaard that comprise chapters IV and V.

Chapter IV presents a close reading and rhetorical analysis of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, the 19th century philosophical-poetic interpretation of the *Akedah*. The chapter serves as a case study for the inquiry into the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics as it relates to practice. It is argued that Kierkegaard's rhetoric (specifically in terms of rhetorical invention and subsequently his rhetorical and poetic style) informs and influences the progression of his hermeneutic. Chapter V provides three separate Jewish interpretations of the *Akedah*, two of which are specifically responding to Kierkegaard's interpretation. Chapter V provides a balancing perspective on the *Akedah* and allows for further discussion into the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics in terms of theory and practice. Moreover, the re-interpretations of

Kierkegaard by Levinas and Derrida exemplify some of the fundamental differences between Christian and Jewish traditions of hermeneutics. The argument that emerges from the multiple inquiries presented in this thesis is multi-faceted and, in some ways, inconclusive. Much of the complex theoretical material seems to rest more heavily upon presuppositions than upon empirical or "factual" evidence. However, it is hoped that the *implications* and *ramifications* of the different perspectives will be more clearly represented from examining them from a rhetorical perspective.

CHAPTER II

RHETORIC, HERMENEUTICS, AND THE STATUS OF MEANING

As was hinted at in the introduction, hermeneutics as a way-of-reading-to-understand chiefly arose with Augustine and his dedication to understanding Scripture in order to preach effectively and to apply the lessons of Scripture for one's every day life.[7] Historically, while Jewish interpretive practices predate Christianity, they also underwent further development alongside Christianity, albeit with a distinctly different understanding of words that was opposed to the Hellenistic philosophical influence upon the Western Church. The historical submersion of distinctly Jewish hermeneutics can, speculatively, be attributed in part to their continual persecution and dispersion in societies where they failed to, or refused to, identify with the dominant culture. Fundamental to both ways-of-reading was the authority of and attention to Scripture as a sacred word.

In the modern context, Hermeneutics has been separated into secular and sacred, dichotomized in terms of a "hermeneutics of faith" and a "hermeneutics of suspicion."[8] Additionally, "secular"[9] academic disciplines have appropriated hermeneutics for their own purposes. While such appropriation is more widespread than ever, the original "secular" interest in hermeneutics sprang from philosophical and literary studies. This chapter is divided into two sections. One will examine the literature and arguments for the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics, while drawing conclusions on their inseparability as well as their distinctive characteristics. It is also a purpose of this study to uncover the particular rhetorics implicit in these hermeneutics. The second part of the

chapter will examine the debate over the status of meaning and theories of interpretation. My argument from this is grounded in a defense of classical formulations of rhetorical agency that necessitates a fundamental concern for authorial intentionality in theory and practice.

2.1 Rhetoric and Hermeneutics

In a two part article Thomas M. Seebohm (1977) attempts to decipher the different understandings of hermeneutics and traces out their possible relationship to rhetoric. He determines five separate hermeneutics, which can be represented in the three terms used in my paper: theological hermeneutics, scientific hermeneutics, and phenomenological hermeneutics. While Seebohm would probably quarrel with these reductions, it is necessary for the present purpose to subsume and discard some of his points. Seebohm's hermeneutics$_1$ covers the basic assumptions of theological hermeneutics and represents the oldest understand of hermeneutics. It includes the Greek art of grammar as well as the approaches of the early Church Fathers, Medieval theologians, and the Protestant Reformers (*Part I*, 182).[10] Hermeneutics$_2$ is drawn from Dilthey and includes the work of E.D. Hirsch (1967) (whose position develops from 1 and 2) and the significant difference from hermeneutics$_1$ is Dilthey's placement of hermeneutics as the foundation for the critique of historical reason. Dilthey's position can be aligned with what I will term scientific hermeneutics (*Part I*, 182). Hermeneutics$_3$ includes Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, though Seebohm also places Ricoeur in his hermeneutics$_4$. Hermeneutics$_3$ falls under my term phenomenological hermeneutics and is the most extended tradition in American literature according to

Seebohm (*Part I*, 185).   Seebohm remarks that phenomenological hermeneutics disregards concerns for method in favor of ontological concerns, which he also sees as a distancing from the connections with rhetoric in his hermeneutics$_1$ (*Part I*, 185-189).

In part II of his essay, Seebohm addresses the connections between rhetoric and hermeneutics more explicitly.   For Seebohm, the connection occurs on the methodological level. In Quintilian, rhetoric's concern with the art of grammar (the ancient hermeneutic), specifically with its application of the art of universal wisdom (*philologia*), is where the connection occurs (*Part II*, 272). The connection is more overt when it is recognized that *philologia* included the art of explication and the art of application of wisdom—the domains of rhetoric (*Part II*, 272). The clear link, from the standpoint of rhetoric, occurs at the canon of invention as it is applied to oral or written utterances. Interestingly, while Gadamer (1997) reintroduces the notion of rhetoric into hermeneutics, his disregard for method would seem to obscure the point Seebohm is making. Another discrepancy occurs between the theological hermeneutics' canon that states a text must be ultimately understood in its own contexts rather than the interpreters'—an equation that is flipped in phenomenological hermeneutics. The aid of rhetoric may or may not serve in similar fashion for both hermeneutics on a grammatical/philological level (even, perhaps, on an implicit methodological level), but with regard to the canon of context there is a bifurcation that may or may not include an implicit rhetorical orientation.   In other words, phenomenological hermeneutics' redistribution of the hierarchy between original context and present context makes the subject of rhetorical inquiry and audience analysis (in its ultimate or final configuration)

fundamentally different from theological hermeneutics. Indeed, considerations of the original context could be counter*productive* to a phenomenological hermeneutic. An amusing example of this can be found in *The Prayer of Jabez*, in which the author attempts to extract principles for "unlocking" divine promises from a genealogical list found in 1 Chronicles 4:10. These hermeneutic systems and their discrepancies continue to figure into the ongoing understanding of rhetoric and hermeneutics, but must be presently filtered through the developments in rhetorical studies that resulted in an expansion of the scope of rhetoric and its subsequent ambiguous formulations in relation to hermeneutics.

The rhetoric-as-epistemic movement during the late sixties and early seventies stirred much interest in communication studies.[11] Responding to the debate over the epistemic status of rhetoric, Hyde and Smith (1979) sought to identify the deeper and more pervasive realm of rhetoric by locating its relationship to hermeneutics on an ontological level. Hyde and Smith argue that:

> The primordial function of rhetoric is to "make-known" meaning both *to oneself and to others. Meaning is derived by a human being in and through the interpretive understanding of reality. Rhetoric is the process of making-known that meaning.* (1979, 348) [italics theirs]

This primordial function can be attributed to rhetoric through a phenomenological understanding of ontology. If understanding is "*the universe of linguistic possibilities that history 'projects' towards human beings*" then rhetoric, as the means by which linguistic possibilities are discovered, is a precondition to understanding and to hermeneutics (350) [italics theirs]. Hyde and Smith develop three fundamental modes to understanding: fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception (351).

Fore-having is the realm of linguistic possibility where the presuppositions afforded by a culture are received *before* the act of interpretation arises (351-52). *Fore-sight* is the abstraction of fore-having that occurs when an individual appropriates a culture's fore-having for himself (he adopts a conscious "point of view") that will guide interpretation (352). *Fore-conception* is the categorical system (a set of rules; or perhaps the best label, method) that is used to interpret communication (352). These modes all represent the fore-structure of interpretation that operates synchronically (the hermeneutic situation of this present moment) and diachronically (the hermeneutic situation of the historical tradition that precedes this present moment) (353). Meaning is achieved when interpretation renders understanding "as something" (353). Hyde and Smith locate rhetoric as the *telos* of hermeneutics, at this production of meaning "as something" (353-354). The rhetoric that communicates something-as-something is an assertion that has three independent functions—pointing out ("the sun"), predication ("is bright"), and communication—that achieve what Heidegger defined as "*a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates*" (353).

With Hyde and Smith's detailed account of the structure and process of interpretation the relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric in a phenomenological ontology become clear. If understanding arises out of the revealing of human *Being* in time then it is inevitable that rhetoric is both the precursor to interpretation and its *telos* because time, history, and their unfolding are matters of the contingent and particular. The contingent and particular can only become matters of the absolute and universal by supra-historical abstraction. The hermeneutic offered by Hyde and Smith is pragmatic

and reveals the logical conclusion of the developments of the New Rhetoric offered by Weaver, Perelman, and Burke. Perelman's movement away from formal logic to a quasi-logic of good reasons (a kind of intersubjective agreement) and Burke's conception of man as the symbol-using animal reveal the turn away from metaphysics toward epistemology and a turn away from certainty (logical or otherwise) to argumentative probability. Within New Rhetoric, a convergence of rhetoric and hermeneutics is also the convergence of language and reality that develops in and from a phenomenological perspective of existence.

Sloan's review of two books, one by Palmer and one by Hirsch, serves both to further clarify phenomenological hermeneutics and to identify an older formulation of hermeneutics (of which Hirsch is representative). Sloan rightly recognizes that phenomenological hermeneutics of the kind Heidegger and Gadamer concerns itself with ontology and epistemology in much broader scope than previous hermeneutic theory. Phenomenological hermeneutics' encounter with a text represents the search not simply for meaning, but for the presence of all human understanding that is revealed in language (103). When Sloan speaks of the processes of understanding and mediating in Palmer, one could easily replace the terms with hermeneutics and rhetoric, respectively. Contrasted with phenomenological hermeneutics is Hirsch's scientific method, which recalls the classical traditions of theological exegesis and forensic rhetoric. Hermeneutics in Hirsch are not directed at an encounter with Being in language, but rather with the individual person who stands behind the utterance in language (105). Ironically, the phenomenological hermeneutics, which purports to treat a text in its

historical particularity actually investigates the abstraction of *being in language* whereas scientific hermeneutics applies abstract typology in an effort to investigate the particular person's purpose in the utterance. Phenomenological hermeneutics is inductive and organic—dialogically abstracting from an individual text the encounter with being in language. Scientific hermeneutics is deductive and metonymic—applying logical abstractions to a text in order to find that meaning that is, probabilistically, the original authors'.

Sloan's note that Hirsch's hermeneutic separates meaning from significance and criticism from interpretation, but it is this key observation that he fails to follow further than its recognition. For Hirsch, meaning is limited to authorial intention and significance is the meaning of any particular reader. The distinction of "meanings" into these two categories preserves the ontological status of rhetorical agency—the author and the reader retain *meaningful* agency over their intentional renderings of a text. The distinctions of Hirsch are precisely what separate him from phenomenological hermeneutics on its ontological and epistemological fronts. Hirsch's ontology is at once more narrow than that of phenomenological hermeneutics and his epistemological orientation is more optimistic of certitude. The ontology of any text is not being in language, but a meaning in an utterance—the communication of an individual rather than universal being. It is precisely by this limitation that his epistemological position can provide a more probable certitude for meaning. Interrogation of a particular individual's range of meaning is a much more narrow task than interrogating *Being* itself in both its *presence* (synchronic meaning in the here and now) and its *prescience*

(diachronic meaning in the sedimentation of historical-cultural tradition). Phenomenology's investment in that *Being in language* commits it to indeterminacy by its very scope, whereas scientific hermeneutic's investment in the *person's utterance* commits it to a more limited range of historical and logical probability.

Historically, where did the distinctions between a scientific and phenomenological hermeneutics arise? That is a question which we will return to throughout the following discussion, but at this point John Campbell's (1978) review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* provides some insight into the question. Gadamer was a student of Heidegger who was a student of Husserl, the 20th century's recognized founder of philosophical phenomenology. Campbell's review of Gadamer summarizes some of the predominant perspectives and concerns of phenomenological hermeneutics. One of Gadamer's aims, according to Campbell, is to recover the human sciences from the mechanistic methodology of the natural sciences (1978, 102). Gadamer attempts to recover aesthetic reason from the minimization to a mere sense of the beautiful that it is reduced to in Kant (103-104). The basic assumptions of phenomenological hermeneutics become clearer in Campbell's discussion of *Truth and Method*.

The first and most important assumption is that language is the storehouse and the revelation of Being. Metaphorically or metonymically (depending upon one's own view) reality and language are *present-ed* in language. The second assumption is that meaning must be understood in its historicity. The application of abstract principles is frustrated by the particularities of history in time. Out of the phenomenological necessity to treat reality in language as historical event comes the only method available

to the interpreter—play or gaming (104-105). Though Campbell does not make the comparison, one can recognize that Kenneth Burke's comedic frame shares this same sense of perspective taking and playfulness. Play is adaptive and therefore unmasterable, but it is nonetheless a necessity for understanding the reality of being in language. Language is not the vehicle by which human beings communicate their identity and meaning, but it is the reality in which identity and meaning are given to human *Being*. In phenomenological hermeneutics language is universalized, spiritualized, personified and deified.[12] The phenomenological turn in the humanities as the structure of reality standardizes hermeneutics, and concomitantly rhetoric, as a universal necessity of intelligibility, meaning, and communicability.

One can further distinguish the differences between scientific and phenomenological hermeneutics by turning to Weinsheimer's (1982) argument against Hirsch in favor of Gadamer. The key distinction between Hirsch and Gadamer, as Weinsheimer notes, is whether application is logically inseparable from interpretation, or stated otherwise, if meaning can be disjoined from its application (1982, 307). For Hirsch, interpretation and application must be distinguished, since interpretation is both understanding and explication, which necessarily precede application (307). For Gadamer, since the *telos* of interpretation always leads to application it cannot be separated from the aim of interpretation (307). Hirsch's separation is intended to preserve the individual subjectivity of the author whereas Gadamer's collusion recognizes the instability of recovering the original presence of the author's intention in a text. From a rhetorical standpoint, Hirsch's observations favor an understanding of the

rhetor's invention and purpose(s) of utterance while Gadamer's observations favor an understanding of the presence audience's reception (both in understanding and action) of the rhetor's utterance. The determining of contexts (original, historical, present) is central to both hermeneutics, but each poses a different hierarchical arrangements of those contexts as well as a different classification of the components and/or processes of hermeneutics.

In 1984 Hirsch offered a clarification of his original formulation of meaning that he made in 1960. In the article he claims it as a new theory of meaning, since he extends meaning from its original historical moment to the conceptual extension of its author's intention. That is to say, his old theory placed meaning firmly within its historical moment, whereas his new theory places meaning in conceptual extensions of the original author's intention. The future-looking frame of the author's intention opens up the possibility (within the author's intention) for applications *of his meaning* in ways beyond the boundaries of his own conceptual knowledge. What Hirsch is allowing for is the analogical nature of conceptual meaning that makes it flexible to future developments in the "real" world. While Hirsch's new conception of meaning moves his hermeneutics closer to Gadamer's, it still remains distinct. Hirsch's discussion of these distinctions provides an excellent summary for our present purposes.

Hirsch (1984) argues that Gadamer's notion that human nature is essentially historical makes it impossible the meaning of a text to remain identical in any way. Quoting Gadamer he says:

> "It is quite mistaken to base the possibility of understanding a text on the postulate of 'connaturality' that supposedly unites the creator and the interpreter

of a work" (p. 277). That is to say (in plainer terms) that writer and reader to *not* share a common human nature. They are not "connatural," because they are not "constituted" by the same historical milieu. (1984, 212)

Hirsch's hermeneutics still attempts to interpret what the text's author is meaning whereas Gadamer's hermeneutics is interpreting what the text's reception in the present cultural tradition is meaning. While Hirsch's new formulation of his old theory extends meaning to include certain applications not directly connected to the author's historical moment he still retains authorial intention as the determinate of meaning, and thus the prime object of hermeneutics. Rhetorically speaking, Hirsch's hermeneutics investigates the constructive moment of a speech act whereas Gadamer's hermeneutics investigates the receptive moment of a speech act because it subsumes application and interpretation.

The only way in which Gadamer can posit the receptive-applicational moment as original to meaning is to argue that human understanding is indeterminate across history. Problems arise for Gadamer in marking off what exactly *present* historical consciousness is, and also how "tradition" operates to determine the range of possible meanings; the latter condition being a point that Hirsch makes in his article (213-214). The problem for Gadamer is not unlike the problem of determining rhetorical effect. Reception and application (or perhaps "historicized meaning" for Gadamer) is difficult to pin down even within a tradition, says Hirsch:

> But history and observation fail to support Gadamer's idea that cultural tradition is or should be the constitutive principle for interpreting texts. If that were so and if tradition were as monolithic as Gadamer imagines, members of the same tradition would not disagree so persistently about textual meanings. (214)

Because receptions and applications of a text are diverse and changing within culture
and its traditions, making them identical to interpretation and to hermeneutics seems to
result in an indeterminacy of meaning that resembles the indeterminacy Derrida claims,
though it denies the conclusion Derrida embraces.

A passing word must be said about Hirsch's new formulation in comparison to
his original, because it has implications in the debate discussed below about
interpretation and theory. Leddy's (1986) response to Hirsch's 1984 article articulates
some of the ambiguities of Hirsch's new position. Two points of interest emerge from
Leddy's observations: author's intention and author's will. In Hirsch's original theory,
intention was limited to concrete objects, but Leddy identifies Hirsch's new concept of
intention to include an implication as well as an object ("I intend *to* communicate; I
intend *for* people to understand") (1986, 618). I suspect that Hirsch might counter that
it is not an implication as such that is intended, but an implication about concepts—that
is to say and author's intention includes alternative objects by the reader as *meaning*
under the same concept which the author *meant*.

Leddy's attempts to use the example of "the" bust of Sir Philip Campton in
Portrait as an intended particular of Shakespeare's reference to "gilded monuments" in
Sonnet 55 to argue against Hirsch, but this reference does not frustrate Hirsch's
formulation simply because Shakespeare might have intended something concrete in his
use of a general reference. It does not seem that Hirsch is arguing that every particular
must mean its general concept, but rather than if an author means a general concept
rather than a particular, then multiple concrete objects are valid substitutions of

meaning. Precisely here is where the issue of author's will comes into view. If an author wills for a concrete object to exemplify a general concept then interpretations that limit meaning to the concrete object are invalid under Hirsch's notion of validity in both his original and new formulation. The difference in Hirsch's new formulation is that objects that were neither consciously or unconsciously part of the author's intended *concept* can be part of his *meaning* if that unintended object can be understood within the author's concept. Shakespeare could never have meant the object of "The White House" when he wrote "gilded monuments," but insofar as "gilded monuments" is conceptual rather than a selection of concrete objects, then "The White House" would be analogous to Shakespeare's meaning.

As discussed above, the change in Hirsch's theory does move him closer to Gadamer's notion of hermeneutics, but only slightly, for Hirsch's focus remains on the author's intended meaning. Whether or not his new theory can be sustained will be hashed out later, but for now it is only necessary to reiterate the distinguishing hermeneutical and rhetorical features it maintains in comparison to Gadamerian hermeneutics.

We can once again distinguish Hirsch from Gadamer and phenomenological hermeneutics with a look at Stewart's (1978) essay, *Foundations of Dialogic Communication*, which outlines the phenomenological foundations of dialogic communication. Dialogic communication can be said to comprise the essential approach of phenomenological hermeneutics—the encounter with Being in language. Stewart identifies four foci of the dialogic perspective: the primary object of study is the

relationship constituted by communication, the experiential nature of understanding, the subjective nature of understanding, and the holistic focus of its conclusions (1978, 184-185). It is significant to the current study that Stewart traces the philosophical foundations of a dialogic perspective to Kierkegaard. Though Stewart naturally concentrates primarily upon Husserl it is important that the existential and subjective components of phenomenology are understood to be presupposed in Kierkegaard's work.

Stewart focuses upon what he calls the pre-reflective, or nonrational component, termed intuition, that is a fundamental assumption and interest of phenomenology. The critical arguments laid against the stability of the abstract principles adopted within scientific hermeneutics can be leveled at this particular aspect of phenomenological hermeneutics. The deeply interior and mystical or spiritual element of intuition is at least as difficult to explain and determine as "context" or "intention" are for scientific hermeneutics. Stewarts' explication of philosophical anthropology reveals it to be a *telos* of phenomenological hermeneutics, which is a significantly different *telos* from scientific and theological hermeneutics.

Phenomenological hermeneutics investigates the meaning of human *Being* in the relationships constituted in language (and I would hasten to add "through rhetoric") (200). Scientific hermeneutics does not take up language as the field of relating, but as the vehicle of relating, investigating the utterance of the individual rather than the revelation of *Being*. Theological hermeneutics subsumes both of these motivations, but is distinctive in that it does not seek out the revelation of human *Being* in language, but

rather the identity and purpose of human beings in the revelatory utterance of God. It is a combination of the focus on the individual utterance of a person taken up by scientific hermeneutics and the essential meaning of humanity taken up by phenomenological hermeneutics. Each of these three hermeneutics entails a particular understanding, application, and manifestation of rhetoric.

In *Rhetorical Hermeneutics*, Steven Mailloux (1985) interrogates the issues of theorizing interpretation and offers his own anti-theory theory (rhetorical hermeneutics) with his own application. He situates the consensual goal of producing literary knowledge in discovering the correct interpretation of a text, or determining *the* meaning (1985, 621). Principles of judgment are needed (it is assumed) as the basis for determining a text's meaning. On either side of the debate, says Mailloux, are textual realists and textual idealists. Briefly stated, realists situate determinative principles outside and prior to a reader's encounter with a text, whereas idealists situate determinative principles in the reader who encounters a text and manifests its meaning. Mailloux couches these approaches in the same basic concern: institutional control (623).

Mailloux provides an extensive explication of the problems and attempted solutions that the realist, idealist, and those in between must deal with. What remains unstated, but clear even upon a superficial reading is that the goal of determining meaning is to have an *absolutely certain* meaning derived from the application of theory to text. Here is precisely why those who fail to stand in realist or idealist camps leave the issues unresolved—for absolute certainty requires no logical contradictions to

persist. Mailloux argues that the inevitable result of theorizing is a turn toward rhetoric, the realm of the probable rather than the certain—a turn away from epistemology (how are we to determine what is known or knowable?) to the ontological (what can we determine to be really there for us to understand?). Mailloux's move into the ontological from the epistemology is revealed in his "therapeutic" rather than "constructive" aim for rhetorical hermeneutics. It also establishes, *a priori*, rhetoric as epistemic. The best one can hope to do is massage a text to feel out its reasonable possibilities rather than expect every component of intention, context, and reception to be excavated from analysis. The persuasive stability of the hermeneutic offered by Mailloux ultimately rests upon the ability to manage what presuppositions guide the analyst at any moment of exegesis. Insofar as presuppositions are unquestioned, persuasive stability rests upon the enthymematic coherence of the meaning the exegete offers an audience.

In her article, *Addressing Alterity*, Davis (2005) endeavors to articulate a non-hermeneutical rhetoric in response to Mailloux's rhetorical hermeneutic (hermeneutical rhetoric). Mailloux's conceptions of rhetorical hermeneutics reveals that invention lies behind every interpretation and interpretation is involved in every inventional moment—to construct is to interpret is to reconstruct is to deliver for reception and reinterpretation. It is in this process of Mailloux's that Davis sees an irreducible otherness that hermeneutics obscures in its appropriative nature. For Davis, rhetorical hermeneutics finds the Self in the other; it proceeds and succeeds only by its ability to recognize sameness in the other in the said. Contrastively, Davis' non-hermeneutical rhetoric

experiences the other as other in the saying. There can be no interpretation because there is no sameness made present.

Davis makes it clear that she is not arguing against the necessity rhetorical hermeneutics, nor *necessarily* its scope, but what she is attempting to reveal is that rhetorical hermeneutics is not ubiquitous despite any attempts to make it so. The uninterpretable saying by the other that suspends apprehension by the self is precisely what lies outside the circle of rhetorical hermeneutics. What both Mailloux and Davis share in their readings is the insolubility of self-and-other. For both Mailloux and Davis the other cannot be comprehended as the other—Mailloux's other is always already interpreted as the self while Davis' other presences its being in the saying, which is outside the comprehension of rhetorical hermeneutics. The inability of the self and other to commiserate either through understanding (for self can only apprehend self) or through experience (the saying other can only be understood as the other's said) calls into question the possibility of shared meaning and perhaps even the possibility of being-for-other as a human relationship.

Davis' perspective resembles and can be clarified in Desilet's (1991) essay that distinguishes Hedeigger's hermeneutics and Derrida's deconstruction. In Desilet's reading, both Hedeigger and Derrida take up the notion of language as the storehouse of Being. Heidegger's explanation of *trace*, or the presencing of Being in language, colludes with Derrida's explanation of *différance*. Both terms indicate that which cannot be indicated in language, which is the emergence of beings into Being (159). The word-as-sign can only stand in the place of what it seeks to bring into presence; the

phenomena to which it refers (159). The assumption that words are copies of the thing itself is what both Heidegger and Derrida exploit and problematize in their theorizing. Because the signs of language reveal the thing itself both as what it is and what it is not there is an essential necessity of the opposition of a thing as it is presenced in language. While Heidegger, with his *trace*, emphasizes the intersubjectivity of the presencing of Being in language, Derrida, with his *différance*, emphasized the subjectivity of the presencing of Being in language. The inherent slippage of meanings in language that is fundamentally conjoined by Being in Heidegger is suspectingly disjoined in Derrida. Derrida's critique of Heidegger seems to be that he is too optimistic about the shared meaning of the presencing of Being in language. Desilet (1991) expresses this difference quite clearly when he remarks about the suppression of difference in Heidegger and the equalizing of sameness and difference in Derrida's philosophy (165-166).

Rorty's (1978) essay, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing," helps to clarify the differences between Derrida and Heidegger on both rhetorical and hermeneutical levels. Rorty locates Heidegger and Derrida as critical responses to Kantian system-building projects. The important divergence Derrida makes from Heidegger as concerns rhetoric and hermeneutics is Derrida's critique of Heidegger's "nostalgia for the innocence and brevity of the spoken word" (1978, 145). Derrida's move to textualize philosophy emphasizes the interpretive activity in the relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric whereas Heidegger's ties to the spoken word privilege the rhetorical (and poetic) activity.[13] Hermeneutics in Derrida turns itself away from the world and exalts

the text-as-text-as-text that is always and already interpreting only itselves (i.e. its own *text* and the texts it rewrites). But rhetoric also takes up a new stance toward invention for the "play" of writing is not aimed at persuasion or conviction (or any *telos*), but at continuation, and not of speaking or conversation, but of written silence.

Rorty's discussion of Derrida reveals a comic frame of understanding, which paints Derrida as a balancing "text" in the textures of philosophy (system-builders and system-destroyers), but in a dialectical, tension-reliant way. If Rorty's depictions are faithful to Derrida's work, what becomes "rhetoric," "hermeneutics," and "rhetorical hermeneutics"? It would seem that they converge in a pragmatic *poesis*—neither understanding the world, nor inventing conviction, nor a mimesis of the sublime or of the real. Deconstructive hermeneutics, metaphorically is itself an "ineffable" that may be, like medieval investigations of God's nature, only describable by what it is not—by what it refuses to be and by what it effects.

The implications for hermeneutics and rhetoric within phenomenological hermeneutics and deconstruction are quite telling. Phenomenological hermeneutics, by its optimistic assessment of intersubjective knowledge and meaning will assume a measure of agreement and stability of words and their meaning in approaching a text, an utterance, or whatever. Deconstruction, by its refusal to privilege intersubjectivity over subjectivity, will question the possibility of agreement of knowledge and meaning for words whenever it brings its attention to a text, an utterance, or whatever. Desilet argues that deconstruction separates the relationship of communication and rhetoric (167-169). Communication cannot be assumed in deconstruction, but rhetoric is always present.

Communication is called into question because intersubjectivity is always in question, but rhetoric assumes the same ground as language because it has always been the art of discerning, managing, or interrogating the uncertain (168). As Desilet puts it:

> By drawing into question the reliability of intersubjectivity, deconstruction initiates a renewed separation of rhetoric and communication. "Communication" connotes a sense of *shared* [emphasis his] meaning (from its root meaning to "make common"), whereas "rhetoric" conveys the stimulation and provocation of meaning with the additional advantage of neither implying nor precluding shared meaning. (169)

There is a clear sense in which deconstruction is a revival or reincarnation of the philosophical conclusions of Gorgias who saw rhetoric as a power by which reality was created through language. It is imperative to recognize that phenomenological hermeneutics as well as deconstruction cannot reach their respective conclusions without first earmarking language as the storehouse of Being. The notion of the presencing of Being in language through the *trace* or the *différance* is not necessarily foreign from scientific or theological hermeneutics, however. Rather, it is the through the metonymic (or metaphoric, depending on one's ontological commitments) containment of Being in language that phenomenological hermeneutics and deconstruction achieve a radical break from scientific and theological hermeneutics.

There are some who argue against the conflation of rhetoric and hermeneutics of the Mailloux variety and prefer distinctions more explicitly (but not completely) Gadamerian. Lyon (2002) observes that Gadamer's notions of rhetoric, hermeneutics, and sociology are interdependent and thus work synergistically whereas for Mailloux, rhetoric and hermeneutics are synonymous (40-42). Lyon critiques Mailloux's view as reductive and debilitating to rhetoric as an action, as an act of textual production, and she

traces these results back to Gadamer's concerns with discourse and texts (2002, 50). She argues that conflating the terms relegates rhetoric to an interpretive framework rather than a rhetorical one. In order to recover rhetoric's productive features, Lyon articulates three modes of invention: rhetorical, hermeneutic, and rhetorical reading. She argues for the distinction of the first sort of invention on the basis of ordinary language (47-48). She notes that rhetorical invention, unlike scientific invention, does not imply novelty of originality, but what might be styled reproductivity.[14]

However, it is unclear how the canon of rhetorical invention does contain the implication of a hermeneutic. The need to interpret the materials and interpret from the materials which rhetorical invention draws upon for its own production (especially when those materials are strictly or predominantly textual) is precisely a hermeneutic enterprise. Similarly, it is easy to imagine "hermeneutical invention" of the kind that is passive in the academe, but there is less clarity for such distinctions in other arenas where hermeneutics flourishes, such as the "pulpit" where exegesis and hermeneutics always precede a rhetoric that produces a discourse that seeks to influence an audience who is already interpreting the sacred text along with the speaker. Lyon's comments on rhetorical reading appear to more closely recognize the blurring of distinctions. Lyon's conclusion that "the invention of discourse has many modes" may be true insofar as modes are not necessitated by the constraints of a rhetorical situation (50). Furthermore, the two poles of prejudice distinguish between understanding (hermeneutics) and production (rhetoric) seems to have a greater cache in particular contexts rather than in general.

It is necessary to sum up the examination of the literature and draw some conclusions before moving on to the next section. From a phenomenological perspective differentiation of rhetoric and hermeneutics is tenuous at best, since theoretical abstractions and practical enactments are not only conditioned by their historical emplotment, but are also controlled by that emplotment. Rhetorical agency is caught up within hermeneutic contingency (the circle that circulates indefinitely through each subsequent *presencing* of *Being*) and becomes too relative to be distinguishable. Hirsch's observations implicate phenomenological understandings of rhetoric and hermeneutics at the point of *meaning*, particularly, the conflation (in Hirsch's view) of meaning and significance. Phenomenological hermeneutics conceives of rhetoric in terms of action rather than actor (to use Burkian terminology), and predominantly in the cultural reception of language and rhetoric. Hirsch's model accounts for both the actor/rhetor (meaning) and the reception of linguistic action (significance). This distinction not only preserves the classical formulation of rhetorical agency, but is corrective of the infinite regress of the dialectic between rhetorical agency and hermeneutical readings to which phenomenological hermeneutics falls prey. However, the implications of "meaning" and "significance" cause a subsequent dilemma. The status of rhetorical agency and the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics is complicated by the debate over the issue of authorial intention in the interpretation of texts. It is to this debate that we must turn to now.

2.2 "Against Theory": The Status of Meaning

The following section chronicles the debate in secular hermeneutics (more commonly, interpretation) that occurred over the course of three separate editions of *Critical Inquiry*. The initial debate began with Knapp and Michaels' essay, *Against Theory* (1982), which sparked a debate that spanned fifteen articles and ten years (from 1982 to 1992).[15] I will proceed chronologically through each article focusing on the major points of view regarding hermeneutics and rhetoric.

The argument posed by Knapp and Michaels against theory is that it creates a problem where none exists by the false separation of authorial intention and textual meaning:

> But once it is seen that the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author's intended meaning, the project of *grounding* [emphasis theirs] meaning in intention becomes incoherent. . . .The mistake made by theorists has been to imagine the possibility or desirability of moving from one term (the author's intended meaning) to a second term (the text's meaning), when actually the two terms are the same. One can neither succeed nor fail in deriving one term from the other, since to have one is already to have them both. (1982, 724)

A little later they identify the blame for this misunderstanding in the false notion that authorial intention is a theoretical issue rather than an empirical one (729). They utilize the problematic example of a random arrangement of words by a computer to argue that such arrangement of word *signs* are not *words* at all, but simply the arrangement of marks that resemble words (732).[16] To achieve such a conclusion Knapp and Michaels *must* understand language as derived (whether humanly or Divinely) and they *must* define meaning and authorial intention as identical *a priori*—hence their critique of Hirsch and of Juhl (the latter making the false separation of language and speech acts).

It is the *a priori* nature of their claim that necessitates Knapp and Michaels' critique of Fish's notion of belief. They commend what seems to be his apparent identification of knowledge as true belief, but they argue that he undermines this observation by arguing that the beliefs of previous interpreters is a "merely different" belief rather than a false one (1982, 739). At this point Knapp and Michaels identify the epistemological necessities that follow: realism or idealism (739). The realist argues that the object exists outside of one's beliefs whereas the idealist argues that beliefs constitute objects. The essential difference, it seems, is that for Knapp and Michaels, knowledge equals true belief, i.e. objective knowledge, whereas for Fish knowledge equals present belief, i.e. intersubjective knowledge. Thus, for Knapp and Michaels, Fish's *theoretical* observation that beliefs are historically contingent represents a *practical* problem when he acknowledges that beliefs *are* discriminating about notion of truth (738).

O'Hara's (1983) critical response is the first that appears in the follow up issue of *Critical Inquiry*. In his essay, O'Hara argues that within Knapp and Michaels' anti-theory resides an implicit reliance upon the "old guard" theoretical positions (albeit unreliably) of the past. O'Hara accuses Knapp and Michaels of an "antidemocratic, genius-will-win out assumption that one can just do criticism" (1983, 732). However, it seems that the point that Knapp and Michaels' are making is not that genius drives criticism, but that all critics necessarily practice the search for authorial intention, whether acknowledged or not. O'Hara's principles of critical activity are not germane to the fundamental point of Knapp and Michaels, but constitute secondary considerations

(i.e. "how should critical practice proceed?" follows the question "what does practice investigate?").

The second critical response is lodged by Hirsch (1983). Hirsch, like O'hara, compares Knapp and Michaels' arguments to the New Critical theorists who also claimed that authorial intention was an unnecessary theoretical consideration. Hirsch rejects Knapp and Michaels' ontological argument in favor of a stipulative one (1983, 747). In other words, whereas Knapp and Michaels postulate that meaning is always what the author intended and intends, Hirsch argues that these are separate objects. The decision to posit meaning as the author's original intent is a stipulation rather than a given, according to Hirsch (747). Why is it stipulative? For the same reason that Knapp and Michaels view it as ontological—belief. The focal point of Hirsch's counterclaim is to show that readers do not always understand "intended" and "intends" in the same way:

> Even granting, for the sake of argument, the equation of belief and knowledge, still "intends" and "intended" would be the same only if we *believed* we were construing what the author intended. But some critics don't believe they are doing that. For them, belief about what "an" author intends and about what the composer of the text intended are not the same. Even under the pragmatic equation of belief and knowledge "intends" and "intended" are here different. (745)

Thus, it is the instability of pragmatic belief that calls into question Knapp and Michaels' antitheoretical reliance upon belief. If it can be established that status of belief itself cannot arrived at without theoretical inquiry, as Hirsch argument attempts to show, then Knapp and Michaels' *practice* becomes suspect.

Crewe (1983) also attacks the weak category of belief articulated by Knapp and Michaels. While Hirsch exposed the instability of the commonality of belief, Crewe exposes the instability of belief as knowledge by dissection Knapp and Michaels' example of the wave-poem:

> A nonpragmatist might suggest that we have begun with an unquestioned belief (the wave-poem is the product of Wordsworth's intention) or naïve faith from which certain practices "naturally" follow. This belief is not replaced by just another belief but y an inhibiting negative belief *in relation* [emphasis his] to the one first held. The effect this second belief produces is thus equivalent to a loss of faith in Wordsworth as author, in the poem as poem, and in our capacity to interpret. (1983, 758-759)

What Crewe does not say, but what might be said, is that theory is the positive response to the failure of practice—it seeks to postulate possibilities of interpretation. Crewe also takes issue with Knapp and Michaels' assertion of the inseparability of meaning and authorial intention. The assertion is not unquestionable for Crewe:

> It apparently does not occur to Knapp and Michaels—at least not with enough force—that to deny distinctions is not thereby [emphasis his] to reenter in practice the condition of reality, nor does it seemingly occur to them that the existence of logical and semantic distinctions does not necessarily imply a prior and undivided substance. (753)

Knapp and Michaels' heavy reliance on belief and their tacit identification of meaning as authorial intent are no doubt the key points of their argument that are in question.

Mailloux (1983) takes a different tack from previous critical responders in basically accepting the major points of Knapp and Michaels' essay. He accepts their critique of theory's claim to reside outside of or beyond practice and its unnecessary separation of meaning and authorial intention. He also agrees with their assessment of Fish's self-contradicting theory about theory—that there is a neutral space where theory

can be judged apart from belief that entails firm conviction (1983, 763). Mailloux does criticize their claim that theory has no practical implications; that it has no influence on practice. Mailloux points out that theory has political consequences as well as persuasive effect on literary practice. He disagrees with their seeming separation of theory and practice, arguing that theory is a kind of practice, a metapractice or an instantiation of practice that results in new directions in both academic and social spheres (766). Thus while theory may not live up to its claims, it still has positive (and negative) effects that makes it continuation inevitable and not altogether disreputable.

The following critical essay by Parker (1983) brings out a heretofore excluded point that "final" versions of an author's text are very often riddled with skewed and intentionless meanings as a result of editing (by the author or editors) or redaction. Although he does not mention it specifically, one might also add the condition of compiled texts and partial texts where multiple authors or incompleteness inhibit the ability to construe an author's meaning (even perhaps by the author!). One might qualify Parker's observation by noting that an author's intention is always present in a text, although that intention may be defeated by the author's own human frailty in construction, but such a rejoinder, while perhaps valid does not solve the problem of determining meaning. Importantly, however, Parker notes that such indeterminacy is not universal, nor does it divest the author of a certain provisional authority:

> As these examples suggest, nonmeanings, partially authorial meanings, and inadvertent, intentionless meanings coexist in standard literary texts with genuine authorial meanings. It happens all the time, and almost nobody minds. Now and again a critic will even take the trouble to celebrate adventitious meaning over what the author really intended, all in the name of respecting the authority of the author ("It's his text, isn't it?"). (1983, 773)

The problems of authorial intent are not unlike the problems of all attempts to judge an object with certainty—human frailty pervades but does not defeat inquiry. The question remains uncertain as to whether authorial intention can be confined to some particular moment of a text's construction or whether must be understood otherwise or not at all.

Rosmarin (1983) follows Parker with an exceptionally cogent analysis of Knapp and Michaels argument. She indicts their reduction of theory to what she shows to be a particular kind of theory, representational theory, and she also shows the limitations of their arguments against representational theory. Rosmarin reconstructs the rhetorical movements in de Man's, Hirsh's, and Fish's arguments, revealing that each rely on a particular ground that must be theoretically and rhetorically defended (1983, 779-780). But even before this, Rosmarin depicts the weaknesses of Knapp and Michaels' supposedly unsupported claims that belief is inseparable from knowledge and language is inseparable from intention (778). Historical theoretical positions reveal that these arguments are contested by quite capable individuals, says Rosmarin (778). Finally, Rosmarin reveals that Knapp and Michaels' claims rest upon their own theoretical convictions and rhetorical constructions in order to sustain their persuasive and argumentative force (781-782).

Dowling's (1983) "scholia" attempts to show a logical mistake on the part of Knapp and Michaels in regard to their identification of meaning and authorial intention. Rosmarin's observation about the variety of perspectives on meaning is further clarified by Dowling's observation that meaning and authorial intention are not identical, but are mutually entailed (1983, 785). That meaning cannot exist apart from an intention is

given, but *whose* intention becomes the question taken up by Dowling. He appeals to the New Critical theorists' exchange of authorial intention for the formal notion of the intention of the speaker internal to the work of literature (787-788).

Knapp and Michaels' (1983) respond to their critics in three categorical areas: epistemology, method, and professionalism. They respond to Crewe's critique of the reliability of belief by arguing that a change in belief does not necessarily rely upon the previously false belief, thereby making all belief suspect, but rather subsequent belief can dissociate entirely from previous belief by recognizing it as false (1983, 792). Thus, changing one's mind does not entail that beliefs are inherently unreliable, but rather than one belief can be shown to be inferior to another—yet belief remains fundamental in the constitution of knowledge (792). What Knapp and Michaels are arguing is not that particular beliefs are grounded, but that belief as an epistemological category is the ground of all interpretation.

Knapp and Michaels also respond to Crewe's, Mailloux's, and O'hara's claim that "Against Theory" is itself a theorizing work. They dismiss Crewe and O'hara as bald assertions that falter because an argument against theory does not necessarily entail that one must be doing theory, and they offer no other arguments are to support their claim (according to Knapp and Michaels) (793). Knapp and Michaels argue that Mailloux assumes that all discourse rests upon theory and that theory rests upon its persuasive force ("every argument against astrology is a form of astrology") (794). Knapp and Michaels' argue that by denying the possibility of demonstration, Mailloux must admit that all arguments are equally mistaken (794). They claim that Mailloux's

counterclaims rest upon an implicit ideal of objective knowledge rather than persuasive probability (795).

In response to method, Knapp and Michaels offer rejoinders to Hirsch, Dowling, and Parker. In reply to Hirsch's criticism that "Against Theory" would lead to the abandonment of historical scholarship Knapp and Michaels argue that identifying meaning with the author's intention has no bearing on what counts as evidence for determining the content of any particular intention (796). In their view, Hirsch mistakenly separates the real historical author from the one postulated by the interpreter (796). They go on to locate authorial intention in the original writing and not a later reading by the same author (using Hirsch's example of Blake) (797-798). Knapp and Michaels dismiss Dowling's argument by arguing that behind the formal observation of the intention of an internal character lies the author's intention to produce an internal speaker (798).

Finally, Knapp and Michaels respond to Crewe's and O'Hara's claims that "Against Theory" would have detrimental effects on the profession or literary criticism. As noted above, O'Hara's claims misconstrue the effect of ridding critical practice of theorizing because critical practice can and must be organized in some fashion, which leaves open the possibility for multiple principles of critical practice (but not a theory of what practice is actually interpreting) (800). Crewe's claim that "Against Theory" gives privilege to a particular institutional preference is rejoined by Knapp and Michaels' claim that their argument is about how *all* interpretation works and thus would apply to all institutional practices (800).

Stanley Fish (1985), two years after the debate discussed above revives the argument against theory:

> The argument against [emphasis his] theory is simply that this substitution of the general for the local has never been and will never be achieved. Theory is an impossible project which will never succeed. It will never succeed simply because the primary data and formal laws necessary to is success will always be spied or picked out from within the contextual circumstances of which they are supposedly independent. The objective facts and rules of calculation that are to ground interpretation and render it principled are themselves interpretive products: they are, therefore, always and already contaminated by the interested judgments they claim to transcend. (437)

According to Fish, the inherent historicity of all human enterprise prevents the establishment of fixed universal or general principles that transcend or stand outside of history. The belief that Fish is committed to espouses an ontology of the apparent—for human reasoning, there is only now what has always been, and what has always been is what is present now, namely, contingent performances:

> Linguistic knowledge is contextual rather than abstract, local rather than general, dynamic rather than invariant; every rule is a rule of thumb; every competence grammar is a performance grammar in disguise. (1985, 438)

The question becomes, if not theory then what are performances or practices grounded in? Fish responds that practices are always and already grounded in belief:

> A theory is a special achievement of consciousness; a belief is a prerequisite for being conscious at all. Beliefs are not what you think about but what you think with, and it is within the space provided by their articulations that mental activity—including the activity of theorizing—goes on. Theories are something you can have—you can wield them and hold them at a distance; beliefs have you, in the sense that there can be no distance between them and the acts they enable. (443, emphasis his)

Out of the above observations, Fish argues that theory cannot have consequences from a foundationalist or antifoundationalist position—i.e. there is no way that theory can

effectively govern practice in a non-contingent (that is, controlled by historical practices) way. The effective consequences of theory are political—they can influence a particular historical context, which can serve to govern practice, not from general principles, but from political and/or persuasive force.

Richard Rorty (1985), following Fish, also addresses the pragmatic argument Knapp and Michaels' laid out in "Against Theory," but does so with his own version of a pragmatic argument. He disagrees with their identification of meaning with the original author's intention, arguing that Knapp and Michaels do not answer Hirsch's point that a text's meaning can be both *an* author's meaning and *its* author's meaning (1985, 464, n. 6). Rorty also disagrees with the identification of meaning and the original author's intention because it excludes distinctions like the one posed by Grice[17] that opens up logical space for interesting questions that could not be asked under Knapp and Michaels' restrictions (460). What Rorty is ultimately arguing against is the necessity for arguing for anything fundamental or essential at all. Rather, a processional rhetoric should provide the vocabulary, materials, and argumentation bent toward persuading others to adopt one's own position. Or as Rorty puts it, to ask on the practical question: "Why do you find what you just said persuasive?. . . .a polite version of the question "What am I going to have to do to convince you?" Though, for the non-pragmatist, it seems impossible (would seem impractical?) to imagine a conversation continuing for very long without returning to "essential" questions.

Knapp and Michaels (1985) respond to Rorty by returning to their foundational arguments in "Against Theory." They again defend the notion that a text is the product

of the intention of its original author's utterance—its particular intention and instantiation (1985, 467). *An* author's meaning for the *same* text is either a separate interpretation (which isn't to say its meaning at all) or it isn't the *same* text at all, but is a different text entirely with different meaning derived from a different intention (467). To defend their argument for the identity of a text Knapp and Michaels identify two possible positions: the intentionalist (their own position) and the formalist, which posits that marks themselves have meaning prior to intention (something both Rorty and Hirsch reject) (468). The question is not logical, but empirical ("Who authored *this* text?") because texts are understood as particular speech acts (469). Using the example of shouting "fire!," they call out Rorty on his argument that no practical difference exists for how we treat language (as real or pretended). The practical difference of treating the shout "fire!" as real or pretended allows Knapp and Michaels to reargue their point that belief is the ground of all knowledge and thus distinguish all practice (470-471).

Knapp and Michaels (1987) expanded their critique of theory in 1987, applying their arguments to hermeneutics (Gadamerian) and deconstruction. Modern proponents of hermeneutics have posited that textual meaning surpasses the intention of the author and thus must be determined by the interpreter within the constraints of that interpreter's own historical situation (1987, 50-51). Knapp and Michaels labor to show the separation of interpretation and application, categories which Gadamer sees as inseparable and as the primary problem of hermeneutics (52). Knapp and Michaels counter by showing that the applications of legislation by judges is either a new application of authorial intention (in situations where an object not specifically mentioned is included in the

general category intended by the author) or a new application that constitutes changing a text (when a judge applies a condition outside of the author's intention). In the latter case, Knapp and Michael's position textual identify with the author thus, in their legal example there are two texts with one meaning each, the author's and the judge's, but Gadamer's position would maintain one text with separate meanings.

In order to maintain the resultant conflation of interpretation and application, hermeneutics must have a criterion for textual identity other than the author's own intention in a concrete historical moment (53). The criterion offered by hermeneutics is objective verbal meaning governed by linguistic conventions independent of the original author's intention, but still plausibly related to it (55-56). While on the surface verbal meaning seems to provide a limitation on possible interpretations, Knapp and Michaels attempt to show that "the rules of language don't provide a range of meanings that are necessarily closer to the author's intention than the range of meanings provided by any other set of rules" (57). Meaning that goes beyond the author's intention cannot be identified through appeals to language syntax or linguistic convention because the former provides no need for distinguishing between texts and the latter represents an arbitrary choice because convention is an insufficient determinate—how is one to distinguish irony for any given word or conventional antonymic meaning—"bad" = "good"—when applied apart from an author (58-59)?

Derrida asserted the insufficiency of linguistic rules or context as a determinate for meaning, but he also rejected the determinacy of authorial intention due to "iterability" (60). Iterability is the condition of a text that is structural readable—the

goes beyond the death of the addressee (60). Thus, though a text's moment of production may be irrevocably lost, and subsequently the author's meaning is indeterminate, the text is still iterable. "For Derrida, the failure of intention to govern linguistic effects (misinterpretation, citation, and so on) points to a deeper failure of intention to determine the meaning of a mark in the first place" (61). Knapp and Michaels remark that Derrida's notion that the condition of iterability (that self-presence is the necessity of intention to reference a code that extends beyond the author's presence in order to mean) rests on the claim the language is essentially conventional, but they endeavor to show that the possibility of failure (of authorial intent) does not necessarily result in its general inadequacy (62).

Associating Derrida's critique with J.L. Austin's categories of speech acts (through Culler's defense of Derrida's theory of meaning), Knapp and Michaels argue that an intention may fail to perform the effect of its intended speech act, but it still *mean* what its author intended (62-64). Their examples attempt to show that meaning can be produced without belonging to a conventional code; as when a person utters a sound with an intentional meaning that is indistinguishable according to known language codes, yet the possibility of interpreting the intended meaning of the sound remains available (65-66). The ability of the new sign to be incorporated into the code does not negate that it is functioning apart from the code in such an instance (66). Ultimately then, it is neither iterability nor conventions that determine intentions:

> In the case of hermeneutics, weak conventionalism won't work because there is no coherent sense in which conventions give the text an identity that will allow it to mean both what its author intends and also something more. In the case of deconstruction, weak conventionalism won't work because although it rejects

the determining force of conventions, it nevertheless accepts the mistaken view
that speech acts are essentially conventional acts. (67)

Thus, again Knapp and Michaels conclude that authorial intention is the only
determinate for interpreting the meaning of a text.

The final round in the debate surrounding "Against Theory" occurred when
Wilson (1992) argued that Knapp and Michaels' argument against interpretation
infringed upon certain standards in the philosophy of language and also failed to account
for interpretive issues that required the interpreter to rely on considerations other than
authorial intention. Wilson contends that Knapp and Michaels argue that what words
mean normatively occur as a result of the frequency of their particular uses. He then
goes on to adequately refute such a claim by appeals to the work of philosophers of
language such as Grice. In the more central issue of interpretation and authorial
intention, Wilson attempts to show, using several examples from fictional discourse, that
considerations of meaning can escape the confines of the author's intent. He argues that
investigating meaning requires one to reflect on discourse-structuring, which is beyond
the author's intention; that the presence of conflicting intentions in the author's narrator
goes requires one to go beyond the author's intention; and that the potential conflict
between intention and realization requires one to go beyond the author's intention (1992,
182-185).

Knapp and Michaels' (1992) response to Wilson attempts to clarify their
argument and reaffirm their potion. First of all, they clarify that their particular
argument against theory does not counteract the conclusions drawn by philosopher of
language about normative language. Though they recognize their own argument in reply

to Rorty could be construed as Wilson sees it, they affirm their agreement that the frequency of a particular utterance is not what makes it normative language (1992, 188 n. 2). Thus they agree with Wilson that, "It is simply false that the idea that words or sentences mean something in a language is in any way incompatible with the intentionality theses that Knapp and Michaels emphasize so much" (Wilson, 172).[18] They further clarify that the normative meaning of language that relies upon theory is not in question:

> Of course we do not deny that authors usually intend to follow linguistic conventions, just as we don't deny that the physical features of a set of marks intrinsically determine whether that set of marks is a token of a sentence type in a given language. What we do deny is that a set of marks counting as a token of a sentence type is enough to make it a text, that is, to give it a particular meaning about which interpreters can coherently agree. (188)

So it is not that Knapp and Michaels are questioning assumptions about language in general, but about meanings derived from texts that interpreters investigate in particular.

However, Knapp and Michaels do disagree with Wilson's arguments for the necessity of going beyond the author's intention to explicate a text's meaning. They endeavor to show the inadequacy of the necessity of relying upon discourse-structure as going beyond the author's intention. They admit that discourse-structure is a necessary consideration of determining meaning, but that it neither goes beyond authorial intent, nor can it suffice as a final determinate of meaning. The Socrates "syllogism" example used by Wilson can be construed, using considerations of discourse-structure to not be a syllogism at all, but three separate utterances of friends of Socrates unrelated to syllogistic argument entirely. The determinate again is what an author or authors mean

by structuring their discourse in a certain way (the professional philosopher who constructs a syllogism, or three friends who are making similar commentary) (189-190).

Knapp and Michaels also show that conflicting intentions do not go beyond authorial intention because "conflicting intentions" can be an intentional act of the author in characterizing a narrator in fiction (191). To posit that the narrator of fiction goes beyond its author's intention is to equate the narrator with a real person who can act autonomously (191). Nor do conflict between an author's intention and a reader's inference go beyond considerations of authorial intent because if the reader is going beyond the author's intention he is no longer interpreting the text, but interpreting something else ("the real world") or interpreting his own novel (his own "fictional world") (192) Finally, the problem of intention and reception does not go beyond authorial intention, but represents that an author has failed to accomplish his intention with a reader, such as make a true argument (the author still *means* exactly what he intended, though he is wrong).

To summarize, Knapp and Michaels are arguing a very narrowly defined and particularly contextualized point: fundamental to every act of interpretation is an investigation of meaning, which belongs particularly to the author of the text at the time of its completion. The implications, complications, subsequent relations, and other factors are posterior to this logical and epistemological antecedent. That the investigation of meaning is inextricable from first considering authorial intention is logically and epistemologically antecedent is presupposed on the equation of knowledge and belief. The heart of the debate on philosophical grounds comes down to that

fundamental presupposition, which is, in the various other positions, argued against from a presupposition that belief and knowledge are (to varying degrees) contingent. Explicated to their logical ends, it does appear that Knapp and Michaels' argument has a more solid footing than their opponents, if not for the simple matter that contingent knowledge has no solid footing, resting as it does upon the historical discontinuity of discourse (for it is in discourse where knowledge and belief are grounded in presuppositions of their contingency). For the present inquiry of this paper, what is germane is how Knapp and Michaels' argument applies to rhetoric and hermeneutics, especially as formulated by Hirsch in contrast to phenomenology. Clearly, Knapp and Michaels' position supports Hirsch's hermeneutic; and thus supports the classical formulation of rhetorical agency, the distinction between meaning and significance, and the corrective against phenomenological hermeneutics (which is representative of the majority, if not all, of the respondents to Knapp and Michaels).

Just as clearly, we must conclude that the interests of proponents and profiteers of theory, hermeneutics, deconstruction, criticism, rhetoric and a host of other positions and perspectives profitably and necessarily go beyond the author's intentions when using a text in order to make arguments and draw conclusions about their particular contexts. However, in order to say something *meaningful* to their audience about that text, these interpr(h)etors necessarily seeks to interpret that text's own meaning, that is, its author's intended meaning at some point in their hermeneutic. Neither phenomenological hermeneutics nor deconstructive hermeneutics ignore authorial intention, but neither do they account it its full measure of importance from a rhetorical perspective that

recognizes the fundamental necessities of invention and agency. To ignore the necessity of authorial intention constitutes a rhetoric of indeterminacy and incoherence for all interpretations of textual meaning, which subsequently divests *all* rhetors (original authors and their interpreters) of any logically defensible agency short of anarchical logomachy, indifferent pluralism, or casuistic cloaking. It could be said the most consistent conclusion for a hermeneutic that denies authorial intention as the determinate of meaning is that it is always and already deconstructive of itself.

For phenomenological hermeneutics, this conclusion seems nihilistic, pessimistic, or at least, overreaching. But only a rhetoric that understands invention as determined by (the intentionalist would say, overdetermined) cultural reception (otherwise *Being in time*) could conclude otherwise, which is, historically and theoretically an impoverished rhetoric, for intentionality and agency have had defining apportionment in the majority of the various histories of rhetoric. Deconstructive hermeneutics, which will be seen more clearly in chapter V, follows the opposing extreme, assuming an overabundant ubiquity of rhetoric, which simultaneous attributes to it all meaning while divesting it of any meaningfulness. For the structure of language is indefinite apart from any restrictions of personhood, intention, and agency, which are sacrificed always, already and again in the indefinite structure of language.[19]

CHAPTER III

UNBINDING THE *AKEDAH*

In chapter I we sought to identify, through a thumbnail sketch, the progressions and development of hermeneutics across its lengthy history. Chapter II sought out clarifications of the relationship of rhetoric and hermeneutics and the status of meaning from a distinctively rhetorical perspective. Far from solving the complex and problematic arguments surrounding hermeneutics, rhetoric, and meaning, chapters I and II do provide an historical and argumentative framework for what comprises the theoretical relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics. In chapter III we take a step back from theory and advance a step forward into praxis. Because Kierkegaard's interpretation of the *Akedah* and his subsequent Jewish respondents comprise the case study for this inquiry into the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics, chapter III is a necessary bridge between general theoretical commentary to the particular cases of Kierkegaard and his Jewish respondents.

As will be seen, the *Akedah*, the Hebrew name for the "binding of Isaac" in Genesis 22 has been interpreted in countless and contradictory ways by Christian, Jewish, and secular commentators. The multiplicity of interpretations serves the reader in at least two ways. First, it provides background context to familiarize and immerse the reader in the primary text and its interpretive cruxes that are the objects of interpretation in Kierkegaard[20] and his respondents. Second, it highlights the different hermeneutical presuppositions along two lines of dialectical tension: the secular and sacred, and the traditions of Christianity and Judaism.

The following study of the *Akedah* will explore the general commentaries on Genesis (from secular and religious authors) as well as more specific works on the *Akedah* and Genesis 22 that have appeared in journal and book form. The survey is not comprehensive in the universal sense, nor is it representative of primary sources in the history of interpretation surrounding the *Akedah*, but it does it does cover the major viewpoints, historical summaries, and consequent interpretations that have been offered concerning the passage of scripture. Since commentaries tend to offer a brief summary of the major issues, points of contention, and exegetic possibilities, we will start with them and then move on to the more detailed treatments. Yet before diving into commentary, here is the *Akedah* in Genesis 22 as it appears in the English Standard Version:

> 22:1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.
> 9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

15 And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven 16 and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, 18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

3.1 Exegetical Commentaries

Gerhard von Rad's (1961) commentary on Genesis isolates the *Akedah* as an older narrative independent of the immediately preceding passage (233). He rejects the interpretation that the *Akedah* is simply a polemic against child sacrifice and that it is an etiology for the Jerusalem Temple (1961, 233-235). Against some rabbinic readings, von Rad does not believe that the narrator took the existence of the ram as miraculous (237). He recognizes vv. 15-18 as a later addition to the "original" story in vv. 1-14,19 and locates the final text's central theme as a radical test of obedience that is characterized both by Abraham's personal trial and God's ability to fulfill His promise to Abraham through the person of Isaac (238-239). Von Rad concludes by indicating the identification of Israel in Isaac in later times (239-240).

Robert Davidson (1979), in his commentary remarks on three of the major interpretations that have been offered for the *Akedah*. He rejects the notion that its fundamental meaning is a polemic against human sacrifice, noting that the practice is continued in the Ancient Near East (including even Israel) and that animal substitution is

already well known during the time of the Patriarchs (93). As a cultic legend explaining the rationale for the notion of Mt. Moriah as Mt. Zion, Davidson argues that the textual tradition is varied, perhaps too much to be the dominant meaning of the passage (1979, 93-94). Davidson desires to place the meaning firmly within the context of Israel's patriarchal tradition, which begins with Abraham. The story is really about Abraham and his relationship to God, Davidson argues (94). Davidson's own commentary on the passage focuses upon the (unknown) psychological state of Abraham, quite willingly attributing what are assumed to be typical emotional responses to God's command. These assumptions lead Davidson into choices that reveal a subjective-psychological hermeneutic:

> The silence of the walk is broken by one poignant question: where is the young beast for the sacrifice? Abraham's reply, God will provide himself with a young beast for a sacrifice, must not be taken as a confident expression of faith that there is a way out of the appalling dilemma. He is being evasive. He does not know. How can he? He can only try to conceal his breaking heart behind conventionally pious words. (96, italics his)

Assuming this "normality" of Abraham's emotional character requires his faith to be false to his word.

Claus Westermann's (1985) commentary on Genesis covers a bit more ground than von Rad or Davidson in its discussion of the *Akedah*. Westermann points out that the philosopher Immanuel Kant found the story impossible to accept on its face, arguing that the voice could not have been the voice of God (1985, 354). Like von Rad and Davidson, Westermann rejects that the primary emphasis is a polemic on child sacrifice or as an etiology for the Jerusalem Temple (354). He locates the narrative's historical setting in the patriarchal period, following the general consensus of an older "original"

version (355-356). Unlike some Jewish interpretations, Westermann concludes that Abraham would not have separated the content of the command from the voice of God who spoke it, thereby eliminating the possibility that Abraham doubted the word was God's own (357). He notes in an excursus that two forms of human sacrifice existed in the Ancient Near East and in the Israel of Scripture: the sacrifice of the firstborn as required by God (but in the biblical tradition the firstborn is redeemed) and in a particularly critical situation (357). The reader of the narrative would know of this sacrificial background, but would also recognize the ambivalence of the command, since the abolition of the sacrifice would have been familiar to the audience as well (358). Unlike some interpreters, Westermann does not view Abraham's reply to Isaac's question as an evasion, but rather he sees it as "throwing the ball back into God's court" by placing upon Him the final outcome of events (359). The ultimate purpose of the narrative for Westermann is one that subdues the exemplary character of Abraham's faith (contra Kierkegaard) in favor of the audience's empathy with Abraham as a suffering father whose son is saved by God's revealing of Himself (364-365).

Walter Bruggeman's commentary in addition to opening with a recognition of difficulties in interpreting the *Akedah* also frames it as "a story of anguished faith" (1982, 185). In a remark on the historical origins of the story, he follows most scholars' perspective that vv. 15-18 are additional to the story, but he nonetheless treats the unit as a whole (186). He is the only commentator reviewed here who singles out verse 14 as a etiological addition (which he leaves unattributed), but like others he does not take it to be the main thrust of the story (185-186). Brueggemann breaks the structure into three

parallel summons (by God, by Isaac, by the Angel of the Lord) with three responses of Abraham; the middle summons having the additional statement of Abraham that God will provide for Himself the sacrifice (186). This structure highlights the statement as one of faith and makes it the hinge of the entire narrative. He marks off the structural boundaries of the narrative with the bookend parallels "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love…(v. 2)" and "You have not withheld your son, your only son…(v. 12)" which open and resolve the crises respectively (186-187). Brueggemann refers to v. 8 (Abraham's statement of faith) as "the deepest mystery of *human faith and pathos*" which stands "between the two statements of *divine inscrutability*" (187, emphasis his).

In what is perhaps his boldest statement, Brueggemann asserts that God is genuinely unknowing of Abraham's faith, placing the language of the narrative in priority over the doctrine of divine omniscience (187). He denies the narrator's opening framework of a test saying, "The narrative will not be understood is it is taken as a flat event of 'testing.' It can only be understood if it is seen to be a genuine movement in the history between Yahweh and Abraham" (187). Brueggemann's interpretation places God entirely within the historical moment, with no position or privilege outside of time and space. If God is not omniscient, then certainly Abraham's faith cannot be certain, and Brueggemann is equally explicit in saying:

> It [v. 8] is a statement of utter trust and confidence, but one that is quite open-ended. Abrahams does not tell Isaac all he wants to know because Abraham himself does not know. He does not know at this moment if Isaac is God's act of provision. He does not know that God will provide a rescue for Isaac. It could be either way: Isaac or an alternative to Isaac. Abraham does not know, but he trusts unreservedly. (188)

For Brueggemann, the trust of Abraham is parallel with God's trust that Abraham will follow through with the deed—it is a trust that is unflinching, but also uncertain. Brueggemann also highlights what Luther and Calvin call the "contradiction in God" to command Isaac's sacrifice against the promise that through Isaac God's promise would be fulfilled (188). For Luther and Calvin, the "contradiction" is merely apparent, since God's omniscience extends into the future and thus His foreknowledge of Abraham's obedience situates the outcome of Abraham's trust as a testimony to creation rather than to God Himself. Brueggeman advises against explanation, concluding that one simply must "face the reality that God is God" (189).

Brueggemann also provides an insightful explanation of the concept of "testing" in Israelite theology. Two Hebrew words are used to exhibit "testing," $\nu A \sigma A \eta$ and $B \alpha \xi \alpha \nu$, the latter of which (which does not appear in the narrative) is more clearly juridical. Breuggemann notes that the concept of testing is integral in Israel's notion of faith, but he also connects such faith to a modern context, providing his own homily on faith:

> It occurs in a faith in which a single God insists upon undivided loyalty, a situation not applicable to most civil religions. Testing is unnecessary in religions of tolerance. The testing times for Israel and for all of use who are heirs of Abraham are those times when it is seductively attractive to find an easier, less demanding alternative to God. (190)

Breuggeman connects the notion of testing directly with God's providence, which he argues is to be understood in two ways, following Barth's view (191). God's providence is one of "good care and sustaining concern" that is equal to His desire to test His people

(192). Of all the commentaries, it is no surprise that Brueggemann's is the most friendly

to Kierkegaard's interpretation.[21]

Hamilton (1995), in what may be the most comprehensive commentary reviewed

here, notes the difficulties in the *Akedah* of determining sources[22] and in determining the

historical nature of the passage (is it a distant reflection? a cultic legend?) (99). Most of

these questions rest upon hypothesis and speculations, as Hamilton blatantly indicates.

He views the narrative as directly connected to the preceding one concerning Ishmael

noting several literary connections (1995, 99-100 n. 13). Hamilton notes that Jewish

tradition believes Isaac to have been 37 years old, deriving the number by subtracting

from Abraham's age at Sarah's death (127) to when Isaac was born (making the

argument of her early death at discovering Abraham's task to slaughter Isaac) (100).

Hamilton notes that the typical syntactical construction places the verb before the

subject, but in the opening line it reads "the Elohim—he tested Abraham!" (101). He

argues from this that there is no doubt that the word is from God and not demonic

temptation (101). He discusses two more recent suggestions for the etymology of

Moriah, one being "my teacher is Yah" and the other, which he find attractive, "land

which is the King's" (thus connecting more closely with Jerusalem) (103). Departing

from Kierkegaard and a few early Jewish interpretations, Hamilton concludes that the

test is not primarily of Abraham's fatherly love for Isaac, but the promise of God of

great posterity through Isaac (103-104).

In order to connect the land of Moriah to Jerusalem, Hamilton reveals that one

must take "three days" to be symbolic of an ominous event in time, such as the idiom

"the eleventh hour" would indicate (107). He shows several places in Scripture where such a reading would is supported, including in Genesis (107). Hamilton observes that Isaac's question to Abraham is composed of six words beginning with "father" to which Abraham's reply is also six words beginning with "son" and repeating the subject-verb syntax opening verse's emphasis on God in the *Akedah*—"God himself will provide" (109). There is a Hebrew wordplay in the second address of the Angel of the Lord using the similar sounding "provide" and "fear," which Hamilton posits as a turnabout of the narrative's central theme: "In an 'artful play on words' the narrator transforms the theme of the story from providing to fearing" (112-113). Where most commentators amend the verb $\ni \alpha \xi \alpha \rho$ (another) to read $\ni \varepsilon \xi A \delta$ (one), Hamilton takes the original to be an ironic statement alluding that Isaac was to be the first ram (113). Hamilton also rejects the majority consensus that vv. 15-18 are later additions, arguing that the restatement of the promises of descendents is integral to the successful obedience of Abraham's in the testing (115).

Gordon Wenham (1994) provides several charts that lay out the structure of the *Akedah* and its relation to the Ishmael narrative preceding it. He divides the *Akedah* into six scenes ordered palistrophically (recursively) where scenes 1 and 6 (vv. 1b-2 and vv. 11-18) match each other in style and content (1994, 100). Scenes 2 and 5 (v. 3 and vv. 9-10) are both narrative without dialogue and focus on Abraham's preparation for the sacrifice (100). Scenes 3 and 4 (vv. 4-6b and vv. 6c-8) correspond by both having the characters located in Beersheba, with discussion of the mountaintop and the sacrifice (100). Wenham also argues against the later inclusion of vv. 15-18, believing that the

nature of the test requires the restatement of the rewards for obedience (102). His structural outline presents an organization that is favorable to understand Abraham's reply to Isaac's question as a positive expression of hope, prophecy, or prayer as a turning point in the narrative (109).

In his commentary, Hartley (2000) aggress with Westerman and Wenham about the hopefulness of Abraham's reply to Isaac's question concerning the lamb for the sacrifice. He notes that the Hebrew verb for "provide" is literally "see" (208). The use of the verb is a clear foreshadowing of Abraham's conclusion, after the fact, in naming the sacrificial sight—"God sees" (2000, 208). Hartley departs from patristic Christian exegesis and sides more closely with the Jewish interpretation concerning the age of Isaac, concluding that Isaac is at least in his early twenties (209). In a note, Hartley indicates that the Hebrew word often translated "boy" or "lad" for Isaac is *na'ar* and can mean either a boy, a youth, or a young adult who is unmarried and under parental authority (211). The conclusion of an older Isaac would lend support to Isaac's own willingness to take part in the sacrifice. Hartley agrees with Moberly (1988) (see below) that the site of Mount Moriah became the place where the temple would be built (211). Hartley also notes that the ram functions in other passages as a synecdoche for Israel's whole sacrificial system and likely foreshadows it in Genesis 22 (211). Hartley connects the *Akedah* directly to the right of God to all the firstborn/firstfruits (human, animal, vegetable) indicated in the later Mosaic law and God's subsequent redemption of the firstborn children (213). The figurative death of Isaac presents various openings for

alternate interpretations from covenantal, cultic, and legal perspectives, to name only three.

Bruce Waltke (2001) makes an interesting observation concerning the structure of the *Akedah* in the larger narrative of Abraham. He notes that the call of Abraham in Genesis 22 match the opening call (with the Hebrew word λεκ–λᵉκΑ) in Genesis 12 and serves as a frame for the cycle:

> The Hebrew phrase λεκ–λεκΑ occurs in the Old Testament only in these two passages, [Genesis 12:1 and 22:2] strongly suggesting that the narrator intends his audience to see the frame. The weighty demand on Abraham is evident in the threefold epithets of the command. Initially, Abraham was told to leave "your country, your people, and your father's household"; now he is commanded to sacrifice "your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love" (22:2).

If his observation is understood correctly, it is virtually impossible to separate the *Akedah* from the events of the narratives preceding this culminating passage in the Abraham cycle. While Waltke recognizes the possibility of Isaac's submission, he argues that the focal point of the passage is Abraham's faith (2001, 301). Waltke remarks on Josephus' intriguing interpretation that Isaac considered himself unworthy to be born and thus ready to be subject to sacrifice for the pleasure of Abraham and God (302). He also mentions Kierkegaard (albeit only in passing), but seems to prefer the notion of the radical, illogical, and absurd that comes directly from Kierkegaard (306). Waltke also notes the typological connections of Mount Moriah with Mount Sinai as well as Abraham as a type of Christ in the Christian tradition (310).

There are several article length expositions and interpretations of the *Akedah* that deserve our attention before we draw some conclusions concerning the rhetorical and hermeneutical implications of the commentaries.[23]

3.2 Articles and Analyses

As many of the commentaries have pointed out, one of the critical observations about the *Akedah* narrative is that vv. 15-18 are not part of the original story, but are the addition of a later editor. Moberly (1988) summarizes three warrants for this conclusion: structurally vv. 1-14 form a complete narrative; vv. 1-14 follow an economic style whereas vv. 15-18 are repetitive and cumulative, using similes and synonyms; and vv. 15-18 contain unique vocabulary to Genesis as a whole (304-308). Moberly indicates several objections to the "general consensus" argument, acknowledging the plausibility in considering vv. 1-19 as original, but he ultimately rejects these on the grounds that plausibility does not seriously challenge the general consensus (1988, 311). However, the general consensus before source-critical methodology was that of single authorship and Moberly himself recognizes that the argument for a late editing is itself plausible rather than certain (309).

The argument appears to rest upon methodological commitments and their presuppositions more heavily than indisputable evidence. Moreover, as Moberly notes, there is no consensus for when the later editing is supposed to have taken place, which complicates any exegesis of the passage seeking out the original historical context (312). From a rhetorical perspective, there is less political backlash for going against the "general consensus," since vv. 1-19 are the received text that has accounted for most of its interpretations in secular and sacred history. There is also less direct necessity for reproducing an unassailable original context because a rhetorical perspective is interested in receptions beyond the original. Finally, Moberly's view that vv. 15-18 are

commentary on vv. 1-14 can as easily be explained as a summary within an original vv. 1-19 without obscuring 15-18 uniqueness. The unique elements of vv. 15-18 are no less unique than the entire *Akedah* is within Genesis, the Pentateuch, and the larger Hebrew Bible—a point confirmed by the history of its importance and formative nature in both Christianity and Judaism.

Moberly also discusses the *Akedah*'s theological context, locating its central issue as the divine promise, but not newly and contingently formed, but as reaffirmation and confirmation of prior promise. As Moberly says:

> Abraham by his obedience has not qualified to be the recipient of blessing, because the promise of blessing had been given to him already. Rather, the existing promise is reaffirmed but its terms of reference are altered. A promise which previously was grounded solely in the will and purpose of Yahweh is transformed so that it is now grounded both in the will of Yahweh and in the obedience of Abraham. It is not that the divine promise has become contingent upon Abraham's obedience, but that Abraham's obedience has been incorporated into the divine promise. Henceforth Israel owes its existence not just to Yahweh but also to Abraham. (321-322)

Moberly's emphasis on the previous context of divine promise situates the tension in whether Abraham will truly be the Patriarch of God's people. From this standpoint God's promise is settled, but Abraham's assurance of that promise remains to be tested finally.[24] In Moberly's assessment, the editor's motive is to link Abraham's obedience to that of Moses by way of analogy (321).

Another critical scholar, J. D. Levenson (1993), argues against the position that the *Akedah* is an etiology for the change from child sacrifice to animals sacrifice in Hebrew culture (111-124). Rather than providing a clear indication of a changeover, Levenson argues that the passage at most "reflects a situation in which the sacrifice of a

sheep as a substitute for the favored son can meet with God's approval" (1993, 119).

That the location of Moriah is identical with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is a

stronger argument for the *Akedah* as etiology, but is still not the primary function of the

story, according to Levenson. Rather, he says of the *Akedah* and two related accounts of

Hagar's expulsion that:

> Each of the three stories has its etiological features, but the meaning of none of
> them reduces to its etiological function. Each tells the story of the symbolic
> death and unexpected new life of the beloved son, a story of far more than mere
> etiological significance. (124)

The argument for etiology sets an important context for consideration of the *Akedah*, but

does not constitute its primary context or its lasting meaning in the Jewish (or Christian)

tradition.

Levenson also addresses the apparent contradiction between the command of

God in Genesis 22 to sacrifice Isaac and the plan of God in Genesis 18 to destroy

Sodom and Gomorrah. He distinguishes the separate context of the situations (one

involves punishment while the other, sacrifice) and the separate nature of the word of

God (one is a declaration of intention while the other is a command) (129-130). While

it is perfectly acceptable for Abraham to argue for the righteous of Sodom and

Gomorrah to be delivered from divine punishment, it is apparently beyond righteousness

to question the direct command of God. Levenson notes that in Jewish and Christian

traditions there is a view that Abraham understood that he would receive Isaac back

alive—thus the test was of Abraham's devotion rather than his knowledge (130). Yet,

Levenson argues that the existence of the alternative view that Abraham was unsure

indicates that the view of Abraham as a paragon of faith (what he calls Kierkegaard's

Christian view) is, "by no means self-evident, or even reasonably clear" (131). Levenson concludes that it was not Abraham's faith that secured the promise, but rather his obedience (141). However, Levenson ignores the larger Genesis context of God's covenant promise[25] to Abraham, which will be discussed in more detail below.

One of the more cogent commentaries on the *Akedah* is by Nahum Sarna (1989). Like Waltke, Sarna notes the parallel phrasing and grammatical structuring that Genesis 22 shares with Genesis 12, but he includes an additional parallel with the wordplay of Moreh (where Abraham was blessed for his first obedience) and Moriah and the building of an altar at each site (1989, 150). He also notes that the Hebrew word stem for "bound" appears no where else in the ritual vocabulary of the Bible (153). In his excurses on the "Land of Moriah," Sarna shows that several etymological possibilities exist including the popular translation "to see," (*root* from *resh*, *aleph*, *he*) the intriguing translation "fear of the Lord," (root from *yod*, *resh*, *aleph*) and the rabbinic translation "to teach" (root from *yod*, *resh*, *he*) (391). Sarna prefers the popular etymology for the translation and doubts the possibility that Moriah is the site of the Temple mount, since Jerusalem is not a three-day trek from Beer-sheba (391-392). He also rejects, as most others have, the *Akedah* as a polemic against human sacrifice, noting both the lack of textual support (the sacrifice of Cain and Abel, Noah, and Isaac's question tend to negate the possibility) and the extra textual evidence (392). Lastly, Sarna notes that more than any other factor, it is persecution that has made the *Akedah* such a singular text in Jewish history because of the willingness of Abraham and Isaac to be wholeheartedly loyal to God and His Law (394).

In greater and lesser degrees, the above commentaries rely upon a wide range of methodological apparatuses for investigating the *Akedah*. From historical and cultural backgrounds, to philological and structural observations, their approach is predominantly scientific, seeking to find the objective and intentional meaning of the author(s)/redactor(s) as well as the cultural reception of the narrative as it was recited over Israelite history. Occasionally, the commentaries departed into a rhetorical hermeneutic aimed at proposing something that the reader could take away beyond the more stylistically informative content. Yet even in these departures the commentators were never far from their exegetical constraints of authorial intention. Rhetoric and poetics seem to converge closely within their hermeneutic since their understanding of rhetoric seems to concern itself less with invention than with style, and rhetoric is not seen as a constitutive principle. We shall see that the Christian and Jewish traditions provide a much less rigid understanding and practice.

3.3 Christian and Jewish Traditions

Ancient exegetical readings of the *Akedah* in the Christian tradition have sometimes been labeled precritical, according to Cavadini (2002, 47). Cavadini's analysis of Philo, Origen, and Ambrose reveal typological and allegorical readings intermingled with historical-literal observations. Philo's exegesis focuses on Abraham's identity both as an historical figure and as an allegorical character, deriving general principles as well as particular observations. The predominant focus is the allegorical however, as Abraham's relationship to God within the *Akedah* is treated according to the identity developed for Abraham in the interpretation (36-39).

Likewise, Origen focuses on the identity of Abraham in relation to God, using a homiletic approach to connect with his own audience on the issue of martyrdom (39). Origen's interpretation is distinctively Christian: he identifies Abraham as father with God as father in the sacrifice of the beloved son, but he does not treat the *Akedah* as a typology of Christ's atonement in terms of Isaac, the ram, or any other narrative elements. Rather, the identity of Abraham and his particular relationship to God in the *Akedah*, and especially as regards the promise of God to Abraham, is forefront in Origen's exegesis while martyrdom is the emphasis of his homily (41-43).

Ambrose presents the most typological and historically distant reading of the *Akedah*, according to Cavadini. The focus is upon Isaac more so than Abraham and Abraham's relation to the events and even his own actions in the narrative itself is one of incidental knowledge to its true Christological meaning (45-46). Abraham is himself an onlooker to the larger theological purpose of the *Akedah*, to signify itself as a type of Christ's atonement (46).

Other interesting interpretations of the early Church fathers are offered as commentary on the *Akedah*. Origen comments on the symbolic mystery of the third day, citing its appearance in the Exodus from Egypt where the people sacrificed and purified themselves on the third day, and also citing the resurrection of Christ (103). Caesarius of Arles connects the third day to the mystery of the Trinity, citing similar passages that Origen noted to support his assertion (103). Origen and Ephrem the Syrian follow the Pauline reading that Abraham believed that Isaac would be raised from the dead, but a more radical reading is offered by Caesarius of Arles who identifies the two servants as a

type of the Jewish people who rejected Jesus as the Christ and the ass as the Jewish synagogue (104). In his typological reading, the ram is a figure of Christ, as is Isaac (104). Ambrose saw Abraham as "a man devoid of natural feeling" able offer Isaac out of a devotion and zeal for piety that suppressed his fatherly love (108). Several interpreters, including Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome, and Bede, explain that God's knowledge of Abraham's faith was not unsure, but that his declaration was to display before the world (108-109). Caesarius of Arles, seemingly the most radical interpreter, goes so far as to locate the mount at Moriah with the mount where Jesus was crucified (111).

Kessler's (2002) study of the artistic representation of the *Akedah* in Christian and Jewish traditions reveals some interesting discrepancies and divergences from the literary interpretations. Kessler notes that by most accounts, the typological interpretations do not arise until after the conversion of Constantine in 312 CE (2002, 76-77). He does find some typological readings in Melito (160-70 CE), Tertullian (200 CE), and Origen (185-251 CE), but the dominant emphasis in pre-Constantine interpretation is upon deliverance rather than typology (77-78). In the typological literary traditions, Christ was not only linked with Isaac, but also with the ram (78). In artistic representations, the focus was more liturgical, connecting the *Akedah* to the Eucharist and thus reflecting the idea of deliverance over Christological typologies (85).

In the Jewish rabbinic literary tradition, Isaac was understood to be a full-grown man, around 37, which emphasized his willingness in taking part in the sacrifice (85-86). The *Akedah* is connected to both the Passover as well as Rosh ha-Shana (the New Year

festival) (86). Isaac is thus linked with the Passover lamb on a theological level, but the Rosh ha-Shana became the stronger connection (86). Isaac is interpreted as a true and wholly acceptable sacrifice to God, though he is not sacrificed. The artistic representation depart more significantly in the Jewish tradition. Synagogue depictions differ most significantly in their interpretation of Isaac as a boy rather than a man, and they are more directly connected to the Temple and the Torah (97). It is clear that both the Christian and Jewish traditions view the *Akedah* as central to their theology and liturgy, and the variations in interpretation mark of particular hermeneutical (as well as theological) suppositions.

In the Genesis Rabbah emphasizes the justice of God in the testing of Abraham, indicating that Abraham was both a capable choice and to reveal Abraham's faithfulness in a more universal context (Neusner 1985, 267-268). Abraham stands, metaphorically, as Israel in the Genesis Rabbah's comment that God may test "Israel" but that "Israel" is not permitted to tempt God (269). It also makes explicit the connection of the sacrificial site at Moriah to the establishment of the Temple and the sacrificial system in Jerusalem (273-274). The indication of "three days" is linked with parallel passages that emphasize the fulfillment of promise, the resurrection of the dead, and Israel's redemption (278). The Genesis Rabbah also adds to the dialogue between Abraham and Isaac in order to show Isaac's willingness, though through doubt, to be submissive to Abraham's decision to obey God's command (281). The Rabbah draws out the ambiguity of the Hebrew wording of the command rendered "bring Isaac up" by creating a dialogue between Abraham and God indicating that God's command was never to

sacrifice Isaac, but to "bring him up" (284). The naming of the place emphasizes the translation of "the Lord will provide" or "see to it" over the more simple "The Lord sees" offered by some exegetes (287). This choice emphasizes the future tense rather than the present, which obviously allows for typological links to God's interactions with Israel.

W.J. van Bekkum (2002) discusses the particular Jewish interpretations of the *Akedah* in Rabbinic Midrash and Piyyut. In Rabbinic literature there is a back-story to the *Akedah* that involve Satan as an instigator of God's test in the same way as he is in the story of Job (2002, 87). Rabbinic literature explains the purpose of the test as to make the name of Abraham known in the world (89). Midrash interpretations indicate that the substitute ram was created in the twilight of the Sabbath eve during the week of creation for the express purpose of being Isaac's replacement (89). The providential preparation from the beginning resolves the tension in God's motives for calling for the sacrifice, and subsequently, the ram becomes a symbol for God's deliverance of the national of Israel throughout the Hebrew Bible (90). Interestingly, Isaac is often a more prominent figure in Jewish interpretations of the *Akedah*. In the midst of Jewish suffering, the figure of Isaac emerges as a symbol of martyrdom and identification for Jews (92). In some interpretations, Isaac is understood to have died and been revived by God, a notion that was used to support the doctrine of resurrection (93). It can be seen that in Rabbinic Midrash and Piyyut the *Akedah* contrast with the Christian tradition as well as secular critical exegeses.

Levenson goes further into the Jewish interpretation of the *Akedah*. He indicates that Isaac was identified with the paschal lamb of the Passover and was a knowing and willing participant in the story of the *Akedah* (180-192). Indeed, some midrashim indicate the shedding of Isaac's blood (193-198). Perhaps nowhere else is the link between Jewish and Christian interpretation closer than here. Although there are still significant differences, the Christian tradition that links Isaac with Christ also links Christ with the Passover sacrifice, while the Jewish tradition that links Isaac with the Passover is but one figure removed and theologically analogous. While stopping short of human sacrificial atonement the common interpretive connection with faith, obedience, and martyrdom in critical moments in the history of the respective religions of Judaism and Christianity is undeniable.

Levenson is not only aware of the connection here, but attributes the transition from Isaac to Christ in terms of the paschal lamb to none other than Paul the Apostle (210-212). Levenson argues, however, that Christ is not a type of Isaac, or as he puts it: "Paul's Jesus does not *manifest* Isaac. He *supersedes* him" (213, emphasis his). In Levenson's argument, Paul displaces Isaac as central figure of the promise and makes him the analogous recipient that is the Church:

> Now if Jesus is the true Isaac, and the Church is the body of Jesus, it follows as night the day that the Church, when it turns its attention to Genesis, must see itself in the role of Isaac, that is, as the promised son of the freeborn woman who, with God's full endorsement, demands nothing less than the expulsion of the rival claimant to her husband's estate. (217)

While Levenson's argument may overstate the emphasis Paul is making, it is nonetheless insightful into the way in which the similarities in Jewish and Christian interpretation of the *Akedah* begin to break and depart on a different hermeneutic.

Another Jewish tradition of interpretation comes from Hasidism, which Gellman (1994) compares with Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. More will be said about Gellman's interpretation of Kierkegaard later, but for now it is pertinent to speak of the Hasidic writers that his work discusses. He looks at the interpretations of Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica (1802-1854), Rabbi Zadok Hakohen of Lublin (1823-1900), Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhansk (1717-1787), Rabbi Judah Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur (1847-1905), and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935). Each Rabbi emphasizes a different element in the *Akedah*, which affects their interpretation.

The first emphasis Gellman handles is the uncertainty that the command to sacrifice Isaac was to *actually* sacrifice him or to go through the motions; an interpretation taken up by Rabbi Leiner. Leiner takes this view because of the earlier promises of God to Abraham that seem in direct contradiction to the present one (1997, 25). Leiner plays up a difference between the divine names *Elohim* and *YHVH*, which in Jewish tradition represent the judgment and mercy of God respectively (26). The test then becomes whether Abraham will succumb to self-deception as a result of the ambiguity of the command (26-27). Gellman separates Leiner's interpretation into two categories: existentialist and theological (28). The existentialist interpretation requires Abraham to resist the desire for certainty and the inclination to rationalize the situation (34). The theological interpretation understands Abraham's ordeal as *averah lishmah*, a

sin for the "sake of heaven", which understands the "angel" who stays Abraham's hand to be really Abraham's own true desire/feeling to not sacrifice his son, which reveals God's true will in the midst of an ambiguous command (38-39). In this interpretation, either act would have been the will of God, for Leiner holds a deterministic view of God's will—the only freedom one has is the freedom to realize that one's actions are always God's will (41-42).

Gellman returns to the *averah lishmah* in the interpretation of Rabbi Zadock. Like Rabbi Leiner, Zadok holds a view of divine determinism which applies to actions, but not to one's thoughts (55). In the *Akedah* this divine determinism becomes salient in terms of repentance from fear versus repentance from love. Repentance from fear clings to the command of God as primary whereas repentance from love clings to the will of God (60). The fearer of God acts out of self-interest to avoid punishment whereas the lover of God would still choose to sin against the command because he or she was certain it was God's will (60-61). This concept is supported by one strand of Hasidic interpretation.

For Rabbi Elimelech, Abraham knows from the very start that God does not intend for Isaac to be truly sacrificed, so the *Akedah* becomes a test of intention (83). Abraham must go up to Moriah "as though" he intended to sacrifice Isaac, and raise the knife "as though" it would ultimately fall upon Isaac, but knowing the entire time the ordeal was nothing more than a performance "as though." Rabbi Alter's interpretation emphasizes that Abraham, as a lover of God, was so in tune with God's will that he understood it in his very being (88). The fact that the *Akedah* present God's revealed

command (sacrifice) in stark contrast to his undisclosed will (sparing Isaac) becomes a warning against carefree application *averah lishmah* in Rabbi Alter's interpretation, for Abraham, as a lover of God, follow His command and is thus a fearer of God (90-91). Contrary to Elimelech's interpretation, Alter's Abraham does not know whether God's command will be resolved in God's will to show mercy upon Isaac (93).

The last of Gellman's interpreters is Rabbi Kook, who, though not a Hasidic Jew, was (according to Gellman) strongly influenced by their thought (99). Kook's interpretation draws upon rabbinic traditions of Abraham's turn away from idolatry when he was in Haran (105). The *Akedah* in Kook's interpretation represents for Abraham a move from philosophical assent to the monotheistic God toward a revision of his previous idolatry into a supraidolatry that constitutes a deeper fervency toward the one true God (106-110). Through the test of the *Akedah*, the previous idolatry of Abraham's past is transformed into a radical devotion to God, which God reveals to also include a devotion to others (115-119).

While the primary focus of Longsworth's (1972) essay is upon the dramatizations of the *Akedah*, his discussion of the allegorical and typological exegesis is informative for the purposes here. He notes that throughout the writing of the early church fathers, the figures of Abraham and Isaac represented symbols of the New Testament testimony of Christ's sacrifice to God the Father for the sins of His people. Abraham's character was symbolic of God the Father, while Isaac represented Christ, as obedient son. Some interpretations went further than this, identifying the sacrificial ram as Christ, the wood that Isaac carried as the cross that Christ carried, and the ass as the

Synagogue, to name a few (1972, 119). Longsworth notes that these interpretations, and especially their later dramatizations by Medieval dramatists do not retain a strong fidelity to the emphasis on Abraham that the original narrative has. The allegorical and typological interpretations subdue the relationship between Abraham and God in service to the subjection of the original narrative to the New Testament Gospel narratives of Christ's sacrifice.

Like Longsworth, Sherwood (2004) identifies the typological interpretations of the *Akedah* in Christianty. However, Sherwood also notes typological readings in Judaism and Islam as well. While more ancient Christian interpretations have identified the *Akedah* with the Passion of Christ, Jewish interpretations have located it both with temple sacrifices of the Solomonic temple and with Rosh Hashanah and the intercessory power of the shofar blast (2004, 833). Christian interpretation locates the drama of the *Akedah* in salvation whereas Islamic and Jewish interpretations locate it in the contest between God and His "Satan" (adversary) (835). What Sherwood points out is that all three religions understand the *Akedah* to be a fundamental moment and expression in their respective theologies—the surrender of oneself (wholly) to the authority of or Word of God (835-836).

Medieval Jewish midrashim and Christian interpretation converge in interpretations of certain typological imagery, including the wood that Isaac carries as a cross and the ram as identified with Isaac (837). Sherwood's remarks about theologians such as Luther and Aquinas, who wrestled with the ethical complications in the *Akedah* narrative before the time when Kierkegaard's famous philosopoetic accounting came

into being, reveals the complicated status of the narrative within Christian tradition (842, 844). Similarly, the tension with human sacrifice revealed in the midrashim's interpretations of the knife stroke show the complicated status of the *Akedah* within Jewish tradition (846-847).

Boehm (2004) reexamines the *Akedah* in its original cultural context. He notes that traditionally, the *Akedah* has been understood as a polemic against child sacrifice in the Ancient Near Eastern world. Modern scholars have argued, convincingly for Boehm, that the polemic understanding does not coincide with earlier internal narrative elements or the internal narrative elements of the *Akedah* itself, or even with the dominant cultural practices of Abraham's period (2004, 145-147). Piecing together textual evidence, Boehm identifies a more ancient source myth of child sacrifice with the following pattern: a threat of disaster to a city or a people for which the "only son" represents an important prominence, a hero-leader of the city or people who initiates the action of sacrificing the son in order to appease the gods, a circumcision motif as an additional attempt to appease the gods, and the effectual appeasement that results from the sacrifice (150-151). Verbal patterns include: the sacrificed one is called the "only one," the phrase "to offer a burnt offering" is present, and the notion of "in his stead" or "instead of" is also present (151). Boehm argues that the *Akedah* constitutes, along with other elements of the Abraham story, an inverted or "reflection" formulation of the pattern of the myth of child sacrifice. Whether or not his central argument holds, Boehm's articulation of the elements of child sacrifice seems plausible as does their incorporation in the *Akedah*, polemical or otherwise.

Boehm (2002) also takes a variant view of the character and motivation of Abraham in the *Akedah*. His argument is that redactionary interpolations obscure the original version's portrayal of Abraham as "going through the motions," but planning to avert God's command, similarly to the way he argues with God for the righteous in Sodom in Genesis 18. Boehm discusses the usual source critical speculations (in this case, what is "E" and what is a later redaction), drawing his own conclusions on his particular considerations of the narrative's flow. Absent from Boehm's reading are strongly theological considerations, such as the perspective of God, the angel, or the Israelite audience, but rather he seeks out the historical authors' portrayals of Abraham alone. Contrary to Kierkegaard, Boehm identifies Abraham as a knight of faith who asserts the ethical in response to God's test to do the unethical in the original narrative—a point that is obscured by the later redaction of the angel of the LORD the second time (vv. 15-18). While Boehm's observations are interesting, they seem unnecessarily complicated for the individual text and its relation to the adjoining narratives and larger whole of Genesis.

It is evident in the alternating expositions of the Christian and Jewish traditions that their interpretive methodologies are not entirely divergent. The typological and moralistic readings that coexist in either tradition are derivative of the notion that the historical message of the text is subservient to the eternal and underlying meaning which the text possesses as a result of being the sacred Word of God. Where the traditions do diverge, interesting rhetorical and hermeneutical observations can be made. For Christianity, Christ has more often than not, and especially in the readings seen in this

chapter, been the organizing principle behind the typological or symbolic interpretations of the underlying meaning. The singularity of Christ is a limiting factor in what attributions can be made, and intertextuality is confined to the person and work of the Christ of the New Testament. In Judaism, however, intertexuality and symbolic interpretations are indeterminate, since not only is the whole of the Hebrew Bible available for incorporation and organization, but so too are the Rabbinic commentaries, the assumption of oral traditions, and the various contextual genres contained in Scripture (including law, prophecy, proverb, to name a few). Despite divergences and typological acrobatics, it is still evident that each tradition is marked by a concern for authorial (though not always authoritative) meaning—Christ as the Word for the Christian, Torah as the Word for the Jew, and this or that author/redactor through the Word for the secular commentator. The reverence for the text in the religious traditions is a corollary of the reverence for the divine Author behind the human authors, whereas the peculiarities of the text in secular commentaries is investigated in relation to the intentional purposes (or unintentional "omissions and/or errors", which necessarily assume a counter-intent) of some person or persons.

Furthermore, from these observations it can be argued that Jewish and Christian hermeneutics include elements of scientific, phenomenological, and deconstructive hermeneutics in varying degrees, which implies that rhetoric within each tradition is as unfixed as it is throughout its secular history. However, what may be safely said in general is that Christian rhetoric and therefore Christian hermeneutics is fundamentally restrictive because it is grounded less in language and more in personhood, that is to say,

in the person of Christ. Jewish rhetoric and hermeneutics fluctuates more because it is grounded in language, albeit with a well conceived theology of language, and can be more or less restrictive depending on the scope that rhetorical invention is allowed to have. These differences will emerge in Kierkegaard and his respondents in these particular and respective fashions.

CHAPTER IV

FEAR AND TREMBLING

In chapter II we surveyed the disparate and multifaceted understandings of rhetoric, hermeneutics, and the status of meaning. In chapter III we examined the even more fragmentary and diverse interpretations of the *Akedah*. In both of these chapters it was shown how systems of hermeneutics have, implicitly or explicitly, different conceptions of rhetorical invention and therefore different implications for rhetorical agency. This chapter is a detailed analysis of Kierkegaard's (1983) novel interpretation of the *Akedah*. Kierkegaard displays his own idiosyncratic hermeneutic, where the form and motive rely primarily upon rhetoric and poetics rather than speculative logic (philosophy) or exegesis (theology). Kierkegaard's style frustrates the traditional hermeneutics search for authorial meaning, even when the author is limited to the pseudonymous author rather than Kierkegaard himself.

The goal of the present chapter is two fold. In order to frame properly Kierkegaard, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between rhetoric and poetic in Kierkegaard, for it is in this interplay that Kierkegaard's hermeneutics is manifested and where it is easiest to misrepresent or misunderstand his work. Thus, the first portion of chapter IV will endeavor to conceptualize this relationship between rhetoric and poetics in terms of Kierkegaard's particular way of writing. However, it is not enough to have a general conception of Kierkegaard's style, for Kierkegaard's interpretation of the *Akedah* is too idiosyncratic to be examined apart from the whole of his work. Louis Mackey's (1971) book on Kierkegaard's poetic philosophy will provide a narrower lens

with which to view the relationship of rhetoric and poetics in Kierkegaard's hermeneutics.

Following the dual discussion of rhetoric and poetics in Kierkegaard, the chapter will turn toward an analysis of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's philosophical, poetic reflection on the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. Throughout the analysis it will be seen how Kierkegaard's use of rhetoric and poetics, including the form of the work itself, operates in an inner-outer hermeneutic. There is a hermeneutic represented by the work as a whole that can be understood within the general theories of hermeneutics surveyed in the first chapter. This outer hermeneutic represents an important example of the kind of rhetoric that supports Kierkegaard's interpretation and can be contrasted with the rhetoric employed by other hermeneutics. There is also an inner hermeneutic that engages the reader in reflexivity; in the action of the reader's own hermeneutic. This inner hermeneutic does not simply shape the outer hermeneutic that can be described as a synthetic whole, but it also places Kierkegaard's hermeneutic beyond the general theories in chapter I. By engaging the reader in self-reflection, Kierkegaard necessitates a decision from the reader to choose *either* a hermeneutics of suspicion *or* a hermeneutics of faith. By this rhetoric and this poetic, by leaving the choice undecided and indeterminate, the inner hermeneutic always leaves the outer hermeneutic in flux. Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* is a hermeneutic on the edges of phenomenological and deconstructive hermeneutics and is yet driven by a classical Christian hermeneutic that would desire to find the Divine Author behind every meaning. Aside from the particular observations of *Fear and Trembling*, this chapter

will also attempt to situate Kierkegaard's rhetoric and hermeneutic within the ongoing discussion of rhetoric, hermeneutics, the status of meaning, and the traditions of Christians and Jewish hermeneutics that have progressed through the first three chapters.

4.1 Rhetoric and Poetics

A detailed survey of the history of rhetoric and poetics, or rhetorical and poetic theory, similar to the historical survey of hermeneutics in the introductory chapter, would be ideal for this chapter. While such a project is beyond the present scope, an efficiently brief discussion may be sufficient to situate the following analysis. Two modern treatments of rhetoric and poetics will be used to carve out a conceptualization of their relationship to one another. These works are James Boyd White's (1985) *Heracles' Bow* and Susan Wells' (1996) *Sweet Reason*.

White's definition of rhetoric as, "the art of establishing the probable by arguing from our sense of the probable," recalls the canon of invention within traditional rhetorical theory (1985, 31). As a lawyer, White's understanding of rhetoric is closely aligned with classical emphases on the available means of persuasion, the aims and effects of persuasion, and the power of persuasion to create and frame points of view (or worlds/communities of meaning). Unlike the classical rhetorical focus on the individual rhetor, White recenters and broadens this focus to the communities that are forming themselves and themselves formed by rhetoric. The interplay of rhetoric as an entity which forms communities and communities as entities which form themselves through rhetoric is left as an unresolved dialectical tension in White's book. Rhetoric is thus a body of knowledge, and activity, and an agent itself. The three categorizations of

rhetoric are seen in White's discussion of the aspects of the rhetorical situation: the inherited language (body of knowledge), the art of the text (its agency), and the rhetorical community (its activity) (45-46). As we will see later on, this conception parallels Wells' discussion of language, narration, and action.

Poetics in White's book seems inextricably tied to the narrative qualities of the rhetorical uses of language. Literary qualities can be understood as both actual examples of literature (including their interpretation) as well as poetic construction of language on the part of a given rhetor or writer (White's example of Gibbons is a primary example of such poetizing). The incorporation of literary examples and poetic construction is rhetorical in its persuasive and constitutive application in the community. Thus, poetics is at one moment literature for use, but then becomes its own constitutive element as it is adopted and reappropriated in the community's consciousness and communication.

The interconnectedness of rhetoric and poetics present in White's discussion of law is even more conflated in Susan Wells' discussion of the discourses of Modernity. She is specifically focused on rhetoric, but she nonetheless employs poetic elements within her conceptualizing and offering of a rhetoric of modernity. Like White, Wells acknowledges the classical understanding of rhetoric as inherently probabilistic: "rhetoric has never known anything but probability, approximation, opinion, words seen only as words" (1996, 52). She also situates rhetoric in the intersubjectivity of community formation (in language by way of rhetoric) and formulation (in language as discourse). Her discussion of language figures heavily in the concerns of hermeneutics. She reflects a much more Gadamerian understanding of language as something

overarching its author; as something which is already in force and constituting its subjects. Her emphasis on the synchronicity of language over the diachronic privilege of authorship situates her discussion firmly in contemporary hermeneutics. The otherness of language follows seamlessly into its indeterminacy, also reflecting modern hermeneutic conceptions of language, rhetoric, and the author.

Her discussion of narration aligns more closely with poetics than it does with rhetoric, which is helpful in our inquiry. Poetics can be thought of as an inner-working focus as opposed to rhetoric's outer-working focus. Put another way, poetics is chiefly concerned with making a world within language whereas rhetoric is meant, not to make a world, but to move it to action. While neither art can be limited to these motives, (as though one or the other were their only concern) their predominant orientations (historically and theoretically) resemble such distinctions. Wells notes that narratives coordinate tasks, locate speakers and hearers in personal identities, and maintain collective identities (33). The element of time within narrative also informs our understanding of poetics, since the multiplicity of times afforded and incorporated into poetic deployments will be helpful in investigating how Kierkegaard's poetics influence his hermeneutic. Finally, action is the link by which rhetoric and poetics are linked in single and multiple contexts. Wells states that "Communicative action is both productive and interpretive. It orients actors to their situation and stipulates the possibility of coming to agreement" (114). The activation of a text in its interpretation is at once poetic and rhetorical and elides intentionality by incorporating the reader into the construction of meaning.

Having briefly outlined some of the more important formulations of rhetoric and poetic in White and Wells, we can put forth a general conception with which to approach the rhetoric and poetics in the following analysis of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Classical rhetoric and poetics are separated from hermeneutics largely by the distinctions between intentionality and ambiguity—intention being important in classical hermeneutics because of classical rhetoric's specific and narrow relation to the rhetor; whilst ambiguity has been the vehicle through which *poesis* travels. The conflation of rhetoric and poetics is not automatically a negative, on the contrary, it is vital to the health of hermeneutics; both intentionality and ambiguity are important even in classical theory. The concern of poetics with the possible and the concern of rhetoric with the probable, if separated, risk the loss of beauty and believability; the loss of coherence and action. A rhetoric without poetic coherence (a world of the possible) falls into the sophistry of cliché and the expediency of the immediate. A poetics without rhetorical vigor risks becoming "purely aesthetic," moved to reflection at the expense of action; emptied of impetus. The language of humanity, if sought out in its full expression, cannot divorce *ars poetica* from *ars rhetorica*.

Let us then recognize the dialectically arranged formulations of rhetoric and poetics:

1. At once classical: where rhetoric is understood as inextricably linked to the intentional purposes of the rhetor and where poetics is the artful use of literature and language to emphasize, analogize, and organize the persuasive intentions of the author—
2. And at once complicated by the ambiguity of language that validates the decentering of the author's own validity and where the poetic use of literature and language sublimates any (con)text that is utilized and incorporates (as a valid hermeneutic) the reader's own relation to the (con)texts and author.

The conceptualization of rhetoric and poetics (or more properly, this semantic range of understanding) taken up here is provisional rather than axiomatic—it is adopted as a framework for combing the text, not as a comprehensive understanding or praxis. Furthermore, while the general conception provides a useful framework for investigating rhetorical foundations of hermeneutics, it does not provide an adequate context for understanding Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. For that lens we must turn to Louis Mackey.

4.2 Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet

Much has been said about Kierkegaard's works in both positive and negative ways, but few have been able to portray, with coherence, what Kierkegaard was doing, how he was doing it, and for what purpose he was doing it in his lifework. Louis Mackey's (1971) book on Kierkegaard may be as definitive as it gets in explicating the kind of writer that was Kierkegaard. Mackey describes Kierkegaard as a kind of poet, rather than a philosopher or theologian, which becomes the all-important context through which one must understand Kierkegaard's writings. Mackey's comments on Kierkegaard's style support the interrelationship of rhetoric and poetics and hints at the double hermeneutic that Kierkegaard accomplishes:

> Kierkegaard's work is poetry because it traffics in possibilities. It is the poetry of existence because the possibilities it exhibits for contemplation are also idealities that challenge the will to the ethical activity of realization. . . .The two faces of possibility effect an identity of poetry and rhetoric in Kierkegaard's work. Poetry generally consists of verbal structures predominantly centripetal (inner-directed); rhetoric on the other hand is largely centrifugal (outer-directed). A poem leads you deeper into itself; a rhetorical address points you beyond itself. Kierkegaard's writings, as a presentation of possibility, are at once poetry and rhetoric. As possibility seen from an aesthetic concern, they are poetry. As

possibility seen from an ethical bias, they are rhetoric. Kierkegaard intended both poetry and rhetoric; more specifically he meant to drive his reader through poetic apprehension to ethical appropriation. (1971, 289-290. emphasis in original)

The statement summarizes the characteristic elements of Kierkegaard's work and the defining elements of his double hermeneutic. That each reader will apprehend the poetic dimension differently is assumed and even encouraged by Kierkegaard. This inner hermeneutic attempts pure subjectivity on the part of the individual, because for Kierkegaard, subjectivity is truth. The outer hermeneutic is conditioned by the individual's apprehension and develops into that singular ethic born of rhetoric's suasive influence.

Lest one assume that Kierkegaard's subjectivity is identical to secular relativism, it is important to remember that Kierkegaard's religion (characterized by faith*ful* praxis—a repetition) places the human subject as wholly other to the Absolute God. As Mackey notes:

> For if God is the Absolute, then He transcends everything that can be known by men, all of which is but relative. God is modally other than man and man's world. His existence, therefore, cannot be proven nor His nature conceived. To demonstrate or delineate God would bring Him within the ambit of finite reason and demean His absoluteness. In a word, everything that is said about God discredits Him, except this confession itself.
> Nevertheless, God can be experienced. Because He is wholly other than man, He can be encountered as the negation of everything human. . . . Whenever all human possibilities—aesthetic, intellectual, moral—are exhausted, there God is present. This is true especially of man's religiousness; human attempts to make contact with God must be frustrated before God Himself can break through. (95-96, emphasis in original)

It is not reality that is relative, nor meaning, nor existence, but rather humanity's perspective of that reality, meaning, and existence. The encounter with the Absolute is

accomplished by the Absolute Himself: "To have no human schoolmaster in faith is to have in God a diligent Father and Teacher. The highest good [faith] can be given by God without reduction, for God is Himself the highest and self-giving Good of every man" (Mackey, 108).

Another complicating element in Kierkegaard's hermeneutic is that faith is a paradox, and thus it cannot be understood except internally and subjectively, by faith itself. Such faith is not self-derived, but gifted by the Absolute Other, which is again a paradox, for in gifting faith, the Absolute Other becomes intimately known (but not understood). Mackey's explanation of Johannes Climacus' "point" resembles (but only indirectly) something of Kierkegaard's own religious understanding: "Christianity, which came into the world as Miracle, ever remains a mystery beyond comprehension and imagination, intelligible only to a faith that is itself miraculous and God-given" (164). As we will see in *Fear and Trembling*, it is the human being's response to the exhibition of faith that can only result in *either* a silence of awe, *or* the strongest offense.

We have begun to glimpse (through a mirror darkly) Kierkegaard's expressions of God, religion, and faith. It remains to discuss his understanding of humanity and of communication, and with these two elements we will have constructed the bifocals (eternal/finite) necessary for viewing *Fear and Trembling*. Mackey indicates that Kierkegaard's view of man was anti-enlightenment, a return to an older heritage of understanding:

> What Kierkegaard proclaimed in the nineteenth century, to the scandal of his Christian contemporaries, is at bottom the common medieval teaching that man's desire for self-fulfillment can be satisfied by nothing less than union with God. Man is capax Dei, and in this negative capability reposes his dignity.

> There is thus an equation between man's want and God's abundance. Omnipotence and creaturely dependence, reconciling grace and sinful defection, are the same reality seen from opposed perspectives. Therefore, to know one's need of God is his highest perfection is the only reliable self-knowledge.

Against the Enlightenment belief that reason, particularly human reason, would lead humanity into its own infinitely increasing becoming, Kierkegaard replies that it is humanity's lack, not its fullness, that defines its relationship to God and the limits of its reason. It is not surprising to find that Kierkegaard's hermeneutic resembles much more closely that of the medievals than his contemporaries who espoused scientific hermeneutics. Kierkegaard's "readings" (whatever the context) were multifaceted, multilayered, and perspectival—the only singular meaning was God's own, yet it was precisely this meaning that was ineffable in its fullness.

It is overstatement to say that Kierkegaard's view of man is static, or that it is objective, though his view certainly has properties of coherence. The *personae* reveal Kierkegaard's primary focus: that humanity consists of individual interpretations of reality. As Mackey explains:

> The stages, not described by a disinterested observer but dramatized by representative personae, suggest that human existence is amenable to a diversity of living interpretations, each consistent in itself, each provident of a unique perspective on others, and each irreducibly distinct from the others. For in spite of the ascending scale in which he presents them (aesthetic, ethical, religious), and in spite of his own commitment of the religious, Kierkegaard never lost sight of the fact that each existence-sphere is a way of life eligible and enactable by a human being, and that the only passage from one stage to another is an utterly free choice entailing a wholesale revision of the personality and its world. (134)

Humanity is a diversity of interpretations on reality—this is the world of becoming—and these interpretations are meant to be opposed against the radical confrontation with the

Eternal Absolute—the world of being. For as many human beings as exist, there are as many unique encounters, perspectives, viewpoints on *the meaningful*.

Finally, a word on Kierkegaard's mode of communication is necessary, and depends upon a working understanding of his use of pseudonyms. The *personae* thwart attempts at identification with any living person who relationship in which Kierkegaard was involved. Kierkegaard's own explicit statements about the pseudonyms and his production of the edifying discourses (his own direct communication) reveal their proper function:

> The edifying discourses and the Christian witness define the religious end to which the aesthetic and philosophical works are means. And conversely, the distinction between pseudonymous and direct writings establishes the independence of the poetic production. Because they can be opposed to the known intent of Kierkegaard, the works of pseudonymous personae are protected against biographical and psychological snoopery. Neither symptoms nor simulacra of any living person, they stand by themselves and take their autonomous literary effect. (Mackey, 249)

The *personae* are indications, perspectives, or viewpoints that articulate particular relationships toward and interpretation of the world and its meaning. What they are and what they are not are secondary to what they are doing, or how it is they function as poetic devices. As Mackey summarizes:

> [T]he use of pseudonyms first severs Kierkegaard's personae from Kierkegaard. At the second level pseudonymity obliterates Kierkegaard the poet. Finally, the identities of the pseudonyms themselves are so scrambled that they become masks without faces, their works self-standing objects unbuttressed by human subjects. The blank calling card inserted in Repetition, the concluding exordium of Either/Or ("Only the truth which edifies is truth for you"), and like hints in the other books, direct the reader to supply the necessary personal identity: his own. So the form of Kierkegaard's writings insinuate their content: subjectivity, inwardness, the passionate appropriation of objective uncertainty, is the only truth possible for an existing individual. (255)

Having summarized briefly Kierkegaard's understandings of the infinite and finite categories of God, religion, faith, humanity, and communication, we are ready to approach *Fear and Trembling* from a perspective slightly opposed to what Kierkegaard may have intended for its readers. It is not the intention here to reproduce the effects of Kierkegaard's work, but to situate his efforts in the developing, (re)discovering, ongoing, and unfolding relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics. So it is the theoretical importance of Kierkegaard's style and the resultant double hermeneutic that springs from his rhetoric and poetic which remain to be discussed.

4.3 Fear and Trembling: Preface[26]

The rhetorical interest in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de Silentio* (1983) surfaces before the work even begins, as a glance at the subtitle and author indicates. One must ask the preliminary question of whether or not the *modus operandi* of Kierkegaard's dialectic is Hegelian or Socratic. If the former we may expect to see the thesis-antithesis battle back and forth to form a higher, transcendent synthesis that hypostatizes the contradictions in a soluble relation. However, if it is Socratic we can only hope for a cynical or humble aporia—a denial of synthetic, transcendent, and certain knowledge. The difference not only has monumental impact upon Kierkegaard's own hermeneutic, but also upon his reader, who, as we will see, Kierkegaard is constantly trying to draw into the equation of faith and offense. McDonald (2005) argues that the form Kierkegaard's dialectic takes is not Hegelian, but Socratic and represents a fundamental rhetorical purpose:

> Hegelianism promised to make absolute knowledge available by virtue of a
> science of logic. Anyone with the capacity to follow the dialectical progression

of the purportedly transparent concepts of Hegel's logic would have access to the mind of God (which for Hegel was equivalent to the logical structure of the universe). Kierkegaard thought this to be the hubristic attempt to build a new tower of Babel, or a *scala paradisi* — a dialectical ladder by which humans can climb with ease up to heaven. Kierkegaard's strategy was to invert this dialectic by seeking to make everything more difficult.

The anti-Hegelian stance adopted by Kierkegaard runs throughout the sections of *Fear and Trembling* and plays no small part of the overall direction and implications of Kierkegaard's use of rhetoric and poetics in his overall hermeneutic.

The other interesting rhetorical device Kierkegaard adopts from the outset is the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio (John of Silence). A few comments have been made of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, but it is enough to be reminded here that the use of indirect communication serves to de-authorize Kierkegaard—to set him at one remove—placing the reader more at the interpretive forefront in the work. The divesting of control on the part of Kierkegaard, while certainly not a new device—consider Plato for example—is one that figures differently from Plato on two counts. First, Kierkegaard's movement is one approaching revelation as opposed to Plato's movement toward enlightened knowledge. Second, Kierkegaard's pseudonym is fictive and adopts an ethos of one-down communication whereas Plato speaks through real characters, which alludes to actual representation rather than authorial control. Kierkegaard's movement focuses the reader on interpreting the poetic creation whereas Plato's movement focuses the reader on the reproduced "historical real." To clarify in terms of Kierkegaard's work, revelation is the individual in absolute relation to the absolute, whereas enlightened knowledge is the individual in relation to the universal.

The rhetorical implications and hermeneutical import of the pseudonym should not be overlooked, for within the work, Abraham is *silent* by necessity of his ordeal of faith. Silentio is a poetic construction meant to focus the reader upon Abraham's movement of faith. It is entirely up to the reader to enter the hermeneutic of faith, because of the de-centering and subordination of Kierkegaard's authority as author and the communicable inadequacy inherent in the pseudonym. Silentio cannot speak for Abraham, nor can he speak of faith (that is, provide knowledge of it), but he can only poetize and philosophize the movement. To take a more poetic stance, the removal of authority is similar to the nature of poetry or poetic prose—it not only invites, but demands that the reader make decisions on elements that are more open and ambiguous than typical philosophy. Philosophy in ancient Greece frequently employed mythic accounts to provide both the authority and the metaphorical apparatus to discuss the nature of things that lie beyond the *mere* human intellect. But Kierkegaard's poetics, as opposed to Greek philosophy, is not seeking to authorize knowledge, but to authorize the journey of the reader, which is Kierkegaard's peculiar hermeneutic. The object is faith, but because faith is incommunicable, the knowable element in *Fear and Trembling* is the method of inquiry; the circularity of the hermeneutic process itself bubbles to the surface as author-reader-text are subordinated to the object and movement of faith (which Kierkegaard begs to be *personally* interpreted).

Ironically (perhaps exactly what Kierkegaard is after) rhetoric and poetics are not used to make something known, but to immerse the reader in a subjective hermeneutic that requires decision to be affirmed or denied, but not primarily communicated (or

directly argued). The traditional hermeneutic concern with the authority of the author is doubly removed: Silentio's inquiry into Abraham does not consider the author of the narrative—whether Moses, or God, or some redactor—and the reader is not led to consider Kierkegaard's intention either. Poetry, which in one way can be described as the unfolding of expression for the sake experiencing and reflecting on the expression, is combined with philosophy, which is concerned with the discovery or uncovering of knowledge. The ironic combination of philosophy and poetics is at once rhetorical; opening and offering to the reader a subjective hermeneutic. It is not that traditional hermeneutics denies subjective influence, but the reader's subjectivity is subordinated in the search for the author's meaning. Kierkegaard's departure from that conceptualization can be considered a precursor to the shift in hermeneutics that comes through Husserl and Heidegger's Phenomenology; culminating in Gadamer's Hermeneutics.

There are several other rhetorical forms that Kierkegaard uses to draw in the sympathetic reader and compel him or her to carry the load of interpretation, to internalize it, and self-authorize the validity not only of Kierkegaard's interpretations, but of the interpretation of the *Akedah*, and finally, the interpretation of faith as faith. Within the preface, the final paragraph marks one of the more distinctive rhetorical elements, draws upon poetic constructions as well. The initial sentence—"The present author is by no means a philosopher"—bookends what is essentially the introductory statement of the paragraph, namely, that current philosophy's focus on the system and exhaustive knowledge or understanding is beyond the purpose of the book itself. This

emphasis on incompleteness and on inadequacy disposes the reader to be aware of gaps that may have been otherwise glossed over in the reader's unquestioning fidelity to the author's words.

The subsequent denial of the system, denial of writing for public acceptance, and the anxiety of having his book chopped apart systematically flow from this admission of incompleteness and inadequacy; of de-authorization. By denying and laying aside what may have been common assumptions the reader would have carried into a reading as well as the author's own authority to speak to those assumptions, Kierkegaard explicitly positions the reader as the locus of the hermeneutical process. There is a keen art of displacement in play that is both poetic and rhetorical—it is poetic because it exchanges analytic/systematic critique for poetic (re)presentation—it narrativizes—and it is rhetorical in its effort to adopt a diagonal approach to argument that attempts to escape synthesis into Hegel's System. Indeed, Kierkegaard's opening preface stands in stark consternation to speculative philosophy's dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The reader is called to disengage with any system (ethical, religious, or otherwise) of understanding in order to confront and be confronted as a singular individual.

4.4 Fear and Trembling: Exordium

Kierkegaard follows the preface with a short narrative followed by four retellings of the *Akedah* each of which conclude with an analogy that relates to the retelling. The identity of the man in the exordium is unstated, and though it could be considered Silentio, the reader is left to assume whether or not the man is the author or the author's invention. The rhetorical function of this ambiguity seems to direct the attention away

from the uniqueness of the individual author and to emphasize his common nature—he is not a thinker, he is not a scholar, but he is an everyman of sorts.

In the first retelling of the *Akedah*, the story emphasizes the incommunicability of Abraham's ordeal. Three times the story relates that Isaac could not understand Abraham. In the end, Abraham's outburst serves to deceive Isaac of the true intention of the ordeal—that it was demanded by God—instead taking on the form of a monster. The analogy provided speaks of the blackening of the mother's breast in the weaning period, so that the child will think something is wrong with the mother's breast, even though it is fine. The man from the introduction is unsatisfied with the retelling, the "terrible means" by which the ordeal is accomplished.

The second retelling emphasizes the resignation of Abraham in the ordeal, who in silence and dejection honors the command, but without understanding or truly accepting it. The analogy is less clear in the second retelling, discussing the concealment of the mother's breast in the child's maturation. It seems that it is the concealment that is emphasized here in relation to the weaning, a part that is withheld without an attempt to reveal. Abraham does not even try to communicate the ordeal to Isaac, but resigns to conceal its purpose from all.

The third retelling is more directly related to the polemical issue Kierkegaard takes up in challenging Hegel's universal absolutist ethics. In the retelling, Abraham cannot reconcile the ethical failure of his duty as father with the command of God to sacrifice Isaac. Even though he passes through the ordeal, he remains in a subsequent ordeal of the ethical import of his action. The analogy of the mother seems to indicate

the loss of the child, which Abraham experiences as the loss of his ethical standing in relation to Isaac. The ordeal and the analogy emphasize the inevitable loss, the catch-22 of sorts, that result from their respective ordeals.

The final retelling is perhaps the most difficult to understand because it seems to initially focus upon Isaac's reaction rather than Abraham. The key phrase that completes the analogy is Abraham's despairing shudder—his faltering, but for a moment—which caused Isaac to lose faith. The stronger sustenance relates to this faltering of Abraham—the stronger sustenance of the mother is the stronger faith that Abraham lacks in the retelling. In all these retellings, the man of inquiry cannot find a satisfactory understanding of Abraham's faith. Each of the retellings will figure into Kierkegaard's three problemata. The interesting element in our inquiry is how the poetizing of the Akedah functions rhetorically to preface Kierkegaard's philosophical dialectic. Certainly the pre-Socratics and even Plato were fond of using mythic narratives to carry their most challenging and abstract notions for which their arguments were most difficult to support. However, Kierkegaard's usage is neither mythic nor a vehicle that carry his claims the way the pre-Socratic and Platonic mythical narrative do—and this is, perhaps for Kierkegaard, a deliberately anti-Socratic movement.

For the pre-Socratics and for Plato, myth is the positive conduit by which their discussions of the arche or the forms are expressed, defended, or approached. What is interesting to note is that for the pre-Socratics, the important content of the myths were expressed directly by the gods, and for Plato, by his chief protagonist, Socrates. In Kierkegaard, the story is woven by the everyman, who is neither godlike nor a great

philosophic mind. Again we see the backgrounding of Kierkegaard and Silentio, who are both displaced from the work and replaced by an ambiguous, yet common narrator. A second difference noted above is that Kierkegaard's poetic retellings are not the vehicles by which his claims are positively carried. For the pre-Socratics and for Plato, the myths are what explain the solidarity of their philosophy with the True or the Good, but for Kierkegaard's pseudonym, they reinforce the negative claim—the escape from intellectual verification that faith achieves when philosophical reasoning seeks to understand and describe it. The stories do add support to "the Silent's" presentation of faith, but the whole process is destructive of narrow conceptions of knowledge and certainty rather than supportive of it. From a hermeneutical standpoint, this constant frustration of understanding meaning complicates the solidarity of any claim to a definitive hermeneutic.

Though it is doubtful that Kierkegaard would argue that interpretation ought to be whatever the reader makes of it, it can be conjectured that he would understand interpretation to be intrinsic to and consistent with the individual responsibility of the reader, especially toward the confrontation between faith and offense. The hermeneutic is not simply "reader response" as though the individual's reception were all that existed, for there is meaning in the Absolute, which always more and always beyond the individual's response. Yet it is not a hermeneutic that aligns with any scientific, phenomenological, or deconstructive hermeneutic, though it draws upon understandings present in each of these approaches. There is clearly one meaning that the reader is supposed to encounter (an assumption of the scientific approach), yet there is an infinite

gulf separating the finite reader from that meaning (an assumption implicit in phenomenological approaches), which requires a repetition of inquiry into meaning (an assumption on the fringes of deconstructive approaches).

4.5 Fear and Trembling: Eulogy

There is a strong sense in which the Eulogy on Abraham is the penultimate poetic to prepare the reader for the examples that Silentio will take up in his dialectic of faith. The rhetorical function of the eulogy is twofold. First, it serves to advance Abraham as the authoritative character in the discussion, in such an unquestionable way that encourages the reader to withhold superficial criticism or surface level analysis of complications in Abraham's own narrative history in Genesis as well as Kierkegaard's presentation. Second, it serves to further mystify the concept of faith that is attached to Abraham.

The initial movement of the eulogy, as the reader should be growing accustomed to, displaces the author, Silentio, as the humble poet, unable to imitate the hero, but able to accentuate and perpetuate the hero's fame throughout history. The second movement places greatness in love, love in struggle, and concludes with a series of paradoxical dyads that accumulate around Abraham at the end of an anaphora (using "one"):

> There was one who was great by virtue of his power, and one who was great by virtue of his wisdom, and one who was great by virtue of his hope, and one who was great by virtue of his love, but Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength if powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred to oneself. (1983, 16-17)

The flourish of paradoxes is one that mystifies the faith by which Abraham is made great. The next movement is a descent from this culmination into some of the historical elements whereby Abraham's faith is evidenced. The element of time runs throughout this section of the eulogy, emphasized especially in opposition to faith—faith overcomes the constraints and exigencies of time. The back and forth of time and faith is drawn to a central point: "Then came the fullness of time" (18). The fullness of time in the testing of faith is made—by faith—an eternal moment for the poet even as it secured an eternal inheritance for Abraham. The ascension toward the Absolute is arrested from idealism in the final movement of the eulogy:

> Yet Abraham had faith, and had faith for this life. In fact, if his faith has been only for a life to come, he certainly would have more readily discarded everything in order to rush out of a world to which he did not belong [….] But Abraham had faith specifically for this life—faith that he would grow old in this country, be honored among people, blessed by posterity, and unforgettable in Isaac […]. (20)

Silentio is careful to maintain the tensions of both the eternal and the timely, the dialectical tensions that are synthetically abstracted into hypostasis by Hegel are kept lively in Kierkegaard's poetizing and, as we will see, in his dialectic as well. Abraham's belief in the preposterous, what will later be called the absurd, figure largely into Silentio's later arguments.

The adoption of paradox and irony, aside from being philosophically Socratic, also represents the irony of the Christian faith, that foundation that is *either* the stumbling block of offense *or* cornerstone for those who enter the ordeal of faith. Kierkegaard concludes on the chief difficulty of the *Akedah*, that it was God who demanded of Abraham his very son, the child of promise, and this is precisely the place

that Kierkegaard wants his reader to go, the place where one can turn easily aside in denial or resignation, but where none can go further than faith. The eulogy's spiraling ascension toward the problemata section ends in an aporia that confounds knowledge rather than synthesizing the contradictions into a stable transcendent structure.

4.6 Fear and Trembling: Preliminary Expectoration

Silentio begins the expectoration with a brief, but substantive differentiation of the external world and the spiritual world. The argumentative function of the move is blatant and necessary. The categories of justice, righteousness, equity, and especially retribution do not maintain themselves neatly and orderly in the external world, but are abstracted into the spiritual world, they make all the difference. Here is what appears to be a Hegelian movement but the purpose diverges from Hegel radically. Silentio's hermeneutic is counterintuitive to acquiring knowledge—it is an apprehension that leaves one undone rather than certain. The Hegelian hermeneutic turns the moment of revelation into an aesthetic hypostasis—something to be admired in its heightened position, but not to be sought, except by secondary emulation; positioned as its copied image in the world. Kierkegaard's hermeneutic is aesthetic, but not primarily so, for rather than hypostatizing the revelation the movement encircles the revelation with further reengagement with individual decision—a "sleeplessness." Witness the difference as Silentio puts it, first the hypostatizing aesthetic:

> We glorify Abraham, but how? We recite the whole story in clichés: "The great thing was that he loved God in such a way that he was willing to offer him as the best." This is very true, but "the best" is a vague term. Mentally and orally we homologize Isaac and the best, and the contemplator can very well smoke his pipe while cogitating, and the listener may very well stretch out his legs comfortably. (28)

And now in contrast with the encircling "sleeplessness":

> So we talk and in the process of talking interchange the two terms, Isaac and the best, and everything goes fine. But suppose that someone listening is a man who suffers from sleeplessness—then the most terrifying, the most profound, tragic, and comic misunderstanding is very close at hand. (28)

Silentio goes on to describe this sleepless man as one who tries to reenact the faith of Abraham, to which the preacher would soundly condemn the man, despite having resoundingly praised Abraham for the very same decision in his sermon. Silentio's hermeneutic leads the revelation into contradiction and conflict with resolution rather than into synthesis and harmony with resolution. The encircling comes in redistributing the object (Abraham's decision) into new contexts, new questions, and new possibilities of explanation. What is also occurring is a dialectical irony, a tension between aesthetics and ethics that Kierkegaard exploits continually by punning on Hegel's notion of the Absolute.

It could be said that the sense of the Enlightenment that fostered scientific hermeneutics sought out the *arche* of interpretation, that one understanding which harmonized the complications present between text and meaning. Classical and medieval hermeneutics may have been more comfortable with multiplicity and range of meaning than the scientific hermeneutics of the Enlightenment though it remains to be seen how Kierkegaard's hermeneutic will round itself (ab)out, beyond the reader's individual experiencing of it. Clearly, at the outset, there is an effort to produce and proliferate complications for the interpreter to grapple with. Such a movement is not uncommon to classical hermeneutics, though the promise of resolution that is withheld

by Kierkegaard is quite radical. Fittingly for Kierkegaard then, it is the synthetic and

resultant hypostatizing aesthetic that Silentio indicts as refusing to think the full thought:

> If a person lacks the courage to think his thought all the way through and say
> that Abraham was a murderer, then it is certainly better to attain this courage
> than to waste time on unmerited eulogies. The ethical expression for what
> Abraham did is that he meant to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he
> meant to sacrifice Isaac—but precisely in this contradiction is the anxiety that
> can make a person sleepless, and yet without this anxiety Abraham is not who he
> is….As for me, I do not lack the courage to think a complete thought. (30)

The interrogator of the question must be willing to wade through contradictions as

contradictions and resist the notion that one has gone beyond faith.

Silentio's interpretation of the *Akedah* is but one of the several motives of

Kierkegaard and is not the primary one. Clearly, Abraham's faith is focused upon,

subjecting of the larger narrative present in Genesis, though it draws upon that story for

the interpretation. The question of faith and ethics is primary as we will see in the

problemata, but whether or not that question is proper to the interpreting the aim of the

original author (Moses? A later writer or redactor?) and audience (Israel post Exodus?

Post Divided-Monarchy? Post Exile?) of the *Akedah* is not addressed at all by

Kierkegaard's pseudonym. Some who transgress the boundaries of the intentional

fallacy have offered suggestions that Kierkegaard was offering a below the surface

apologia for his behavior toward Regine, which resulted from his decision to end their

engagement and was enacted in his ill treatment of her as a way of easing her conscience

toward him in the break up. There are, at once, philosophical, religious, and personal

stakes in the interpretation that could only be managed and played out together by way

of the poetic and rhetorical constructions Kierkegaard choose for his hermeneutic.

However, none of these can be asserted as primary motives. Despite whatever motive may be driving Kierkegaard or his pseudonym, it is ultimately in the encounter of the reader with the text that will be the determinate figure of what is primary.

It may or may not be profitable to expose any of these motives as primary, though it seems that the intersection of the philosophical problem of ethics and the religious problem of faith contains the force that moves the text through to its completion. Indeed, if one is to attempt an objective attribution of Kierkegaard's motive in the work, it would be to expose the possibility of an encounter of the individual with the Absolute, beyond the individual's ethical relationship in the universal. Silentio confesses, "It is supposed to be difficult to understand Hegel, but to understand Abraham is a small matter" (33). But this assumption is rejected and replaced by the paradox as the pinnacle of Abraham and of faith: "I by no means conclude that faith is something inferior but rather that is it the highest, also that it is dishonest of philosophy to give something else in its place and to disparage faith" (33). Kierkegaard, through Silentio, is revealing how he will approach the following problemata.

There is one more poetical/rhetorical element that needs to be addressed in the Preliminary Expectoration. The opposition of the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation is a significant characterization of both Abraham and the possible misunderstanding of Abraham that Silentio guards against.[27] The knight of infinite resignation is possesses the same passion, the same reflection, the same struggle and fullness of the moment that the knight of faith experiences, but it is in their *telos* (within

the given *kairos*), the finality of their movements, where they diverge. Consider the characterization in the following passage:

> The knight [of infinite resignation] then, will recollect everything, but this recollection is precisely the pain, and yet in infinite resignation he is reconciled with existence. His love for that princess would become for him the expression of an eternal love, would assume a religious character, would be transfigured into a love of the eternal being, which true enough denied the fulfillment but nevertheless did reconcile him once more in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take away from him….Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the infinite world there is much that is not possible. The knight, however, makes this impossibility possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it. The desire that would lead him out into actuality but has been stranded on impossibility is now turned inward, but it is not therefore lost, nor is it forgotten….In infinite resignation there is peace and rest; every person who wills it, who has not debased himself by self-disdain…can discipline himself to make this movement, which in its pain reconciles one to existence. (43-45)

Silentio frames this characterization as the necessary precursor of the movement of faith: "Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith" (46).

The characterization of the knight of infinite resignation once more places Silentio in the background of the text, looking on the primary object of Abraham in the ironic position of an inferior authority. Yet, in the same moment as Silentio, and indeed the reader's own authority, are debased, there is a recovery accomplished in the incorporation of infinite resignation into the hierarchy of the movement of faith. The dual action of deflation and incorporation is what allows Silentio's ethos to maintain its influence while it also works on the reader's pathos, insofar as the reader can identify

with the knight of infinite resignation. The movement of faith that goes beyond infinite resignation is that which concludes that what is impossible will be precisely what is gained, by virtue of the absurd. The mystification occurring here at the pinnacle of Silentio's hierarchy defies the security of rational verification—a move that de-centers hermeneutics from all possible categories of reading (authority of the writer, reading subject, genre, or lifeworld) and places it outside of expression. Poetics might identify this moment as an encounter with the sublime; rhetoricians might mark it as an enthymematic instance of arguing the unknowable; and philosophy might identify it as Silentio's arche. Regardless of how it might be labeled, the purpose and hope for its effect can be identified. Rhetorically, Kierkegaard needs a contrastive position for which the movement of faith can be compared to apart from Hegel's analytic/systematic categories. Poetically the characterization is a foil, which will serve to highlight the nature of the movement of faith (characterized in the knight of faith).

Furthermore, the characterizations become necessary if Kierkegaard desires to go beyond a polemic against Hegel's System. In order to be something more than a critique of Hegel, there must be something offered in its place. The difficulty of placing faith at this pinnacle is that it is impossible to justify upon rationality alone. Positing an *arche* is always a presuppositional matter (which is what Kierkegaard would emphasize). The addition of the characterizations provides a wider context than philosophy proper—and a wider context that Hegel's philosophy specifically—from which Kierkegaard can positively address the nature of a positive presentation. By his poetic personification of faith and its hierarchical formulation—the knight of faith over the knight of infinite

resignation—Kierkegaard elides the narrower constraints of the context of speculative philosophy.

The movement is at once poetic and rhetorical; it is at once constitutive; it is framing a point of view; it is world-making. In hermeneutics this practice is commonly employed when one references examples and experiences; when one creates analogies and myths to aid in understanding a text. These poetic practices are not themselves a novel development occurring first or only in Kierkegaard. Rather, it is the position held by the references that is unique to his usage. The author and text from which interpretations are drawn is backgrounded for the constitutive text that Kierkegaard qua Silentio qua the reader is co-creating. The movement is not simple eisegesis, but an idiosyncratic hermeneutic; abstracting the primary text and reifying it in subjugation to the text-in-process. Rhetorically, by engaging the reader so directly in the process, the hermeneutic is a call to action. The reader cannot simply delight in the world-making, nor can the reader dismiss the author's perspective, unless the reader is at the same time willing to dismiss himself. Scientific hermeneutics would clamor over Kierkegaard's intentions, phenomenological hermeneutics would beckon the constraints of the culture, deconstructive hermeneutics would relish in its effete moment of retextualization, but Kierkegaard's hermeneutic is a repetition of *this* encounter with meaning. While one method seeks the initial historical moment (scientific), another the present cultural moment (phenomenological), and another the impossibility of any moment (deconstructive), Kierkegaard's method could encompass all of these, but would subject

them to the possibility of a confrontation with the Absolute Other—and that toward the

repetition of faith or offense.

4.6 Fear and Trembling: Problema I[28]

Problema one interrogates the ethical as universal and the possibility of its

teleological suspension in the example of Abraham as the single individual who, in faith,

by way of the absurd, is asserted above the universal. There is a philosophical necessity

in placing the ethical as the universal, for this is Hegel's formulation of the System.

Silentio identifies the critical stasis point at the *telos* of the ethical:

> If this [the singular individual entering the universal] is the highest that can be
> said of man and his existence, then the ethical is of the same nature as a person's
> eternal salvation, which is his *telos* forevermore and at all times, since it would
> be a contradictions for this to be capable of being surrendered (that is,
> teleologically suspended), because as soon as this is suspended it is relinquished,
> whereas that which is suspended is not relinquished but is preserved in the
> higher, which is its *telos*. (54)

It is the movement and paradox of faith that problematizes the ethical as universal, and

therein lies the philosophical (and spiritual, for Kierkegaard) import. Here is how

Silentio phrases the problem:

> Faith is precisely the paradox that the single individual as the single individual is
> higher than the universal, is justified before it, not as inferior to it but as
> superior—yet in such a way, please note, that it is the single individual who,
> after being subordinate as the single individual to the universal, now by means of
> the universal becomes the single individual who as the single individual is
> superior, that the single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute
> relation to the absolute. (55-56)

With the terms of the dialectic laid out before us, we can investigate how Kierkegaard

utilizes the *Akedah* poetically, rhetorically, and philosophically to create a hermeneutic

of faith over and above Hegel's System that is quite removed from the hermeneutics that

arise from the various examples of interpretation and exegesis of the *Akedah* seen in chapter II.

Constraints of the ethical as universal are pitted against the character and movement of Abraham within the Biblical narrative. The first dialectical opposition occurs at the familial level of father/son relation: the father must love the son more than himself. If the story can be reconciled to this universal, then a teleological suspension of the ethical is avoided and Abraham remains subjugated to the universal. The dialectic proceeds by way of analogous comparisons of familial trials of sacrifice— Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia, Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter, and Brutus' sacrifice of his sons Titus and Tiberius. The poetic connection between these characters and Abraham is enough to build the possibility that Abraham resides within the universal:

> The tragic hero is still within the ethical. He allows an expression of the ethical to have its τελοζ in a higher expression of the ethical; he scales down the ethical relation between father and son or daughter and father to a feeling that has its dialectic in its relation to the idea of moral conduct. (59)

In these examples, the higher ethic maintains: for Agamemnon it is the appeasement of the gods, for Jephthah it is to save a nation, and for Brutus it is to uphold the idea of the state. But for Abraham none of these ethics maintains, for it is not on account of moral virtue, but of personal virtue, says Silentio. By poetizing the *Akedah* with these alternative narratives, Silentio avoids the hermeneutical concern of the broader context of Abraham's trial within its own narrative. The promise of God to Abraham is to make of him a great nation—a promise that depends upon an heir, but also upon the benevolence of God to bestow it. An exegetical hermeneutic would need to reconcile

these two character elements within the larger development of the promise in the course of time elapsed in the story up to this point.

Kierkegaard will later draw upon such textual elements, but within his hermeneutic it is not the author's construction of the narrative that is under examination, but the particular nature of Abraham within the context of (and in contrast to) Hegel's philosophy. This abstraction is the first remove from what classical hermeneutics centers its focus upon, namely, authorial intention. The subordination of Kierkegaard's authority in the use of a pseudonym and the pseudonym Silentio's subordination of his own authority in the sections preceding the problemata constitute a second and third remove, respectively. The poetical use of the analogies and the rhetorical aims of the philosophical dialectic produce a hermeneutic that is no longer tied to its original text or author, but has become the constitutive text of Kierkegaard, his pseudonym, and the reader, the reader holding the final privilege of acknowledging or denying any authoritative meaning.

From here, it is for us to inquire into the particular poetic form and rhetorical impact of the hermeneutical shifts that occur within the text and without the text as we follow the arguments that Kierkegaard lays out through Silentio. After admitting the three tragic heroes as subsumed by the universal and negating their relation to Abraham, Silentio brings in his conclusion on the dialectic of teleological suspension:

> But I come back to Abraham. During the time before the result, either Abraham
> was a murderer every minute or we stand before a paradox that is higher than all
> mediations. The story of Abraham contains, then, a teleological suspension of
> the ethical. As the single individual he became higher than the universal. This
> is the paradox that cannot be mediated….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. (66-67)

Thus, Silentio draws the reader back to the mystical, the paradoxical object of faith, which is at once recognizable, but impossible to understand or mediate. The inner hermeneutic as run its circle and has both shed its light upon and shrouded in darkness the original text.

4.7 Fear and Trembling: Problema II

As he does in problema I, Silentio sets up the dialectic by accepting the ethical as the universal; this time carrying it out as the divine. The ethical as the divine universal situates the singular individual in an essential duty to God, not in relation to God as God, but in relation to God as the universal. He then presents Hegel's duty as the authority of the outer over the inner. Against this, the paradox of faith is represented as a special sense of the interiority that is incommensurable with exteriority. It is here that Silentio must bring in the concept of infinite resignation to differentiate the interiority of faith from the interiority of philosophy. In order to go beyond reason, Kierkegaard must make this distinction between an aporetic paradox and the paradox of faith. The former ends in infinite resignation while the latter is its fulfillment by virtue of the absurd. Upon this differentiation rests the entirety of Silentio's positive arguments. The polemic against Hegel could survive on the strength of infinite resignation as a critique, but the understanding of faith, though unmediated, must have its *process* of engagement explicated if the work is to be more than a critique of Hegel, and for the hermeneutic to explain its indefinite circular movement. Whereas Hegel's speculative movements lead

to hypostasis, Kierkegaard's movements lead to repetition of the moment of the absurd. But let us focus more acutely on the problema II: the absolute duty to God.

Silentio's framing of the absolute duty to God is purified, idiosyncratic singularity: "that there is an absolute duty to God, for in this relationship of duty the individual relates himself as the single individual absolutely to the absolute" (70). It is in this formulation that ethics is made relative to the absolute:

> [T]o say that it is a duty to love God means something different from the above, for is this duty is absolute, then the ethical is reduced to the relative. From this it does not follow that the ethical is invalidated; rather, the ethical receives a completely different expression, a paradoxical expression, such as, for example, that love to God may bring the knight of faith to give his love to the neighbor— an expression opposite to that which, ethically speaking, is duty. (70)

How will Silentio defend this hermeneutic? The first movement involves what might be called telescoping the object. Silentio uses Luke 14:26[29] to narrow the lens on the object of faith that will be broadened over the context of the problem of faith as absolute duty to God. The ethical impossibility (from Hegel's philosophy) of the verse merges well with the knight of faith characterization of Abraham, for as we remember at the end of problema one Abraham was either the murderer or the knight of faith. Here the issue of hatred becomes the opposing side of the coin for describing the knight of faith. Silentio qualifies the paradox accordingly: "The absolute duty can lead one to do what ethics would forbid [i.e. hate mother, father, sibling, self], but it can never lead the knight of faith to stop loving" (74). The verse clings to Abraham through this analogical construction.

The second movement in the hermeneutic occurs by way of Hegelizing the Church, that is, the universal body of believers in Christ. This rhetorical equation

functions to maintain the individual in absolute relation to the absolute, despite other readings that may read the individual as an inextricable member of the Church as the Body of Christ.[30] This is not to say Silentio cannot reconcile the individuality of the members within the Body, but that such a movement would derail the flow of his argument and deny the reading that he uses against Hegel. Silentio adopts a narrow formulation of the Church in order to cast it against the Hegelian system. The Hegelizing the Church is its metaphoric identification with the State:

> The idea of the Church is not qualitatively different from the idea of the state. As soon as the single individual can enter into it by a simple mediation, and as soon as the single individual has entered into the paradox, he does not arrive at the idea of the Church; he does not get out of the paradox, but he must find therein either his salvation or his damnation. A Church-related hero such as that expresses the universal in his act, and there will be no one in the Church, not even his father and mother, who does not understand him. (74)

In both equating the Luke passage and distinguishing the singular individual from identification with the Church, Silentio emboldens the absolute individual within his hermeneutic. The former movement is accomplished by means of a rhetorical telescoping while the latter movement is accomplished by way of metaphorical equivocation. Notice that neither of these tools are employed in the service of exegesis of the text of the *Akedah* narrative or its author's meaning. The constitutive text that Kierkegaard/Silentio is weaving is utilizing textual elements abstracted from their original context of validation and authority.

Once again it is necessary to focalize where the hermeneutic is going for Kierkegaard. Having teleologically suspended the ethical as universal thereby mystifying the τελοζ of faith and by positing the absolute individual in relation to the

absolute, Kierkegaard mystifies the experience of faith by making the movement of faith

idiosyncratic:

> Whether the single individual actually is undergoing a spiritual trial or is a knight of faith, only the single individual himself can decide….The true knight of faith is always absolute isolation; the spurious knight is sectarian….the knight of faith, on the other hand, is the paradox; he is the single individual, simply and solely the single individual without any connections and complications….The knight of faith is assigned solely to himself; he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understandable to others, but he has no vain desire to instruct others. The pain is his assurance; vain desire he does not know—for that his soul is too earnest. (79-80)

The hermeneutic which has been abstracted from original text and author is not

abstracted from direct mediation. The circle is not only indefinite and continuous in its

interpretive conclusions, but it is reified and indefinitely symbolized in its authority. It

is here where the inner hermeneutic and outer hermeneutic are twisted, as a coil, and

split into their respective realms. Kierkegaard, nor Silentio can stand in the place of the

reader and though their hermeneutic has clear implications outside of the text

(Kierkegaard/Silentio's hermeneutic *is their own*, multi-vocally) it is also nuanced,

altered, radically or otherwise, by the individual reader's own apprehension and

appropriation in the encounter (Kierkegaard's hermeneutic *is my own*, univocally). The

hermeneutic is characteristically double-entendre—repetitions ever-standing-under;

doubly interpreted unfolding.

4.8 Fear and Trembling: Problema III

In the final problema the ethical as universal is constituted as that which is

disclosed. Insofar as this hold, Abraham stands in breach of the universal because he did

not disclose his ordeal to those it concerned the most, or to anyone for that matter. In

order to salvage the supremacy of faith that he has been building, Kierkegaard must also place the universal as mediation itself. The undisclosable, unmediated absolute individual in relation to the absolute is incommunicable by the very nature of its relationship as higher than the universal and the separation of the infinite and the finite. It is in the final problema that Kierkegaard, through Silentio, addresses the relation between ethics and aesthetics; or what might be called the relation between philosophy and poetics, and what might also be called the sublime.

The problema begins with a discussion of recognition and hiddenness using Aristotle's discussion of drama in the *Poetics*. The dyad is the central rhetorical hinge upon which tragedy turns:

> In Greek tragedy, the hiddenness (and as a result of it the recognition) is an epic remnant based on a fate in which the dramatic action vanishes and in which it has its dark, mysterious source. Because of this, a Greek tragedy has an effect similar to that of a marble statue, which lacks the potency of the eye. Greek tragedy is blind. Therefore it takes a certain abstraction if one is to be influenced by it properly. (84)

The abstraction that Silentio is indicating here is not put forth in rhetorical language but is, willy-nilly, the enthymematic moment of dramatic tragedy. Silentio concentrates on hiddenness and recognition within the tragedy, but what it would be *recognized* as by the original audience is hubris. The *Akedah* could be taken from this dramatic perspective, it could seek to understand Abraham's hubris, but of course, the *Akedah* is not tragic, nor is Kierkegaard especially concerned with the original audience's relation to the story. The hermeneutic requires understanding to come from within the narrative, and not from the broader intention by which the author constructed the narrative or the reception of the original audience. The point of departure for Silentio's argument requires

illustration: he needs the categories of disclosure and hiddenness to pursue dialectically through aesthetics and ethics toward faith. However, within the illustration we can see that the hermeneutic employed draws the interpreter into the text, drawing meaning from its subjects in their own context. The circular process of classical hermeneutics from the author's text to the context of its construction and back again becomes an internalized circular process with the text itself—the hero's knowledge position to the larger context of the narrative and back again. The recentralization of interpretation on this interior circle is a shift from classical hermeneutics and is accomplished by the rhetorical choice of Silentio to derive the dyad of disclosure and hiddenness in this way.

Let us mark off the dialectic before we seek out the ways in which rhetoric and poetics are operating within the problema. Remember that it was originally ethics that was paired with disclosure and then aesthetics and ethics were set as a dyad for dialectic inquiry as were disclosure and hiddenness. Silentio balances the four terms in the following manner:

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          Ethics               Aesthetics
          -------------        --------------
          Disclosure           Hiddenness
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It is by way of several examples Silentio arrives at this construction: "Esthetics, then, demanded the hiddenness and rewarded it; ethics demanded the disclosure and punished the hiddenness" (86). A series of literary examples of proceeded through dialectically to strengthen the relations between these terms. In the same way that Silentio used the poetic accounts to carry the rhetorical force of his dialectical arguments in the previous problemata, so too he here proceeds.

All the while, Kierkegaard is drawing heavily upon his own ability to grasp rightly the elements of these narratives (hermeneutics—>poetics) in order to use them in comparison with Abraham (poetics—>hermeneutics—>poetics) so that he might dialectically prove the supremacy of Abraham as the knight of faith above the universal (poetics—>rhetoric—>philosophical hermeneutic). The parenthetical diagrams above betray the truly nonlinear relationships between rhetoric, poetics, and hermeneutics. The field of interpretation utilizes each of these constructions of knowledge in a web of connectivity that are at every point potential and actual in the system of their deployment. Though any given moment of an argument or literary creation one may be drawn upon to bear the heavier load, they are each in play, supportive and active within the process. Implicated in this process is Kierkegaard himself, who is, by way of his hermeneutic and through his rhetoric, stationed in a paradox of irony himself—what is incommunicable (the faith of Abraham) is being communicated about and what is uninterpretable (the dilemma of God's demand) is what he is interpreting. It is here where the distance provided by the pseudonym and the distance taken by the pseudonym position the reader in the same ironical paradox. The results of Kierkegaard's hermeneutic, accomplished by momentous feats of rhetoric and poetics, is difficult, confusing, and frustrating for the reader—and would this not be Kierkegaard's intention?

4.9 Concluding Remark

If one thing is clear from Kierkegaard's interpretation of the *Akedah*, it is that understanding does not always precede expression, nor does it have to in order to be

considered a reasonable and reasoning activity. But expression eventually and inevitably calls forth understanding; it calls forth interpretation; and it is in this fundamentally human work where rhetoric and poetics converge. Rhetorically, Kierkegaard's hermeneutics accomplishes a response that is indeterminate, even in its repetition. To say as much is not to deny that is has a singular meaning, or that the intention of Kierkegaard is unrecoverable or unimportant. On the contrary, understanding Kierkegaard's intentions and the meaning which he held fast are what allow us to decipher what sort of hermeneutic *Fear and Trembling* offers.

The significance of *Fear and Trembling* may far outstrip the narrower impact of understanding Kierkegaard's intentions, but for the rhetorician, to ignore that concern more often than not leads toward a production of one's own rhetoric rather than an understanding of another's rhetoric—epitomizing the claim so often labeled against rhetoric, that it is "mere words," "empty" persuasion, or worse, logomachy. However, the relevance of poetics relationship to rhetoric and, therefore, to hermeneutics is an important corrective to the often narrow lens that intentionality is accused of adopting, and to which it can no doubt fall prey.

Despite Kierkegaard's difficult hermeneutic and its existential cast, which aligns closely with the focuses of phenomenological and deconstructive hermeneutics, it is nonetheless possible and profitable to understand how his intentions are guiding his hermeneutic, how his agency is affecting the reception of his text and the text he examines. It is not simply culture's reception of the text, nor the structures and gaps of language itself that are to be accredited with what occurs in Kierkegaard's reading of the

Akedah, nor indeed, what occurs in the *Akedah* on account of Kierkegaard's reading. His agency is a key element, perhaps the primary element, in understanding how rhetoric shapes his hermeneutic and how his hermeneutic shapes the text he is interpreting. Possibility and perspective always precede probability and conclusion, though they are not always recognized or expressed as such.

Kierkegaard's Christianity is markedly evident in his interpretation of the *Akedah*, but the primary support for that conclusion comes in the final chapter. In the next chapter we will focus on a selection of contemporary Jewish responses to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, which will complete this thesis' circumscription of *Fear and Trembling* as an investigation and example of the ongoing relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics.

CHAPTER V

THE BINDING OF KIERKEGAARD

The previous chapter promised to situate Kierkegaard within the Christian tradition of hermeneutics. In order to do this, the final chapter of inquiry will explore several modern Jewish interpretations and critical responses to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and additionally, the *Akedah*. The (re)interpretations are from three separate Jewish scholars who wrote at three different periods in the 20th century. The first author is Erich Auerbach (1957), whose comments appear in his popular book, *Mimesis*. Auerbach's comments do not address Kierkegaard directly, but his focus and observations provide a useful comparative hermeneutic and will help us to resituate the *Akedah* from its treatment in chapter III of this thesis. Following Auerbach's general observations of Hebrew narrative and the *Akedah*, we will turn to Susan Handelman's (1982) excellent discussion of the interpretive traditions of Christianity and Rabbinic Judiasm in *The Slayers of Moses*. We will then turn to a second Jewish author, Emmanuel Levinas (1996), whose book, *Proper Names*, has a section that argues against Kierkegaard's interpretation of the *Akedah* and attempts to recapture the primary place of ethics in the narrative. A short Catholic reply to Levinas will be examined before moving on to the third Jewish author, Jacques Derrida. Derrida's *Gift of Death* (1995) is a deconstructive reading of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, which also incorporates comments on Levinas' critique of Kierkegaard. The reader should note that the progression through the authors is chronological rather than topical, though it is to the advantage of Derrida as the last writer to have all the works present for his analysis.

Finally, we will return to Handelman for some observations on Derrida and draw some conclusions in line with the ongoing discussion of the relationship of rhetoric and hermeneutics and the dialectic between Christian and Jewish traditions of interpretation. Let us begin with Auerbach.

5.1 Mimesis

Auerbach's reading of the *Akedah* is done in comparison, or rather contrast, to the epics of Homer. It is through this comparison that Auerbach shows the particular style of Hebrew narrative and especially that of the *Akedah* itself. Auerbach's first observation is the suddenness with which the reader is presented with the action of the narrative. There is no prior explanation for God's meeting with Abraham, no indication of time or place or movement to or from somewhere, no exposure of God's reasons for testing Abraham (1957, 5-6). It is this peculiar (when compared to the Greeks) lack of description of God that leads Auerbach to explain that the Jewish conception of God:

> [W]as not fixed in form and content, and was alone; his lack of form, his lack of local habitation, his singleness, was in the end not only maintained but developed even further in competition with the comparatively far more manifest gods of the surrounding Near Eastern world. The concept of God held by the Jews is less a cause than a symptom of their manner of comprehending and representing things. (6)

This conception of God figures well into Kierkegaard's own view of God as transcendent and ineffable—the Absolutely Other—and will play a part in both Levinas' and Derrida's interpretations, though in separate ways.

Auerbach is keen to note the compact nature of the narrative descriptions, observing that the lesser characters and objects in the story do no even receive adjectives or epithets, though their purpose is directed solely toward that "end which God has

commanded" (7). Though Abraham's journey is "like a silent progress through the indeterminate and the contingent" Auerbach interprets the only indication of time "early in the morning" is taken to be a construction:

> So "early in the morning" is given, not as an indication of time, but for the sake of its ethical significance; it is intended to express the resolution, the promptness, the punctual obedience of the sorely tried Abraham. (7, emphasis mine)

It is interesting that Auerbach calls attention to Abraham's ethical supremacy in the face of his willingness to commit what Kierkegaard calls the supreme violation of ethics. As we will see a little further, Levinas attaches his arguments to the very notion that Auerbach is highlighting, namely ethics, positing it as the dominant theme of the narrative.

Auerbach's next important observation concerns the description of Isaac. Unlike the other characters, he receives an all-important descriptor, he is the "only son" whom Abraham loves. No other characteristics receive mention, because it is this one characteristic that puts the reader in suspense and puts God in the unenviable position as chief antagonist, for He is fully aware of what He is asking (8). The dialogue in the narrative, unlike Homeric dialogue, does not externalize thoughts, but rather "indicate[s] thoughts which remain unexpressed" (8). No motives are given, no expression of feeling, only:

> [T]he externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else is left to obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a

single goal (and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and "fraught with background." (9)

It is no wonder that so many different interpretations have arisen from one text, and why few texts are as equal for the task of examining what hermeneutic (and therefore what rhetoric) is driving the interpreter's thought. It is Auerbach's concept of "backgrounding" that drives interpreters to explain what the narrative leaves barren. Permit me to quote his description of the term in full:

> [E]ven the separate personages can be represented as possessing "background"; God is always so represented in the Bible, for he is not comprehensible, as is Zeus; it is always only "something" of him that appears, he always extends into depths. But even human beings in the Biblical stories have greater depths of time, fate, and consciousness than do the human beings in Homer; although they are nearly always caught up in an event engaging all their faculties, they are not so entirely immersed in its present that they do not remain continually conscious of what has happened to them earlier and elsewhere; their thoughts and feelings have more layers, are more entangled. Abraham's actions are explained not only by what is happening to him at the moment, nor yet only by his character (as Achilles' actions by his courage and his pride, and Odysseus' by his versatility and foresightedness), but by his previous history; he remembers, he is constantly conscious of, what God has promised him and what God has already accomplished for him—his soul is torn between desperate rebellion and hopeful expectation; his silent obedience is multilayered, has background. (9-10)

Auerbach's notion of backgrounding encourages the interpreter to be cognizant of what Auerbach attributes to the consciousness of the Biblical characters—their relational history. The *Akedah* as a narrative within the larger Abrahamic narrative requires the reader to be aware of the preceding interactions (something Levinas will also highlight) and one must also consider God's own history the precedes even Abraham's history. It is no small matter that phenomenology tends to "background" history while foregrounding the present moment, the existent moment, which of course, is what is highlighted by Kierkegaard, the oft labeled "father of existentialism."

The presuppositions of Kierkegaard resurface in Derrida on an opposing plane, but constitute a rhetoric of the here and now that formulates and figures their respective hermeneutic endeavors. Kierkegaard is assuming that the Word's presence is ineffable, and can only be experience through a transcendent movement of faith—presence is a mystery. Likewise for Derrida, the Word's presence is ineffable, not because it is reached through transcendence, but because it cannot be reached at all—presence is a myth. But we should not get too far ahead of Auerbach just yet.

There is one final element that must be brought to light from Auerbach, and that is his own hermeneutic position. While he objects to what he calls (polemically?) "rationalistic interpretation" it seems that what he describes resembles the historical-critical approaches that have sought to reproduce the factually accurate historical setting, characters, etc. He argues that the writer of the narrative (whom he assumes is the Elohist of the documentary hypothesis, ironically, a construction derived from historical-critical scholarship) believes with conviction in the veracity and truth of the story he is writing (11). Out of this conviction comes a radical urgency, says Auerbach, that imposes itself upon the reader unlike Homeric epic:

> The world of the Scriptures stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other senses, issue, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it. The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels. (12)

Auerbach's description of the way in which the Bible confronts its reader resembles Kierkegaard's own estimation of the example of Abraham, though certainly from a

different teleological vantage point. The idea of submission and rebelliousness, of faith and absurdity, of responsibility and heresy (discussed in Derrida[31]) highlights this confrontation that the reader has with Scripture and that the reader confronts in hermeneutics. It is this necessity of meaning (when it is so desired) that begs to be thought (interpreted) as revealed (rhetorically). As Auerbach puts it:

> In the story of Isaac, it is not only God's intervention at the beginning and the end, but even the factual and psychological elements that come between, that are mysterious, merely touched upon, fraught with background; and therefore they require subtle investigation and interpretation, they demand them (12).

It is this demand for interpretation that has led to the effusion of interpretations of the *Akedah* throughout the course of its ongoing history. Auerbach indicts Paul as the radical reinterpreter of Judaism, but it can also be said, and with more particular force, that the radical break in interpreting the *Akedah* also came with Paul, who evoked the example of Abraham as evidence of faith in God and faith in the resurrection of the dead. Jewish interpretations have made much account of the Pauline interpretation, perhaps due to his unashamed Christian apologetic, though he was certainly trained in Rabbinic exegesis before his conversion. The world has yet to see a synthesis of these Jewish and Christian hermeneutics and it may never (many on both sides might exclaim, "God forbid it ever be seen!"). Indeed, as Handelman has shown, the two traditions have insoluble assumptions on fundamental issues on interpretation.

5.2 The Slayers of Moses

There are several differences in the philosophical presuppositions of Judaism and Christianity that Handelman (1982) explains throughout her book. One significant differences is the assumption of an ultimate reality outside or beyond the boundaries of

the words of Scripture in Christianity (through the Greeks) contrasted with the ultimate reality authoritatively contained within (and created through) the words of Scripture in Jewish thought (1982, 30-31). Additionally, Jewish belief in the oral traditions of Scripture entails that the Word, as creative, continues to be manifest (though it is eternal) in the Rabbinic commentaries across history. Christianity's belief in Jesus as the creative Word entails that the creative word has its end in a person rather than in the words themselves. The theoretical constraints on interpretation therefore diverge dramatically in the two traditions. For Judaism, the organizing principle of an authoritative interpretation is *halakhah*, or "the way," which was the foundation of legal interpretation and the duties of Jews to God and man. Handelman notes that combining *midrash halakhah* and the *Mishnah*, the oral law, was not intended "to fix the law, but to organize, facilitate, and preserve its study" (45). Interpretation is constitutive and continuous within Judaism, whereas in Christianity interpretation is an uncovering and is fixed upon one meaning. Indeed, the person of Christ becomes a figure through which all interpretation proceeds in Christian hermeneutics, typified by the allegorical and typological methods of interpretation that dominated the early Greek Church fathers (83-120). The distinction between the "letter" and "spirit" in Christianity was fundamental to their transcendent interpretations of Scripture that were in stark contrast to Jewish interpretations. These divergences provide the proper context for understanding the critical responses of the Jewish Levinas and Derrida to the Christian Kierkegaard. For each of these writer emerges from within rather than apart from their religious interpretive traditions as will be evident seen by the end of this chapter.

5.3 Proper Names

Levinas (1996) acknowledges Kierkegaard as an important figure in European thought in regard to maintaining the irreducibility of human subjectivity in contrast to the notions of Hegel's idealism and objective Being (66). Against the System and against the Kantian notion that Being was the correlate of thought, Kierkegaard recognized the interiority of Being, but encapsulated it not in a thinking thought that can be expressed, but in a secret mystery, or perhaps a mysterious secret, that is inexpressible (1996, 67). Levinas summarizes the value of Kierkegaard's notion of existence in its polemic against the totalitarian results of Hegelian subjectivity in the service of impersonal logos (68). But against Kierkegaard, Levinas poses the question of whether a return to subjectivity requires a turn away from thought, and whether such a turn does not lead to other forms of violence on the other side of the totalitarian violence Kierkegaard felt so keenly (68). What Levinas would ask of Kierkegaard is whether there is a true ethical stage that is not something other than Kierkegaard's description of it as "generality and equivalence of the inner and the outer" (69).

It is with this in mind that Levinas provides an opposing vision of the *Akedah*, contrasting Kierkegaard's interpretation set forth in *Fear and Trembling*. To the question "Is the relation to the Other that entering into, and disappearing within, generality?" that Levinas says is what must be asked in opposition to Kierkegaard and to Hegel, a (re)interpretation of the *Akedah* in terms of ethics must be undertaken. Levinas situates Kierkegaard's notion of God in a quandary: "Thus, he [Kierkegaard] describes the encounter with God as a subjectivity rising to the religious level: God above the

ethical order!" (74). In the exclamation point is found the impossibility of this notion for Levinas, who would turn the notion around entirely: "Perhaps Abraham's ear for hearing the voice that brought him back to the ethical order was the highest moment in this drama" (74). Levinas takes the culmination of the narrative to be in its teleological direction—Abraham's obedience revealed, *without* the necessity of breaking with the order of ethics, but *instead* reestablished in that order. For Levinas, the will to act is not, in this case, identical to the act itself, thus the ethical is not transcended by some religious existence, but is rather confirmed as the epitome of religious existence.

Levinas explains the notion of ethics in terms of the responsibility of the subject, the *I*, before the Other. "Subjectivity *is* in that responsibility [for the Other] and only irreducible subjectivity can assume a responsibility. That is what constitutes the ethical" (73). In this phrase, Levinas appropriates Kierkegaard's notion of the subject in its irreducible relationship to the Other (for Kierkegaard, the Absolute Other). But instead of accepting its secrecy and inexpressibility, Levinas argues that Kierkegaard mistook what it was that really shatters the generalized System:

> If the relation to exteriority cannot form a totality whose parts can be compared and generalized, it is not because the I keeps its secret within the system, but because the exteriority in which human beings show us their faces shatters the totality. (73)

The hermeneutic of Levinas rests upon a different philosophical foundation than does Kierkegaard's, but it is more than just the philosophical presuppositions and their correlative arguments that there is difference. There is also difference in the context, and specifically the rhetorical context, which they assume to encompass the *Akedah* narrative.

Taking into consideration the observation of the "backgrounding" that Auerbach saw in Biblical narrative, we can see where Levinas' hermeneutic distinguishes itself from Kierkegaard's in terms of rhetoric, both in the sense of interpreting the narrative (a *hermeneutical* rhetoric) and in terms of conveying that interpretation to a new audience (a hermeneutical *rhetoric*). Specifically, Levinas' interpretation pays closer attention to the rhetorical invention available to the author of the narrative: the "backgrouning" provides the situational context for the narrative as well as a range of linguistic words, constructions, etc., from which to draw upon to highlight the important points of the narrative. Kierkegaard is presumably aware of all this, but chooses rather to downplay or omit what Levinas would bring to bear. Indeed, Levinas points out an important omission by Kierkegaard that Levinas himself plays up in his interpretation of the *Akedah*:

> And Kierkegaard never speaks of the situation in which Abraham enters into dialogue with God to intercede in favor of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the name of the just who may be present there. In that passage, Abraham is fully aware of his nothingness and mortality. "I am bust dust and ashes" practically opens the dialogue, and the annihilating flame of divine ire burns before Abraham's eyes each time he intervenes. (74)

Levinas recounts the previous characters of Abraham and God in the prior narrative (Genesis 18:1-33) as "background" for the *Akedah*. In chapter II several commentaries acknowledged the part that God's prior promises play in the *Akedah* and here Levinas is incorporating characteristics of Abraham, God, and their relationship into his interpretation. By eliminating these considerations from his reading, Kierkegaard is utilizing a narrower rhetorical context for the *Akedah*, and it is precisely here where Levinas exposes the conceivable limitations of his interpretation.[32]

Levinas' opposition to Kierkegaard is also based upon a rhetorical hermeneutics. He is driven to disagree because of what he sees as the results of Kierkegaard's observations:

> What disturbs me in Kierkegaard may be reduced to two points. . . .The second point. It is Kierkegaard's violence that shocks me. The manner of the strong and the violent, who fear neither scandal nor destruction, has become, since Kierkegaard and before Nietzsche, a manner of philosophy. One philosophizes with a hammer. In that permanent scandal, in that opposition to everything, I perceive by anticipation the echoes of certain cases of verbal violence that claimed to be schools of thought, and pure ones at that. (76)

It is because of these sensations that Levinas finds in Kierkegaard[33] (or perhaps more precisely, in Kierkegaard's *manner*) that his interpretation of the *Akedah* (one might argue, an interpretation called forth by this opposition to Kierkegaard) relies upon a rhetorical hermeneutic—a hermeneutic that proceeds through its interpretation with attention to the forthcoming utterance it will become for a present audience. It is with this in mind that Levinas can conclude about Abraham: "That he obeyed the first voice is astonishing: that he had sufficient distance with respect to that obedience to hear the second voice—that is essential" (77).

5.4 The Gift of Death

Like Levinas, Derrida's (1995) reading of the *Akedah* is born out of a response to Kierkegaard. Derrida's method of deconstructing written works is itself a sort of exegesis, though without the typical restraints that are understood under that term's history of practice. Derrida's interpretation of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the *Akedah* focuses on two particular categories, which his previous chapters in *The Gift of Death* extract from other sources: gift and secret. For Derrida it is the gift that takes up

the central focus, though (and Levinas would be likely to agree) for Kierkegaard it is the

secret that figures more prominently. Derrida explains Kierkegaard's use of the allusion

to Philippians 2:12, positing the Other (here, God) as Wholly Other:

> If Paul says "adieu" [literally "for God" or "to God"] and absents himself as he
> asks them to obey, in fact ordering them to obey (for one doesn't ask for
> obedience, one orders it), it is because God is himself absent, hidden and silent,
> separate, secret, at the moment he has to be obeyed. God doesn't give his
> reasons, he acts as he intends, he doesn't have to give his reasons or share
> anything with us: neither his motivations, if he has any, nor his deliberations, nor
> his decisions. Otherwise he wouldn't be God, we wouldn't be dealing with the
> Other as God or with God as wholly other [tout autre]. (1995, 57, italics in
> original)

Here is the secret that so enthralls Kierkegaard, which Derrida says is a meditation on a

"still Jewish experience of a secret, hidden, separate, absent, or mysterious God" (58). It

is not surprising that Derrida chooses to focus upon *Problema III*, the silence of

Abraham in his reading of Kierkegaard.   In the Christian tradition, as Handelman

explains in *The Slayers of Moses*, "The theology of the word is the end of signification

and the consummation of desire in complete presence, and thus the word becomes

literally flesh, the word that is a silence transcending the entire system of discourse"

(119). For Derrida there is not presence and the word is never transcended, so it is an

imperative of his reading of Kierkegaard that silence be reread. He follows

Kierkegaard's argument that Abraham's silence is a breach of the ethical order, a

betrayal of ethics (59). Derrida, unlike Levinas, fully accepts the dichotomy between

subjectivity and ethics, that ethics is to be understood generally:

> Such is the aporia of responsibility: one always risks not managing to accede to
> the concept of responsibility in the process of forming it. For responsibility (we
> would no longer dare speak of "the universal concept of responsibility") demans
> on the one hand an accounting, a general answering-for-oneself with respect to

the general and before the generality, hence the idea of substitution, and, on the other hand, uniqueness, absolute singularity, hence nonsubstitution, nonrepetition, silence, and secrecy. What I am saying here about responsibility can also be said about decision. The ethical involves me in substitution, as does speaking. (61, italic in original)

Out of this comes the responsibility to the Absolute in contrast to the responsibility to the general (ethics). Thus far, Derrida is reading the *Akedah* alongside Kierkegaard.

Derrida continues his exegesis of Kierkegaard by transitioning from the secret that must be silent to the gift that is a double-sided paradox. The gift of death is one both of Isaac as Abraham's gift and Abraham's subjective offering as gift:

The paradox [of a love that is willing to hate what one loves] cannot be grasped in time and through mediation, that is to say in language and through reason. Like the gift and "the gift of death," it remains irreducible to presence or to presentation, it demands a temporality of the instant without ever constituting a present. . . .in the act of giving death, sacrifice suspends both the work of negating and work itself, perhaps even the work of mourning. (65, italics in original)

The gift and the secret share a similar paradoxical nature, though they are not one-and-the same thing. Derrida's difficult exegesis spirals around to the point he is making, and has been making, about the nature of responsibility:

Absolute duty demands that one behave in an irresponsible manner (by means of treachery or betrayal), while still recognizing, confirming, and reaffirming the very thing one sacrifices, namely, the order of human ethics and responsibility. In a word, ethics must be sacrificed in the name of duty. It is a duty not to respect, out of duty, ethical duty. One must behave not only in an ethical or responsible manner, but in a nonethical, nonresponsible manner, and one must do that in the name of duty, of an infinite duty, in the name of absolute duty. (66-67, italics in original)

Here again, Derrida has no disagreement with Kierkegaard on the way in which ethics and subjectivity seem to function in an apparent paradox. However, Derrida carries the paradox even further than Kierkegaard. Derrida asserts that every other (one) is every

(bit) other (68). That is to say, if God, as the Absolute Other (every bit other) demands this radical singularity of duty, it follows too that every other (in their radical singularity) is also absolutely other and requires the same (ir)responsibility (68). Every singular human being has a duty to every other human being, not simply those in proximity or within one's family, etc:

> As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, the look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all others. I offer a gift of death, I betray, I don't need to raise my knife over my son on Mount Moriah for that. Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am doing that, raising my knife over what I love and must love, over those to whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurably. (68)

Derrida's interpretation of the import of the *Akedah* as a figure of one's relationship to the Other is at once in step with Kierkegaard and a step beyond it as well. Like Kierkegaard, Derrida is willing to accept that one's absolute singular relationship to the Absolute requires an absolute duty, but he goes beyond Kierkegaard's formulation by drawing the Absolute back into the realm of concrete relationships: every other one is every bit other and therefore one's absolute duty extends to every possible human relationship.

But Derrida's reading also is something quite different from Levinas. For Levinas, the offering of oneself to the Other is a fulfillment of the generality, for that generality is produced in individual singularities, but for Derrida, there is no such arc of change:

> I can respond only to the one (or to the One), that is, to the other, by sacrificing the other to that one. I am responsible to any one (that is to say to any other)

only by failing in my responsibility to all the others, to the ethical or political generality. (70)

For Derrida and, in a more narrow fashion, for Kierkegaard's Silentio, the ethical must be transgressed in the absolute duty to the Other, but for Levinas the ethical is only embodied in the decision to give oneself for an other. It is as though for Derrida and Kierkegaard the ethical generality is a prefigurement or precondition for the ethical decision of a singularity. For Levinas, generality might be better understood as the standard that arises as each singularity offers itself to the other. The important observation here is not about ethics, but about hermeneutics, for in order to arrive at their conclusions, Kierkegaard, Derrida, and Levinas must appropriate the text(s) (rhetorical invention) and derive their understanding (hermeneutics). To summarize, Kiekegaard's Silentio seeks that which is beyond signification and linguistic content, Levinas seeks to situate content within a more comprehensive word, and Derrida seeks to dissolve the transcendence and presence into a concrete wording.

With these distinguishing features in place, one can understand the hermeneutic that Derrida carries into his reading of the *Akedah*. It follows the phenomenological stance that Kierkegaard's existential hermeneutic prefigures, though its fidelity lies in the negation/frustration rather than the affirmation/satisfaction of meaning. That is to say, both Derrida and Kierkegaard exalt the current historical moment in their readings—Kierkegaard the moment of presence and Derrida the moment of rewriting. Derrida frames the *Akedah* similarly to Kierkegaard:

> [B]y commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son, to put his son to death by offering a gift of death to God, by means of this double gift wherein the gift of death consists of putting to death by raising one's knife over someone and

> putting death forward by giving it as an offering, God leaves him free to refuse—and that is the test. . . .In essence God says to Abraham: I can see right away that you have understood what absolute duty towards the unique one means, that it means responding where there is no reason to be asked for or to be given; I see that not only have you understood that as an idea, but that—and here lies the responsibility—you have acted on it, you have put it into effect, you were ready to carry it out at this very instant (God stops him at the very instant where there is no more time, where no more time is given, it is as if Abraham had already killed Isaac: the concept of the instant is always indispensable): thus you had already put it into effect, you are absolute responsibility, you had the courage to behave like a murderer in the eyes of the world and your loved ones, in the eyes of morality, politics, and of the generality of the general or of you kind. And you had even renounced hope. (72)

The long paragraph encompasses Derrida's interpretation of the *Akedah* and remains relatively close to Kierkegaard, save in the renouncing of hope. Kierkegaard plays upon the New Testament exposition that Abraham knew he would receive Isaac again through resurrection, but Derrida does not align himself with Kierkegaard on that point.

Derrida also makes an interesting intertextual interpretation of Abraham's response to Isaac that he incorporates into his argument (the rhetoric following upon his hermeneutic). In "responding without responding" Abraham, like Melville's Bartleby, "would prefer not to" accomplish the thing he is responsible to do (74-75). What Kierkegaard would reserve as incomparable, Derrida finds a comparison for, an a literary comparison at that:

> He [Abraham] can say nothing more and will do nothing more if God, if the Other, continues to lead him towards death, to the death that is offered as a gift. And Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" is also a sacrificial passion that will lead him to death, a death given by the law, by a society that doesn't even know why it acts the way it does. (75)

Derrida would take the comparison further, highlighting the fact that in neither of these narratives does a woman figure with any prominence. However, Derrida prefers not to

follow through with his observation, leaving it as a tantalizing question, itself a sort of silent sacrifice.

Another interesting departure from Kierkegaard in Derrida's reading is the tonality that Derrida gives to Abraham's dialogue. For Kierkegaard, and for Derrida, the irony in Abraham's words is real and penetrating, but for Derrida the irony is "meta-rhetorical" (77). Precisely because Abraham accepts his responsibility to the Other without knowledge, he also proceeds without knowledge and he will not speak in "figures, fables, parables, metaphors, ellipses, or enigmas" (77). It is interesting here that Derrida would reduce rhetoric into its sylistics, leaving out its more important canon of invention. What Derrida would see surmounted in Abraham's dialogue is more precisely understood, not as a meta-rhetoric, but as *the* rhetoric for that particular moment, for Abraham and Isaac's *kairos*. Abraham has been given the command by God, a command to sacrifice Isaac, and if Abraham's faith has led him to obey that command, to say that God will provide is drawing upon the veracity of that command, for when Abraham accepts by faith (*pistis*) the command, it is God who possesses Isaac by Abraham's obedience. The act must be carried out, but Abraham for Abraham to be willing to give Isaac as a sacrifice, it is also incumbent upon him to recognize Isaac as God's gift to him, an element that has its own background in the story of Sarah's barrenness, and *in the name of* Isaac. It could be argued that this is not an Abraham acting without knowledge, for though he does not possess knowledge of the outcome, he does possess a knowledge of whom it is that commands, and what that relationship constitutes for him, as a faithful servant.

But it is not upon Abraham's "meta-rhetoric" that Derrida binds Kierkegaard's interpretation, but it is to the other others that the offering is made, to the *tout autre est tout autre*—every other (one) is every (bit) other. The move is characteristic of Derrida, using the ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings in the French to explicate and expand upon the ground Kierkegaard has laid. It was indicated above that Derrida would use this phrase to depart from Kierkegaard, but Derrida's own words accomplish it more poetically:

> This formula [*tout autre est tout autre*] disturbs Kierkegaard's discourse on one level while at the same time reinforcing its most extreme ramifications. It implies that God, as the wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other. And since each of us, everyone else, each other is infinitely other in its absolute singularity, inaccessible, solitary, transcendent, nonmanifest, originarily nonpresent to my *ego*. . .then what can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to *every other (one) as every (bit) other*, in particular my relation to my neighbor or my loved ones who are as inaccessible to me, as secret and transcendent as Jahweh. (78)

Derrida doubly deconstructs both Kierkegaard's interpretation (while saving its choicest observation, in Derrida's estimation) and the *Akedah*, for at once does Derrida turn upside down and inside out the notion of one's absolute singularity in relation to the Absolute Other. For Kierkegaard's Silentio, this relationship existed only between a human and God, for only God was Absolutely Other, but Derrida turns that figure inside out by applying it to every other human being (no longer a singular relationship, but indeterminately plural) and flipping it upside down so that there is no longer one Absolute Other, but an indefinite number of Absolute Others. But here Derrida, like Levinas, is deliberately misreading Kierkegaard by equating him directly with Silentio. I suspect that the purposes behind the misreading are similar—the commitment to the

word as such is an intended denial of the "presence" that transcends the word. For Levinas, for Derrida, Kierkegaard's attempts to distance himself pseudonymously does not escape his implication in Silentio's words.

Here is also where we see the departure of deconstructive hermeneutics from the phenomenological stance that is prefigured in Kierkegaard and from the more classical stance that Levinas resembles. Phenomenology advances upon a rhetoric of the presently-being-there individual, it is immersed in the particular perspective of that individual with the present culture. Deconstruction advances upon a rhetoric of the absent yet conceivable, beyond time, beyond any necessary consideration of individual, culture, or context (though these always *play a role*). Instead deconstructive rhetoric relies upon the ambiguity of language itself, upon its multiple meanings (*tout autre est tout autre*) by incorporating them into its hermeneutic, usually with the intent to pluralize, to open space for different readings to emerge. Phenomenology's hermeneutic is humanistic, the singular being in culture, whereas Deconstruction's hermeneutic is linguistic, the plural possibilities everywhere conceivable. Levinas' hermeneutic draws its impulse from the possible readings of the text, taking special consideration for how its internal relationships and intertextuality are influencing the narrative under question. Kierkegaard has intertextual considerations as well, but it is the individual character and the individual story that are focused upon so intently, and the weight of the text's significance for today overshadows its original importance.

It is possible to locate a phenomenological hermeneutic within Kierkegaard's reading, and while Levinas lies closer to scientific hermeneutics and Derrida lies closer

to deconstructive hermeneutics, both of their responses to Kierkegaard draw upon the phenomenological presupposition of reception of the text as opposed to its intention. Obscured is Kierkegaard's meaning (as he himself obscures) and the original meaning of the *Akedah* in order to highlight particular elements drawn from (rhetorical invention) their reading of Kierkegaard and their underlying commitment to a Rabbinic hermeneutic tradition. In Levinas' reading, meaning and significance are blurred, and the distinction is meaningless in Derrida's reading, in which significance is all there may be in any case. It only remains now to bring some closure to our inquiry into rhetoric and hermeneutics.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Throughout the chapters of this paper we have sought to identify the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics, the status of meaning, and compare Jewish and Christian interpretations the converge and diverge in their readings of the Akedah. The three types of hermeneutics discussed in chapter II, scientific, phenomenological, and deconstructive, each conceive of rhetoric in differing ways. Scientific hermeneutics provides the most comprehensive understanding of rhetorical invention, preserving more definitively a defensible rhetorical agency without (especially in Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance) sacrificing the valuable focus on a text's reception. Phenomenological hermeneutics focus predominantly upon the reception of a text, but not in any particular audience, but rather in the Being that emerges in cultural epochs. Thus, rhetorical invention is expanded indefinitely and rhetorical agency becomes increasingly indefensible. Deconstructive hermeneutics further universalizes rhetoric invention by placing within the context of the structure of language itself, which not only allows for, but requires continual restatement and rhetorical agency is reduced an empty concept. The different religious presuppositions that form the hermeneutic convictions of Christian and Jewish traditions are hard to align in any of these particular types of hermeneutics in a general manner. However, in particular cases, such as Kierkegaard, Levinas, and Derrida, there are recurring hermeneutic principles and commonplaces for rhetorical invention that surface. The Christian tradition's attention to transcendent and fixed meaning is starkly contrasted by Judaic tradition's creative and ongoing

intertextuality within the eternal words of their scriptures. For both traditions, interpretation is ongoing and encouraged. But whereas the novelty in Christian hermeneutics comes in the applications of the unchanging meaning of Christ as the Word of God, the novelty in Jewish hermeneutics comes in the re-interpretive meanings of the unchanging words of Scripture. The plurality of eternal words versus the singularity of an eternal person restricts the materials and suppositions that can be gathered through rhetorical invention.

What can be done in an inquiry into the intersection of rhetoric and hermeneutics can be repeated in a variety of investigative and interpretive practices and traditions, not limited to those with a typically "humanistic" flavor. The recent concern about the ubiquity of rhetoric34 demands that one be able to articulate in precisely what ways rhetoric is present, how it operates, and it relationship to the inevitable concern for other elements and categories that are present in any given context. Unless one is ready to commit to the ancient sophistic notion that speech is the ultimate power by which all things known are created, these questions and others require the rhetorician's close attention and analysis. The preceding chapters and pages have been this writer's attempt to identify the theoretical and practical relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics from a rhetorical perspective.

There are implications that have been pushed aside, such as the implications for rhetoric as a way of reading apart from its political contexts and as a way of speaking, and this omission resulted from the more dominant focus upon the hermeneutic side of the relationship. The advent of the difficulties surrounding the "everything is rhetorical"

discussions may be partly to blame for the confusion, for whenever the scope of a concept is broadened it risks losing clarity and definition. Chapter III and IV have, more or less clearly, attempted to show that rhetoric is indeed deeply invested in hermeneutics, but it need not be considered ubiquitous or necessarily the dominant consideration. Saying as much also implicates the present writer in a hermeneutic itself, that must be willing to choose from among the possibilities what to focus on, to draw out, to highlight in any given act of reading and explaining.

The complexities of these details may invite further confusion and they certainly invite further questioning; the continuance of refining and reopening inquiries that are available in the abstraction of general theory and in the ongoing and changing moments of historical contexts that inhabit this present world. What is more clear is that hermeneutics, as a theory of interpretation, entails its own theory of rhetoric as a starting point and as an articulation to an audience who will judge the credibility and validity of its observations. Whether rhetorical invention is limited to the scientific stringency of historical author and context, to the religious desire for the word of God, to the individual consciousness and cultural milieu, or to the possibility and impassability of language itself—each choice draws upon presuppositions, inductions, deductions, and reasoning that guide interpretive decisions and proceed toward an audience as a terminating *telos* that is a hermeneutic's own testament. But this rhetorical invention is not an "absolute singularity" that stands alone, for it is itself an application of its hermeneutic when it draws from its field of vision certain elements while excluding others.

NOTES

[1] There are numerous examples one could examine under this heading. See especially: Bazerman, Charles. 1989. *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. Rhetoric of the Human Sciences Series, University of Wisconsin Press. Ceccarelli, Leah. 2001. *Shaping Science with Rhetoric: The Cases of Dobzhansky, Schrodinger, and Wilson*. University of Chicago Press. Fahnestock, Jeanne. 2002. *Rhetorical Figures in Science*. Oxford University Press. Gross, Alan G. 1996. *The Rhetoric of Science*. Second ed. Harvard University Press. Harris, R. Allen, ed. 1997. *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric of Science: Case Studies*. Landmark Essays Series, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Myers, Greg. 1990. Writing *Biology: Texts in the Social Construction of Scientific Knowledge*. Science and Literature Series, University of Wisconsin Press. The work of Gross has been particularly influential in the field of Communication.

[2] The Greek word *mimesis*, was understood as "representation" by both Plato and Aristotle. The particularly Greek understanding of words as representations of ideas is a major topic of Handelman's book, *The Slayers of Moses*, which we will return to later.

[3] Augustine's classic work, *On Christian Doctrine*, is in large part a treatise on the influence of rhetoric in textual interpretation (exegesis) and in the understanding and transmission of Scriptural meaning (hermeneutics).

[4] A wonderful work that offers a comparative picture of rhetoric during the medieval and renaissance periods is Ong, S. J., Walter J. 1958. *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[5] An interesting secular hermeneutic for Biblical texts is offered in Kermode, F. 1979. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. The rhetorical scholar might also compare Kermode's observations with Sloane, T. O. 1971. "Hermeneutics: The Interpreter's House Revisited." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 57(1): 102-107 and especially Mailloux. 1989. *Rhetorical Power*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

[6] I have chosen to adopt *Akedah* over Christianity's traditional label "The sacrifice of Isaac" because of the functional ease of the label and for my own aesthetic preference.

[7] See especially Book IV of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*.

[8] See Paul Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy*.

[9] It should be understood that "secular" is a horribly nondescript term that pleads for refinement. Biblical studies has tended toward "secularization" since the Enlightenment and has been thoroughly "secularized" since the 19th century advances of German higher-critical scholarship. The context in which I wish to use "secular" here refers specifically to disciplines whose focus and interest, while not divested of all concern for religion and Scripture, are not primarily guided by concern for religion and Scripture.

[10] Seebohm separates these into three historically divided subsets of hermeneutics (1), but I will treat them under one heading.

[11] The flagship essay in the movement is Robert Scott's 1967 essay, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," found in Central States Speech Journal 18: 9-16.

[12] If I may be permitted an abstract aside, it is as though the death of the Christian God in Western intellectual history resulted in the deification of the empirical (sciences) and the communicable

(humanities), which now compete for the commitment of human reason and worship. While the outlines of Christianity as a religious system still mark the territory of present day Western culture (especially American culture), in many ways its popular adherents adopt its religious principles as they are deduced or derived from empirical or humanistic presuppositions and teleology, apart from Divine revelation that may or may not be explicitly confessed. It is thus, a *language* of religion that characterizes much of modern Christianity as opposed to knowledge and understanding of any specific historical or propositional content.

[13] The way in which Heidegger and Derrida "problematize" a catch-word such as "Being" or "differance" is suggestive of the orality/literacy position each philosopher assumes. Both writers are clearly interpretive *and* rhetorical, though Derrida's anti-project frustrates a rhetorical mode of understanding, sophistic, Aristotelian, Platonic or otherwise, whereas Heidegger's re-undiscovering of Being can be understood within a historical rhetorical perspective rather than against it.

[14] The reproductive metaphor seems a tight analogy in this instance because it contains within it the notion of drawing upon common preexisting elements (sperm, egg, or even DNA) to "create" or "make" something new and different, yet in many ways similar.

[15] The initial article appeared in *Critical Inquiry 8:4*, with *CI 9:4* devoting several critical responses and rejoinders. The editor's note in *CI 11* indicated three apportioned essays as the "final round" but Knapp and Michaels offer a second essay in *CI 14:1* and two later essays appear in *CI 19* to "officially" close the debate. The collection of articles in this debate also appear in book form: Mitchell, W. J. T. (1985). *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*. University of Chicago Press Journals.

[16] Knapp and Michaels also use the example of a random wave which washes over the beach, leaving behind it a completed poem—this "wave-poem" is an example that will be revisited in the ongoing debate.

[17] Rorty remarks that, "Grice would say of a pattern of marks created on a beach by a random wave motion [Knapp and Michaels' hypothetical example] that it means whatever the sentence it has been construed to token means, even though nobody ever meant anything by it" (460).

[18] Cited in part by Knapp on Michael on page 188 of their reply: Knapp, S. a. W. B. M. (1992). "Reply to George Wilson." Critical Inquiry 19(1): 186-193.

[19] For alternative perspectives on interpretation and meaning from a literary perspective, the reader should see Sontag, S. 1966. *Against Interpretation*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux as well as O'Hara, D. T. 1983. "Revisionary Madness: The Prospects of American Literary Theory at the Present Time." *Critical Inquiry* 9(4): 726-742.

[20] For the purposes of wading through these interpretations, a brief synopsis of Kierkegaard's interpretation is necessary here. For Kierkegaard, Abraham's faith is both ineffable and inexpressible and is exemplary of how individual subjectivity in relation to God (the Absolute) stands above Hegel's system of universal ethics, which takes its fundamental first principles from familial relational responsibility (father to son in this case). Kierkegaard formulates three controversial ethical conclusions based upon the person of Abraham in relation to God in the narrative: Abraham's actions represent a teleological suspension of the ethical (the point just mentioned regarding Hegel's ethical system); that the individual stands in a subjective relationship to God that requires an absolute duty to the Absolute, thus internal subjectivity is posited hierarchically above any deducible objective knowledge; and that Abraham's silence toward Isaac, Sarah, and the servants, while not ethically defensible, is still morally just because of the absolute duty requirement derived prior to taking up this question. Out of these comes the commonly attributed irrational "leap of faith," which, stripped of its religious language, reduces to an existential, subjective epistemology of morality (but not of ethics, which Kierkegaard leaves within the objective systems of Hegel and Kant).

[21] Twice does Brueggemann mention Luther's viewpoint that the contradiction can only be addressed by God's Word and not by human reason or a faith unfixed on the Word. Brueggemann also mentions Kierkegaard in passing, but it seems clear that the Lutheran strand of thought is concurrent in Kierkegaard and Brueggemann.

[22] Much of the source-critical method owes itself to distinguishing different authors for the use of the divine names. In the *Akedah*, two different divine names, *Elohim* and *YHVH*, are used together, which leads source critics to pose later redactions, insertions, and anachronisms.

[23] One commentary that was not cited in the above section but may be useful to the reader of early Christian exegesis and hermeneutics is Sheridan, M., Ed. 2002. *Genesis 12-50*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

[24] There are a series of obstacles and threats that follow God's initial promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 including: Sarah's beauty before Egypt's pharaoh, finding an heir of Abraham's loins (Lot, Eliezer, and Ishmael represent obstacles as heirs apparent), the promise to barren Sarah complicated by Abimelech's desire to take her into his harem, and finally the command to sacrifice Isaac.

[25] On page 142 Levenson says, "One paradox of the aqedah is that it is Abraham's willingness to give up Isaac that insures the fulfillment of the promise that depends on Issac." This recognition is hints at the precisely context in which the *Akedah* has been placed by other interpreters. Unfortunately, this excerpt is the full extent to which Levenson deals with the context of Isaac's sacrifice as a threat to the covenant promise made by God to Abraham.

[26] All quotations of *Fear and Trembling* come from the 1983 Hong and Hong translation: Kierkegaard, S. (1983). Fear and Trembling/Repetition. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

[27] One could speculate that the knight of infinite resignation is a character with whom Kierkegaard identifies with closely. Hong and Hong note in their introduction: "But the author, Johannes de Silentio, is not Abraham; he can make the movement of resignation but not that of faith….While working on *Fear and Trembling* in Berlin, Kierkegaard opened a journal entry dated May 17, 1843, with a line that Johannes de Silentio could have written *mutatis mutandis*: 'If I had had faith, I would have stayed with Regine'" (xix). Once again it is important to subdue any biographical interpolations into Kierkegaard's work, but there is at least some significance in the attribution.

[28] Let me remind the reader that all quoted passages are from Hong and Hong's translation.

[29] "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (ESV)

[30] See for example 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 where the Church as a "body" of believers is described in terms of its inseparable parts, which constitute its individual members in relation to one another.

[31] Derrida's use of heresy and responsibility in *The Gift of Death* is couched in an ironic relationship—heresy is the condition by which responsibility is made possible. Handelman is keen to point out this same heretical movement occurs in Derrida in relation to the "responsibility" of traditional Rabbinic interpretation—an irony that she argues Derrida does not acknowledge.

[32] It should be noted here that Levinas' critique, because it attributes the language of Silentio directly to Kierkegaard, is a direct misreading of Kierkegaard's aims. The distance that Kierkegaard seeks to create with the pseudonym is closed off by Levinas' attributions, obscuring the irony and polemical purposes that Kierkegaard was employing. This is itself a microcosm of the distinctive differences in Jewish and

Christian hermeneutics as discussed by Handelman, for Kierkegaard is continually pushing meaning beyond what the words of his pseudonyms would convey, whereas Levinas (and later Derrida) occupy themselves with the possibilities afforded by the pseudonyms in speaking about Kierkegaard himself. The communicative ethics embodied by Levinas and Derrida, different as they may be, still stand in a closer relationship to each other than they do with Kierkegaard.

[33] Again, Levinas' qualms about Kierkegaard are equating him with Silentio in a way Kierkegaard would probably take issue with. However, it is imperative to realize that it is this dissociation from the word, so frequently seen in Kierkegaard, is precisely what Levinas' objections are antagonizing within the larger discussion of ethics.

[34] Edward Schiappa's article, "Second Thoughts on the Critiques of Big Rhetoric"
Philosophy and Rhetoric 34.3 (2001) 260-274, provides a good synopsis of the discussions and anxiety about the broadening scope of rhetoric.

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